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in a new series beginning with volume XVI in Dec 1998. Our website is **http://classics.dal.ca/Journals/Dionysius/**.

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Preface

Three years ago I invited former students and friends of our Department to a colloquium on "Wisdom belongs to God." The title came from Plato's Socrates. In the *Apology*, Socrates, obedient to the god whose oracle agreed that he was wisest of humans, subjected to his elenchus all who might be thought to know or supposed themselves to know. By this examination, he arrived at the conclusion: "The truth of the matter is pretty certainly this, that real wisdom is the property of God, and that this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom has little or no value." Thus, critical philosophical reason is affirmed, and, at the same time, it also discovers its own limit. This structure is paradigmatic. In the Hellenic tradition reason's quest is undertaken with an ascetic totality appropriate to what is laid on by divinity, and, by self-criticism, it arrives at the divine wisdom on which it depends. Transforming Socrates, Plato and Aristotle affirm divinity is not jealous, its goodness is as self-diffusive as the light of the sun, and by nature shares the wisdom which is proper to it.

From at least the time of Homer, the Greeks characterised themselves in terms of an inquisitive, ceaselessly active reason with an inclination to scepticism; so multi-formed and determined to succeed with its schemes as to be deceptive and untrustworthy; so endlessly questioning as to defy authority even that of the gods, to say nothing of rulers. We need only to mention Odysseus, Achilles, Ajax, Prometheus, Pentheus, Antigone, and, above all, Oedipous, to see the poetic theologians depict equally the god threatening power of reason and the evil in it. In consequence, the reason which is proper to them is ultimately self-critical and self-transcending, or, to add 19th century terms, it is Aufgehoben or self-overcoming. The fear of endlessly meddling rationality and the deeply thought criticism of it appear in a great chorus of the *Antigone* of Sophocles: "Awesome and terrible wonders are many, and none is more than the human … [S]peech, and wind-swift thought, and all the moods

that mould a state, hath he taught himself… Cunning beyond fancy's dream is the fertile skill which brings him, now to evil, now to good. When he honours the laws of the land, and that justice which he hath sworn by the gods to uphold, proudly stands his city: no city hath he who, for his rashness, dwells with sin."

The wide range of the essays in this volume indicates the breadth of imagination with which my invitation was taken up. It, together with essays by Tim Riggs, Olivier Boulnois, Michael Harrington, and myself in *Dionysius* 35 (2017) are a gleaning from the rich feast presented during that memorable week in June, 2017. They have been revised in light of its elenchus. Its Editors, Drs Fournier, Diamond, and myself, are grateful to the authors for their gifts of time and thought, to Justin Wollf and his team who made the colloquium work, and to Jacob Glover, who, ever better and more masterfully, produces *Dionysius*.

Dr Nicholas Thorne in "Socratic Wisdom in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*" enables us to begin with the Socratic "Wisdom Belongs to God." Plato's teacher is compared to Tiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*. Both are divinely inspired but only the stimuli of encounters enable them to know what they have received: "Accordingly, Socrates can be said to have wisdom, and yet its source lies beyond him, a gift, we can infer, of the god." Aaron Higgins-Brake, takes us to the human ascent to divine wisdom in Plotinus by way of the *Gnothi seauton*. The most striking remarks in his ""We Too Are Kings": Plotinus on the Self and God" concern the self and the One. "Plotinus does not merely conceive the One to be the self, but also considers these two terms to be essentially synonymous. To be a self or to be a being is to be one in some way. The source of oneness and thus the source of selfhood is nothing other than the One itself. Everything else that may be called a self is so-called only in a derivative sense." Such a treatment of the fundamental takes us back to the second essay in this volume, Dr Michael Fournier's "Epicurus' Panpsychism." It argues: "the atom must have some fundamental idea of self, it must have some self-relation. I argue that this is some form of contemplation,

similar to that found in Aristotle. For Aristotle continuous contemplation does not involve an object external to thought. Thus for Aristotle and for Epicurus, continuous contemplation makes us invulnerable and issues in a divine life, a life that is unwearied, pleasant, and blessed in virtue of its indestructibility. It is not difficult to see the similarities between the life of *theoria* in Aristotle and Epicurus." We might say that it is even easier to see the similarities between the One and the atom of Epicurus.

