

**OTTO, WALTER F.** Walter Friedrich Otto (1874–1958) was a German scholar of classical philology, mythology, and the history and philosophy of religions. The son of pharmacist Hermann Ernst Otto, Walter Otto was born in Hechingen, a small town below Mount Hohenzollern in Swabia. His family, marked by strong pietistic principles, soon moved to Stuttgart, where Otto attended secondary school at the humanistic Eberhard Ludwigs Gymnasium beginning in 1882. After winning the *Konkurs* in 1892, he was admitted to the Stift, an evangelical college in Tübingen that had been in earlier times the school of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin and the philosophers G. W. F. Hegel and Friedrich Schelling. The following year Otto switched to classical studies under Otto Crusius, Wilhelm Schmid, and Ludwig Schwabe. He continued these studies in 1894 in Bonn, where he was strongly influenced by Hermann Usener and Friedrich Bücheler. Under the supervision of the latter, he wrote his dissertation on the origin of Roman proper names, for which he was awarded a Ph.D. degree in 1897.

Following the *Staatsexamen* in the same year, he taught in a secondary school in Bonn for six months, and from 1898 onward he served as assistant of the *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae* in Munich. As part of this project he became editor of the *Onomasticon Latinum* from 1905 to 1911, continuing his work in the field of Latin onomastics. In 1905 Otto completed his *Habilitationschrift* on *Juno* at the University of Munich under his former teacher in Tübingen, Otto Crusius. Other major essays on Roman religion appeared in the years 1900 to 1916, most of them in the *Real-Encyclopädie*. At the University of Munich he became *Privatdozent* in 1905; he gave Latin style exercises from 1907 on, and was appointed *außerordentlicher Professor* in 1910. Besides the philological work at the *Thesaurus*, which led Otto to the acquaintance of Ernst Diehl and Alfred Klotz, he attended the psychodiagnostic lectures of the Bachofen-influenced scholar Ludwig Klages. In 1911 he gave lectures at the University of Vienna, where his friendship with Hans von Arnim started.

In 1913 Otto was appointed *ordentlicher Professor* for Latin literature in Basel, and the next year he moved, with the same function, to Frankfurt am Main, where he wrote his main works, *The Homeric Gods* (1929) and *Dionysus* (1933). Here he was the leader of a major school in ancient culture and religion to which adhered important scholars, such as the classicist Karl Reinhardt and the ethnologist Leo Frobenius (who were Otto's best friends for his whole life), the Sinologist Richard Wilhelm, the philosopher Kurt Riezler and, among the younger generation, the Germanist Max Kommerell (who became Otto's son-in-law in 1936), the historian Franz Altheim, the religious historians Carl Koch and Károly Kerényi, the Iranist Hermann Lommel, and the ethnologist Adolf Ellegard Jensen. Most of these scholars wrote important works within the sixteen-volume series *Frankfurter Studien zur Religion und Kultur der Antike*, edited by Otto between 1932 and 1938. In those years Otto played

a key role in Frankfurt's cultural life, attending both Wilhelm's China-Institut and Frobenius's Forschungsinstitut für Kulturmorphologie (Otto helped to transfer the latter from Munich to Frankfurt). He went several times to the exile residence of Kaiser Wilhelm II in Doorn (Netherlands), where scholars of Frobenius's entourage were invited regularly to hold conferences on myth-related topics. In his last years in Frankfurt, Otto put great efforts into advising the scientific edition of the unpublished works of Max Scheler and Friedrich Nietzsche. Otto was an important member of the scientific committee of the Nietzsche-Archiv in Weimar: together with Karl Schlechta and Martin Heidegger, both appointed to the committee by his suggestion, Otto tried to save Nietzsche's legacy from a mere political use.

