# RECONSTRUCTING LATE ANTIQUE PSYCHOLOGY: REVERSION, CONVERSION AND INTROVERSION OF THE SOUL[1]

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Abstract: The religious, theological and philosophical discourse in Late Antiquity concerning the human soul, the Greek *psuchē*, reveals a sophisticated and complex psychological language that was aimed at conceptualizing and articulating the act of conversion. The analysis of Gnostic, Orthodox Christian, and Neoplatonic writings in relation to the *psuchē* shows the cardinal role that this term played in formulating individual processes of mental transformation. Attributing active agency, mutability and relational aspect to the individual *psuchē* turned it into a unique conceptual device, necessary to define anew the human condition.

In his monograph, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some aspects of religious experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*, written fifty years ago, Eric Robertson Dodds analyzes the different developments in thought in the second and third centuries AD as a general intellectual reaction to changes in the Roman world.[2] In his first chapter 'Man and the Material World,' he describes the devaluation of the universe in the early Christian centuries as progressive withdrawal of divinity from the material world and the corresponding devaluation of ordinary human experience. He describes the characteristic attitudes that developed in this era towards the world and the place of man within it as a product of a global sense of anxiety, which incited man to turn his back on the here and now – the visible cosmos – in favor of 'mystical experiences' of the soul.[3] This seems to

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[2] E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some aspects of religious experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1965).

[3] We use here Dodds' terminology. Note that we shall avoid the use of 'mystical' and 'mysticism,' in order not to differentiate between the religious, philosophical and psychological aspects of the 'experiences' attributed to the *psuchē*. See one of the best introductions to the phenomenology of mysticism: M. de Certeau, "Mysticism," trans. Marsanne Brammer, *Diacritics* 22/2 (1992) pp. 11-25.

Dodds to be not only a sort of escapism, but even, in his words, "a collective cultural neurosis," which he connects with Christian asceticism.[4] The movement of man away from reality and towards a moral validation of invisibility is, according to Dodds, a product of "a wave of pessimism that swept over the West."[5] Using Freudian language, Dodds sees the soul as the means of dissociation, both external (separating a man from the reality that surrounds him) and internal (according to the Freudian *ego-superego-id* model).

In Dodds' reading, 'mystical experiences' express man's search for unity, through which the perceiver realizes his own inner union.[6] Dodds continues to look for what he calls a mystical philosophical discourse that provided a psychological reply to the questions of this 'age of anxiety,' and finds it in the two great thinkers of the third century: Plotinus and Origen.[7] By avoiding sense-perception the *psuchē* gains a cardinal role as the means of connecting man not only to the divine, but also to man's own existence in the universe.

In what follows we shall examine the human soul as a theological and philosophical construct in order to reveal the definition of its new functions as a creative cultural means of an individual psychological process. We shall see that the construct of the human *psuchē* does not indicate a rupture between the visible and invisible world which Dodds identified as the characteristic of an 'age of anxiety.' It enables, instead, to resolve this tension by providing a means to create and develop new psychological strategies which provide man with control of both the visible and the invisible, the real and surreal dimensions of his existence. We shall start with the articulation of this process in philosophical and theological terms in Gnostic texts.

### The Gnostic *psuchē*

The symbolic language of the myths recorded in the Gnostic texts known as the Nag Hammadi Collection attests to the development of a new religious language in the first centuries of the Christian era, which makes use of symbols such as soul, spirit, mind, wisdom and faith.[8] Here we find the unification of man and God the Father through the

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[4] "In the recurrent *topos* of the flight of the soul through the universe – imagined as taking place in a dream, or after death, or sometimes just in waking contemplation – we can trace a growing contempt for all that may be done and suffered beneath the moon." (Dodds, *op. cit*, p. 7).

[5] *Ibid*., p. 18.

[6] *Ibid*., p. 80.

[7] *Ibid*., pp. 83-128. Plotinus makes the entire universe the creation of the *psuchē* (Plotinus, *Enneads,* v.1.2.1ff, vol. 2, p. 261 in *Plotini Opera*, eds. Henry Paul and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1959, 1973), and conditions the meeting between the soul and God by the elimination of everything: Plotinus, *Enneads*, vi.7.34.12ff (vol. 3, p. 256ff), vi.9 (vol. 3, p. 322ff), following Dodds, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-86).

[8] We have used the translations in the edition: *The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, ed. Marvin Meyer. New York: HarperOne, 2008.

*nous*, the mind, in order to obtain divine knowledge.[9] We can also look at the way the creation of the world and the creation of man are constructed here, as well as the place of the human soul connected to *Sophia* ('Wisdom') "whom some call *Pistis*" ('Faith') which breathed spirit into man,[10] or her daughter *Zoe* ('Life').[11] In 'On the Origin of the World,' the tripartite Gnostic model is laid out, according to which man is created from body, spirit (the breath of the Wisdom of God), and soul. It is the soul, the last element received by man, which enables knowing (*gnosis*) God.[12]

This process of 'knowing' God is further developed in the so-called 'Exegesis of the Soul,' which defines a new function to the human soul within the developing religious language.[13] The myth tells the story of the fall of the soul (*psuchē*), a feminine entity of androgynous form, away from her union with the Father into the material world. This is followed by a process of repentance, which is also a process of regaining the knowledge (*gnosis*) she had originally. The soul is finally united with her bridegroom, who is sent to her from God:[14]

> Wise men of old gave the soul (*psuchē*) a feminine name. In reality she is female in her
> nature (*phusis*) as well. She even has her womb (*mētra*). As long as she was alone with
> the father, she was virgin and androgynous in form. But when she fell down into a body
> (*sōma*) and came to this life, then she fell into the hands of many robbers and men of
> hubris. And the wanton creatures passed her from one to another and soiled her. Some
> made use of her by force, while others did so by seducing her with a deceiving gift. In
> short, they defiled her, and she [was no longer] virgin. And she prostituted her body
> (*sōma*) and gave herself to one and all, considering each one she was about to embrace to
> be her husband. When she had given herself to wanton, unfaithful adulterers, so that they
> might make use of her, then she sighed deeply and repented. Thus when she turns her

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[9] In 'Thunder/Thunder: Perfect Mind' and in the 'Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth,' where the author adopts from Hermes the idea of the mind moving the soul into the divine mind (*ibid*., pp. 416-417).

[10] Note the tripartite Neo-platonic model of body, spirit and soul.

[11] See the creation of man by the spirit of Sophia, and the creation of the soul within him by Zoe her daughter ('On the Origin of the World,' *ibid*., pp. 213-214).

[12] *Loc. cit.*

[13] 'The Exegesis on the Soul,' trans. Marvin Meyer, *ibid*., pp. 223-234. Bibliography by Madeleine Scopello: *L'Exégèse de l'âme, Nag Hammadi Codex II, 6: Introduction, traduction et commentaire* (Leiden: Brill, 1985). *Ead.*, *Femme, gnose et manichéisme: De l'espace mythique au territoire du réel* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). *Ead.*, "Jewish and Greek Heroines in the Nag Hammadi Library," in *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism*, ed. Karen L. King (Harrisburg Pe.: Trinity Press International, 2000) pp. 71-90. *Ead*., "Les 'Testimonia' dans le traité de l'Exégèse de l'âme," *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 191 (1971) pp. 159-171.

[14] In the translation of William C. Robinson, copied from The Gnostic Society Library website, 'The Nag Hammadi Library:' http://www.gnosis.org/naghamm/exe.html on September 22nd, 2013, with alterations from Scopello: *L'Exégèse de l'âme…, op.cit.*, pp. 103-110.

face from those adulterers, she runs to others and they compel her to live with them and made her their slave as masters upon their bed…

As long as the soul (*psuchē*) keeps running about everywhere copulating (*koinōnein*) with whomever she meets and defiling herself, she exists suffering her just deserts. But when she perceives the straits she is in and weeps before the father and repents (*metanoein*), then the father will have mercy on her and he will make her womb (*mētra*) turn from the external domain and will turn it again inward, so that the soul will regain her proper character (*merikon*). For it is not so with a woman. For the womb of the body is inside the body like the other internal organs, but the womb of the soul is around the outside like the male genitalia which is external…

And so the purification of the soul is to regain the newness of her former nature and to turn herself back again. That is her baptism (*baptisma*). Then she will begin to rage at herself like a woman in labor, who writhes and rages in the hour of delivery. But since she is female, by herself she is powerless to beget a child. From heaven the father sent her her man, who is her brother, the firstborn. Then the bridegroom came down to the bride. She gave up her former prostitution and cleansed herself of the pollutions of the adulterers, and she was renewed so as to be a bride…

Then the bridegroom, according to the father's will, came down to her into the bridal chamber, which was prepared. And he decorated the bridal chamber. For since that marriage (*gamos*) is not like the carnal (*sarikikos*) marriage, those who are to have intercourse with one another will be satisfied with that intercourse (*koinōnia*). And as if it were a burden, they leave behind them the annoyance of physical desire and they turn their faces from each other. But this marriage (*gamos*) was not of this [kind], but once they unite with one another, they become a single life.

In a captivating article, June Singer has attempted to read the mythical motion of the Gnostic soul as a psychological process of evolution of the individual, embedded with Jungian archetypes.[15] For Singer, the Gnostic soul is the archetypal vessel that is given form in order to be able to carry the holy spark or seed that exists within each human being. She explains the myth as dealing not with repentance from sin, but with a process of turning away from ignorance in order to regain the gnosis that the soul once knew and has forgotten.[16] She thus sees it not only as a process of purification from external contaminations, but of inner transformation away from suffering. This process of

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[15] June Singer, "The Evolution of the Soul," in *The Allure of Gnosticism: The Gnostic Experience in Jungian Psychology and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Robert A. Segal (Peru Il.: Open Court, 1995) pp. 54-69. See also Robert A. Segal, "Jung's Fascination with Gonosticism," in *The Allure of Gnosticism…, op. cit.*, pp. 26-38; Christine Downing, "Towards an Erotics of the Psyche," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 44 (1976) pp 629-638. For a Jungian reading of Christian symbolism see: C. G. Jung, *CW* 9ii, v, § 68ff (="Christ, a Symbol of the Self").

