HILARY ARMSTRONG

Arthur Hilary Armstrong
1909–1997

I

HILARY ARMSTRONG changed the subject of ancient philosophy by devoting much of his long life to promoting study of the Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus. When Armstrong graduated from Cambridge University in 1932, Plotinus was widely regarded in the English speaking world as an obscurely mystical thinker, a minority interest at best, and certainly not a philosopher remotely comparable in intellect and rigour to Plato and Aristotle. Today, thanks to Armstrong's prolific output, especially his seven-volume text and translation of the *Enneads*, no serious scholar of ancient philosophy can afford to neglect Plotinus. Armstrong by intellectual and emotional temperament had a remarkable affinity for Plotinus' extraordinary mind and imaginative complexity. His books and articles are more than a fine scholarly achievement. They also express Armstrong's enthusiasm for the spirituality and theism that drew him to Plotinus, and they publicise that philosopher with a subtle combination of sympathy and criticism. One of his greatest achievements was his ability to exhibit Plotinus' creative use of the preceding philosophical tradition. Hence Plotinus has become essential reading not only for those particularly interested in Neoplatonism but also for anyone engaged with the afterlife and interpretation of the Presocratics, Plato, Aristotle, and Stoicism.

As well as being a leading scholar of ancient philosophy, Armstrong was a devout, active, and increasingly idiosyncratic Christian; or perhaps better, a free-thinking Christian Platonist. His religious outlook, catholic

Proceedings of the British Academy, **120**, 3–17.

with a small c (though he espoused Roman Catholicism for much of his life), consistently informed his view of Plotinus. As he grew older, he became increasingly ecumenical, critical of eccesiastical hierarchy, and sympathetic to the religious experience of other faiths. He published extensively both on contemporary theological issues and also on early Christian thought and its relation to Greek philosophy, especially Platonism.

II

Armstrong was born at Hove in Sussex on 13 August 1909, the youngest of four children. His father, an Anglican priest in the Chichester diocese, had read theology at Cambridge, and collected antique Bibles. There was another clergyman in the family, Armstrong's maternal uncle Arthur Shirley Cripps. This man became an Anglican priest in Rhodesia where he built a mud-brick church, practised poverty, and became revered as the local saint. Cripps also wrote religious verse. Religion, then, was a central part of Armstrong's early experience and probably reinforced by his reputedly strict and dominating father whose political sympathies were high Tory. His mother is remembered as a submissive figure. His father would not have sympathised with the feminist leanings evident in some of Armstrong's later publications.

As a young child, he was precocious and made to read *The Times* at the age of six. With his sister Dorothy he developed a love of gardening that remained a strong interest throughout his life, and he became a keen photographer, which reflected the feeling for natural beauty that is constantly evident in his writings and a basic feature of his personal religion. Of his two brothers, John became a distinguished artist (ARA), painting in a Daliesque style, while the other, Ronald, disappeared. Whether through nature, nurture or both, Armstrong and his brothers shared a character that would be marked by streaks of rebelliousness and unorthodoxy.

At the age of thirteen he went to Lancing where Evelyn Waugh was an older contemporary. Like Waugh, Armstrong was strongly attracted to Roman Catholicism. Before converting to that faith in 1932, he collaborated with David Jones, an engraver, on his first publication—*A Dominican Calendar* (Ditchling Press, 1928), consisting of hand-written Greek and Latin texts to accompany engravings for each month of the liturgical year. He studied the Classics tripos at Jesus College, Cambridge, where

he was a mainstay of the chapel; and after graduating with first-class honours he spent a year at the University of Vienna. In 1933 he was appointed librarian in charge of the new library of the Cambridge Classical Faculty in Mill Lane, a position that gave him a virtual research fellowship. There he began the work on Plotinus that became his first monograph, *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe in the Philosophy of Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1940; reprinted Amsterdam, 1967; French translation with critical preface, Ottawa, 1984). At Cambridge he was a very close friend of Arthur Peck, who became a Fellow of Christ's College in Classics, and with whom he shared an unlikely interest in Morris dancing as well as ancient philosophy. Another dancing friend was Joseph Needham. In 1933 he married Deborah Wilson, whom he had met in Vienna. Deborah was one of the first women graduates of the University of Birmingham. She was of Quaker background, but converted on her marriage to Roman Catholicism.