Because of his connections with Kurt Riezler and his "clique," the Nazis forced Otto to move to Königsberg in 1934. Here he succeeded the Greek classicist Paul Maas, who had to leave his chair because of his Jewish origins, and became a good friend of the younger scholar Willy Theiler. He was also close to the philosopher Hans Heyse, the art historian Wilhelm Worringer, the musicologist Hans Engel, the archaeologist Guido von Kaschnitz-Weinberg, and the Indologist Helmut von Glasenapp. Besides his academic relationships, Otto took part in Königsberg's cultural life, becoming a member of the Königsberger Gelehrte Gesellschaft and the Kant-Gesellschaft, and attending the aristocratic society of Eastern Prussia (through the families Dohna and Dönhoff he was introduced to anti-Nazi milieus). During this period Otto wrote about Goethe's and Hölderlin's relationship to Greek religion, lectured on Nietzsche and Socrates, and edited the *Jahrbücher für die geistige Überlieferung* together with Karl Reinhardt and Ernesto Grassi. The second volume of this series was forbidden by the Nazis, who therefore decided to cancel the award of the Kant-Preis to Otto in 1943. In 1944 he escaped the disaster of Königsberg, leaving behind his library and several manuscripts. This heavy loss was important for Otto's shift to a more philosophical—and less philological—approach to classical myth, which goes back to the 1920s but is particularly characteristic of his works after 1945. Having spent the last year of war in Elmau (Bavaria), he obtained two teaching assignments in Greek literature in Munich and Göttingen (1945 and 1946), was visiting professor in Tübingen in 1946, and became emeritus in that university in 1955. During this period he was one of the founders of the Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft and the Max-Scheler-Gesellschaft (the latter of which he directed), and lectured on various topics, including Apollo, Prometheus, the spirit of Greek religion, Greek tragedy, Socrates, and humanism.

Starting from studies in Latin onomastics strongly influenced by Usener's *Götternamen* (1896) and Bücheler's works on ancient Italic languages, Otto moved in his postdoctoral years to a comprehensive interpretation of Roman religion. As a challenge to Georg Wissowa's *Religion und Kultus der Römer* (1902), Otto concentrated on the autochthon (non-

Greek) aspects of the main Roman gods (Fatum, Faunus, Fides, Fortuna, Genius, Janus, and Juno), pointing out their chthonian, as well as their benign, character. In these years he also extended his cognition in the field of history of religions, on which he gave lectures at Munich University (thereby dwelling especially on Greek mystery cults). These interests directed his studies about soul-beliefs in ancient religions—a topic on which he lectured in Frankfurt and wrote his first book in 1923 (*Die Manen*).

In another book of the same year (*Der Geist der Antike und die christliche Welt*) Otto gave a strongly Nietzsche-influenced view of the Jewish and Christian religions in antithesis to the Greek Olympian world. Here, and in a series of articles leading to his main work, the *Homeric Gods* (1929; English translation, 1954), he supplied a philosophical interpretation of Greek religion, abandoning the philological method that had guided all his previous works. This methodological shift was due to Otto's classicistic conception of the uniqueness of Greek religion compared to any other. He maintained that the Homeric mode of seeing and thinking of the Olympian gods found continual expression within the Greek world "despite all temporal and individual variations, in the representative works of the Greek genius, whether in poetry, plastic art or philosophy" (Otto, 1929/1954, p. 20), being not only the very essence of Greek civilization, but indeed "the religious idea of the European spirit" and "one of humanity's greatest religious ideas" (p. 13). According to Otto, each Olympian god (he dwells on Athene, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, and Hermes, not taking into account Zeus) is an *Urgestalt des Seins*, capable of revealing from its peculiar point of view the totality of reality—worldliness and naturalness—in human shape. Such are, for example, Apollo, the anthropomorphic revelation of spiritual freedom and distance from the mortal's world, and his twin sister Artemis, who represents "freedom of another sort—the feminine," which is "free nature with its brilliance and wildness, with its guiltless purity and its mysterious uncanniness" (p. 102). As Goethe had pointed out, Greek religion should therefore be considered as "theomorphic" and not as "anthropomorphic," with the divine in its human appearance being the model for mankind—and not the opposite.

