

# “His Own Side-Show”: E.R. Dodds and Neoplatonic Studies in Britain, 1835–1940

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This paper will be primarily a documentary and biographical study.<sup>1</sup> First, I shall try and record some of the salient facts about the study of Neoplatonism in Britain in the one hundred and five years from 1835 (when Friedrich Creuzer’s edition of Plotinus was published at Oxford in the year of Thomas Taylor’s death)<sup>2</sup> to 1940 (when A.H. Armstrong’s first major publication on Plotinus appeared).<sup>3</sup> Secondly, I shall draw on this information to throw some

1. As such, it will differ from related studies in which greater emphasis has been placed on issues of philosophical interpretation: e.g., Jay Bregman, “The Neoplatonic Revival in North America,” *Hermathena* 149 (1990): 99–119, and Wayne Hankey in three related essays: “French Neoplatonism in the 20th Century,” *Animus* 4 (1999): [www.mun.ca/animus/199vol4/hankey4.htm](http://www.mun.ca/animus/199vol4/hankey4.htm), *Cent ans de Néoplatonisme en France: une brève histoire philosophique*, published with J.-M. Narbonne, *Lévinas et l’héritage Grec* (Paris and Sainte-Foy, 2004) and “Re-evaluating E.R. Dodds’ Platonism,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 103 (2005): in press. I am grateful to Professor Hankey for showing me a copy of the latter. I have not provided detailed biographical documentation since most of the individuals mentioned in this paper have been the subject of entries in *The Dictionary of British Classicists*, 3 vols., ed. R.B. Todd (Bristol, 2004). I have followed the various spellings of “Neoplatonism” used in texts quoted. The Dodds and Murray Papers that will be cited below are both in the Bodleian Library, Oxford. Dodds’s *Missing Persons: An Autobiography* (Oxford, 1977) will be cited by its foretitle. For a bibliography of Dodds’s publications see *Quaderni di Storia* 48 (1998): 175–94, and 61 (2005): 221–24.

2. Thomas Gaisford, Regius Professor of Greek, is credited with arranging for this publication with the Clarendon Press after the original initiative had been taken by Daniel Wyttenbach. Entitled *Plotini Opera Omnia*, it is in three volumes, the third of which contains Creuzer’s “annotationes.” As for Thomas Taylor, his translation of selections from Plotinus was first published between 1787 and 1794, and reprinted in Bohn’s Classical Library in 1848; it was the translation through which Yeats first became acquainted with Plotinus (see Roy Foster, *W.B. Yeats: A Life*, vol. 1 [Oxford, 1997] 50). It had been republished in 1895 with an introduction by the theosophist and associate of Madame Blavatsky, G.R.S. Mead (1863–1933). Taylor’s translations of Neoplatonic texts are now available in vols. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 of the collection published by the British Prometheus Trust ([www.prometheustrust.co.uk](http://www.prometheustrust.co.uk)).

3. *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus*, Cambridge Classical Studies 6 (Cambridge, 1940).

light on the crucial decision made by E.R. Dodds (1893–1979) at the outset of his career during World War I to engage in the Neoplatonic studies that established his scholarly reputation over the next two decades.

Hilary Armstrong (1909–1997) is rightly credited with having led in the English-speaking world a revival in the study of Neoplatonism,<sup>4</sup> but in the century following Taylor's death there were forerunners, both inside and outside the academy. Even earlier British scholars and thinkers had shown an enthusiasm for Neoplatonism derived from religious, philosophical and cultural considerations,<sup>5</sup> but Neoplatonism became the object of a more scholarly and historical study only during the nineteenth century and by a slow and intermittent process. It was therefore in a rather unpromising environment that E.R. Dodds, Armstrong's mentor, first became interested in this field. He had the courage of his curiosity and was prepared, at what might have been some risk to his career, to deviate from the standard Oxford classical curriculum and associate himself with what was generally regarded within academic circles as a marginal and even somewhat suspect field of study. His scholarship of the 1920s and early 1930s is, I shall hope to show, worth putting into its historical background and biographical context so that his achievements can be seen as the prelude to Armstrong's career and thus to the foundation of modern British studies in Neoplatonism.

#### PRELUDE: E.R. DODDS AND HILARY ARMSTRONG—1936

“One tends to get rather isolated when working on Plotinus, in England at any rate, and that is liable to produce eccentricity, slipshodness, and either extreme depression or an inflated opinion of one's own work.”<sup>6</sup> So wrote Hilary Armstrong to Dodds in February 1936. Armstrong was then in his fourth year of post-graduate work on Neoplatonism at Cambridge and surprisingly uneasy in his chosen field of research. He had won the Cromer Prize of the British Academy in the previous year for his essay “The ‘One’ of Plotinus,” while his correspondent, E.R. Dodds, then Professor of Greek at the University of Birmingham, had recently published a major and well-received edition of Proclus' *Elements of Theology* (Oxford, 1933). Also, one of Dodds's former students, R.E. Witt (1903–1980), another Cromer prize-winner for work on Plotinus,<sup>7</sup> had overlapped with Armstrong at Cambridge in research,

4. See most recently A.A. Long in his memoir of Armstrong at *Proceedings of the British Academy* 120 (2003): 3–17 at 3.

5. There is no single history of this tradition, but W.R. Inge, *The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought* (London, 1926) remains a readable and sympathetic discussion.

6. Dodds Papers, Box 2 (letter of 13 February 1936). Armstrong at the time was working as Assistant Librarian at the Classical Faculty Library at Cambridge to support his studies.

7. Witt's “The Relation of Plotinus to Stoicism” earned an MA at Birmingham in 1929 and the Cromer Prize in 1930 (see *Proceedings of the British Academy* 16 [1930]: 4).

supervised by F.H. Sandbach, that led to a study of Albinus (as he called him) and Middle Platonism.<sup>8</sup> Finally, in 1930 Stephen MacKenna (1872–1934), with the help of another of Dodds's Birmingham students, Bertram Samuel Page (1904–1993), the author of a 1927 MA thesis there on Numenius, had completed the first effective English translation of Plotinus.<sup>9</sup>

Yet Armstrong's research supervisor was the elderly Laurence Professor of Ancient Philosophy, Francis Macdonald Cornford (1874–1943). In 1908 he had concluded his book *From Religion to Philosophy* with a rhetorical flourish in which he had made the extraordinary claim that Aristotle's idealization of the contemplative life was only a step away from "the mystical trance of neoplatonism," an "ecstasy" in which "Thought denies itself; and Philosophy, sinking to the close of her splendid curving flight, folds her wings and drops into the darkness whence she arose—the gloomy Erebus of theurgy and magic,"<sup>10</sup> a passage that many years later Dean Inge, the author of a major study of Plotinus, called a "bad end to a good book."<sup>11</sup> It is unknown how sympathetic a supervisor Cornford was, but he was certainly not institutionally the heir to any tradition of Neoplatonic studies, having been a student of the dean of Platonic studies at Cambridge in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Henry Jackson (1839–1921), who in one of his surveys of Greek philosophy had devoted just one sentence to Neoplatonism.<sup>12</sup> Cambridge University's only significant interest in Neoplatonism had been in 1912 when its Press published *The Problem of Evil in Plotinus*, by Benjamin Apthorp Gould Fuller (1879–1956), an American scholar who

8. Witt's *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism*, Cambridge Classical Studies 3 (Cambridge, 1937) is based on, but is not identical with, his Cambridge PhD thesis, "Albinus and Middle Platonism" (1934).