In 1936 Armstrong was appointed Assistant Lecturer in Classics at University College Swansea. His first writings on Plotinus appeared at this time: 'Plotinus and India', *Classical Quarterly*, 30 (1936), 22–8, and 'Emanation in Plotinus', published surprisingly for the period in the leading philosophical journal *Mind*, 46 (1937), 61–6. Shortly before the outbreak of war, he accepted the position of Professor of Latin Literature and Classical Greek at the Royal University of Malta in Valletta. By this time he had three young children. The family travelled to Malta by way of Italy and Sicily. This was a traumatic experience, but much worse was to occur when the island came under siege in 1942 and was bombed by the Italians. The Armstrongs, seriously depleted in weight and forced to sell all their possessions, were evacuated to Britain by military plane. Before they left Hilary ruefully observed someone wearing his pyjamas. He enjoyed his years in Malta. Before the privations of war became severe, he had a lively social life there, and he later wrote an article for *The Downside Review* on the fauna and flora of the island.

On returning to England in 1943, Armstrong first taught sixth-form Classics at Beaumont College, Old Windsor. That same year he delivered a series of lectures on ancient philosophy at the London headquarters of the Newman Association, a society of Roman Catholic university graduates. These lectures were the foundation for his most widely read book, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (London, 1947, frequently reprinted, translated into Italian, Spanish, and Japanese, and running to a fourth edition in 1965). In about 250 pages, the book surveys the entire period of ancient philosophy, starting with the Presocratics and concluding with

the later Neoplatonists and Augustine. This was a very bold project for a scholar in his thirties to undertake, and one that showed a remarkable command of the subject in one so young. It would be forty years before a book of comparable scope and accessibility appeared—Terence Irwin's *Classical Thought* (Oxford, 1988).

Comprehensive though Armstrong's *Introduction* is, it is no even-handed synopsis. Half the book is devoted to post-Aristotelian philosophers. This treatment of material that was quite unfashionable at the time adds much to the work's appeal; the later chapters devote far more space to Neoplatonism and early Christian thinkers than a more conventional study would have allotted. The book was and remains a masterly treatment, elegantly written, forthright in judgement, and attractively personal. Such criticisms as can be brought against it are few as compared with the strictures Armstrong himself pronounced against his work in the introduction he attached as preface to the fourth edition. Some of his comments are worth quoting at length because they give a revealing glimpse of the author's mentality.

He describes the book as bearing 'the stamp of what is now a rather old-fashioned sort of Roman Catholic onesidedness and complacency . . . the musty smell of a period when educated Catholics could still talk about the Perennial Philosophy (meaning Thomism) . . . More serious is the failure to show any sign of realizing that contemporary philosophy has important criticism to offer of some of the traditional positions described with approval.' Armstrong berates himself for 'narrowness in the whole planning of the book'. What he refers to is 'the assumption that the only really important and interesting movements of thought derived from ancient Greek philosophy in the mediaeval period were those of the Latin West', as distinct from Byzantium and the world of Islam. As editor of *The Cambridge History of later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1967), Armstrong took steps to rectify these self-confessed omissions by commissioning chapters on Early Islamic Philosophy (R. Walzer) and a chapter including Byzantium (I. P. Sheldon-Williams).

He finds another limitation of the book in its 'Cambridge' approach, especially in the chapters on Plato. He alludes here critically, though also deferentially, to the influence of F. M. Cornford, saying that his own 'account of Plato's metaphysics is perhaps too clear-cut and simplified even for an elementary introduction'. As an alternative, he recommends his readers to explore 'Oxford' ways of looking at Plato, especially the books of I. M. Crombie, referring to Crombie's *An Examination of*

Plato's Doctrines (London, 1962) and *Plato, the Midwife's Apprentice* (London, 1964).