Otto deepened his idea of the Greek divine as a revelation of "being" in human form in his other major work, *Dionysus* (1933; English translation, 1965). Relying on this conception, Otto was one of the few scholars of his time maintaining the Greek provenience of Dionysos, long before Michael Ventris and John Chadwick discovered the god's Mycaean evidence in 1952. Though not belonging to the Olympian deities, this god discloses "a whole world, whose spirit presents itself again and again in new forms, connecting in an eternal unity the sublime with the simple, the human with the animal, the vegetal with the elemental" (Otto, 1933/1965, p. 188). The very essence of Dionysos lies therefore in the opposition between these incompatible poles; hence his madness, visible in his symbols: the mask

(incarnating the simultaneity of presence and absence), the music (embodying both noise and silence), and the wine (symbol of the paradoxical unity of pleasure and pain). This madness, in which brightness and obscurity, and joy and horror, coincide, unifies also life and death, concealing in itself the mystery of procreation. For this reason, the Dionysian world is a feminine one, closely connected to women, as is clearly shown by the god's followers, the Maenads, and his spouse Ariadne.

SEE ALSO Greek Religion; Kerényi, Károly.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Otto's Ph.D. work was written in Latin and published in 1898 in the *Fleckeisens Jahrbücher (Nomina propria latina oriunda a participiis perfecti)* (Leipzig, 1898), pp. 745–932. His most important essays on Roman religion, which made him a renowned philologist, have been collected posthumously in the *Aufsätze zur römischen Religionsgeschichte* (Meisenheim a. G., 1975). Other major contributions to this topic can be found in volumes 6, 7, and 8 of August Pauly and Georg Wissowa's *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1909–1913).

The shift to a comprehensive view of the history of religions is evident in Otto's editorial effort in the series *Religiöse Stimmen der Völker* (a German translation of the major religious texts of the world, published in Jena, 1915–1923), and in his monograph *Die Manen oder von den Urformen des Totenglaubens: Eine Untersuchung zur Religion der Griechen, Römer, und Semiten und zum Volksglauben überhaupt* (Berlin, 1923), which challenges Erwin Rohde's notion of psyche by showing the distinction between thymos, the life-spirit, and psyche—that is, the immaterial phantom of a person that remains when the life-spirit leaves the body at the moment of death (this distinction can be made in Roman and Jewish religions as well). In 1923 appeared also *Der Geist der Antike und die Christliche Welt* (Bonn; Italian trans., 1973), a book Otto didn't want republished, followed by his most widely known works, namely *Die Götter Griechenlands: Das Bild des Göttlichen im Spiegel des griechischen Geistes* (Bonn, 1929; English trans. by Moses Hadas: *The Homeric Gods: The Spiritual Significance of Greek Religion*, London, 1954; Italian trans.: Florence, 1941; Spanish trans: Buenos Aires, 1973; French trans. with a foreword by Marcel Détienné: Paris, 1981; Romanian trans.: Bucharest, 1995); and *Dionysos: Mythos und Kultus* (Frankfurt a. M., 1933; English trans. with an introduction by Robert B. Palmer: *Dionysus: Myth and Cult*, Bloomington, Ind., and London, 1965; French trans.: Paris, 1969; Italian trans.: Genoa, 1990; Greek trans.: Athens, 1991; Spanish trans.: Madrid, 1997).

Important writings to evaluate Otto's relationship to the Nazi regime are his booklet *Der junge Nietzsche* (Frankfurt a. M., 1936; reprinted in *Mythos und Welt*, Darmstadt and Stuttgart, 1963), and two volumes of the series *Geistige Überlieferung*, which he edited in Berlin in 1940 and 1942. Otto's literary bequest is evident in his books *Der Dichter und die alten Götter* (Frankfurt a. M., 1942; Italian trans.: Naples, 1991) and *Die Gestalt und das Sein: Gesammelte Abhandlungen über den Mythos und seine Bedeutung für die Menschheit* (Düsseldorf and Köln, 1954), where Hölderlin's topic of the

“flight of the Divine” is analyzed in relation to the absence of the Olympian gods in modern times. According to Otto, in our epoch only poetry can save humankind from decay, poetry being the only possible approach to the truth of reality, as pointed out in *Die Musen und der göttliche Ursprung des Singens und Sagens* (Darmstadt, 1954). The importance of Greek myth from a philosophical perspective is pointed out as well in *Gesetz, Urbild, und Mythos* (Stuttgart, 1951; reprinted in *Die Gestalt und das Sein* [Dusseldorf and Köln, 1954], pp. 25–90, and in New York, 1978; Italian trans.: Rome, 1996), and in *Theophania: Der Geist der altgriechischen Religion* (Hamburg, 1956), with a biographical sketch by Ernesto Grassi; reprinted with a foreword by Friedrich Georg Jünger and a biographical note by Bernhard Wyß (Frankfurt a. M., 1934; Japanese trans.: Tokyo, 1966; Spanish trans.: Buenos Aires, 1968; Italian trans.: Genoa, 1983; French trans.: Paris, 1995).