[16] Which in Jungian terms would be identical with the 'individuation process' (*loc. cit.*).

transformation is symbolized here by the unusual metaphor of turning the external womb inward in a sort of a return to the *self*, away from external stimuli towards the inner divine spark. This return inwards seems to symbolize both a psychological and a theological process.[17] It enables a gnosis of both the inner soul and the divine spark which it contains, and through it of God whose grace is indispensable for the reunification of the soul with the divine.[18] This process of return through 'introversion' of the soul is *her* 'conversion' (Greek: *epistrophē*), a necessary process of perfection to become whole again and at one with *her* divine origin, which is the meaning here of *her* redemption and salvation.[19]

This text reveals clearly the new function of the soul as a means of religious and psychological transformation via repentance, return and conversion.[20] Thus belief is perceived as a transformation of the *psuchē*, which is also a psychological process composed of repentance and conversion as return (Greek: *epistrophē*), in order to gain belief and knowledge in its divine part as we see in the 'Exegesis of the Soul.'[21] In this, the Gnostic text does the opposite of what Dodds claims. Not only does it not validate the rupture between the visible and invisible world that Dodds identifies as the characteristic of an 'age of anxiety,' but it resolves it through a psychological strategy and by using the human *psuchē* as an instrument. The very idea that the human soul can experience *epistrophē* – a conversion as a reversion to its original values in order to unite the two worlds, the external and the internal – gives man control of both the visible and the invisible, the real and surreal dimensions of his existence. It inverts the anxiety, and transforms it into a reconciliation of the conflict between external and internal aspects of the human soul in what June Singer identified as a psychological process of transformation. We find the same theme of a process of self-transformation as a conversion-reversion of the *psuchē*-soul and *her* return to God through a psychological introversion in the theology and philosophy of the period.

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[17] See Giovanni Filoramo, "The Transformation of the Inner Self in Gnostic and Hermetic Texts," in *Transformations of the Inner Self in Ancient Religions*, eds. Jan Assmann, Guy G. Stroumsa (Leiden: Brill, 1999) pp. 137-149.

[18] In Jungian terms, this is the unification of the soul and the self, which is the objective of the psychological process.

[19] This fits exactly the Jungian conceptualization of the psyche.

[20] See following note. Maddalena Scopello reads this text against the background of purity and pollution in Second-Temple Jewish and early Christian apocryphal texts: *ead.*, *L'exégèse de l'âme…, op. cit.*, 57ff. She questions whether this text should be considered Gnostic at all, but concludes that in spite of its Romanesque character, it reflects a simplified reading of Gnostic thought (*ibid.*, pp. 95-100).

[21] In the 'On the Origin of the World' the end of age is symbolized by the return of the rule of Pistis Sophia (*The Nag Hammadi Scriptures*, p. 292) who will drive out the gods of chaos and light overcomes darkness (ibid., pp. 220-221). For the relation between ecstasy, *psuchē* and Pistis Sophia see: *Pistis Sophia*. This Gnostic text concerns the repentance and salvation of Pistis Sophia, whom Jesus finds below the thirteenth *aeon* (*ibid.*, i.34-36, pp. 51-52).

### The theological functionality of the *psuchē*

Much like Origen (c. 184/175-c. 253/254), who uses an apparently Platonic discourse in order to present the soul as a link to God as part of the cosmic theology that he constructs in his 'On the First Principles' (*De principiis*), [22] his contemporary Tertullian (c. 155-c. 240) was also interested in the nature of the soul and dedicated two essays to the *anima*.[23]

> It's too bad, I suppose, that the Law has come forth from Judaea and not from Greece. It is regrettable too that Christ chose fishermen instead of sophists to preach his doctrine. The philosophers with their vaporings becloud the clear sky of truth. These must Christians disperse, scattering the teachings of the philosophers about the origin of things by using the heavenly teachings of the Lord. Thus, the doctrines by which the pagans are deceived and the faith of Christians weakened will be destroyed.[24]

This is how Tertullian chooses to open his *De anima* – 'On the Soul' – setting himself not only against the philosophers in the first three chapters, but also against Greek philo-

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[22] PG 11:218-225 (=Origen, "On the First Principles," ii.8: *De anima*, analysis *infra*). See Patricia Cox Miller, "Shifting Selves in Late Antiquity," in *Religion and the Self in Antiquity*, eds. David Brakke, Michael L. Satlow and Steven Weitzman (Bloomington In.: Indiana University Press, 2005) pp. 15-39. For an analysis of his diversion (consciously or unconsciously) from Plato's *psuchē* as he perceived it see Mark Julian Edwards, *Origen against Plato* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002) ch. 3. Note that *De principiis* came down to us in its Latin translation. For Paul see Theo K. Heckel, "Body and Soul in Saint Paul," in *Psyche and Soma: Physicians and Metaphysicians on the Mind-Body Problem from Antiquity to Enlightenment*, eds. John P. Wright and Paul Potter (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000) pp. 117-131.

[23] Tertullian, *De anima*, ed. J. H. Waszink, in Tertullian, *Opera*, ed. Dom Eligius Dekkers (Turnout: Brepols, "CCSL II," 1954) vol. 1, vol. 2, pp. 779-869, trans. Edwin A. Quain in *Tertulian Apologetical Works and Minucius Felix Octavius* (Washington D.C.: The Catholic Univ. of America Press, 1962, pp. 179-309). Tertullian, *De testimonio animae,* ed. R. Willems, in Tertullian, *Opera*, vol. 1, pp. 173-183. For the problems in this text see: Laura Nasrallah, *An Ecstasy of Folly: Prophecy and Authority in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, Ma.: Harvard University Press, 2003) pp. 111-114. Note that unlike the Stoic Latin authors who used *animus* for the Greek *psuchē* (eg. Cicero), Christian Latin authors turn to *anima* keeping thus the Greek feminine. Augustine, on the other hand, uses *anima* and *animus* alternatively for the human soul and any other type of soul, while *animus* is also reserved for 'mind': Gerard J. P. O'Daly, "Anima, animus," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Mayer, vol. 1 (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG, 1986) pp. 315-340. Gerard J. P. O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley-Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1987) pp. 7-8. See *infra* nn. 34-35.

[24] Tertullian, *De anima*, iii.3: '*Deliquit, opinor, diuina doctrina ex Iudaea potius quam ex Graecia oriens. Errauit et Christus piscatores citius quam sophistam ad praeconium emittens. Si qua igitur in hunc modum de nidoribus philosophiae candidum et purum aerem ueritatis infuscant, ea erunt Christianis enubilanda et percutientibus argumentationes originales, id est philosophicas, et opponentibus definitiones caelestes, id est dominicas, ut et illa quibus ethnici a philosophia capiuntur, destruantur, et haec quibus fideles ab haeresi concutiuntur, retundantur*' (trans. E. A. Quain, *op. cit.* p.186).

sophy as such. We shall see, however, that he adopts much more than he would care to admit from Greek philosophy. In fact, no other means (be it rhetorical or terminological) existed, for him or for any subsequent Christian theologian, which would serve to develop and formulate their ideas about the Scriptures. Tertullian's objective is to show that the human *anima* (rather than *animus*, see below) emanated from God's breath (Latin: *ex dei flatu*), which he connects to the verse in Genesis 2:7, but in contrast to Platonism, he demonstrates that this is corporeal. The rhetorical means for showing the corporeality of the soul (*corporalitas animae*, *De anima*, vii.1) he demonstrates, following the Stoics, as the passions.[25] The soul shares the pain of the body when the latter suffers from bruises, wounds, etc., while the body reflects the disabilities of the soul under the influence of anxiety, worry, or love, through sense perception.[26] His objective, the corporeality of the soul, is indispensable in order to explain how the soul could suffer in hell.[27] Nonetheless Tertullian's analysis had to be constructed on the premise of the immortality of the soul. In other words, what becomes so central in the Christian discourse about the soul is the need to reconcile the paradox of the soul being both made (born and created) and corporeal (Stoicism) while being nonetheless immortal (Platonism) yet "not more than immortal."[28] This paradox is resolved through an exegesis of Scripture. The relationship between body and soul serves a new function here, in establishing the basis for Christian theology.[29]

In both his treatises about the soul, *De anima* and *De testimonio animae*, Tertullian advances the idea that knowing God is a matter of the soul.[30] The soul is the witness of

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[25] See his reference to Chryssipus: *ibid*., v.6. See H. von Staden, "Body, Soul, and Nerves: Epicurus, Herophilus, Erasistratus, the Stoics, and Galen," in *Psyche and Soma… op. cit.,* pp. 79-116. Jackie Pigeaud, *La maladie de l'âme: Étude sur la relation de l'âme et du corps dans la tradition médico-philosophique antique* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1989) pp. 265-269.

[26] Tertullian, *De anima*, v.5, vi.5. Cf. Galen, *Quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequantur*. In *Claudii Galeni Pergamenti: Scripta Minora*, vol. 2, ed. Johannes Müller (Amsterdam: A. M. Hakkert, 1967 =Leipzig: Teubner, 1891) pp. 32-79. There are many parallels between Tertullian and Galen in the role that they attribute to the *psuchē*. This study is a part of a larger project that analyzes also the medical concept-ualization of the *psuchē* in Late Antiquity.

[27] Tertullian, *De anima*, vii.2-3.

[28] *Ibid*., iii.2. See Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tryphon*, ed. Miroslav Marcovich, *Justini Martyris Dialogus cum Tryphone* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1997) dia.1.5 (p. 71): 'others maintain that the *psuchē* is immortal and incorporeal (Greek: *athanaos kai asōmatos*), they think that they will not be punished for their bad actions since the incorporeal is not affected (*apthes gar to asōmaton*). And otherwise that since the *psuchē* is immortal they do not need God.' For a full discussion about the immortality and corporeality of the soul see *ibid.*, dia. 4.1-6.2 (pp. 76-82).