9. "The Life and Philosophy of Numenius." Page was Dodds's "earliest research pupil"; see Dodds, "Numenius and Ammonius," in *Les Sources de Plotin*, Fondation Hardt, Entretiens, vol. 5 (Vandoeuvres and Geneva, 1960) 3. Apart from translating *Enneads* 6.1–3 and contributing to the revision of MacKenna's translation for its reprint in the 1950s, Page was slated to edit the fragments of Porphyry, and Dodds passed onto him J. Bidez's notes. In 1959 Page abandoned the project and sent the notes to Heinrich Dörrie (Dodds Papers, Box 5; Page to Dodds, 23 December 1959), from whom they passed via Richard Walzer to Andrew Smith; see Smith, *Porphyrii Philosophi Fragmenta* (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1993) vii, who omits Page's role in the chain of transmission.

10. *From Religion to Philosophy: A Study in the Origins of Western Speculation* (Cambridge, 1908) 263.

11. *The Hibbert Journal* 51 (1952–53): 79.

12. These are at Cambridge University Library, Add. 6411, "History of Greek Philosophy. Dr Jackson's Lectures. Michelmas Term 1873." In reviewing examination papers for Part II-B (ancient philosophy) of the Classical Tripos from the 1880s and 1890s I've found some Neoplatonic presence in the form of "gobbets" (short passages for translation) from Plotinus and Proclus.

later taught at Harvard, and whose manuscript of this book had been read by George Santayana.<sup>13</sup>

At Oxford too Neoplatonism had no academic roots. When in 1936 Dodds was being considered as Gilbert Murray's successor as Regius Professor of Greek, he was seen as an oddity, criticized for being interested "in late & mystical Greek writers,"<sup>14</sup> and thus for not having worked on a "classical author."<sup>15</sup> A colleague at Birmingham asked to address such criticism had to assure Murray, in the phrase used in the title of this paper, that "Dodds's neo-platonism is his own side-show," and went on to say, "All his work in the University here has been on the main Greek authors of the *great classical period*" (my italics for the revealing tautology).<sup>16</sup> Since the Oxford Greek Chair was entirely in the gift of the Crown, Dodds gained it through Gilbert Murray's influence with the Prime Minister of the day, Stanley Baldwin, despite the disapproval of his future colleagues.<sup>17</sup> Murray's case to Baldwin was in fact based on the quality of Dodds's edition of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, with A.D. Nock's lavish praise given considerable weight.<sup>18</sup> However, when in 1948 Hilary Armstrong was being considered for an appointment at Oxford in ancient philosophy, support from Dodds and other members of the relevant committee could not overrule one person's objection to his appointment on the grounds that "Mr Armstrong's interests have hitherto been chiefly in the period after Aristotle," whereas the immediate curricular needs were for a specialist in Plato and Aristotle.<sup>19</sup> The plea that Dodds had

13. Fuller's monograph is not mentioned by Bregman (n. 1 above), who does, however, briefly note Santayana's *Christian Platonism* (116 with n. 117). At Cambridge Fuller was advised by S.C. Roberts, a classicist who later went on to a distinguished career in English studies, not apparently by any of the local ancient philosophy scholars.

14. Isaiah Berlin, *Flourishing: Letters 1928–1946*, ed. H. Hardy (London, 2004) 178.

15. This was a charge laid by Randolph Churchill (Winston Churchill's son) in a newspaper article (*Daily Mail*, 27 June 1936) at the prompting of disaffected Oxford dons.

16. Letter of Charles Grant Robertson (Vice-Chancellor of the University of Birmingham) to Gilbert Murray, 30 April 1936; Murray Papers ms. 76/245–46.

17. I go into some detail on the circumstances of his appointment in a paper forthcoming in the proceedings of the conference "Gilbert Murray Re-assessed" held at London in July 2005.

18. Nock repeated his view (*Classical Review* 48 [1934]: 141) that he "did not know any finer edition of Greek book" than Dodds's to Gilbert Murray (letter of 17 February 1936; Murray Papers ms. 75/204) who misquoted it in his letter to the Prime Minister as "the best commentary on a Greek text that ha[s] appeared in England for a hundred years" (2 June 1936; Murray Papers ms. 77/138; similarly at the *Oxford Mail*, 27 June 1936, p. 1, in response to objections to Dodds's appointment).

19. The evidence here is in the form of report of the committee dated 16 June 1948 and preserved in Box 3 of the Dodds Papers (Correspondence for 1940–49), in the file for 1948. It may be of interest to note the committee was unanimous in wanting to offer the post to Gregory Vlastos, then at Cornell University, but were unable to conclude this arrangement.

made in a lecture at Oxford shortly after his arrival not to segregate post-Aristotelian from pre-Aristotelian thought had not yet been heeded.<sup>20</sup>

Anecdotes are revealing, but we must also try and identify in general terms the competing forces that served both to discourage and to facilitate work on Neoplatonism during the preceding century.

#### NEOPLATONIC STUDIES IN BRITAIN BEFORE DODDS: OBSTACLES AND INCENTIVES

To begin on the negative side, at least three forces militated against Neoplatonic studies flourishing in Britain in an academic environment. First, the curriculum of the universities precluded the study of ancient authors outside a fairly narrow range to which the term “classical” was applied. “Classical” meant not just that the authors in question were worthy of study for their content (that they were “the best” in the words of the earliest regulations for the Cambridge Tripos; or were among the rigidly prescribed “set books” at Oxford), but also that they were considered models for imitation though composition in prose and verse, a procedure that lay at the heart of British classical education and its competitive examination system. Plotinus’ Greek was not a desirable object of imitation, nor was his subject-matter likely to be attractive when, in the words of the Oxford scholar William Sewell (1804–74) (who probably read Plotinus in Creuzer’s Oxford edition of 1835), it was “selected *without any order*, as accidental questions arose”—questions that Sewell also considered as unsuitable “for English ears in the nineteenth century.”<sup>21</sup> Demosthenes’ and Cicero’s orations, texts that Dodds detested,<sup>22</sup> were considered more suitable and eminently more imitable. Yet reformers of the traditional classical curriculum, like Murray and Richard Jebb, scarcely helped matters by privileging the major authors and central periods. Their approach may well have been more imaginative (as shown, for example, in Cornford’s interest in ritualism and his assimilation of sociological ideas), but a prejudice against non-canonical areas of study remained intact.

Secondly, the study of Neoplatonism necessarily involves the study of Plato but not until the last third of the nineteenth century did British Platonic

20. This was in a lecture “Some Neglected Continuities in Greek Thought” (Dodds Papers, Box 27/10), delivered in May 1937 to Greats students. Dodds laid particular emphasis on the neglect of Plotinus.

21. *An Introduction to the Dialogues of Plato* (London and Oxford, 1841) 306 n. 2.

22. In his lively piece, “The Rediscovery of the Classics,” *Irish Statesman* vol. 2, no. 42 (10 April 1920): 346–47, reprinted at *Classics Ireland* 6 (1999): 92–98 ([www.ucd.ie/~classics/99/todd.html](http://www.ucd.ie/~classics/99/todd.html)), Dodds singled out (p. 97 of the reprint) “Cicero and Demosthenes in their political speeches” in a list of “incurably tedious authors” who should be “expelled from the school curriculum.”

scholarship come into its own. Before George Grote's major study of Plato (1867) and Lewis Campbell's editions,<sup>23</sup> it was the aforementioned William Sewell who had written the only significant British academic monograph on Plato. It included a lengthy chapter on Neoplatonism ('Alexandrian Platonism'), in which, as we have seen, he was critical of Plotinus, but showed more sympathy with Proclus' commentaries, as perhaps texts more easily read as ancillary to Plato.<sup>24</sup> But as British scholars (such as Jackson, Richard Archer-Hind [1849–1910] and James Adam [1860–1907] at Cambridge, and R.L. Nettleship [1846–92] at Oxford) began in the 1880s and 1890s to establish a body of work on Plato, they pursued it within curricula that continued to give Plato and Aristotle primacy, with little or no room allowed even for Hellenistic philosophy, let alone anything from later periods.