Otto dedicated his last efforts to two major figures of Greek philosophy: Socrates (about whom he wrote 1,800 pages from 1940 to 1955, still unpublished) and *Epikur*, edited posthumously in *Das Wort der Antike* (Darmstadt and Stuttgart, 1962), pp. 293–333; Italian trans.: Parma, 2001). Also published after Otto’s death were *Das Wort der Antike* (Darmstadt and Stuttgart, 1962) and *Mythos und Welt* (Darmstadt and Stuttgart, 1963), edited by Kurt von Fritz with a critical commentary on Otto’s work and a bibliography of his publications by Egidius Schmalzriedt; and *Die Wirklichkeit der Götter: Von der Unzerstörbarkeit griechischer Weltansicht* (Hamburg, 1963), containing a deep appreciation on Otto’s oeuvre by Károly Kerényi. The unpublished work of Otto that survived the flames of Königsberg lies in the *Deutsches Literaturarchiv* in Marbach; it includes roughly 25,000 handwritten pages, mostly stemming from lectures and conferences, and about 1,250 letters from and to Otto dating from 1944 to 1958.

Major biographical sketches of Otto include Karl Reinhardt, “Walter F. Otto,” in *Vermächtnis der Antike* (Göttingen, 1966), pp. 87–90; Otto Weinreich, “Walter F. Otto zum 75: Geburtstag” and “Walter F. Otto zum 80: Geburtstag,” both collected in *Ausgewählte Schriften 1937–1970*, vol. 3 (Amsterdam, 1979), pp. 275–277 and 361–363; Willy Theiler, “Walter F. Otto +” in *Gnomon* 32 (1960): 87–90; Viktor Pöschl, “Walter F. Otto und Karl Reinhardt,” in *Literatur und geschichtliche Wahrheit* (Heidelberg, 1983), pp. 247–273; Gerhard Perl, “Walter F. Otto (1874–1958) in Königsberg,” in *Eikasmos* 4 (1993): 283–285; and Hubert Cancik, “Walter Friedrich Otto,” in *Neue Deutsche Biographie*, vol. 19 (Berlin, 1999), pp. 713–714. A biographical picture including information on Otto’s unpublished work is supplied by Alessandro Stavru, “Il lascito di Walter Friedrich Otto nel Deutsches Literaturarchiv di Marbach,” in *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 64 (1998): 195–222. On Otto’s gradual divergence from the ideas of his teacher Hermann Usener see the thorough study of Antje Wessels, *Ursprungszauber. Zur Rezeption von Hermann Useners Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung*, New York–Berlin, 2003, pp. 185–225.

The only booklength work on Otto—Josef Donnenberg’s dissertation *Die Götterlehre Walter Friedrich Ottos: Weg oder Irrweg moderner Religionsgeschichte?* (Innsbruck, 1961)—cannot be considered a comprehensive study, since it analyses only his

writings on Greek religion and leaves out Otto’s interpretation of Roman religion, which influenced profoundly his pupils Franz Altheim and Carl Koch, and was appreciated even by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf (*Der Glaube der Hellenen*, Berlin: vol. 1, 1931, pp. 11–12, 142, 313; vol. 2, 1932, pp. 328–329). In more recent times, following the reprint of Otto’s main writings on Roman religion in 1975 by Reinhold Merkelbach, Wolfgang Fauth underlined their importance (*Anzeiger für die Altertumswissenschaft* 32 [1979]: 105–109), whereas George Dumézil criticized them in, for example, *La religion romaine archaïque* (Paris, 1974).