Current readers of Armstrong's *Introduction* will probably think he was too hard on himself. The book is rewarding in part because of its one-sidedness. His critical comments are chiefly interesting for the light they shed on his own capacity for rethinking his positions and priorities. Right up to the end of his long life he remained a remarkably open-minded thinker, albeit staying constant to his unshakable theistic intuitions.

III

The appearance of this book, seven years after the publication of Armstrong's still indispensable monograph on Plotinus, must have done a lot to launch his reputation as a scholar of ancient philosophy. Together with E. R. Dodds (FBA), Regius Professor of Greek at Oxford, who strongly supported him, he was now the leading British expert on Plotinus. In 1946 he returned to full-time university teaching first as Lecturer and then as Senior Lecturer in Latin at University College, Cardiff. Then, in 1950, he succeeded A. C. Campbell as Gladstone Professor of Greek at the University of Liverpool, remaining there as head of the Department of Greek until taking early retirement in 1972. F. W. Walbank (FBA) was already there in the chair of Latin. When Walbank soon moved sideways to the Rathbone Chair of Ancient History, R. G. Austin, who had been Armstrong's former boss at Cardiff, replaced him as Professor of Latin. No provincial university in England had a more illustrious trio of Classics professors.

The Armstrongs, now parents of five children, began living in the Wirral. Hilary denounced their West Kirby home as bourgeois (his wife had wanted something grander), and they moved to an attractive house in one of Liverpool's older residential districts, quite close to the university. Classics at Liverpool was organised in three departments, Latin, Ancient History, and Greek. Small though each of these was, they cherished their autonomy, and cooperation between them was less evident than the uneasy coexistence that this curious, though then common, administrative practice encouraged. (The situation was scarcely different during my own tenure of the Gladstone Chair from 1973 to 1983.) From the outset, it seems, Hilary took no interest in university committees, leaving the running of the department to his junior colleagues as far as

he could. At routine meetings he would sometimes groan and wave his hands in desperation; and at home he was much the same, so helpless when the lights fused during a party he was hosting that all he could manage was to jump up and down, calling 'do something'. As a teacher, however, he was kindly and much appreciated, but in an era without computers, e-mail, and university assessment demands, he stood out for his lack of practicality. He did not type or drive, and it is hard to imagine how he would have coped without the unremitting support of his staunch Greek department colleagues, Henry Blumenthal and John Pinsent. Their devotion to him (including regular visits to his Shropshire home after he retired) shows the warmth and even charisma of a personality that those who did not know him well or shared his interests tended to find aloof. By the time he retired from the Gladstone Chair, aged sixty-three, he had become so remote from the university community in general that I rarely heard his name mentioned by colleagues outside Classics.

During his earlier Liverpool years Armstrong forged close ties with two colleagues in other departments, A. C. Lloyd (later FBA) and R. A. Markus (later FBA). Lloyd, who held the Liverpool chair of Philosophy from 1957 to 1984, shared Armstrong's passion for Plotinus and Neoplatonism, but in temperament the two men were strikingly different except for their disinclination for university administration. In contrast with Armstrong's religiosity, Lloyd was fiercely agnostic, and his personal tastes as well as his bachelor life-style and vigorous wit made him a striking contrast to his reclusive colleague. Yet, they cooperated successfully and greatly respected one another. With Markus, a leading medieval historian, Armstrong shared a strong interest in Augustine and Christianity. They jointly published a short book *Christian Faith and Greek Philosophy* (London, 1960, translated into Portuguese and Polish), based on lectures they gave under the auspices of the university's Extra-Mural Department; and Marcus wrote the chapters on Marius Victorinus and Augustine for Armstrong's *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*. Lloyd was responsible for the chapters on the Later Neoplatonists. Another Liverpool contributor to this large volume was the medieval historian H. Liebeschütz, author of the entire part on Western Christian Thought from Boethius to Anselm. With Armstrong himself writing the part on Plotinus, this *Cambridge History* was very much a Liverpool volume, registering the fact that at the time of its composition that university was the British centre for the study of the book's subject matter. Its status in this regard was further enhanced with the appointment of Henry

Blumenthal, the leading British Neoplatonist scholar of his generation, to the Greek department.