Thirdly, the British academic system had no systematic research culture. Research degrees beyond the undergraduate level were, for example, largely unavailable at Oxbridge in the humanities until around the time of World War I,<sup>25</sup> and research, at least in literary and textual studies, was generally confined to major authors and pursued in isolation. This situation discouraged the study of non-standard, or curricularly peripheral, fields. In fact, two major encyclopedias of the later nineteenth century, William Smith's *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (1870) and the ninth edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* (1884) both had to have their articles on Neoplatonism authored by continental scholars—Christian Brandis on Plotinus in the former, Adolph Harnack on Neoplatonism in the latter.<sup>26</sup>

Yet there were some incentives to explore Neoplatonism. First, accounts of Plato could not be totally divorced from the subsequent history of Platonism. General histories of ancient philosophy (by the Irish scholar William Archer Butler [1814?–48] of Trinity College, Dublin, or the decidedly non-academic *littérateur* George Henry Lewes [1817–78], to take contrasting examples) had to pay some attention to the Platonic tradition. Butler was sympathetic to the extent that he detected in Neoplatonism the precursor of Christianity,<sup>27</sup>

23. *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, 3 vols (London, 1865). Campbell produced editions of the *Theaetetus* (Oxford, 1861) and the *Sophist* and *Politician* (Oxford, 1867).

24. *An Introduction* 306 n. 2 (this footnote is extensive and reaches p. 308). Proclus, he claimed, "has imbibed far more of the clearness, and even of the eloquence, of Plato."

25. The doctoral degree was introduced at Oxford in 1917 and at Cambridge in 1919, as part of a complex set of developments reaching back some decades. See Renate Simpson, *How the PhD Came to Britain: A Century of Struggles for Postgraduate Education* (Guilford, 1983) especially ch. 6.

26. Smith's *Dictionary*, vol. 3 (London, 1870) 423–28 and *Encyclopedia Britannica*, ed. 9, vol. 17 (Edinburgh, 1884) 332–39.

27. *Lectures on the History of Ancient Philosophy*, ed. W.H. Thompson, vol. 2 (Cambridge, 1856) 348–69. Like Sewell and Kingsley, Butler called Neoplatonism "the school of Alexandria." He saw Plotinus, Iamblichus and Proclus as marked by a "uniformity of style and purport"

whereas the positivist Lewes covered Neoplatonism in a chapter tendentiously entitled “Reason allies itself with Faith, and Philosophy renounces its independence.”<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile a private scholar A.W. Benn (1843–1916) in *The Greek Philosophers* (1882) declared in rather similar vein that “In absolute value, Neoplatonism stands lowest as well as last among the ancient schools of thought.”<sup>29</sup>

Between the 1880s and World War I two figures stand out in the academic world as having tried to refine these programmatic treatments of Neoplatonism:<sup>30</sup> the legendary Cambridge savant Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson (1862–1932) and Oxford’s White’s Professor of Moral Philosophy, John Alexander Stewart (1846–1933). Dickinson was led by his interest in Platonic mysticism to write in 1886–87 a fellowship dissertation, “Plotinus’ Interpretation of Plato’s Theory of Ideas,” for King’s College, Cambridge.<sup>31</sup> He did the writing in the Reading Room of the British Museum, “in one sense not a bad environment for this oriental-italo-egypto-graeco writer.”<sup>32</sup> Stewart brought Plotinus peripherally into his books on Plato’s myths and theory of ideas as a way of emphasizing the psychological and aesthetic dimension of Platonic metaphysics.<sup>33</sup> Then between 1914 and 1922 he offered an annual reading class on Plotinus, and on two occasions gave a series of lectures on Plotinus in relation to Bergson and Leibniz, but these courses never yielded any publication.<sup>34</sup> One of those classes (Hilary Term, 1914) is

(348), and concluded that Neoplatonism was a “perversion ... providentially ordered” in that it identified the need for Christianity.

28. Lewes, *The History of Philosophy from Thales to Comte*, ed. 5 (London, 1880) vol. 1, 378.

29. Benn, *The Greek Philosophers*, vol. 2 (London, 1882) 335. The vituperation got worse: “Neo-Platonism is nothing if not a system, and as a system it is false, and not only false but out of relation to every accepted belief. In combining the dialectic of Plato with the metaphysics of Aristotle and the physics of Stoicism, Plotinus has contrived to rob each of whatever plausibility it once possessed” (p. 336). Benn here evinces a common nineteenth and early twentieth century prejudice against eclecticism as inherently objectionable.

30. In the non-academic world mention must be made of Samuel Halliday. In 1965 A.H. Armstrong told Dodds (Dodds Papers Box 6; letter of 10 May 1965) that he had recently bought “from a Kingston [on Thames] bookshop a complete MS translation of the *Enneads* by Samuel Halliday of the Laurels, Sidcup, made between 1903 and 1916.” Armstrong remarked that “it doesn’t seem to be too bad,” and that it was “legibly written and well bound, with quite a sensible short introduction.” Efforts to trace the whereabouts of this translation, and to discover who Halliday was, have so far been unavailing.

31. *The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson* 69. There is a copy of the dissertation at King’s College, Cambridge, Archives Centre.

32. *The Autobiography* 138.

33. See the indices to his *The Myths of Plato* (London, 1905) and *Plato’s Doctrine of Ideas* (Oxford, 1909).

34. My information is taken from the lecture lists in the *Oxford University Gazette*. Also, in the Hilary (January–March) term of 1919–20 one K.J. Mukherjea of Jesus College gave lectures on “Plotinus with special reference to the theory of knowledge.” Mukherjea took a degree in

recorded by Dodds in his autobiography as “seminal” for his work on this author, though it was attended for the most part only by him and T.S. Eliot (then in Oxford to advance his Harvard dissertation on F.H. Bradley).<sup>35</sup> Its syllabus is probably the one recorded in Eliot’s copy of Volkmann’s edition at King’s College, Cambridge.<sup>36</sup> Dodds’s and Eliot’s paths were to cross again over Neoplatonism in the 1950s and 1960s when Faber and Faber, of which Eliot was a director, acquired the rights to Stephen MacKenna’s translation of Plotinus and Dodds advised on revisions needed for its publication.<sup>37</sup>

Secondly, the study of Neoplatonism complemented theology and church history. The escape from celibacy by nineteenth-century Oxbridge dons via degrees in divinity and thence ordination, marriage and ecclesiastical duties is well known. But as a side-product this academic ethos did encourage some interest in the Platonic tradition as part of the theological heritage. The work of Charles Bigg (1840–1908) in early Church history is a good example,<sup>38</sup> while William Ralph Inge (Dean Inge) (1860–1954), following ordination, simply gravitated away from the duties of a classical tutor at Oxford in the 1890s into theology, and more specifically into the study of mysticism, which in turn led to his extensive study of Plotinus in the Gifford Lectures at St Andrews in 1917 and 1918.<sup>39</sup> Earlier his *Christian Mysticism* (1899) had included material on Plotinus, and Inge had prepared himself by borrowing a copy of Lowes Dickinson’s dissertation.<sup>40</sup>

*Litterae Humaniores* in 1916 and a qualification in Bengali (1918), and presumably returned to work in administration in India.

35. *Missing Persons* 40.