[29] Guy Stroumsa, " 'Caro salutis cardo': Shaping the Person in Early Christian Thought", *History of Religions* 30/1 (1990) pp. 25-50. See PG 11:218-225 (=Origen, "On the First Principles," ii.8: *De anima*).

[30] Knowing God is attributed to the *psuchē* and not to the mind: Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tryphon*, *op. cit.,* dia. 4.2 (p. 77).

truth because it comes from God and hence knows him.[31] This Christian belief (*opinio christiana*) according to which the soul can experience and feel (in contrast to knowing through philosophy), Tertullian explains, is perceived by non-Christians as delusion (*vanitas*), folly (*stupora*) and presumption (*praesumptio*).[32] Thus it is this belief that he wishes to validate. For this purpose he constructs a model of the soul, which is based on sense perception and cognitive capacities.[33]

Tertullian shows how the body's functions (affections, temperaments, sense perception) determine mental capacities, and attributes them to the *animus* (mind, "which the Greek call *nous*"), which is, he explains, a faculty within the soul, by which it gains knowledge.[34] However, the *animus* (mind) is not distinct from the *anima* (soul), but is inseparable from it, and acts as both its capacity and instrument: "its slave and not its master."[35] Moreover, it acts in complete agreement with sense-perception. The senses are the basis of any experience and thought, and any misconception of the truth is due to disorder of interpretation or opinion (hence the mental capacity), rather than the functioning of the senses.[36] The soul cannot perceive what the body feels without its mental capacity (*animus*).[37] But, "when a man is demented (*dementit homo*), the soul is demented (*anima dementit*), and the mind (*animus*), far from being separated from it, is the fellow sufferer of the soul. In fact, the soul is the principal sufferer in such a contingency. Thus when the soul leaves

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[31] Tertullian, *De testimonio animae*, ii.6 (p. 177).

[32] *Ibid*., iv (pp. 178-180).

[33] For Tertullian drawing on Soranus of Ephesus' *De anima* see Nasrallah, *op. cit.,* ch. 3: 'Tertullian and the soul's condition,' p. 114, n. 58.

[34] Tertullian, *De anima*, xii.1 (p. 797). Note that here we can discern the terminological gap between the Greek and the Latin, that caused divergence also within the Latin discourse. Cf. Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations*, ed. Georges Fohlen, trans. Jules Humbert, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1964, 1968). While Cicero uses the Latin *animus* for the Greek *psuchē*, Tertullian sticks to the feminine form and uses *anima*. In fact Cicero's *anima* and *animus* are swapped here. *Anima* is here the *psuchē*, and *animus* is the mental capacities of the *psuchē*, see following note and cf. O'Daly, "Anima, animus", *op. cit.* on Augustine's terminology in this matter (*supra* n. 23).

[35] Tertullian, *De anima*, xii-xiii. Cf. Erasistratus who made the nervous system the instrument of the *psuchē*: von Staden, *op. cit.*: The soul may have multiple powers, capabilities, operations, faculties, but they are really organic parts of a single living being: the soul is one undivided entity in contrast to the views of Plato, Zeno, Aristotle, Panaetius, Soranus and Chryssipus, who divide it into two, three, five, six, seven and eight respectively (Tertullian, *De anima*, xiv.1-2, p. 799).

[36] *Ibid*., xvii.9 (p. 805) where Tertullian brings examples of Greek tragedies: Orestes, who looking at his sister perceives her as his mother, and Ajax who seeing Ulysses in the slaughtered cattle: these are not defective visions, but *insania* – a disorder in the perception of the senses. Cf. Ps.-Plutarch, *Opinions of the philosophers* (*Placita philosophorum*) in Plutarch, *Œuvres morales*, ed. and trans. Guy Lachenaud, vol. 12, pt. 2: *Opinions des philosophes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2003) iv.12 (pp. 153-154), where the case of Orestes' visual misperception is an example of an illusion (*phantasma*), the creation of the wrong effect in the *psuchē* in view of the object perceived. This is, the author says, what characterizes the state of *melancholia* and *mania*.

[37] Tertullian, *De anima*, xviii.6-9 (p. 808).

the body upon death, the mind leaves it too, being joined to the soul."[38] Tertullian defines the soul as a means of connecting between man and God, which is actually what his treaty is all about. The soul is the bearer of the proofs of Christian faith, not books or knowledge.[39] This is very similar to the role that Origen and Plotinus attributed to the soul, as revealed by Patricia Cox Miller, in connecting the man to the divine.[40] The human soul therefore replaces philosophy, since it perceives true divine knowledge through its dual capacities: sensing and knowing. In a word, *anima* is what enables man to know God through the senses.[41] This is also where Tertullian diverges from the Stoics. Being spirit, the soul cannot be body.[42] This distinction is the reason why true knowledge of God cannot come from sense-perception and cognitive knowledge.[43] So how can man experience God if the soul is distinct from the body? To answer this, Tertullian breaks away completely from what he said so far, in order to present the other side of his model: the soul's dissociation from both its mental and sensation capacities (i.e. the body) when it is in a state of ecstasy.

Tertullian's move aims to resolve the paradox Christianity introduced into the Stoic versus Platonic discourse about the soul. The soul cannot be both body (Stoicism) and immortal (Platonism). For Tertullian, the soul is indeed immortal (otherwise there can be no hell and no resurrection), but it is also corporeal (otherwise it cannot suffer).[44] But since he cannot but acknowledge that death does separate between soul and body, and that the body is mortal, the soul must be corporeal but cannot be body.[45] Hence, the soul must have some means of connection with God other than via knowledge through the body or sense-perception. The soul "would appear not to be body, since its motion is not governed by the laws of bodily motion."[46] And this is the reason why sleeping, dreaming and especially ecstasy become so central to Tertullian's argument: they exemplify the soul's motion independently of the body.

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[38] *Ibid.*, xviii.9-10 (pp. 808-809), trans. E. A. Quain, *op. cit.*, p. 221 (with my alterations).

[39] Tertullian, *De testimonio animae*, i (pp. 175-176).

[40] Miller, *op. cit.*

[41] Since, as Tertullian shows no experiencing or intelligence is possible without the senses of the body: Tertullian, *De anima*, xvii.9 (p. 805).

[42] *Ibid.*, v.2-3 (pp. 786-787).

[43] Here lies the difference that the Christian authors establish between knowledge through the soul without the body from the one hand, and knowledge through perception from the other hand, which is manifested in the sin of eating of the Tree of knowledge of Good and Bad.

[44] *Ibid.*, vii.3 (p. 790).

[45] *Ibid.*, v.6, 11 (p.787, 857).This is exactly where Galen too diverges from Stoicism but for other reasons and in a totally different direction (Galen, *op. cit.*, von Staden, *op. cit.*). Cf. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Tryphon*, *op. cit.*, dia. 6.1-2 (pp. 81-81).

[46] '*Anima autem nec extrinsecus mouebitur, ut quae non sit inanimalis, nec intrinsecus, ut quae ipsa potius moueat corpus. Itaque non uideri eam corpus, quae non corporalium forma ex aliqua regione moueatur,*' Tertullian, *De anima,* vi.1 (p. 788).

Sleep is for Tertullian an example par excellence to show a state of suspension of the activity of the senses.[47] Sleep brings quiet to the body, but not to the soul. To Tertullian the soul is always in motion, since nothing that is immortal can be quiet. Hence the body which is mortal is quiet in sleep, but not the soul.[48] The fact that the soul continues to be in motion is exemplified in dreams: although it does not depart from the body, it does the following:

> it wanders over land and sea, engages in trade, is excited, labors, plays, sorrows and rejoices, pursues the lawful and the unlawful, and clearly shows that it can accomplish much without the body, that it is supplied with members of its own, although showing the need it has of exercising its activity in the body once again. Thus, when the body awakens, it portrays before your eyes the resurrection of the dead by returning to its natural functions. There you have the natural explanation and the rational nature of sleep. Thus, by the image of death, you are introduced to faith, you nourish hope, you learn both how to live and die, you learn watchfulness even when you are asleep.[49]

The soul, Tertullian explains, is in constant movement thanks to its immortality and divinity. He goes on to equate the soul's main function in sleep to a gladiator's motions without his weapons, when his actions bear no result.[50] And this power of the soul, "a deprivation of the activity of the senses," is what "we call ecstasy… [creating here a Latin term – *ecstasis* – by transliterating the Greek word *ekstasis*] which is an image of madness (Latin: *amentiae instar*)."[51] Tertullian continues to develop this idea of a state of the soul – *amentia* – which instead of 'madness' or 'insanity' we propose to translate as *a-mentia* – 'un-mindedness,' i.e. the soul separated from the mind, its mental instrument. But how can the soul 'remember' its dreams (a mental capacity), if it is in a state of *amentia*, disconnected from the mind?[52] This point is central to Tertullian's argument, because he needs to demonstrate his argument that "we are affected by emotions in our dreams," and not through the senses and the mind.[53] He concludes that the peculiarity of this state of *amentia* does not destroy the mental functions, but only withdraws them

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[47] Cf. Galen's use of sleep: Mark Ahonen, *Mental Disorders in Ancient Philosophy* (Cham: Springer, 2014) p. 148ff.

[48] Tertullian, *De anima*, xliii (pp. 845-848).

[49] *Ibid.*, xliii.12 (p. 848).

[50] *Ibid.*, xlv.1-2 (p. 849).

[51] *Ibid.* xlv.3 (p. 849). See Therese Fuhrer, "Ecstasis," in *Augustinus-Lexikon*, ed. Cornelius Mayer, vol. 2 (Basel: Schwabe & Co. AG, 1994) pp. 736-738.

[52] Tertullian, *De anima*, xlv.5 (p. 850).