The *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, though excellent in its treatment of Neoplatonism and that movement's influence, is too narrowly focused to do justice to the 'Later Greek' of its title. The volume includes only a perfunctory treatment of Stoicism, bypasses Scepticism, and says little about the commentators on Aristotle. In partial defence of Armstrong's editorial decisions, it is fair to say that all three of these subjects, now very much to the fore, were being little studied in Britain in 1967. Another relevant consideration must have been length, since the volume runs to over 700 pages. Yet, Armstrong made a poor decision in assigning the long first part of the book, surveying Greek philosophy from Plato to Plotinus, to the turgid pen of Philip Merlan; and throughout Armstrong's work one finds a tendency to depreciate Stoicism. With the recent publication of numerous works on that philosophy, including *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy* (ed. K. Algra *et al.*), the shortcomings of Armstrong's *Cambridge History* appear much less significant than the book's undoubted strengths.

Fruitful though Armstrong's collaborative work was, his most important contribution to ancient philosophy in his Liverpool years was the preparation and partial publication of his seven-volume translation and edition of Plotinus for the distinguished Loeb Classical Library series of Harvard University Press. He kept in close touch with Continental experts on Neoplatonism, especially P. Henry and H.-R. Schwyzer, and it is their great editorial work on Plotinus (3 vols., Oxford, 1964–82), that he used as the basis for his own text. Armstrong's first two volumes appeared in 1966, followed the next year by volume 3. By 1976, shortly after his retirement from Liverpool, he was ready with volumes 4 and 5, but for reasons outside his control these were not published until 1984. Volumes 6 and 7 appeared in 1988, supported by grants from the British Academy and the Leverhulme Trust. His original intention was to publish six volumes, each containing nine treatises (enneads) in accordance with Porphyry's edition of Plotinus' work. In fact, he found that he needed two volumes (6 and 7) for the sixth and most demanding ennead.

The Loeb series publishes texts of Greek and Latin authors accompanied by translations. Volumes are typographically complex. The left-hand page contains the original text and brief textual apparatus. The right-hand page gives the corresponding translation. Footnotes may also be included. Volumes of the series vary considerably in their scale of annotation and explanatory material. Armstrong strikes a fine balance. His

pages are less cluttered than those of some recent volumes in the series, but he introduces each of the fifty-four treatises with a helpful synopsis, and his volume 1 includes text and translation of Porphyry's Life of Plotinus.

Prior to Armstrong, English readers of Plotinus were dependent on the translation by the maverick and brilliant Irishman Stephen MacKenna (1872–1934). MacKenna had literary genius. His version of the *Enneads* will never be surpassed in its intuitive feeling for the original; but as a translation for scholars it is too free, insufficiently sharp in rendering technicalities, and based on an inadequate Greek text. Armstrong's great achievement is his accuracy and complete immersion in Plotinus' philosophy.

Plotinus concludes *Ennead* 1.6, adapting Plato, by describing the soul's ascent to ultimate goodness. Here is MacKenna's version:

> So, mounting, the Soul will come first to the Intellectual-Principle and survey all the beautiful Ideas in the Supreme and will avow that this is Beauty, that the Ideas are Beauty. For by their efficacy comes all Beauty else, by the offspring of Being and of the Intellectual-Principle. What is beyond the Intellectual Principle we affirm to be the nature of Good radiating Beauty before it. So that, treating the Intellectual-Cosmos as one, the first is the Beautiful: if we make distinction there, the Realm of Ideas constitutes the Beauty of the Intellectual Sphere; and the Good, which lies beyond, is the Fountain at once and Principle of Beauty: the Primal Good and the Primal Beauty have the one dwelling-place and, thus always, Beauty's seat is there.