36. The list of *Enneads* written in Eliot’s copy (John Hayward Bequest; Archives Centre, King’s College, Cambridge) is 3.1, 5.9, 4.8, 6.9, 3.8 and 5.1, in that order. However, only the text of the first of these is annotated and so it may have been the only one read in what were eight weekly meetings of probably no more than an hour each.

37. There are numerous letters on this matter between Dodds and Eliot as well as others at Faber and Faber in Box 4 of the Dodds Papers (Correspondence, 1950–55).

38. *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria* (Oxford, 1886; rev. ed. 1913) is his masterwork, but in 1895 he published *Neoplatonism* (1895) for the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge. Dodds, in his *Select Passages Illustrating Neoplatonism* published for the same Society in 1923 remarked that Bigg offered “a short and simple, but not quite unprejudiced, account” (p. 127). Or as Dean Inge more pointedly remarked, this book is “not wholly free from the patronising tone which was then customary in criticising ‘Pagans’” (*The Platonic Tradition in English Religious Thought* [n. 5 above] 111). See also Inge, *The Platonic Tradition* 103–11 on B.F. Westcott who had intended to write on Plotinus (105).

39. *The Philosophy of Plotinus*, 2 vols (London, 1918; further editions, 1923 and 1929). Inge’s *Diary of A Dean: St Paul’s 1911–1934* (London, 1949) 40 and 47 has vignettes on the delivery of the lectures; see also p. 36, where the invitation to deliver the Gifford lectures led him to readjust a book on Plotinus that was in process.

40. In his memoirs (*The Autobiography of G. Lowes Dickinson*, ed. D. Proctor [London, 1973] 79) Dickinson claimed that Inge did not employ any more critical an approach to Plotinus than he had in his pioneering expository account.



Lesser lights were similarly motivated. For example, the Revd John Hunt brought Neoplatonism into his books on pantheism,<sup>41</sup> while his wife, Mrs John Hunt, inspired by her husband's interest in Plotinus, produced a lengthy novel, *The Wards of Plotinus*<sup>42</sup>—a little known analogue to *Marius the Epicurean*, or *Hypatia* (whose author, Charles Kingsley, a historian, had himself lectured on 'Alexandrian' philosophy).<sup>43</sup> Stephen MacKenna belongs in this context to the extent that his Catholic background may have fueled his interest in Plotinus, but he is *sui generis*, and was motivated as much by an aesthetic engagement with Plotinian language and thought as by any ideological or spiritual orientation. Thanks to Dodds's edition of MacKenna's diary and letters (a curious digression from his scholarship after MacKenna's death in 1934)<sup>44</sup> we know a great deal about the genesis of this translation and about the whimsical character of its author who stumbled on Creuzer's edition of Plotinus in St Petersburg in 1905, abandoned his successful career as a journalist and, with the financial support of the entrepreneur Ernest Debenham and Dodds's loyal and sympathetic assistance, produced a complete translation the *Enneads* between 1908 and 1930.<sup>45</sup> His aim was to translate "Plots.," as he like to call him, "into beautiful English,"<sup>46</sup> though, as Dodds warned his Oxford students in one of the "classes" (i.e, seminars) on Neoplatonism that he managed to slip into his twenty-four years of teaching at Oxford, "MacKenna was *theodidaktos*, like Ammonius Saccas [cf. Photius, *Bibl. Codd.* 214 and 251] he had never been to a university and had taught himself all the Greek he knew. Hence he is not to be trusted as a crib, though to the Greekless reader he conveys the thought and spirit of Plotinus better than any other translation."<sup>47</sup>

41. His *Pantheism and Christianity* (London, 1884) was a revision of his *An Essay on Pantheism* (London, 1866). The fifth chapter is a basic survey of Neoplatonism, based, as he admits, on J. Simon, *Histoire de l'école d'Alexandrie*.

42. *The Wards of Plotinus*, 3 vols (London, 1881). See Preface, p. viii on her husband.

43. Kingsley published these as *Alexandria and her Schools* (Cambridge, 1854).

44. *Journal and Letters of Stephen MacKenna* (London, 1936). Dodds was very insistent on undertaking this labour of love. Its genesis is explained in a letter to Thomas MacGreevy (Trinity College Dublin, ms. 8112/547; 7 July 1934), who had independently planned a similar memoir.

45. In a letter to Gilbert Murray (Murray Papers ms. 408/27; 6 June 1934) Dodds described MacKenna as "an organic compound of Socrates and Oliver Goldsmith, flavoured with a dash of Montaigne and a spot of St Francis." In 1937 Sir Ernest Debenham informed Dodds that of the 6000 copies of the five separate volumes of MacKenna's translation printed, 1343 (i.e., only 22.4%) remained unsold (Dodds Papers, Box 2; letter of 4 May 1937).

46. *Journal and Letters* 117.

47. *Introduction to Neoplatonism*, ms at Dodds Papers, Box 21c, pt. IV, pp. 2–3. Dodds gave this class in 1937, 1947, 1953 and 1959. The class lists are preserved; enrollment averaged around twenty, including in 1953 his only doctoral student in Neoplatonism, Henri-Dominique Saffrey, whose D.Phil. thesis was an edition of Book 2 of Proclus' *Platonic Theology*.

Finally, there were some philosophical considerations at work. The entrenchment of Absolute Idealism in British philosophy in the later nineteenth century created a philosophical culture that might have been as hospitable to Neoplatonism as it was to Platonic studies. Yet apart from the Gifford Lectures on the theology of the Greek Philosophers by Edward Caird (1835–1908), which contained a lengthy and well regarded section on Plotinus, this did not happen as much as might have been expected.<sup>48</sup> Platonism was simply not modern Idealism, as historians of philosophy, such as Jowett, stressed, whereas other scholars forged links between Idealism and Plato without straying into Neoplatonism. This happened in a curious manner at Cambridge in the realm of classical scholarship when Richard Archer-Hind and Henry Jackson found idealism in some of Plato's later dialogues, especially the *Timaeus*, and Jackson in particular espoused a version of it as what he called Plato's "later theory of ideas." Lowes Dickinson was motivated to write his dissertation on Plotinus partly as a reaction against this line of interpretation, which he saw as antithetical to Plotinus' interpretation of the theory of ideas, while others saw it as a virtual revival of the Middle Platonic notion of ideas as thoughts in the mind of God.<sup>49</sup> When in the early 1930s R.E. Witt wrote his doctoral thesis on Albinus he cited Jackson's interpretation as a modern analogue to the Middle Platonism that he was then studying.<sup>50</sup>

But Idealism in other forms could be relevant to the study of Neoplatonism, as the case of Thomas Whittaker (1856–1935) shows. Whittaker is still known for a book on the Neoplatonists that was for decades the best survey available in English.<sup>51</sup> He was not himself a product either of a classical or philosophical academic culture, but a natural sciences graduate of Oxford who seems to have had private means that allowed him to embark on a personal philosophical odyssey that led from an initial reaction against the Absolute Idealism prevalent at Oxford in his day to a complex position that was fundamentally (as far as can be determined from its diffuse exposition) a philosophy of science that combined empiricism and idealism. By the latter he meant, historically, both Neoplatonism and the position of Berkeley in his late work the *Siris*. His book on the Neoplatonists was a record of an enthusiastic engagement with thinkers whom he felt were relevant to the secular

48. Caird, *The Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers*, 2 vols (Glasgow, 1904). See MacKenna, *Journal and Letters* 154 on Caird as the only translator (i.e., in the illustrative passages in his book) whom he admired.

49. I have reprinted Dickinson's criticism of Jackson and discuss Jackson's interpretation of Plato in "Henry Jackson Re-assessed," in *The Owl of Minerva: The Cambridge Praelections of 1906*, ed. C.A. Stray, Cambridge Philological Society suppl. vol. 28 (2005) 87–110.