[53] *Loc. cit.* precisely in contrast to both Galen, *Quod animi mores, op. cit.* and Ps.-Plutarch, *Opinions of the philosophers*, *op. cit.,* iv.13-20; 21 (pp. 153-161).

temporarily.[54] This reasoning serves Tertullian to demonstrate the prophetic nature of dreams, and to show that to encounter and to know God is not a process of the senses-mind-soul mechanism, but an encounter of the soul in a state of *amentia*.[55] The soul is gifted with foresight (*divinatio*) "different from that capability of prophecy (*prophēteia*) and comes from the grace of God."[56] The touchstone for this proves to be the state of ecstasy that God set upon Adam in Genesis 2:21.[57] "Thus, in the beginning, sleep was preceded by ecstasy, as we read: *and God sent ecstasis upon Adam and he slept.* Sleep brought rest to the body, but ecstasy came over the soul and prevented it from resting, and from that time this combination constitutes the natural and normal form of the dream."[58] In formulating this encounter with God as a psychological process, i.e. a movement of the *psychē*, Tertullian was not alone.

## The Neoplatonic *psuchē*

> Often have I woken up to my self out of the body and entered into my self, outside of
> other things, seeing a beauty of great wonder and trusting that then above all I belonged
> to the greater part, activating a best life and coming to identity with the divine, having
> being seated (*hidrutheis*) in it, coming to that actuality, seating my self (*hidrutheis*) above
> every other intelligible object, after that rest in the divine when I come down to reasoning

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[54] "The fact that we remember dreams is proof of the fundamental soundness of the mind, but the dulling of a sound mind while memory continues to function is a species of madness. In that state, therefore, we are not considered insane, but only dreaming, and hence to be in full possession of our faculties, the same as at any other time. Although the power of exercising these faculties is dimmed, it is not completely extinguished and, while control seems to be lacking just at the time when ecstasy is affecting us in a special manner, still it then brings before us images of wisdom as well as those of error" (Latin: *Igitur quod memoria suppetit, sanitas mentis est; quod sanitas mentis salua memoria stupet, amentiae genus est. Ideoque non dicimur furere, sed somniare; ideo et prudentes, si quando, sumus. Sapere enim nostrum licet obumbretur, non tamen extinguitur, nisi quod et ipsum potest uideri uacare tunc, ecstasin autem hoc quoque operari de suo proprio, ut sic nobis sapientiae imagines inferat, quemadmodum et erroris*)', Tertullian, *De anima*, xlv.6 (p. 850).

[55] *Ibid*., xlvi. As Tertullian said earlier in the same treaty about the soul's motion: "Have we not shown elsewhere that the soul is moved by another in prophecy and madness" (*ibid*., vi.3). Here he proves that soul is corporeal yet moved from without. He then proceeds to divide dreams into three categories: (1) vain, deceitful and impure which emanate from the Devil; (2) True prophetic emanating from God; (3) dreams which the soul induce of itself by the attentive contemplation of its surroundings – the result is the what the soul endures when in ecstasy – i.e. "a special category as arising from ecstasy and its attendant circumstances" (*ibid*., xlvii). And he notes that encountering God in this state of dreaming requires fasting (*ibid*., xlviii).

[56] *Ibid*., xxii.1 (p. 814).

[57] *Ibid*., xxi. And here he joins Philo: *Quis rerum divinarum heres*, in *id., Opera*, eds. Paul Wendland and Leopold Cohn, vol. 3 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1962) pp. 56-61 (249-266, chs. 51-53).

[58] Ibid., xlv.3 (p. 849), trans. Quain, p. 280. To Tertullian a true prophet must loose his own senses since is overshadowed by the power of God, and cannot know what he has said: Tertullian, *Against Marcion* (ed. Ae. Kroymann, in Tertullian, *Opera, op. cit.,* vol. 1, pp. 437-726) iv.22.4-5 (p. 601). Ecstasy is here *amentia* (*loc. cit.*, and *ibid*., v.8.12, p. 688).

from Intellect, I am at a loss how I ever came down, and how my soul (*psuchē*) has come to be in the body (*sōma*) when she is what she has shown herself to be in herself.[59]

No Church Father wrote this beautifully moving paragraph. It was Plotinus himself (c. 204/5-270) who documented his experiences for the purpose of the philosophy he was developing.[60] We should refrain from using the term 'mystical' here to describe this sort of experience, since the modern distinction between 'mystical,' 'philosophical' and 'psychological' should be considered as anachronistic for the period in question.[61] The

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[59] Plotinus, *Enneads*, *op. cit.* iv.8.1.1-11 (vol. 2, p. 224), here in the translation of Kevin Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism* (West Lafayette In.: Purdue University Press, 2004) p. 31 (cf. Henry and Schwyzer's translation in Plotinus, *eid.* eds. vol. 3, p. 224: "Theologia I"). I am thankfull to Brian Stock who have suggested here to use Plotinus' 'my self' instead of 'myself'. Note that the verb *hidruthēsthai* can be translated as being seated, set or settled (settled down). Andrew Smith translates it as "setting myself" (Andrew Smith, *Philosophy in Late Antiquity*, London: Routledge, 2004, p. 51). As Corrigan states, the active and the passive moments of Plotinus' experience are evident in the active and passive participles of the verb "to seat" – *hidruein* (*hidryein* in Corrigan's transliteration). Corrigan identifies here a tension between an entry into a deeper *selfhood* and the perplexity that one can find oneself back in ordinary, bodily consciousness.

[60] For the importance of personal 'mystical' experience in Neoplatonism see Antony Charles Lloyd, *The Anatomy of Neoplatonism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) pp. 125-126: the hypostases are experiences in Neoplatonism, and have 'phenomenological properties,' which cannot be themselves derived from the Neoplatonic philosophical system. For Plotinus' practicing his philosophy, see Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus*, eds. Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera*, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964) ch. 23 (pp. 31-32). This is Corrigan's analysis: "Porphyry tells us in his *Life of Plotinus* that Plotinus had genuine mystical experiences, and this passage seems to capture both the unity and perplexity of such experiences for Plotinus himself. Of course, 'god' is not only, above all, the One, but also Intellect and soul; even our intellects Plotinus calls divine, or the 'god' within. This passage, then, could describe union with Intellect, but the phrase 'above every other intelligible object' indicates that Plotinus probably is speaking of mystical union with the One. The active and the passive moments of such experience are evident in the active and passive participles of the verb 'to seat' (*hidryein*), and there is a tension between entry into a deeper selfhood and yet the perplexity that one can find oneself back in ordinary, bodily consciousness." (Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 31). 'God,' 'Intellect,' 'One,' 'Soul' have all of course precise meanings in the language of Plotinus, which this paper cannot unfortunately elaborate on. For Plotinus' psychology we have consulted the following studies: Eyjólfuk Kjalar Emilsson, *Plotinus on Sense-Perception: A Philosophical Study* (Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1988); *id*. *Plotinus on Intellect* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007); *Id*. "Plotinus and soul-body dualism," in *Companions to Ancient Thought*, *2*. *Psychology*, ed. Stephen Everson (Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1991) pt. 8; Stephen R. L. Clark, "Plotinus: Body and Soul," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press) 1991, pt. 11. Henry J. Blumenthal, "On soul and intellect," in *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus*, *op. cit.*, pt. 4; Lloyd P. Gerson, *Plotinus* (London-New York: Routhledge, 1994) pt, III; Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 18ff. Our main concern here is to understand the role that the Neoplatonic model attributes to 'conversion' as a process of return: *epistrophē*. See W. Beierwaltes, *Selbsterkenntnis und Erfahrung der Einheit: Plotinus Enneades V 3: Text, Übersetzung, Interpretation, Erlauterungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1991) pp. 175-182.

[61] M. de Certeau, *op. cit.* For Plotinus' use of the term see previous note and Blumenthal, *op. cit.*

concept of the *psuchē* enabled the thinkers to define mystical, theological and, in Plotinus' case mainly philosophical aspects as 'psychological' in the modern sense of the term. We can of course use the same argument the other way around, namely that the psychological needs of the individual were articulated by the creation of this language. This is what the journey of the Gnostic soul expresses, or in the words of Plotinus: "The real desire of our soul is for what is greater than *herself*."[62] This is precisely the objective of the process of conversion as a reversion: *epistrophē* as a change of awareness, not of location.[63]

Our objective here is not to analyze this new language, nor shall we examine the use that Neoplatonism made of the *psuchē*. We should, however, consider that it has influenced and maybe even determined the conceptualization of conversion as both a psychological and theological process, and the definition of both as 'spiritual' (i.e. in contrast to the corporeal or somatic). There is a great deal that could be said about the parallel, if not joint development of Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and Christian theology.[64] What is essential for our purpose, however, is to understand that the Christian concept of the soul's *epistrophē* as conversion had precise psychological and philosophical meanings which are made clear by the Gnostic and Neoplatonic writings. Though Plotinus' paragraph cited above seems to describe an ecstatic (i.e. 'mystical') experience, we need first to understand it in philosophical terms, and to note the major difference between Plotinus' means of self-transformation and the *ekstasis* of the *psuchē* as it was defined by early Christian thinkers.[65] This difference was embodied in the place that Plotinus attributed in his model to the mind.

Being Platonists, both Plotinus and Tertullian maintain a dissociation between the *psuchē* and its incorporeal body.[66] Since the connection between *psuchē* and body was

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[62] Plotinus, *Enneads* i.4.6.17 (vol.1, p. 76), trans. Corrigan, *op. cit.*, p. 32. For Plotinus this is what incites the soul to ascend up to Intellect, and sometimes through Intellect also to the One (*ibid.*, pp. 32-33).

[63] Or, in the words of Lloyd: "content of consciousness or thought." The meaning of *epistrophē* varies. Common to all is a process of conversion of the *psuchē* through its return to its internal source, hence reversion. It can also signify introversion. For the ambiguity of the term see Lloyd, *op. cit.*, pp. 126-130. See Michael Atkinson's commentary on the two notions of *epistrophē* in Plotinus: *Plotinus: Ennead V. 1: On the 'Three principal hypostases* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 64. For Paul Aubin on the term see *infra* n. 84. .

[64] See Salvatore R. C. Lilla, *Clement of Alexandria: A Study in Christian Platonism and Gnosticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), and even as far as theurgy is concerned: Birger A. Pearson *Gnosticism and Christianity in Roman and Coptic Egypt* (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004) ch. 8, and bibliography on pp. 224-225, nn. 1-3.