And now Armstrong's rendering:

> First the soul will come in its ascent to intellect and there will know the Forms, all beautiful, and will affirm that these, the Ideas, are beauty; for all things are beautiful by these, by the products and essence of intellect. That which is beyond this we call the nature of the Good, which holds Beauty as a screen before it. So in a loose and general way of speaking the Good is the primary beauty; but if one distinguished the intelligible [from the Good] one will say that the place of the Forms is the intelligible Beauty, but the Good is That which is beyond, the 'spring and origin' of beauty; or one will place the Good and the primal beauty on the same level: in any case, however, beauty is in the intelligible world.

MacKenna's translation has poetry and rhythm (as Plotinus' original does not); but it fails to convey the difficulty Plotinus wants to state concerning the limitations of language for expressing the relationship of beauty to the intelligible world on the one hand and to the highest reality, the Good, on the other hand. For anyone grappling with the obscurities of Plotinus' thought, Armstrong's version is distinctly preferable. He also indicates, as MacKenna does not, that the words 'spring and origin'

(rendered by MacKenna 'Fountain and Principle') are a quotation from Plato's *Phaedrus*.

The difficulties of Plotinus' Greek are extreme. One may wish that Armstrong had said more about them in the introduction to his first volume and that he had given a fuller account of his policy as translator. He also missed an opportunity to discuss the rhetoric of the *Enneads*. There is no question, however, but that his Loeb Plotinus is a towering achievement. In 1970, three years after the publication of his third volume, he was elected Fellow of the British Academy. This belated honour in Britain gave him great pleasure, though he had long been recognised in Continental Europe as a major scholar.

A detailed assessment of Armstrong's interpretative work on Plotinus would be out of place in this memoir and far beyond my competence.[1] Many of his articles as well as his early monograph have become classics, including the large number of them cited in the bibliography of *The Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* (Cambridge, 1996), edited by L. P. Gerson. From the beginning of his work, as is evident in *The Architecture of the Intelligible Universe*, Armstrong resisted the reduction of Plotinus' philosophy to a completely consistent system. While he did a great deal to lay out the structure of Plotinus' metaphysics and its rationalistic underpinnings, he was also receptive to the 'wild' and visionary passages, finding Plotinus in some ways more like the romantic poets and painters he so deeply influenced than he was like an academic philosopher. Armstrong's sensitivity to ambiguity and flexibility in the *Enneads* stands as a salutary warning, reminding those who work on these fascinating texts that, for all that they share with earlier Greek thought, they are a strikingly original guide to, and even a record of, an all-embracing inner experience, combining rationality, intuition, and erotic yearning for ultimate union with the ineffable and transcendent One or Good or God, which is the source of everything. Armstrong lived long enough to see the *Cambridge Companion to Plotinus* in print, and it must have given him great satisfaction. Globally speaking, he was one among several eminent Neoplatonic scholars of the twentieth century, but without his impetus the subject would hardly have developed in the English-speaking world to the high point it has reached today.

[1] I refer, instead, to the following publications: H. J. Blumenthal and R. A. Markus, eds., *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought* (London, 1981); H. J. Blumenthal, 'Plotinus in the light of twenty years' scholarship, 1951–1971', in *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, II. 36. 1 (Berlin/New York, 1987), 528–70; and K. Corrigan and P. O'Cleirigh, 'The course of Plotinian scholarship from 1971 to 1986', ibid. 571–623.