Both when introducing *Dionysius* 35, and in other recent writing, I have remarked on a shift in Neoplatonic perspectives: "Among leading contemporary Western philosophical and theological phenomena is making the ineffable immediately incarnate, i.e. the immediate union of the extreme ends of Platonist systems. The ineffable first is immediately joined to the material; intellect is pulled within soul, or life, spirit is bodily, and body has the attributes of mind.'[1] Nothing could illustrate that more than an interchangeability between Aristotelian divine *theoria*, the apprehension of the Plotinian One, and the life of the Epicurean atom. At various stages along the path to this comparison are the concern with sensation of the good (Dr Tim Riggs' "The Light of Truth: The Role of the Good in Human Cognition in Late Ancient Platonism"), Dr Evan King, on the Ground in Eckhart, Matthew Wood, on Proclus' theory of the symbol, Daniel Heide, on Aristotelian hylomorphism in Origen and the fate of bodies for him and Eriugena, and Dr Matthew Furlong, on place in Eriugena. Elizabeth King is determined to prevent the disappearance of the civic virtues in Plotinus, and Dr Emily Parker will not allow matter to become an independent principle in Philo.

In Dr Matthew Wood's "Similarity and Difference in Proclus' Theory of the Symbol," we "come to see in what ways the doctrine

1 W.J. Hankey, "Founding body in Platonism: Reconsiderations," for the Medieval and Renaissance volume, edited by Andrew LaZella and Richard A. Lee, Jr., of The Critical History of Philosophy Series, University of Edinburgh Press, in press.

demarcates, from within the framework of a uniquely Neoplatonic theory of poetics, what Proclus considers to be the limits of philosophical reason." The papers by Dr Rebecca Coughlin ("Uniting with Divine Wisdom: theurgic prayer and religious practice in Dionysius and Marsilio Ficino"), Nathan McAllister (" The Soul as Limit: Iamblichus' Doctrine of the Soul and the Beginning of Wisdom") go back before Proclus to Iamblichus with the same result. Theurgic prayer and religious practice are necessary and appropriate to the soul's rise through but beyond reason to union. This is a pagan – Christian world in which, as Simon Fortier shows in "Proclus on θεός," god is said, like being, one, and good, in many ways. So many that Evan King's essay for us ("Berthold of Moosburg on Intellect and the One of the Soul") begins: "The almost total concord of the pagan Proclus and the Christian Dionysius is the doxographical foundation of Berthold of Moosburg's *Exposition on the Elements of Theology of Proclus* (~1327--1361)." Berthold may be taken as completing a series in this small collection of essays: "The ground of the soul, rather than the place of true selfhood, becomes the principle by which the soul abandons itself entirely." This is how Dionysius is matched: "As for Dionysius, his essential contribution is the ecstatic language of going outside ourselves: 'not according to ourselves, but our entire selves placed outside of ourselves entire and deified entire'."

Such wisdom prevailed into 17th century England as David Curry shows in "*Redire ad principia*: The Dance of Apophatic and Kataphatic theology in Lancelot Andrewes." Unfortunately the theological learning through which it could be understood did not survive. T.S. Eliot and Nicholas Vossky fail, as Vossky's father also did, by trying to understand later Neoplatonism within the limits of polemical preconceptions about Plotinus. Daniel Watson in "A Law beyond Grace in The Prologue to *Senchas Már*" is not procrustean, but the effort to find analogies and parallels between the Irish and the Hellenes is only just started. Happily he will continue his work in Dublin with a fine multiyear fellowship. A European Research Council project on the *Liber de causis* will draw the

Kings and Matthew Vanderkwaak for four years to the same city.

This coincidence provides an opportunity to recollect the crucial role of the Irish in carrying Neoplatonism as a living spiritual, literary, and philosophical movement into our time. Matthew Furlong "The Liturgy of Place: Theophany and Liberal Arts from Eriugena to Deleuze" reminds us of the essential role of the French: "In Eriugenian terms, Deleuze and Foucault want to define the Procession as fully as possible. Deleuze invents a language and logic of spatio-temporal rhythm for this kind of thinking, taking seriously the notion that time is the horizon of Being. Like Eriugena, Foucault thinks incorporeal things in terms of their spatio-temporal genesis. With Deleuze, he only admits of transcendences that express the spatio-temporal dynamisms which express them. He characterizes his thinking as an 'incorporeal materialism'." Jean Trouillard appears repeatedly in our volume; he judges that Eriugena is the standard for the authentic development of Neoplatonism in the West. Peace reigns between these two traditions of Neoplatonism, both continued abundantly in the Classics Department and by this journal.

January 5, 2019
Wayne J. Hankey