50. "Albinus and Middle Platonism," Ph.D. thesis (Cambridge, 1934) 170–80.

51. *The Neo-Platonists: A Study in the History of Hellenism* (Cambridge, 1901; 2nd ed., 1918).

scientific culture he embraced (he was an active figure in the “Rationalist” movement, associated particularly with The Rationalist Press Association). Whittaker gave special attention to Proclus in the second edition of his book (1918), and the appearance of that revised version (in the same year as the first edition of Inge’s *The Philosophy of Plotinus*) may have triggered A.E. Taylor’s 1918 paper on Proclus,<sup>52</sup> which he based mainly on *The Elements of Theology*, a work for which, he noted, a new edition was badly needed. Early in the 1920s he persuaded the young E.R. Dodds to fill that need, as he magnificently did in 1933 with his new critical edition.<sup>53</sup>

Such, then, were the major obstacles and minor incentives to the study of Neoplatonism in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Britain: the obstacles largely institutional and systemic, the incentives strongest when derived from general intellectual and philosophical considerations. So let us consider how and why E.R. Dodds embarked on the study of Neoplatonism.

#### E.R. DODDS—NEOPLATONISM AND THE IRRATIONAL, 1914–36<sup>54</sup>

Dodds’s interest in Neoplatonism did not stem directly from the study of Plato. At Oxford in his day in the wake of Ingram Bywater and his generation Aristotelian studies flourished, with J.A. Stewart the only Oxford philosopher much engaged with Plato, and, as we have seen, Plotinus. Plato meant mainly the *Republic* as a set book for Greats (the final examinations of the school of *Literae Humaniores*), for which Dodds perversely prepared by attending the lectures of Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller (1864–1937), a maverick pragmatist who offered anti-metaphysical polemics that would resonate in some of Dodds’s later work on Plato.<sup>55</sup>

Any approach from the perspective of theology, or Church history, would also not have appealed to Dodds who had cast aside his ancestral Protestantism and religious belief generally while still a schoolboy. As he later complained of Dean Inge, “he tends greatly to overstate the similarity between Plotinus’ teaching and that of the Church of England.”<sup>56</sup> Dodds was interested in the phenomena of religion, but without grounding them in theology or

52. “The Philosophy of Proclus,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 18 (1917–18): 600–35.

53. See *Missing Persons* 91. In a letter to Gilbert Murray (Murray Papers ms. 44/100–01; 1 February 1922) Dodds revealed his intention to edit this work, though he was concerned about securing a publisher, “fifth century Neoplatonists not being at all a popular line of business in this country.”

54. There is much material relevant to this section in *Pagan and Christian Anxiety: A Response to E.R. Dodds*, ed. R.C. Smith and J. Lounibos (Lanham, Maryland, 1984), a collection of ten papers; see especially J. Lounibos, “Plotinus: Pagan, Mystic, Philosopher” 131–68.

55. See *Missing Persons* 39, and Todd, “Plato as Public Intellectual: E.R. Dodds’ edition of Plato’s *Gorgias* and its ‘primary purpose,’” *Polis* 19 (2002): 52–53.

56. *Introduction to Neoplatonism* IV, 3.

institutional practices. In this respect his engagement with Neoplatonism from the perspective of secular rationalism would differ markedly from that of scholars with Christian commitments such as A.H. Armstrong, not to mention numerous French scholars of the twentieth century.<sup>57</sup> Nor finally would Dodds have been oriented to Neoplatonism by Idealism. If nothing else, his philosophy tutors, E.F. Carritt and A.S.L. Farquharson, were both followers of the realist J. Cook Wilson, and he himself recalled his time at Oxford as a confusing period of transition from the reign of Idealism to an as yet undefined replacement.<sup>58</sup>

And so what motivated Dodds? We cannot be sure, but we do know that the intellectual environment he created for himself as an Oxford undergraduate was hospitable to a burgeoning interest in Neoplatonism. Thus he furthered the interest in psychological research that he had begun as a schoolboy, while he “strayed to other disciplines” by attending lectures on psychology by William McDougall (1871–1938) and on anthropology by Robert Ranulph Marett (1866–1943), “neither of them ‘useful’ [*sc.* for examination purposes] but both of them for me seminal.”<sup>59</sup> Now psychological research (popular and even respectable in Britain since the 1880s, and of interest to both Murray and Schiller) meant exploring the paranormal through experiment and research. McDougall’s lectures meant exposure to social psychology, specifically to theories of social evolution based on a psychology of instinctive drives needing coordination to produce social harmony.<sup>60</sup> Marett’s lectures meant contact with an evolutionary anthropology of religion.<sup>61</sup> All these associated currents emerge in some of Dodds’s earliest publications in an Irish magazine, the *Irish Statesman*, in 1919.<sup>62</sup> In one (“The Renaissance of Occultism,” a prelude to articles on telepathy, hypnotism and survival) he boldly identified the social psychology of late antiquity (“the last great revival of thaumaturgy, in the

57. On Armstrong’s religious approach to Neoplatonism see Jay Bregman, “The Contemporary Christian Platonism of A.H. Armstrong,” in *Neoplatonism and Contemporary Thought: Part One*, ed. R.B. Harris (Albany, 2002) 335–45. On French Neoplatonic studies see Hankey’s articles cited in n. 1 above.

58. See Dodds, *Missing Persons* 39.

59. *Ibid.*

60. McDougall had recently published his *Social Psychology* (1st ed., 1908) which formulated the theory of instincts that Dodds seems largely to have accepted.

61. Marett was a Greats tutor (he lectured on the *Republic*) and his field of anthropology was listed under *Literae Humaniores*. His lectures in Dodds’s time included “Early Types of Religious Experience” (Hilary Term, 1914) and in Trinity Term, 1915, “Primitive Virtues and Vices” and a seminar on the works of J.G. Frazer.

62. Originally in *Irish Statesman* vol. 1, no. 14 (27 September 1919): 337–38, it is reprinted at *Classics Ireland* 6 (1999): 98–104 ([www.ucd.ie/~classics/99/todd.html](http://www.ucd.ie/~classics/99/todd.html)) as an appendix to my article “E.R. Dodds: The Dublin Years (1916–1919)” 80–105. The quotations that follow are from 101–02 of the reprint.

late days of the Roman Empire,” as he labels it) as parallel to contemporary fascination with the occult. The origins of this development (and the search for origins was central to the anthropology and social psychology to which he had been exposed) he pinpointed in:

the decay of the traditional western religions, the failure of Stoic and Epicurean materialism, and the bursting of all those formal moulds which the Greek spirit had shaped for itself in life and in the arts. Then, as now, the barrier built up by centuries of organized thinking between the explored territories of the conscious reason and the subconscious wonder-worlds of demons, dreams and bogies, seemed to wear thin and let through a swarm of bizzareries, quasi-miracles that provoked the curiosity of an age and vanished without satisfying it.

Here, of course, are the seeds of his future interest in the irrational in antiquity and in particular in its decline. As I have shown elsewhere, the original plan for the work that became *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley, 1951) was for a set of “Studies in the Rise and Fall of Ancient Rationalism.”<sup>63</sup>

But what specifically of Neoplatonism? In a letter that Dodds wrote to Gilbert Murray in December 1914 just as he was about to begin studying for Greats, he proposed a special paper on a topic well outside the mainstream of classical authors and subjects and designed “relieve a little the monotony of Greek Historical Inscriptions and Aristotelian Logic.”<sup>64</sup> “I have thought of offering,” he wrote, “the Gnostics or the neo-Platonists or both,” and added, “I am rather attracted by the bizarre blending of philosophy and mysticism and magic in these writers.” He envisaged eventually “tracing the obscure undercurrent of magical tradition that flows down from the Empire into the Middle Ages through the magical papyri, the so-called Hermetic books, the ‘grimoires’, and so forth” and added “There might be interesting sidelights on morbid psychology and the aberrations of the religious consciousness.” Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, he explained to Murray, “would make a good point of departure.” But he did not know whether anyone at Oxford could supervise such a project, and even had to ask Murray if he knew of “any good books to read.”