While Plotinus remained the main focus of Armstrong's scholarship throughout his life, he was very active during his Liverpool years as a contributor to Catholic journals, including *The Downside Review*, *The Heythrop Journal*, and *The Tablet*. In these publications he was principally interested in comparing Platonic and Plotinian conceptions of divinity, salvation, love, and human status with Christianity. He collected some of these articles, together with his earliest papers on Plotinus, in a volume entitled *Plotinian and Christian Studies* (London 1979). Although some of the material on Plotinus is strictly exegetical, the general impression that the book conveys is the author's dialectical manoeuvering between what he calls 'the critical Hellenic spirit' and traditional Christianity, often to the advantage of the former. Armstrong makes such remarks as 'I always thought that I was a Christian of a sort'; but he wonders 'what the history of Christianity would have been like if Our Lord's first contact with Graeco-Roman civilisation had been of a rather different kind—if, instead of being summarily crucified by a second-rate Roman official he had been cross-examined by a genuinely Socratic Greek philosopher' (XIV, p. 45). He writes approvingly of 'reflective Hellenic piety', finding in it a basis for rejecting 'the anthropocentrism which has been characteristic of at least the later Christian and post-Christian centuries of our era, the setting of men (in or out of the Church) apart from the non-human material world which is regarded as wholly profane, mere raw material for human exploitation' (XIV, p. 46). (One recalls Armstrong's love of gardens.) It would require a lengthy study to explore the complexity of his religious outlook, celebrating what he calls 'the divine self-manifestation in the glorious diversity of the universe', while equally committed to the idea of divine transcendence. Neither Neoplatonists nor Christian philosophers seem to have completely satisfied his essentially undogmatic temperament. Instead, he consistently engaged with both movements, not only studying them historically and analytically but also in terms of their applicability to a modern theistic sensibility. In due course, unhappy with ecclesiastical hierarchy and dogmatism, Armstrong renounced Roman Catholicism, and returned to the Church of England.

IV

By this time he had already embarked on a fresh teaching and research career as Professor of Classics and Philosophy at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, a position he held from 1972 to 1983. This institu-

tion is older than most British and American universities, with a Faculty of Arts dating back to 1818. At Dalhousie Armstrong was instrumental in founding a new journal *Dionysius*, managed by the Department of Classics, and specialising in work on later ancient philosophy and patristic studies. His renown as an expert in these fields brought him many graduate students with whom he established strong relationships for the rest of his life. I have the impression that he was much happier with the atmosphere of Dalhousie than with Liverpool, where he had few students with whom he could work intensely on his favourite topics.

Before retirement from Liverpool, the Armstrongs moved to a wonderful Elizabethan house near Ludlow, to which he returned during each of his Canadian years. The house had a large garden, which Hilary used not only for cultivating flowers and fruit but also for philosophical thought. Throughout the 1980s he continued to publish numerous articles and to give lectures on Plotinus, other Neoplatonists, and early Christianity. He assembled these later publications in a second volume of papers, *Hellenic and Christian Studies* (London, 1990). By 'Hellenic' Armstrong says in his introduction that he means 'someone who holds to the old ways of worshipping and thinking about the Divine, in more or less conscious opposition to Christianity'. While much of his work in this volume is a historical engagement between Platonism and early Christian thought (as in his previous collection), Armstrong here, more clearly than anywhere else, affirms his conviction that debate between the Hellenic and Christian traditions has consequences and relevance for contemporary ways of thinking about divinity.

The collection starts with a remarkable paper entitled 'Some advantages of polytheism'. Placed at the beginning of the book, this paper is essentially programmatic, since it registers Armstrong's constant insistence on the need for pluralism and openness in approaches to religious experience. He characterises himself as one who 'can only say that awareness of God in the natural world is the heart and foundation of any religion I have'. In this article and elsewhere in the book, his writing shows a wit and lightness scarcely evident in his earlier work, and one glimpses his love of English poetry, especially Blake, and art. The tone of the polytheism article can be partly gauged by the following quotation from its first page: 'I have sometimes been sufficiently irritated by the way Christians talk about Greek heathenism to think about setting up in my garden a statue of Priapus or of Diana of the Ephesians.'