In a similar way, due to its nonphilological nature, Otto’s approach to Greek religion encountered on one hand indifference (or even resistance), and on the other appreciation. This is evident in the reactions of major scholars to *Die Götter Griechenlands*, which encountered unfavorable criticism in the reviews by Martin Persson Nilsson, *Deutsche Literaturzeitung* 28 (1929): 1334–1337; Louis Gernet, *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d’histoire anciennes* 5 (1931): 91–94; Herbert Jennings Rose, *The Classical Review* 6 (1956): 162; Hubert Cancik, *Der altsprachliche Unterricht* 27 (1984): 71–89. *Die Götter Griechenlands* was assessed positively by Mario Untersteiner, *Il mondo classico* 1 (1931): 15–23; Bruno Snell, *Theologische Literaturzeitung* 3 (1955): 152–153; Arthur Hilary Armstrong, *The Hibbert Journal* 54 (1955–1956): 96–98; Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Revue de l’histoire des religions* 200 (1983): 102–103. *Dionysus* was heavily attacked by Martin Persson Nilsson, *Gnomon* 11 (1935): 177–181, and Hubert Cancik in *Die Restauration der Götter*, edited by Richard Faber and Renate Schlesier (Würzburg, 1986), pp. 105–123; it was evaluated neutrally by Arthur William Hope Adkins, *The Classical Review* 21 (1971): 147–148; and was appreciated by Gustav van der Leeuw, *Nieuwe theologische Studien* 17 (1933): 87–94, and Mario Untersteiner, *Il mondo classico* 6 (1936): 297–305. Other interesting reviews on Otto’s interpretation of Greek myth, extending beyond his main works, are those of Ludolf Malten, *Gnomon* 20 (1944): 113–126; Albin Lesky, *Gnomon* 24 (1952): 432–434; Walther Kraus, *Gnomon* 30 (1958): 561–566; Willy Theiler, *Gnomon* 35 (1963): 619–621, and Philip Merlan, *Gymnasium* 70 (1963): 424–429.

The influence of Otto’s ideas is mostly evident in the oeuvre of Károly Kerényi, especially in his *Dionysos* (London, 1976), but it can also be noticed in such scholars as the philologists Bruno Snell (*Die Entdeckung des Geistes* [Hamburg, 1946], pp. 30–44) and Willy Theiler (“Der Mythos und die Götter Griechenlands” in *Untersuchungen zur antiken Literatur* [Berlin, 1970], pp. 130–147), as well as in the archaeologists Karl Schefold (*Griechische Kunst als religiöses Phänomen* [Hamburg, 1959]) and Erika Simon (*Die Götter der Griechen*, [Munich, 1969]). A much more indirect reception of Otto’s thought can be caught in some writings of Walter Burkert (via his teacher Carl Koch) and, in a structuralistic frame, in the later works of Jean-Pierre Vernant and Marcel Détienne.

The importance of Otto’s view of Greek Olympian religion for studies in the history of religion has been pointed out by Albert Henrichs, “Die Götter Griechenlands: Ihr Bild im Wandel der Religionswissenschaft,” in *Thyssen-Vorträge: Auseinandersetzungen mit der Antike*, edited by Hellmut Flashar (Bamberg, 1987), pp. 3–49. The latter scholar contributed

also to the success of Otto's interpretation of Dionysian duality in "Loss of Self, Suffering, Violence: The Modern View of Dionysus from Nietzsche to Girard," in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 88 (1984): 205–240, making it become a popular hermeneutic paradigm (Anton Harald Bierl, *Dionysos und die griechische Tragödie* [Tübingen, 1991], pp. 1–20; Françoise Frontisi-Ducroux, *Le dieu-masque* [Paris and Rome, 1991], pp. 62–63; and Giovanni Casadio, *Il vino dell'anima* [Rome, 1999], pp. 79–81).

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**OUSPENSKY, P. D.** Petyr Dem'ianovich Uspenskii (1878–1947) was a Russian philosopher, mathematician, teacher, and mystic. He is known as a conveyor and interpreter of the teachings of G. I. Gurdjieff (1866–1949), but was well established as an author even before he encountered Gurdjieff. Ouspensky has a lasting place in the early-twentieth-century Russian literary tradition, and as a writer of numerous books on human spiritual development.