[65] See Nasrallah, *op. cit*.

[66] For Plotinus' soul-body relation see: *Enneads* iv.3.32.2-9, iv.7.8.2-3. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-44. Blumenthal, *op. cit.*. See the analogy of light: the soul is to the body as the light is to air, independent of a substrate, which makes the soul an activity independent of a bodily substrate. In fact the objective here is to

defined first and foremost through sense-perception, they argued for a disconnection of the *psuchē* from sense-perception (from the activity that attaches it to the body). For Plotinus, however, the power of the senses is located in the soul, and perception is the soul's active power which joins to external objects through incoming stimuli.[67] The mission of the soul is to reach the higher level of being ('the One') by means of contemplation, but without being involved with or disturbed by the surrounding universe. This may be attained by disabling sensations so that they do not become perceptions.[68] This, however, does not mean that the soul should negate all perceptions. On the contrary, the senses are proactive: they sense before mental perception is possible. However, perceptions of external objects should be suppressed in order to enable a process of self-perception and self-reflexivity through a process of introversion of the soul.[69] Plotinus constructs his model in order to enable ascent by thought (*noein*). Cognitive capacities should be used with the objective of becoming godlike, since the soul can transcend to the One only by movement through the level of Intellect, as part of the process of return to *herself*.

According to this perception, there are two contradictory movements within the unity of being: movement towards the external world, and the return to the internal principle of identity by Intellect.[70] This return is realized through the soul's perception of *herself* without any other objects – hence, self-reflexivity in the terms of Lloyd Gerson.[71] This is the reason why the soul needs to turn away from the world towards Intellect in order to internalize *herself*, and this is why this is a conversion – *epistrophē* – as a movement of return, *epistrophē pros heautē*.[72]

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use Intellect to achieve emancipation of the soul from the bodily substrate (Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 44-45: analysis of *Enneads* iv.5.6-7).

[67] Smith, *op. cit.*, ch. 4: "Soul, the universe and matter". The active power of the soul is expressed in the idea of 'reading' of the sounds for example: (*ibid.*, p. 50). About the connection between the activities of the *psuchē* and the senses cf. Ps.-Plutarch, *Opinions of the philosophers*, *op. cit.*, iv.10-18 (pp. 151-157).

[68] Plotinus, *Enneads*, v.1.12 (vol. 2, pp. 288-289). Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 50-53. But see a more complex explanation about Plotinus' individual soul: Blumenthal, *op. cit.* and Remes Pauline, *Plotinus on self: The philosophy of the 'We'* (Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 85-91.

[69] Plotinus, *Enneads* vi.9.7 (vol. 3, p. 319).

[70] Pierre Hadot, "Epistrophè et metanoia dans l'histoire de la philosophie," in *Acts du XIᵉᵐᵉ Congrès International de Philosophie, Bruxelles. 20-26 août 1953,* vol. 12: *Histoire de la Philosophie: Méthodologie, Antiquité et Moyen Âge* (Amsterdam: North-Holland Publishing Company, 1953) pp. 31-36.

[71] Lloyd P. Gerson, "*Epistrophē pros heauton*: History and Meaning." *Documenti e Studi sulla tradizione filosofica medievale: An International Journal on the Philosophical Tradition from Late Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages of the Società Internazionale per lo Studio del Medioevo Latino (S.I.M.E.L.)* 8 (1997): pp. 1-32.

[72] According to Charles Taylor (*Sources of the Self: The making of the modern identity*, Cambridge Ma.: Harvard University Press, 1989, p. 111.) it is this inwardness which makes us "think of our thoughts, ideas, or feelings as being 'within' us, while the objects in the world which these mental states bear on are 'without'," Cf. *epistrophē pros heautē* to *anachorein eis heauton*, 'to retire into oneself': André-Jean Festugière, *Personal Religion among the Greeks* (Berkeley Ca.: University of California Press, 1954) p.

In the paragraph cited above, which documents his own psychological experience, Plotinus emphasizes the act of reasoning (*logismos*). We should thus understand this experience not as *ekstasis* of the soul away from *her* cognitive capacities (in contrast to the mission that Tertullian gives to the soul), but as employing them on a different level of consciousness, in a word: as a philosophical and psychological practice.[73] This, of course, joins the assertion of philosophers ever since Plato that philosophy is the only cure for the diseases of the soul, in spite of the development of the perception of diseases of the soul as mental incapacities caused by disorders in the nervous system.[74] On the contrary, the fact that 'diseases of the soul' have become connected to the nervous system explains perfectly Plotinus' emphasis on psychological transformation by dissolving altogether what for him is a hindrance of the body (*enochlēsis tou sōmatos*), i.e. the link between the senses and perception.[75] This is precisely the function of the nervous system.

Plotinus contrasts contemplation through seeing (i.e. perception by the eyes), which makes the soul reflect on external objects, with "another kind of seeing (*allos tropos tou idein*)," which he defines as "*ekstasis* and simplification (*haplōsis*) and giving oneself over (*epidosis hautou*), and pressing towards contact (*ephesis pros haphēn*) and *stasis* and a sustained thought leading to adaptation (*perinoēsis pros epharmogēn*)."[76] This should not be understood as a part of a mystical experience.[77] It signifies here a high level of consciousness which enables the use of the mind by reflection and thinking, but in a reflexive mode in order to avoid sense-perception, and hence external stimuli.[78] It is an obligatory state in the soul's mission to unite with the One, the Good. In this unification the soul connects *herself* to the mind, and actively thinks, perceives and reflects (*noei*):

> There the *psuchē* takes her rest and is outside evils because she has run up into the place
>
> which is clear of evils; and she thinks there, and is not passive (*noei entautha kai apathēs*

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58ff.  In Plotinus' model this is possible thanks to the *psuchē*'s two voices who create an inner dialogue. I am grateful to Brian Stock for this discussion. Cf. *id., Augustine's Inner Dialogue: The Philosophical Soliloquy in Late Anqituity* (Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2010), ch. 2.

[73] Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 13f.

[74] See Ahonen, *op. cit*., pp. 142ff.

[75] Plotinus, *Enneads*, vi.9.10.1f (vol. 3, p. 325).

[76] Plotinus uses here imagery about devotion through contemplation in a shrine: *id*., *Enneads*, vi.9.11.21-25 (vol. 3, p. 327). Note that this is the only use of the term *ekstasis* in the *Enneads* (cf. Theiler, *Plotinus Schriften*, vol. 6, p. 174, reads *Enneads* vi.7.17.40 as *ekstasis* instead of *ektasei*: Eng. trans. A. H. Armstrong, 7 vols. Cambridge Ma. Harvard University Press, "The Loeb Classical Library," 1966-1988, vol. 7, p, 342, n.1). Note that Plotinus uses *ekstatikē* for a displacing motion (*Enneads*, vi.3.21.47, vol. 3, p. 125) and *exestēkotes* (*Enneads*, vi.8.2.7, vol. 3, p. 273) for persons who are deranged or beside themselves, together with those who suffer from mania (*mainomenoi*) and those caught by drugs or imaginations which they are not master.

[77] 'Mystical' in the modern sense of the term, although Plotinus uses the term *ta mustēria* for this philosophical practice in the beginning of the tractate: *Enneads*, vi.9.11.1 (vol. 3, p. 326).

[78] Cf. Augustine's inner dialogue ('*solilquy*'), in Brian Stock, *Augustine's Inner Dialogue, op. cit.*, ch. 1.

*entautha*), and her true life is there; for our present life, the life without God, is a race of life imitating that life. But life in that realm is the active actuality of Intellect; and the active actuality generated gods in quiet contact with that Good, and generates beauty, and generates righteousness, and generates virtue. It is these the *psuchē* conceives (*kuei*) when filled with God, and this is her beginning and end; her beginning because she comes from thence, and her end because her good is there. And when she comes to be there she becomes herself and what she was; for what she is here and among the things of this world is a falling away and an exile and a 'shedding of wings' (*kai en toutois ekptōsis kai phugē kai pterorueēsis*)."[79]

This description shows the transformation of the soul (and Plotinus' personal experience as he documented it in the paragraph cited above) as a continuously active mental process which is the only way for salvation:

> The *psuchē* then in her natural state is in love with God and wants to be united with him; it is like the noble love of a girl for her noble father. But when the *psuchē* has come into the world of becoming and is deceived, so to say, by the blandishments of her suitors, she changes, bereft of her father, to a mortal love and is shamed; but again she comes to share her shames here below, and purifies (*hagneusasa*) herself of the things of this world and sets herself on the way to her father and fares well.[80]

This is a striking parallel to the Gnostic 'Exegesis of the Soul,' including the use of the same imagery of the prostitution of the soul, and its contamination by an earthly love which separates the soul from God, and makes *her* forget him.[81] However, Plotinus makes it clear that the return of the soul, *her epistrophē*, to *her* source away from the body is a mental process of Intellect.

We thus see how the new intellectual current of the time, whether Neoplatonist, Gnostic or Christian Orthodox, came to define and use the movement of the soul/*psuchē* in order to implement incorporeal processes as spiritual. Each current, however, defined the meaning of the movement of the *psuchē* differently.

### Conversion as a faculty of the soul

In an illuminating article, Lloyd Gerson analyzes the changes in the use and meaning of the word *epistrophē* as part of the philosophical conceptual phrase of a 'return towards

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[79] Plotinus, *Enneads*, vi.9. 9.13-24 (vol. 3, p. 323), trans. Armstrong, "The Loeb Classical Library," vol. 7, pp. 334-337 (p. 336, n. 1: 'shedding of wings' from *Phaedrus* 248c).

[80] *Ibid*., vi.9.9.33-38 (vol. 3, pp. 323-324, trans. Armstrong, "The Loeb Classical Library," vol. 7, p. 337). I use the term 'salvation' because Plotinus speaks here of a process of purification that is the only means for the soul to save *herself* from the other, earthly, prostitute's love (*hoion hetairistheisa*) (*ibid*., vi.9.9.26-31).