Of especial interest in the book are four long papers which Armstrong gave as contributions to the annual Eranos conference at Ascona from

1986 to 1989. By the time he delivered the last one of these he was eighty years old, but they read as the work of someone at the height of his powers. The organisers of Eranos made an inspired choice in inviting him, and he found the Eranos setting and tradition, inspired by Jung, much to his liking: 'There seems to be a presence there of gods too real for theology which generates a sort of freedom and seriousness (not necessarily solemnity) not far from the spirit of Plotinus as I understand him' (p. x). One has the sense that Eranos treated him as a guru, and that he played the role both superbly and ironically. (Though not exactly handsome, Armstrong was a big man with a strong face and winning smile.)

Eranos sets its contributors a general theme for them to develop according to their speciality. The expansiveness of the occasion gave Armstrong opportunities to show his deep interest in Greek literary texts as well as his familiar Platonists. His first Eranos lecture was entitled 'The divine enhancement of earthly beauties: the Hellenic and Platonic tradition'. He begins with a brilliant survey of Greek literary representations of beauty, ranging over Homer, the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, Sappho, Sophocles, and Theocritus (clearly a favourite author). By the end he is comparing the principles of light and dark in late Neoplatonism with Yin and Yang. In the heart of the paper, he argues persuasively that the Platonic Forms, because they are neither in space nor in time, should not be regarded (in spite of some of Plato's language) as 'beyond' or 'outside' the material world but rather as the ground of its existence. In similar vein, he interprets the 'ladder' of love in the *Symposium* as including descent to see lower beauties enhanced by the divine presence of Beauty Itself.

This study deserves to be much more widely read than its somewhat obscure publication has probably made possible. The same applies to Armstrong's other Eranos papers: 'The hidden and the open in Hellenic thought', 'Platonic Mirrors', and 'Itineraries in late antiquity'. Of all Armstrong's later writings, the last of these papers gives the clearest and strongest impression of his final religious outlook.

The theme of that Eranos session was crossroads; he chose to speak about 'the spiritual crossroads of late antiquity', meaning the period 200–700 CE, but he begins his article with the present situation, as he sees it, in which Christianity's 'dominance' is over, and a new way needs to be found 'if we are to survive at all as properly human beings'. He constructs his argument around the crossing of 'three itineraries'. The first of these he calls 'the ancient piety of folk religion', referring to a sense of 'harmony and integration with the gods of nature'. And he warns of 'the grave psychological consequences if it disappears from experience and

consciousness', because of our need, as he sees it, to establish unity with the divine in nature. His second itinerary (Jerusalem) is Christianity (in which he includes Judaism), characterising it as 'intransigent and exclusive monotheism', an outlook that led to the exclusion of the feminine from the sphere of divinity. The third itinerary is, of course, Athens, or Greek philosophy, culminating in Neoplatonic, 'non-exclusive' monotheism.

Armstrong was never a merely bland defender of Christianity, but, given his earlier Catholic phase and involvement with numerous Catholic circles at home and abroad, his comments on the victory of that religion over the Way of Athens would make the Vatican shudder. He writes tartly about the Church's grabbing of wealth and power, and he assigns the triumph of Christianity to 'internal power-politics' as distinct from 'the inevitable result of a great spiritual movement marching irresistibly to its goal'. Calling that victory 'fatal', he looks to a 'future in which all that is reasonably certain seems to be that no religious group will be of much service to the world unless it is prepared to accept equality with others, to practice mutual hospitality' (XIV, p. 131). For his own part, having returned to the Church of England, he occupied a prominent forward pew at the Sunday morning service of St Lawrence's, Ludlow.

His broad interest in all forms of religion made him a highly appropriate editor of the volume on *Classical Mediterranean Spirituality* (New York, 1986) in the series *World Spirituality. An Encyclopedic History of the Religious Quest.*[2] For this large book, he enrolled a team of scholars from Germany and France as well as Britain and North America, including several of his former students. The chapters include not only treatments of Greek and Roman religion and the contributions of leading ancient philosophers, but also studies of Egyptian cults, the civic contexts of religion, and the piety of ordinary men and women in late antiquity. As the author of the chapter on Epicureans and Stoics, I corresponded with Armstrong and found him enthusiastic about my proposed interpretation of the Epicurean gods (chiefly developed by my collaborator David Sedley in fact) as a theory of human idealisation and projection, anticipating Feuerbach, rather than as metaphysically independent entities. Knowing only Armstrong's work on Plotinus at this time, I was surprised by his enthusiasm, but I now see that it was symptomatic of his sympathy for the most diverse religious experience.