December 1914. The date is important. Dodds had just spent two and a half years at Oxford largely focusing on the requirements of a linguistically oriented curriculum in which he had just excelled by winning the Ireland Scholarship, for which he had, for example, mastered the intricacies of verse composition modeled on “classical” authors. But he had developed, largely

63. See Todd, “A Note on the Genesis of E.R. Dodds’s *The Greeks and the Irrational*,” *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* 42 [n.s. 17] (1998): 663–76, at 670–72.

64. This is at Murray Papers, ms. 114/27, and the plan is alluded to briefly at *Missing Persons* 40.

auto-didactically, an interest in the topic of religious irrationalism in late antiquity. He could conceptualize this phenomenon in evolutionary terms and plan to study it as a historical phenomenon, even though he would soon apply an evaluative criterion to it based on his conception of Hellenic rationalism and on his wider commitment to a standard of rationality in all aspects of human affairs.

Many influences may have been at work. His early membership in George William Russell's Hermetic Society in Dublin, which he joined in 1913,<sup>65</sup> reflected an interest in what we may loosely call spiritualism and the occult, though Dodds was not Yeats, however much he admired the great poet, and steered clear of theosophy and the like in favour of the respectably semi-scientific milieu of the Society for Psychical Research, with its academic, and particularly Cantabridgian, connections.<sup>66</sup> The extracurricular Oxford lectures mentioned above would have given him the perspective to analyze and evaluate ancient manifestations of the paranormal and the occult in psychological and anthropological terms.

He was also, as Wayne Hankey has argued, unquestionably motivated by Murray's own chapter in *Four Stages of Greek Religion* (1912) on "the failure of nerve" in the Hellenistic period and the early centuries of the Roman Empire.<sup>67</sup> In depicting this decline of rationalism Murray had dealt with some of the same phenomena (e.g., Hermeticism and Gnosticism) that Dodds cited in the letter quoted above; indeed, Dodds probably proposed this topic to Murray because he thought that it would receive a sympathetic reception from the author of that chapter, which despite its overwhelmingly negative account of post-classical antiquity, did engage with it seriously,

65. The reply from Russell (AE) to Dodds's inquiry is at *Letters from AE*, ed. A. Denson (London, 1961) 85.

66. A representative specimen of theosophical culture relevant to this paper is Charles J. Whitby, *The Wisdom of Plotinus: A Metaphysical Study* (London: William Rider and Sons, 1909; repr. 1919). Whitby, a medical doctor by profession, refers, for example, to F.H. Bradley's theory of the Absolute as amounting to "in fact a reinstatement of the Plotinian theory of the Noumenal Universe" (9). Whitby's publisher, Rider, was active in the areas of the occult and spiritualism. They published *The Occult Review* and other works by Whitby, such as *The Open Secret: Intuitions of Life and Reality* (1912) and *Other-world Stuff* (1922). This was a world away from the Society for Psychical Research, where Dodds could rub shoulders in the 1920s with Eleanor Sidgwick and Gerald Balfour (*Missing Persons* 108, and 97–111 on his lifelong engagement with psychical research).

67. See Hankey, "Re-evaluating E.R. Dodds's Platonism" (n. 1 above) pt. 1, "The question and answer within which the evaluation of Neoplatonism occurs." "The Failure of Nerve" (as the Preface explained, a phrase borrowed from J.B. Bury) was originally ch. 3 of *Four Stages*, and then became ch. 4 of *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (London, 1925) in a revision for which Murray sought Dodds' advice on the material on late antiquity (letters of 3 and 25 July 1924; Murray Papers ms. 48/113 and 129). Dodds noted in the second of these letters that most of his notes were concerned with Neoplatonism.

even to the extent of including a translation of Sallustius' treatise *On Gods and the World*.<sup>68</sup> Although Murray successfully discouraged Dodds from doing a special subject in this field for Greats,<sup>69</sup> it was not long after Stewart's class and while spending 1916–17 in Dublin (following rustication by his college for outspoken support for the Dublin Rising of Easter 1916) that he first met Stephen MacKenna (probably in the early part of 1917) who had recently embarked on his translation of Plotinus. Dodds was by then ready to begin scholarly work on Neoplatonism, and did so in earnest once he had returned to England in 1919 and to a post as Lecturer at University College, Reading.

He began slowly with critical notes on Plotinus and soon established contact with the only other academic student of the Plotinian text in Britain, J.H. Sleeman (1880–1963).<sup>70</sup> He was also commissioned to provide a modest collection of Neoplatonic texts and careful translations (more careful than those of any of his predecessors, and certainly more so than MacKenna's) for the *Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge*; these were published in 1923 and 1924.<sup>71</sup> He seems to have jump-started this project by offering

68. Murray had announced his interest in holding a seminar on this work in his inaugural lecture as Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, *The Interpretation of Ancient Greek Literature* (Oxford, 1909) 6-7, and remarked that "if, in many of the problems of Neo-Platonic philosophy, I should be to my class at best a one-eyed man leading the blind, there are those in Oxford who could, and I am sure would, from time to time be willing to guide us." He was probably thinking of J.A. Stewart and Water Scott (the editor of the *Hermetica*, who had retired to Oxford in 1905), both of whom he recommended to Dodds when the latter showed his first interest in Plotinus and the Hermetic corpus (Dodds Papers, Box 1; letter of 26 December 1914). Murray later described himself as "in a very modest way the first begetter" of A.D. Nock's edition of Sallustius (Cambridge, 1926) (Murray Papers, ms. 75/145; letter to Nock, 31 January 1936).

69. Letter of 26 December 1914 (Dodds Papers Box 1); I have confirmed from inspecting the examination papers of 1917 that no such special subject was included. In early 1961 Dodds to some extent emulated Murray by discouraging John Dillon from doing a special subject in Greats on Plotinus, as Dillon himself has told me (letter of 28 April 2000), and as is confirmed by letters from Dillon's tutor, Peter Brunt, in the Dodds Papers, Box 6, Correspondence 1961, letters of 13 and 19 January 1961. Dodds specifically urged Dillon to undertake preliminary studies of works such as the *Timaeus* and the *De Anima*, not to turn his back on the subject entirely.

70. There is a cordial letter from Sleeman at Dodds Papers, Box 1, dated 9 April 1922, praising Dodds for his article, "Plotiniana," *Classical Quarterly* 16 (1922): 93-97.