[81] See: Scopello, *L'Exégèse de l'âme, op. cit.*, pp. 159-160.

itself' (*epistrophē pros heauton*) in ancient and medieval philosophy which he calls 'self-reflexivity.'[82] His analysis reveals the Neoplatonic development of the process of self-reflexivity as the capacity for recognizing one's own states without interpretation, which differentiates it from introspection.[83] *Epistrophē* as self-reflexivity is to Plotinus an application or a specification of 'conversion.'[84] Two centuries later Proclus will base his structure on the fact that such a process depends completely on the desire of the *psuchē*, and that everything that is capable of *epistrophē* (*epistreptikon*) is non-corporeal (*asōmaton*), because *epistrophē* is conditioned by self-movement.[85] In other words, Proclus makes any type of conversion solely dependent on the *psuchē*.[86] What is striking is that simultaneously Christian authors also struggled with the same problem of how the *psuchē* can return to the Good, the Father, the Source. They also use the term 'conversion' – *epistrophē*, *metastrophē* – i.e. return to the divine source.[87] We should note however that here is a difference between Plotinus' model of the individual *psuchē* and the models that Christian thinkers developed.[88] As Paul Aubin shows, Christian authors developed their own tradition of employing the term, and in addition make extensive use of re-

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[82] Gerson, "*Epistrophē pros heauton...*," *op. cit.*

[83] For Plotinus, as Gerson explains, the act of thinking is primarily self-thinking, and self-thinking in itself is composed of self-reflexivity and self-knowledge of *nous*, while 'the return toward oneself' – *hē epistrophē pros hauton* – is a means to acquire this knowledge of itself. See his analyses of *Ennead*, v.3.13.13-17, v.9.1.50-51, and his translation of *Enneads*, vi.3.6.39-43: "In it (Intellect) there is no practical activity – for there is not even desire for what is absent in pure intellect – but in this return to itself (*hē epistrophē pros hauton*) demonstrates that it is not only probably but necessary that it have knowledge of itself. For otherwise what would its life be, it being separated from practical activity and in intellect?" (*ibid.*, pp. 14-15).

[84] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21 Paul Aubin has found the roots of this perspective in the extensive and unusual use of the term by Epictetus: Paul Aubin, *Le Problème de la « Conversion »: Étude sur un terme commun à l'Hellénisme et au Christianisme des trois premiers siècles* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1963) pp. 59-66. Cf. Augustine's use of the verb *redire* and the soul's perception as a device towards mental perception: Stock, *Augustine the Reader, op. cit.,* pp. 72-73.

[85] Gerson, "*Epistrophē pros heauton…*," *op. cit.*, pp. 19-20. Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, ed. Eric Robertson Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) prop. 15-17, pp. 16-21.

[86] The triad *monē-proodos-epistrophē* forms the basic means of conceptualization of causation in Neoplatonic philosophy in terms of motion, and is attributed by Proclus (412-485) to Iamblicus (Gerson, "*Epistrophē pros heauton…*," *op. cit.*, p. 19f). In his *The Elements of Theology*, prop. 35 (p. 38) Proclus uses this triad in both his logics, as well as in his ontological process of creation. He states that such a process is possible only for entities who possess a *psuchē*, since the 'return'/'reversion' – *epistrophē* – is a result of desire (possible only for souls). I am thankful to Orna Harari for this part.

[87] See in particular *epistrophe* linked to the *psuchē* in Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* (ed. Pierre Nautin, trans. *id.* and Pierre Husson, *Homélies sur Jérémie*. 2 vols., Paris: Éd. Du Cerf, "SC 232, 238," 1976-1977) iv.1 (vol. 1, pp. 258-260), and *ibid.*, xix.15 (vol. 2, pp. 242-244) following Aubin, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

[88] In very general terms, in Plotinus' model part of the soul makes part of the One (*supra* n 68).

pentance (*metanoia*, as we also see in the 'Exegesis on the Soul') which becomes the dominant term for any process of spiritual return.[89]

Both William James and Arthur Darby Nock dedicated pioneering studies to the subject of conversion as a psychological means used by religious movements.[90] Nock has defined conversion as: "The reorientation of the soul of an individual, his deliberate turning from indifference or from an earlier form of piety to another, a turning which implies a consciousness that a great change is involved, that the old was wrong and the new is right. It is seen at its fullest in the positive response of a man to the choice set before him by the prophetic religions."[91] James, on the other hand, understands conversion in terms of its psychological, rather than intellectual effects, meaning a new level of consciousness and perception of the way in which the individual can see himself as a part of the surrounding universe: "What is attained is often an altogether new level of spiritual vitality, a relatively heroic level, in which impossible things have become possible, and new energies and endurances are shown. The personality is changed, the man *is* born anew, whether or not his psychological idiosyncrasies are what give the particular shape to his metamorphosis."[92]

In contrast to later works on the subject of early Christian conversion that analyzed it as social, cultural and political process of transformation, both Nock and James precieved the phenomenon of conversion as a private process of the individual.[93] However, these two great thinkers have understood the process of conversion differently: one as an intellectual process and the other as emotional.  The *psuchē* became central to both types of change since, as we have seen, the *psuchē* was attributed with both intellectual and emotional denotations. Without the *psuchē*, therefore, there could be no conversion. The question is what kind of conversion was promoted by the early Christian authors? The answer to this must be both kinds. It is not a coincidence that the three Greek terms managed to lead both authors and scholars in different directions. The terms *metanoia,*

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[89] Aubin explains the similarity between Origen and Plotinus as a product of a shared Alexandrian philosophic training (*ibid*., pp. 155-157). See Hadot, *op. cit.*

[90] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: The Gifford Lectures delivered at Edinburgh 1901-1902* (New York: The New American Library, 1958). Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961). For a linguistic-psychological approach see Peter G. Stromberg, *Language and self-transformation: A study of the Christian conversion narrative* (Cambridge U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[91] Nock, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

[92] James, *op. cit*, p. 241.

[93] Among these studies: Nicholas H. Taylor, "The social nature of conversion in the early Christian world", in *Modelling Early Christianity: Social-scientific studies of the New Testament in its Context*, ed. Philip F. Esler (London: Routledge, 1995) pp. 128-136; Thomas Finn, *From Death to Rebirth: Ritual and Conversion in Antiquity* (Mahwah NJ: Paulist, 1997); John Curran, "The Conversion of Rome Revisited" in *Ethnicity and Culture in Late Antiquity*, eds. Stephen Mitchell and Geoffrey Greatex (London: Duckworth and the Classical Press of Wales, 2000) pp. 1-14; Denise Kimber Buell, *Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) ch. 5.

*epistrophē* and *metastrophē* were all used to model, structure and articulate what Christian conversion was all about. To put it simply, they were used in different ways by different authors. While *metanoia* primarily meant repentance, i.e. an intellectual process of inversion of values, both *epistrophē* and *metastrophē* were applied to the emotional and psychological ('psychological' in the modern sense) processes of transformation of the human *psuchē*. What is particularly remarkable is that, in contrast to Neoplatonism, Christianity, at least in its early stages, shows a considerable diversity of expressions of the process of conversion. What interests us here, however, is conversion as a faculty of the *psuchē*. And here it is striking that Christian authors have distinguished between its mental and non-mental aspects (we use 'non-mental' here to refer to phenomena that cannot be grasped by the mind following Tertullian's conceptualization of *a-mentia* as 'un-mindedness – while we refrain from 'emotional' and 'spiritual'). It is the non-mental which becomes a faculty of the *psuchē* in Christian texts.[94]

In his *Dialogue with Tryphon*, Justin Martyr describes the process of conversion, *epistrophē*, and repentance, *metanoia*, as a cure for 'disease of the soul' (*nosos psuchēs*). God's grace, an indispensible ingredient, is bestowed upon those whose soul is purified of all evil (*ponēria*).[95] In describing the process of his own conversion, Justin contrasts two different types of what he calls 'philosophy.' The first is the philosophy that led him in search of God to Platonists, Pythagoreans, Stoics and Peripatetics. This direction failed, according to the argument, because the fact that the soul is immortal contradicts the fact that *she* can see God and understand the justification for *her* state in this life.[96] In other words, the faculty of the mind or intellect (*nous* or *dianoia*) is not sufficient to encounter God.[97] Justin then describes the process of his transformation, using the truth of the prophets, which came from seeing and hearing God: "This sparked a fire in my soul, and I was seized by love towards the prophets and those men, Christ's friends. And having thought about these sayings within me, I found that this was the only certain and useful philosophy."[98] This method of knowing God, through revelation of prophecy, here negates seeing God through the mind (*dia tou nou*).[99] Cognitive philosophy, which presented itself as the only means of attaining God and being united with him, is here

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[94] Although Hadot (*op. cit.*) has distinguished *epistrophē* and *metanoia* as Neoplatonic type of conversion and Christian type of conversion respectively, and argued that the *metanoia* is a radically different process of rebirth of the man, the two terms are used to describe the Christian experience of conversion. In his *Ladder of Divine Ascent* John Climacus connects together repentance and *epistrophē* to God (PG 88:764; 829; 848). See also Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah*, *op. cit.*, above.

[95] Justin Martyr, *op. cit.*, dia. 30.1 (p. 177), dia. 41.1 (p. 137).

[96] *Ibid.*, dia. 4.4-7 (p. 78). Hence his conclusion: those philosophers knows nothing about these issues since they cannot say what the *psuchē* is (*ibid.*, dia. 5.1, p. 79). And see the continuation of this argument in *ibid.*, dia. 5.4-6.2 (pp. 80-82).

[97] *Loc. cit.*

[98] *Ibid.*, dia. 7.1-8.2 (pp. 82-84).