Ouspensky was born in and grew up in Moscow. His mother was a painter, and his father a railroad surveyor who died when Ouspensky was a child. The precocious boy was dissatisfied with school. Even as a youth he discriminated between "ordinary knowledge" of worldly matters and "important knowledge" concerning questions about the nature of reality, human evolution and destiny, and the acquiring of higher consciousness. For this reason, he left the academic world and did not take any of the higher degrees for which he was qualified. These questions preoccupied him throughout his life. In 1905 he wrote a novel titled *Kinema-Drama*; it was not published until 1915 and was later translated into English as *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin*. The book, based on the idea of eternal recurrence popularized by Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), dramatizes the notion that eternal recurrence, or living the same life again and again, can come to an end for a person who learns its secret. To escape "the trap called life," one must make sacrifices for many years, and even many lifetimes.

In 1907 Ouspensky's quest led him to Theosophy. After reading the works of Helena P. Blavatsky (1831–1891) and others, he joined the Theosophical Society in Saint Petersburg. However, Ouspensky became dissatisfied with Theosophy. Although invited to join the Inner Circle of initiates to study secret teachings, he declined and left the Theosophical Society in 1916. Ouspensky found that Theosophy was not a continuing path for him, but he acknowledged that it opened the door to esotericism and the study of higher dimensions.

In 1911 Ouspensky published a major work, the *Tertium Organum: The Third Canon of Thought, a Key to the Enigmas of the World*. This book, translated into English in 1920, argued that a new mode of thinking was needed in Western civilization. The classical mode had opened metaphysical inquiry. However, it also led to positivistic thought, which

chose to suppress metaphysics in favor of empirical science. Aristotle (384–322 BCE) wrote the first *Organon*, a compendium of logic and a systematic means of communicating knowledge, exploring the principles of logic and discovery; Francis Bacon (1561–1626) wrote the *New Organum*, exposing the idols of the human intellect, which opened the way for further scientific exploration during the Renaissance. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum* brought together theories of Eastern and Western mysticism, as well as sacred art and modern science, in a way that enlightened and moved the seeker toward a higher consciousness and a greater understanding of the principles of the universe.

Ouspensky's search for esoteric knowledge led him to travel to India and Ceylon in 1913. He was prevented from going to Persia and Central Asia because of the outbreak of World War I. He returned to Saint Petersburg via London, Norway, and Finland. Giving a lecture in Saint Petersburg in 1915, he met Sofia Grigor'evna Maksimenko, who became his wife. Ouspensky was told of another group engaged in the study of esoteric wisdom and occult phenomena; this was the circle around Gurdjieff. Ouspensky went to meet him in Moscow, and was accepted as a student of stature. Gurdjieff acknowledged that Ouspensky was a thinker and author in his own right. *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (1949) contains an account of Ouspensky's conversations with Gurdjieff and a lucid systematic exposition of Gurdjieff's early ideas.

As early as 1918, Ouspensky began to become disillusioned with Gurdjieff's leadership. In a typescript for a meeting in 1937, Ouspensky explained that Gurdjieff had said years earlier, "First of all you must not believe anything, and second you must not do anything you do not understand." Ouspensky felt Gurdjieff was violating these principles, although the two men continued to work together. After immigrating to London to escape the Bolsheviks, Ouspensky developed his own circle of disciples. Gurdjieff joined him there in 1922 and acquired some of Ouspensky's pupils. In 1924 Ouspensky refused to stay at Gurdjieff's Institute at Prieuré des Basses Loges at Fontainebleau-Avon in France, and he announced the independent nature of his future work. The final break came in 1931 when Ouspensky was denied all access to Prieuré.

Undaunted, Ouspensky continued to teach and to write in London and founded the Historico-Psychological Society. However, World War II made life in London difficult. He also taught for a time in Lynn in Surrey, but decided to go to the United States, where he held large meetings in New York and New Jersey from 1941 to 1946. Although in failing health, he returned to England in 1947. Before his death in October of that year, he told his disciples that the work as they had known it could not continue without him. However, they were free to pursue the truth in their own way.

*The Fourth Way* (1957), consisting of records of Ouspensky's meetings from 1921 to 1947, was published under the supervision of Ouspensky's wife. The term "Fourth