[2] Armstrong was also the obvious choice to write the survey article on 'Greek philosophy and Christianity', for M. I. Finley's new edition of *The Legacy of Greece* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 347–75.

V

Armstrong was a very unusual man. Though seeming to be unworldly and incapable of being practical, he was intensely aware of what he found important in everyday experience, and always receptive to new ideas in the spheres that interested him. He felt things deeply, and he could be as troubled by a bad frost ruining his plants as he would be annoyed by a papal encyclical. His writings are most generous in their acknowledgements of what he learnt from others, whether these people were illustrious scholars or MA students that he taught. He never resorts to polemic, and his expository manner is more tentative than assertive.

Next to Plotinus, his sympathy was strongest for Plato's dubitative Socrates. Armstrong's religiosity, for those who do not share that outlook, is an impediment to reading some parts of his large output, and his writing style, though sometimes arresting, can be verbose but also unduly elliptical. Sometimes too his enthusiasms ran away with him, as when he claims that there was continuity between Hellenic philosophical monotheism and 'archaic peasant religion' (*Hellenic and Christian Studies*, XIV, p. 111).

The scholarly world has taken the measure of his great work on Plotinus and the Platonic tradition, but he was also a creative religious thinker (with some affinity to Teilhard de Chardin) and a more interesting one than has probably been widely recognised. Filtered through his religious orientation, the negative theology of Plotinus (one of his favourite topics), i.e. the impossibility of attaching any positive attributes to the ultimate divine principle, becomes an affirmation of 'faith in and dim awareness of the Unknowable Good, which I cannot and do not want to get rid of, but which remains tentative, personal, not absolute or excessive, and making no demands on others' (*Hellenic and Christian Studies*, VII, p. 50).

In addition to his service at Dalhousie University, Armstrong's North American experience included a visiting professorship at Manhattanville College, Purchase, NY; and in 1979 he was Professor of Christian Philosophy at Villanova University, Pennsylvania. The American Catholic Philosophical Association awarded him its Aquinas Medal in 1973. He was a pioneer founder of the quadrennial Oxford Patristic Conference. His former Liverpool colleagues, Blumenthal and Marcus, edited a Festschrift in his honour, appropriately titled *Neoplatonism and Early Christian Thought* (London, 1981).

Though obviously an assiduous scholar, Armstrong had many other interests. Besides the gardening and photography already mentioned, he

was passionately devoted to classical music and ballet, regularly attending concerts at the Liverpool Philharmonic during his years in that city. He enjoyed walking and travel, and he remained a pipe-smoker to the end of his life, undeterred by the fact that he once set his house on fire with a discarded pipe. He suffered a stroke in 1989, which made further work difficult, but he remained a voracious reader with a remarkable gift of recall, and he continued to cherish close contact with scholarly friends and former students. One of these, Kevin Corrigan (an expert on Plotinus), has written about Armstrong's liking to be taken out for a pub lunch, which could involve a drive of a hundred miles to and from his favourite place.

Armstrong died on 16 October 1997. His ashes are interred with those of his wife in the Ludlow churchyard which is also the last resting place of A. E. Housman. He is survived by two sons and a daughter.

A. A. LONG
Fellow of the Academy

Note. My face to face experience of Armstrong was limited to a single day we spent together in the Cambridge area in the early 1980s. What I chiefly remember about the occasion was the effortless flow of conversation and our mutual delight in the beauty of Ely Cathedral. I am indebted to the Reverend Christopher Armstrong for telling me much about his father's background and early life. Others whose reminiscences have been helpful to me are Jay Bregman, Kevin Corrigan, Barry Fleet, and the late Henry Blumenthal.