[99] *Ibid.*, dia. 3.7-4.5 (pp. 77-78).

demonstrated as useless.[100] In this, it would appear, Justin makes use of the way in which Christian conversion is manifested in the Book of Acts (see Paul's revelation in Ac. 9:3 in addition to his *ekstasis* in Ac. 22:17), and makes it the only certain method of self-transformation towards God, truth and salvation.[101] Thus although the entire treatise is a dialogue of persuasion aimed at converting Jews, Justin here proves to be linked to Tertullian's later treatises which define revelation and ecstasy as the means of conviction.[102] In the writings of Origen, Clement and Theodoret of Cyrrhus, however, this line is much more attenuated. Since the objective of these writers is to turn Christianity into philosophy, they emphasize the importance of cognitive and mental conviction. Moreover, like the philosophers, these authors attribute this faculty to the *psuchē* in order to explain conversion as a change (*metathesis*) and a return (*epistrophē, metastrophē*) to the divine.[103]

The way these authors conceptualize the act of conversion cannot be separated from the way they understand and explain the very phenomenon of *pistis* (faith, belief, or conviction). Salvatore Lilla has shown that the concept of *pistis* is at the heart of Clement's Christian doctrine.[104] Influenced by both Philo and his contemporary Gnostics, Clement differentiates between faith, as an intellectual conviction resulting from demonstration and part of a process of knowing (*gnosis*), and between faith as a 'higher form of knowledge,' which is revealed through Scripture. Clement demands that both of these should be interpreted at the individual level. No true Christian conversion is possible without faith as a higher form of knowledge, since it is based on the revelation of Scripture.[105] In his chapter on the prayer, Clement constructs this practice as a private means of conversing with God, following this 'higher form of knowledge,' i.e. through the 'mystical' encounter of the *psuchē*.[106] According to John Clark Smith, Origen's concept of Christian conversion is also a combination between cognitive conversion

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[100] *Ibid.*, dia. 2.1 (p. 71). This is by negating the immortality of the soul with *her* capacity to perceive divine justices (dia. 5.4-6.2, pp. 80-82).

[101] It is remarkable that the negation of cognitive philosophy was done on a purely cognitive basis (*loc. cit.*).

[102] Cf. absence of the term ecstasy from Augustine's *Confessions* vii (Fuhrer, *op. cit.*). On Plotinus' influence on Augustine's conceptualization of mental process see Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge Ma.-London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996) p. 65ff.

[103] Clement, *Stromata* iv.3.27-28 (ed. A. Van den Hoek, trans. Cl. Mondésert, *Les Stromates: stromate iv*, Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 463," 2001, pp. 100-102) in citing the Stoics, *ibid.*, iv.16.100 (*ibid.*, p. 222), vi.1.3 (ed. and trans. Patrick Descourtieux, *Les Stromates: stromate vi*, Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 446," 2001, p. 62).

[104] Lilla, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-141.

[105] Clement, *Stromata*, vi.6.45.5-6 (pp. 152-154) and against the Gnostic: *ibid.*, vi.8.71ff (p. 202 ff.).

[106] *Ibid.*, vii.7 (ed. and trans. Alain Le Boulluec, *Les Stromates: stromate vii*, Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 428," 1997, p. 128ff.).

through thought and perception, conversion of the individual's behavior, as well as a spiritual return through the truth of the Scriptures.[107] In any case, for both, conversion of faith is not merely an act of man through his *psuchē*, it is also conditioned by God's desire to make this change, actualized by divine grace.[108] This could be realized through revelation.[109]

Here it is important to understand that conversion could not be merely cognitive, because *pistis* is no longer simply an intellectual conviction through demonstration, but also a non-mental belief, which gets its evidence from the Scriptures in a way which contradicts the Jewish legalistic interpretation. Hence it is precisely directed as the opposite of any act of intellect.[110] The concept of conversion which these authors construct necessitates seeing the faculty of perceiving God as a faculty of the soul. Clement calls this a 'psychic' sense-perception, and intelligence capable of distinction (*psuchikē aisthēsis kai diakritikē noēsis*).[111] For Origen, on the other hand, *pistis* is the new method for curing the soul (i.e. instead of philosophy), together with both its mental and non-mental aspects.[112] This means that while still maintaining intellectual method as a means of salvation, for these authors the non-mental aspects are an inseparable part of any process of transformation.

In his treaty 'Cure of Hellenic Diseases' (*Ellēnikōn therapeutikē pathēmatōn*), Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c. 393–.c 457) offers an elaborated discussion on the subject. His first book is dedicated to faith (*pistis*). He defines the disease of the soul (*nosos tēs psuchēs*) as absence of faith.[113] His entire treaty is directed precisely to people who are afflicted with this disease.[114] However, in contrast to both Clement and Origen, Theodoret differentiates faith from mind and intellect: "Without faith even the mind cannot see the intelligible things, since it is not possible to perceive invisible things without it."[115] The mind needs faith just as the body needs the eyes, since no truth can be attained without faith.[116] This new state of awareness, as defined by Christian and Neoplatonist writers, was connected both in theory and practice to ecstasy.[117]

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[107]John Clark Smith, "Conversion in Origen," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 32/2 (1979) pp. 217-240.

[108] Clement, *Stromata*, vi.2.28 (pp. 114-116), who emphasizes God's desire, but does not name it grace.

[109] *Ibid*., vi.3.34 (pp. 128-130).

[110] As is described in Justin's *Dialogue against Tryphon*. Lilla, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-141.

[111] Clement, *Stromata*, vii.7.36.5-37 (pp. 134-136).

[112] Origen, *Contra Celsum* viii.51 (PG 11:1592c-1594a).

[113] Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Cure for Hellenic Diseases*, i.1-8 (ed. and trans. Pierre Canivet, *Thérapeutique des Maladies helléniques*, 2 vols., Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 57.1-2," 2000-2001, vol. 1, pp. 104-105).

[114] Just like "the treatment of madmen is consisting of tying up the insane patient in order to inflict medical procedures on him," Theodoret means to treat those who suffer from disbelief (*loc. cit.*).

[115] *Ibid*., i.72ff (vol. 1, pp. 123-4) developing a citation of Parmenides of Elea

[116] *Ibid*., i.78 (vol. 1, p. 124), i.127-128 (vol. 1, p. 136).

[117] The present study does not include a discussion on Augustine' psychology and its relation to conversion and the beliver's conviction. See O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind, op. cit.*, ch/. 2; Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader, op. cit.* ; *id., Augustine's Inner Dialogue, op. cit.*

### Ecstasy between perfection and madness

A contemporary of Theodoret, John Cassian (c. 360–435), devotes considerable attention to ecstasy in his *Conferences*. For Cassian, ecstasy is the highest level of perfection, and requires a deep and thorough self-transformation. Only then, when all evil thoughts are controlled and eliminated, can the soul achieve contemplation of the invisible and gaze at God.[118] Cassian then writes about a method of disconnecting from all distractions and attaining a pure state of prayer in which the intellect is emptied of all thoughts and images by the recitation of psalms, and is set on fire: ecstasy.[119] In addition, Cassian describes the practice of this ecstasy as part of the way of life of the anchorites, whose solitude and freedom from all stimuli permit a state of permanent ecstasy, a freedom that he himself lost when the desert became disturbingly populated.[120] The fact that the concept of ecstasy became a practice is reflected in the Christian writings of the period, namely descriptions of individuals' way of life. In 'The Sayings of the Desert Fathers' (*Apophtegmata patrum*) in particular, ecstasy is practiced as means of withdrawing into oneself and encountering God.[121] This is also the case in other texts that describe the anchoritic life, such as the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius, the *Spiritual Meadow* of John Moschus, and the writings of John of Ephesus on the Eastern Fathers.[122] Ecstasy became a common practice, not only of anchorite monks, but also for coenobitic or semi-coenobitic monks.[123] Just as in Tertullian's *De anima*, so here too ecstasy is sometimes accompanied by vision (Greek: *theōria*) and prophecy, which are narrated and referred to after the being experienced.[124]

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[118] John Cassian, *Conferences*, eds. Michael Petschenig, Gottfried Kreuz. *Collationes* (Vienna: Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, "CSEL 13," 2004) iii.7.2-3 (pp. 74-75).

[119] "And so our mind will reach that incorruptible prayer to which in our former treatise, as the Lord vouchsafed to grant, the scheme of our Conference mounted, and this is not merely not engaged in gazing on any image, but is actually distinguished by the use of no words or utterances; but with the purpose of the mind all on fire, is produced through ecstasy of heart by some unaccountable keenness of spirit, and the mind being thus affected without the aid of the senses or any visible material pours it forth to God with groaning and sighs that cannot be uttered," *ibid.*, x.11.6 (p. 305), trans. Edgar C. S. Gibson.

[120] *Ibid.*, xix.5.1-2 (p. 538).

[121] *Les Apophtegmes des Pères: Collection systématique*, ed. and trans. Jean-Claude Guy (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 387, 474 , 498," 993-2005) iii.31 (vol. 1, p. 166), iii.38 (vol. 1, pp. 170-172), vii.52 (vol. 1, p. 384), ix.16 (vol. 1, p. 440), xviii.10 (vol. 3, pp. 50-52), xviii.27 (vol. 3, pp. 80-82).

[122] Palladius, *La Storia Lausiaca*, ed. G. J. M. Bartelink, trans., Marino Barchiesi (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori, 1990) 1 (p. 17), 17 (p. 72). John Moschus, *Le Pré Spirituel*, ed. and trans. M.-J. Rouët de Journal (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 12," 1946) chs. 16, 19 (pp. 57, 59-60). John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, PO 82/17:214-220, 229.

[123] *Les Apophtegmes des Pères*, *op. cit.*, iii.33 (vol. 1, p.166).

[124] *Les Apophtegmes des Pères*, *op. cit.*, vii.52 (vol. 1, p. 384), xviii.27 (vol. 3, pp. 80-82). Palladius, *op. cit.* 1 (p. 18), 38 (pp. 192-202). See the prophecy of Didumos whose vision announces the death of emperor Julian (ibid., 4, p. 28).The same is narrated by Sozomen, *Histoire Ecclésiastique*, ed. J. Bidez and G. C.