71. *Select Passages Illustrating Neoplatonism* (London, 1923) and *Select Passages Illustrative of Neoplatonism* (London, 1924), the latter being the Greek texts translated in the former work. Dodds (*Missing Persons* 75) suspected that Dean Inge may have arranged for him to prepare these volumes; Donald Russell (*PBA* 67 [1981] 362) claims that MacKenna recommended him and that Inge read the work in manuscript. Oddly Dodds never records meeting Inge, and I have found no correspondence between them in the Dodds Papers. Perhaps Dodds's generally favourable review of the third edition of Inge's *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (*Classical*

some lectures on Neoplatonism at Reading in the summer term of 1921,<sup>72</sup> though what sort of audience he can have gathered for these talks, which may have been extra-mural or interdisciplinary presentations, is unclear.<sup>73</sup> This early engagement with Neoplatonism allowed Dodds to evince his passion for the Plotinian system as “Hellenic through and through,” not, that is, as “the decadence of Greek thought” and the product of orientalizing syncretism, as some nineteenth century thinkers had claimed, but instead, as recent British predecessors (Bigg, Caird, Whittaker and Inge) had recognized, “its logical culmination.”<sup>74</sup>

In 1926 he returned to his old college at Oxford (University College) to address the Oxford Philological Society on “The Parmenides and the Origins of Neoplatonism,” a paper that when published in 1928 with “The Neoplatonic ‘One’” replacing “Neoplatonism” was soon recognized as a major contribution to the field.<sup>75</sup> Dodds recalled that the President (his former Greats tutor A.S.L. Farquharson) had difficulty in getting an audience for the talk, though the minute book of the Philological Society shows that the eventual number present was no smaller than gathered around the same time for papers on more familiar subjects.<sup>76</sup> By 1929 Dodds could remark

*Review* 43 [1929]: 140–41) contained too much negativity for the Gloomy Dean’s liking, such as the claim (141) that “[Inge] inclines to exaggerate the resemblance between Plotinism and Christianity and to cut Plotinus loose from his moorings in Greek rationalism—an interpretation which is greatly assisted by his perverse choice of ‘spirit’ as a rendering for the Plotinian *nous*.”

72. The actual commission may have been given in early 1920. In a letter to his friend Thomas MacGreevy (20 January 1920; Trinity College Dublin, ms. 8112/32) Dodds refers to having shortly to see “a dull man who may conceivably get me some lucrative grinding.”

73. They are preserved in a notebook at Box 26/4 of the Dodds Papers. The six lectures cover “Movements of Greek Thought,” “The Revival of Platonism: Platonic Theology,” “Neoplatonism: Its Rise and Character,” then three lectures on “The Plotinian System,” on “The Phenomenal World,” “The Real World,” and “The One.” They can be considered a forerunner of the more elaborate *Introduction to Neoplatonism* that Dodds offered at Oxford (see n. 47 above), which consisted of seven classes, two on the background to Plotinus, four on Plotinus, and one on the development and transmission of Neoplatonism.

74. See *Select Passages* (1923) 9. Of course, his view of Plotinus as the continuator of Greek rationalism still needed defence, ably provided by A.H. Armstrong in his first article, “Plotinus and India,” *Classical Quarterly* 30 (1936): 22–28 as a reaction against Emile Bréhier’s *La Philosophie de Plotin* (Paris, 1928).

75. “The Parmenides of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic ‘One’,” *Classical Quarterly* 22 (1928): 129–42.

76. I am grateful to Mr Angus Bowie of Oriol College, Oxford (the then Secretary) for providing me with a copy of the relevant pages of the minute book. There were thirteen people present, the same number recorded for a paper on Thucydides the following week, and one less than showed up for a paper on Propertius later that term. Dodds (*Missing Persons* 92) claims that an initial audience of two swelled to “six ... possibly even eight” only after some delay.



on “notable signs of the increased interest in, and respect for, Neoplatonic studies in this country,” something he considered “due almost entirely” to the work of Whittaker, MacKenna and Inge.<sup>77</sup> It would have been immodest, but not untrue, for him to have added his own name to this list.

Dodds worked intensively for several years on his edition of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology*, even taking time out from his honeymoon in Italy in 1923 to collate manuscripts at Florence and Venice.<sup>78</sup> Given that intellectually Dodds was out of sympathy with post-Plotinian Neoplatonism,<sup>79</sup> the choice of Proclus may seem odd. But if he wanted to establish himself by publishing a major critical edition, he probably regarded Plotinus as too much of a challenge. His edition was originally intended as an Oxford Classical Text, but was published with a translation and commentary at the insistence of Sir David Ross,<sup>80</sup> and its reception on publication in 1933 (notably in a laudatory review by A.D. Nock) was, as we have seen, a crucial factor in Gilbert Murray’s recommendation to the Prime Minister that Dodds succeed him as Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford in 1936. Equally it was one of the factors that made that appointment so controversial.

Dodds’s Neoplatonic scholarship was innovative in subject-matter relative to earlier British scholarship, but also embodied rigorous technical scholarship applied to editing and commentary, a legacy of the training that he owed to his tutor, A.B. Poynton.<sup>81</sup> He certainly eschewed the grand syntheses found in Caird’s and Inge’s Gifford Lectures, or, however much he may have respected it, anything like the broad humanism of his Oxford mentor. Instead, he was firmly committed to industry and technique in a manner quite unlike Murray’s general approach to scholarship.<sup>82</sup>

Yet he significantly curtailed work on Neoplatonism after his Oxford appointment, to some extent because of an intrusive curricular milieu, with its focus on set books of the classical period. He was required to lecture on Plato

77. This is taken from a review of the third edition of Inge’s *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (London, 1929) at *Classical Review* 43 (1929): 140. Similar sentiments are expressed in his *Introduction to Neoplatonism* (n. 47 above) pt. IV, p. 3, where he stresses also that work on Plotinus has been produced “outside the walls of the universities.”

78. *Missing Persons* 85.

79. In his lecture of 1937, “Some Neglected Continuities in Greek Thought” (n. 20 above), he referred to Plotinus’ successors as “mostly pagan schoolmen” (Dodds Papers, Box 27/10, p. 19).

80. *Missing Persons* 91.

81. See Todd, “Technique in the Service of Humanism: A.B. Poynton’s Legacy to E.R. Dodds,” *Eikasmos* 15 (2004): 463–76.

82. In a letter to Dodds written on receiving a copy of his former pupil’s edition of the *Bacchae*, Murray remarked “how much more industrious and careful you are!” and said that in the commentary “you have dug deeper than I did and collected the evidence and stated the case where I, even if roughly right, had been impatient” (Dodds Papers, Box 3; 19 December 1944).

and Greek tragedy and took up the challenge of editing mainstream works that grew out of his teaching duties, first Euripides' *Bacchae* (Oxford, 1944) and later Plato's *Gorgias* (Oxford, 1959). Still, he lamented that Oxford's school of *Literae Humaniores* did not "foster a sense of continuity" in the history of philosophy: "For the typical mind formed by Greats, man's serious effort to understand himself and his environment comes to a dead stop with the delivery of Aristotle's lectures on ethics, to be resumed, after a little pause of two millenia when the curtain rises on the spectre of Descartes saying 'cogito ergo sum.' And yet we know that the history of the spirit is a continuum, not a sequence of disconnected chunks: there is flux and reflux in it, but never a dead stop, and nothing that happens in it is unrelated to its past or irrelevant to its future."<sup>83</sup> The sense of continuity that Dodds expresses here valuably counter-balances those sweeping remarks about the irrationalism of late antiquity for which he has been quite justifiably criticized.<sup>84</sup> It also shows that however restricted in scope his own publications may have been, he did not lose sight of that larger picture so eloquently conjured up in the following prelude to one of his Oxford classes:

In [Neoplatonism] converge almost all the main currents of thought that come down from a thousand years of Greek philosophical speculations; from it emerges the stream of Hellenic idealism which was to fertilise minds as different as Augustine and Boethius, Dante and Coleridge,<sup>85</sup> and T.S. Eliot. For that reason Neoplatonism is to the historian of ideas a necessary point of reference whether he approaches it from the side of antiquity or works back to it from the Middle Ages or the Renaissance.<sup>86</sup>

Yet Dodds's interest in Neoplatonism was also always part of a wider interest in irrationalism in antiquity. Before returning to Oxford he had published a psychopathological analysis of St Augustine's *Confessions*, and two papers dealing with Euripides' depiction of personal and social pathology,<sup>87</sup> and had also begun to study Greek religion of the classical period with

83. *Introduction to Neoplatonism* (Dodds Papers, Box 21c) Pt. I, p. 2.