The link between the Christians and Neoplatonists in reference to the practice of ecstasy is found in two late antique Christian texts: *The Divine Names* by Pseudo-Dionysius, and, in the seventh century, *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by John Climacus. Both texts are famous for the use they make of the Neoplatonist practice of self-reflection as a means of attaining the divine by framing it within a Christian theological structure. In the center they place the *psuchē* as a distinct part of the human being that could and should aspire to disconnect itself from the other parts in order to attain the divine.[125] As for ecstasy, Pseudo-Dionysius makes it clear that this is not just a human movement, but also comes from God. He explains Paul's seizure by ecstasy as a product of yearning for God, which only the soul can attain because it is the only part of the human being that can negate both sense-perception and mind, as well as human reason.[126]

Nevertheless, even if these writings give the impression that ecstasy has become an accepted social norm, other texts portray a totally different image and use the same term *ekstasis* in a negative sense. Laura Nasrallah has revealed that this use was embedded in the political movement against prophetic groups of Christians, such as those described in the anti-Phrygian discourse in Epiphanius' *Panarion*.[127] This is also the view, for example, of Eusebius, who speaks about 'false ecstasy' as an indication of false prophets.[128] Thus although ecstasy was elaborated in Christian writings as a theological practice, it also

Hansen, trans. André-Jean Festugière, 4 vols. (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 306, 418, 495, 516," 1983-1996) vi.2.6-8 (vol. 3, pp. 252-254).

[125] Both Ps.-Dionysius and John Climacus emphasize the disconnection of awareness from mind. For Climachus see PG 88:969, 1065, 1108. See especially the final steps 26-29 in his *Ladder*. For Ps.-Dionysius and the cessation of mental activities as a means to know God: *Corpus Dionysiacum, I: De Divinis Nominibus*, ed. Beate Regina Suchla (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990) i.4 (=592c-593a, pp. 114-115), iv.5-9 (=700d-705b, pp. 149-153), vii.1-3 (=865b-872b, pp. 193-198) where human mind is contrasted with the divine mind, and thus needs to be abandoned. See also John. D. Jones, "The character of the negative (mystical) theology for Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagite," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 51 (1977): 66-74.

[126] Which are both not from God, and thus need to be abandoned: Ps-Dionysius, *op. cit.*, iv.13 (=712a, pp. 158-159) where he refers to Paul's descriptions in his epistles (Gal 2:20, II Cor. 5:13). And his summary on the necessity of ecstasy and the limits in following God: *ibid.*, xiii.3 (=980d-981, pp. 229-230).

[127] Nasrallah, *op. cit*, ch. 5: ' "An Ecstasy of Folly": The Sound and Unsound Mind in Epiphanius's Anti-Phrygian Source.'

[128] In reference to the false prophets of Montanus Eusebius cites a description of an author who was in Ancyra in Galatia, and who describes the acts of the 'pseudo-prophets:' Eusebius of Caesarea, *ecclésiastique*, ed. and trans. Gustave Bardy, index by Pierre Périchon, 4 vols. (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 31, 41, 55, 73," 1952-1967) v.14-16 (vol. 2, pp. 45ff). He also describes the same in Mysia on the Phrygian border in Ardabau, where Montanus was taken by a false ecstasy (Greek: *en katochēi tini kai parekstasei genomenon*, v.16.7, vol. 2, p. 48), and he started to talk and pronounce strange words and to prophesize in a way completely different than the traditional. Eusebius continues to describe the activities of this Montanus his followers, but mention also his opponents (*loc. cit.*). He describes the symptoms of 'false ecstasy' which starts by a voluntary delirium, and arrives to an involuntary delirium of the soul (*ibid.*, v.17, vol. 2, pp. 53-54).

became a symptom of heresies and a way of identifying false prophets. But even within monastic literature itself ecstasy acquired a negative meaning, since it was also used to designate the dangers and failures of anchorite life, where it was possible to fall into madness.[129] This is prominent in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus (345–399).[130] In his treaty *On Thoughts* he describes the conditions required to embrace the anchoritic life, and specifies that monks who are not ready risk falling into states of madness (*ekstaseis*). He himself, he writes, has known cases of monks who had sunk into states like this (i.e. madness), and were trapped in visions of images and demons, forgetting their human state.[131] Cases such as these are also recorded in other sources, and give a much more complex picture of the religious use of ecstasy.[132] It is exactly to such a complexity that Iamblichus addresses himself.

A follower of Plotinus, Iamblichus sets out a distinction in the perception of ecstasy as theurgic practice in his treaty 'On the Mysteries.'[133] In the part of his treaty that deals with divination he responds at length to Porphyry on this topic. Porphyry, writes Iamblichus, considered religious and medical ecstasy to be equivalent, and concluded that all forms of divinations (which were seen as belonging to divine ecstasy) are in fact forms of medical illness inflicted by sick demons.[134] Iamblichus, on the other hand, differentiates the ecstasy which is a product of corporeal illness (Greek: *ta nosēmata tou sōmatos*) as in cases of melancholia, drunkenness or rabies) from divine ecstasy.[135] The whole of his writing on ecstasy (book iii, according to a much later division) aims at distinguishing

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[129] For ecstasy as madness see for example the explanation of Eusebius who designates the anti-Christian rage of Diocletian as a disease (Greek: *nosos*), which caused his *dianoia* (not his *psuchē*) to fall into *ekstasis* (*ibid.*, viii.13.11, vol. 3, p. 30).

[130] Evagrius Ponticus speaks about distraction of the mind as *ekstasis phrenōn*, equivalent to mania and caused by demons: Evagrius Ponticus, *Traité pratique ou le moine*, eds. and trans. Antoine Guillaumont and Claire Guillaumont (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 170, 171," 1971) chs. 14, 46.

[131] Evagrius Ponticus, *Sur les pensées*, eds. and trans. Paul Géhin and Claire Guillaumont (Paris: Éd. du Cerf, "SC 438," 1998) ch. 23 (pp. 232-235). More on ecstasy as an attack of demons: Evagrius, *Traité pratique ou le moine*, *op. cit.*, ch. 14 (vol.2, pp. 532-534). We shall not refer here to the connection between ecstasy, false visions and demon possession, although this is a relevant issue, following Inbar Graiver. *Self-Transformation in Early Christian Asceticism* (Phd dissertation currently under preparation at the School of Historical Studies, Tel Aviv University).

[132] See father Antonius' description of monks whose repeated independent efforts, without the guidance of a spiritual father, brought them to a state of ecstasy (Greek: *ekstasis phrenōn*): *Les Apophtegmes des Pères*, xi.1 (vol. 2, p.136). See Angelo Gianfrancesco, "Monachisme ancien et psychopathologie: Ancient monasticism and psychopathology," *L'évolution psychiatrique* 73 (2008): 105-126.

[133] For the dating of this treaty see: Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, ed. Edouard Des Places, trans. Emma C. Clarke, Johns M. Dillon, Jackson P. Hershbell (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta, 2003) p. xxvii, n. 46.

[134] *Ibid.*, iii (p. 118ff), in particular iii.7 (p. 134), iii.25 (pp. 178-182), iii.31 (p. 194ff).

[135] *Ibid.*, iii.25 (pp. 178-182).

between the two ambiguous states (Greek: *amphibolai katastaseis*) of *ekstasis*.[136] He attributes the term 'the act of being inspired' (*to enthousian estin*) to the *ekstasis* which originates from the gods, in order to differentiate it from the *ekstasis* which accompanies diseases of the body.[137]

As Miller has shown, unlike Plotinus Iamblichus thought that the soul cannot recover its own divinity by *herself* but needed divine intervention.[138] Being *enthousiasmos*, 'inspired,' is exactly such an intervention in the form of 'divine ecstasy,' 'divine mania,' while mere *ekstasis* is a disease of the body. His explanation is based on the application of Plotinus' ideas to his own concepts about the soul.[139] Iamblichus is replying here to Christians (*atheoi*) who blamed the Pagans for madness inflicted by the devil as part of their divine practices.[140] As a follower of Plotinus, he replies that divine inspiration (*to enthousian*) does not come from man and is not a faculty (*dunamis*) of the soul.[141] It can only come from above, and attract the soul towards the Intellect. All other forms of ecstasy, which are false divinations, come from man who wishes to connect to the divine, although divinations cannot originate from man.[142] Iamblichus thus distinguishes between religious and medical states of ecstasy, according to their origin. The origin of the first is divine, while the second is a disease of the body. The distinction that he tries to make between the theurgical and medical dimensions, works perfectly well as a theoretical philosophical discussion. In fact we find the same distinction in Epiphanius' discussion 'On the faith,' which is part of his *Panarion*. He too uses *enthousiōsis* for religious ecstasy.[143]

### To conclude

We have followed the development of a religious, theological and philosophical discourse starting from the second century AD in view of the question: how to conceptualize and articulate the act of conversion as an individual process of mental transformation. To this end the concept of the soul, the Greek *psuchē*, proved to be indispensible, and moreover a unique term that could be remodeled to suit the ways in

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[136] *Ibid.*,iii.25.9-10 (p. 182).

[137] *Ibid.*, iii.8 (p. 136), iii.25 (pp. 180-182).

[138] Miller, "Shifting Selves in Late Antiquity," pp. 24-25.

[139] See here the captivating analysis of Gregory Shaw, "Containing ecstasy: the strategies of Iamblichean theurgy," *Dionysius* 21 (2003) pp. 53-87.

[140] Hence he covers all kinds of Pagan practices of divination in his explanation.

[141] Iamblichus, *op. cit.*, iii.7-8 (pp. 134-136).

[142] *Ibid.*, iii.22 (p. 174), iii.27 (p. 186).

[143] Epiphanius of Salamis, *De fide*, 11.3 (in *id., Works*, ed. Karl Holl, Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1980-2013, vol. 3, p. 511). Cf. his previous paragraph on ecstatic practices in the festivities of Kronos in Egypt.

which conversion (be it a religious or philosophical concept) was perceived, explained and in fact modeled. More than revealing distinct discourses of Gnostics, Orthodox Christians, and Neoplatonists, this analysis attests to a common and shared psychological language, which used what we can term as 'the instrumentalization of the human soul' in order to set processes of mental transformation. Constructing psychology as a practice was the main objective of these thinkers. The concept of the human *psuchē* seems to serve as their means.