84. See Hankey (2004) (n. 1 above) 190 on Pierre Hadot's conjoint criticism of Dodds and Festugière. The same kind of criticism, or qualification, has been directed at his later work, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (Cambridge, 1965); see, for example, W.H. Frend at *History* 51 (1966): 202 and various contributors to the collection *Pagan and Christian Anxiety* (n. 54 above).

85. Dodds knew whereof he spoke in the case of this author since he had assisted his wife, Annie Edwards Powell, with her book *The Romantic Theory of Poetry: An Examination in the Light of Croce's Aesthetic* (London, 1926; repr. 1979) in its fourth chapter on Coleridge.

86. *Introduction to Neoplatonism* (Dodds Papers, Box 21c), Pt. I, p. 3.

87. "The *aidôs* of Phaedra and the Meaning of the *Hippolytus*," *Classical Review* 39 (1925): 102–04; "Augustine's *Confessions*: A Study of Spiritual Maladjustment," *The Hibbert Journal* 26 (1927–28): 459–73; "Euripides the Irrationalist," *Classical Review* 43 (1929): 97–104.

particular reference to mystery religions.<sup>88</sup> He may have for a while felt some affinity to the doctrines of Neoplatonism, and in his poems he certainly he reflected its psycho-physical dualism, emulating in a mild form the kind of imaginative engagement with Neoplatonism found in Yeats, whom he greatly admired.<sup>89</sup> But by 1930 he had adopted a secular *Weltanschauung*, founded on social psychology and expressive of a general stance towards human irrationalism. Briefly, he saw morality as essentially a form of socially effective functioning in contrast with both Victorian Puritanism and Utilitarianism, yet he regarded such functioning as achieved only in the face of a system of human instincts (a legacy of William McDougall's psychology; cf. n. 60 above) that militated against the development of moral character and could negatively determine it.<sup>90</sup> The irrationalism of the instincts, and their constant potential for psychologically destructive effects, formed the conceptual foundation that underlay not only his interest in psychical research but also this historical studies of antiquity, and these, if he was to match the aspiration of his ambitious scheme, had to range well beyond the texts of Neoplatonic philosophy.

The edition of the *Bacchae* undertaken soon after his arrival at Oxford, after a slight hesitation because of a possibility of his working with Paul Henry on a new edition of Plotinus,<sup>91</sup> can be seen as reflecting this preoccupation with the irrational by engaging him with a text that subtly balanced the

88. This began with an invitation in 1932 from Gilbert Murray to speak to Greats students on early Greek religion; there is an exchange of letters at Murray Papers, ms. 418/87, 88 and 93 (March 1932). The lecture in question was given in May 1932 (it is preserved at Dodds Papers, Box 31/8).

89. Dodds's poem "The Moon Worshipers" (*Thirty-two Poems* [London, 1929] 19) is a good example of dualism ("We are the partly real ones/Whose bodies are an accident"). On Yeats's use of Plotinus see, for example, W.B. Stanford, *Ireland and the Classical Tradition* (Dublin and Totowa, 1976) 97, and see Dodds, *Missing Persons* 60–61 on his service to Yeats as "an occasional informant on questions of ancient philosophy and ancient religion."

90. Here I am giving just an epitome of a lecture of 1931, "The Ordinary Man's Ethics" (Dodds Papers, Box 31/1). It is Dodds's only surviving paper on general philosophy and marks his commitment to the kind of secular rationalism that had been germinating since his boyhood rejection of Christianity had left him open to the influences of psychology and the social sciences.

91. In a letter of 7 December 1936 from Dodds to Kenneth Sisam of the Clarendon Press in the Oxford University Press Archives file on the edition of the *Bacchae* Dodds specifically says: "It has recently been suggested to me that I might be asked to collaborate with Father Henry in his critical text of Plotinus, and I should like to be free at any rate to consider such a proposal though I am not certain that I should accept it." Dodds had become Regius Professor of Greek in mid-1936 and faced a choice between continuing his studies of Neoplatonism or working on some canonical text. He seems not to have regretted his decision, saying that when he returned to Oxford after World War II, just after the publication of the edition of the *Bacchae*, he "had at last established (or so I felt) that I knew something about other matters than neo-Platonism" (*Missing Persons* 169).

exhibition of psychopathological states with their analysis. Euripides, whom Dodds followed Murray in idealizing, could thus be valued for understanding the dangers of the very instincts that he could display dramatically. Around the same time, after plans to reprint MacKenna's translation in a Loeb edition had fallen through, Dodds declined to follow up on the suggestion of W.H.D. Rouse, the series general editor, that he prepare such an edition when Henry's text became available.<sup>92</sup> For by 1939 he had, as we have seen (cf. n. 63), mapped out a plan for studies in the decline of rationalism in antiquity that began with the classical period. From then on his study of Neoplatonism would be subsumed under a larger program dictated by his pessimistic historicist vision. The authors of the classical period that he dealt with at Oxford could also, as *The Greeks and the Irrational* showed, serve this larger project of studying rationalism and its decline. To that extent, Neoplatonism did become a "side-show," but in a constructive way. For example, Dodds's work on Plotinus had from the outset been marked by the claim that this thinker admirably avoided the irrationalism of his era and thus stood out as "a genuine Hellenist."<sup>93</sup> But in that respect Plotinus resembled *mutatis mutandis* Euripides who similarly resisted an irrationalism that he all too clearly recognized. In the same vein, Dodds's attraction to Plato's *Gorgias* was in part based on an admiration for Plato's rejection of the extreme and irrational aspects of fifth-century Athenian mass democracy.<sup>94</sup>

The evidence on the place of Neoplatonic studies within Dodds's early intellectual development indicates why he was willing to deviate from the entrenched curriculum in which he was educated. He approached Neoplatonism in a manner than can only be called *sui generis*. Working without any specific philosophical or religious motivation, he boldly blended psychology and anthropology into an evolutionary historicism that highlighted central aspects of the cultural world of later antiquity. It was a rare scholar who

92. Letter of Rouse to Dodds of 24 November 1937, at Dodds Papers, Box 2. An earlier editor, T.E. Page, had approached Stephen MacKenna in 1919, and later in 1931 after the appearance of the final volume of his translation, with a view to preparing a Loeb edition, but MacKenna turned him down on both occasions out of a reluctance to revise his work; see Dodds ed., *Journal and Letters of Stephen MacKenna* (n. 44 above) 153–54 and 281–83 (letters to Dodds). Given this, it is not surprising that Page rebuffed Dodds's proposal in the early 1920s to prepare a Loeb edition himself (*Missing Persons* 75).

93. See the powerful conclusion to "The *Parmenides* of Plato and the Origin of the Neoplatonic 'One'" (n. 75 above): Plotinus was "the one man who still knew how to think clearly in an age which was beginning to forget what thinking meant." The same position was restated, in calmer terms decades later in his "Tradition and Personal Achievement in the Philosophy of Plotinus," (*JRS* 50 [1960]), reprinted in Dodds, *The Ancient Concept of Progress and Other Essays* ch. 8, where (at 139) the phrase "genuine Hellenist" can be found.

94. See Todd, article cited in n. 55 above.

had the intellectual curiosity and discipline to develop this position, and an even rarer one who did so while remaining attached to the fundamentals of classical philology but without losing sight of a wider historical picture of which Neoplatonism was a part.

