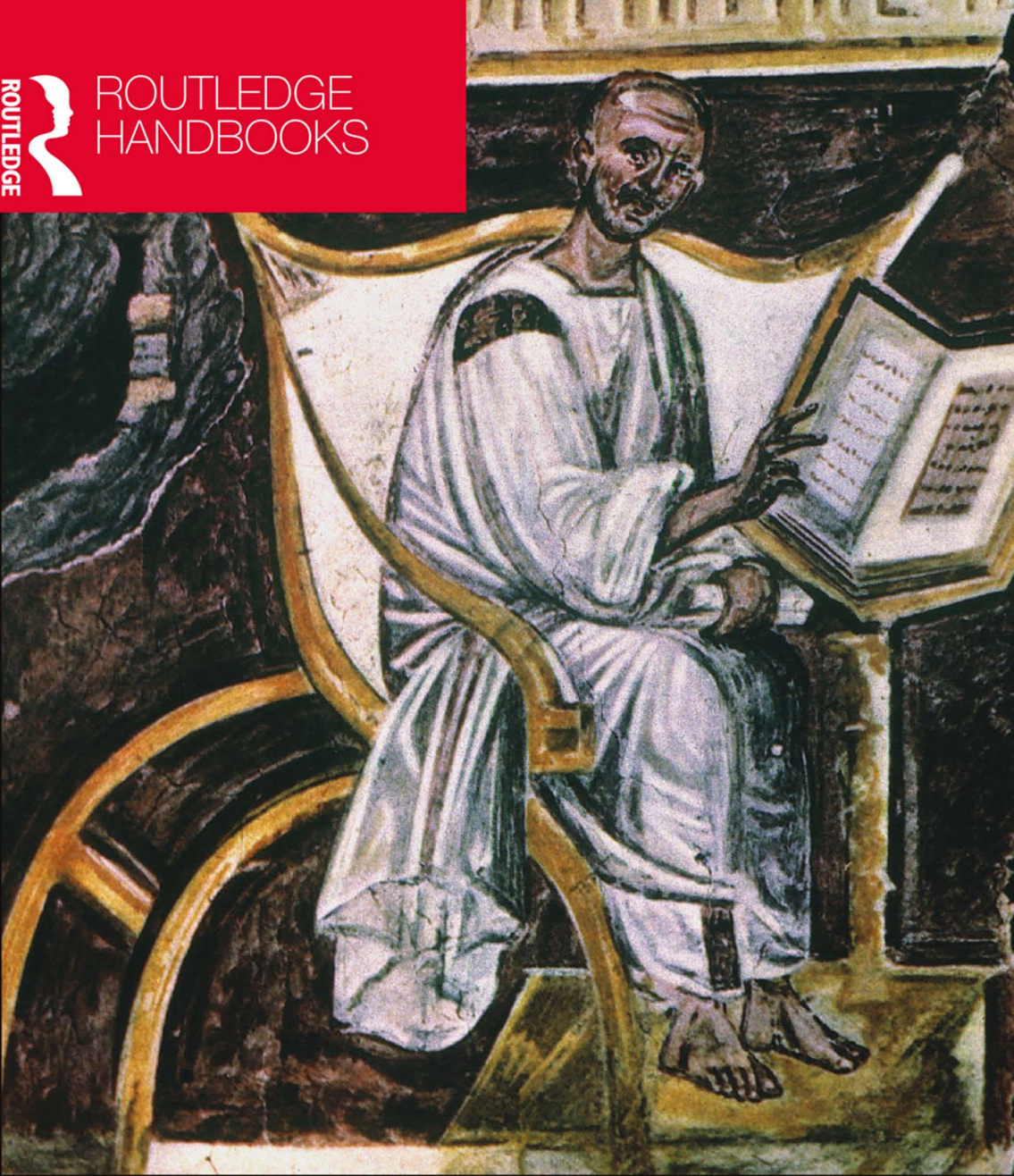




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The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy

Edited by Mark Edwards

The Routledge Handbook of Early Christian Philosophy

This volume offers the most comprehensive survey available of the philosophical background to the works of early Christian writers and the development of early Christian doctrine.

It examines how the same philosophical questions were approached by Christian and pagan thinkers; the philosophical element in Christian doctrines; the interaction of particular philosophies with Christian thought; and the constructive use of existing philosophies by all Christian thinkers of late antiquity. While most studies of ancient Christian writers and the development of early Christian doctrine make some reference to the philosophic background, this is often of an anecdotal character, and does not enable the reader to determine whether the likenesses are deep or superficial, or how pervasively one particular philosopher may have influenced Christian thought. This volume is designed to provide not only a body of facts more compendious than can be found elsewhere, but the contextual information which will enable readers to judge or clarify the statements that they encounter in works of more limited scope.

With contributions by an international group of experts in both philosophy and Christian thought, this is an invaluable resource for scholars of early Christianity, Late Antiquity and ancient philosophy alike.

Mark Edwards has been Tutor in Theology at Christ Church, Oxford, and University Lecturer/Associate Professor in Patristics in the Faculty of Theology and Religion in the University of Oxford since 1993. Since 2014, he has held the title of Professor of Early Christian Studies. His books include *Origen against Plato* (2002), *Catholicity and Heresy in the Early Church* (2009), *Image, Word and God in the Early Christian Centuries* (2012), *Religions of the Constantinian Empire* (2015), and *Aristotle and Early Christian Thought* (2019).

‘For a modern intellectual culture that distrusts trust and prefers analysis to exegesis, the very notion of early Christian philosophy is apt to be an uncomfortable stretch. But Mark Edwards and company do not retreat to the safe, if vacuous, conjunction: early Christianity and philosophy, as if one were a prosthesis for the other. This volume’s concise forays into a still surprisingly unfamiliar intellectual landscape bring ancient philosophy into the heart of early Christian exegesis. The introduction by Edwards brilliantly articulates the stakes of following along.’

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‘This well-conceived collection of studies makes a powerful case that ancient Christians took philosophy seriously and historians of ancient philosophy need to take Christians seriously.’

– **George Boys-Stones**, *University of Toronto, Canada*

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– **Alberto Rigolio**, *University of Durham, UK*

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Introduction

Mark Edwards

Objectives

The purpose of this volume is to furnish both scholars and students with a comprehensive survey of the uses in early Christian thought of the tools, the tropes and the themes of philosophy as that term was commonly understood in the ancient world. Contributors of accredited expertise have been asked to furnish chapters on individual thinkers, on the pagan schools of thought which served as a foil or as a quarry to these thinkers, and on certain perennial topics of discourse which engaged the most philosophical minds of the church in the first six centuries of the Christian era. The value of such an enterprise must lie in its having no controlling narrative, in being as hospitable to the infantile polemics of Epiphanius as to the seminal improvisations of Clement or Gregory of Nyssa, in accommodating both the opportunistic scepticism of Arnobius and the fathomless meditations of Augustine. As the titles of the chapters explain themselves, and as the ordering of chapters within each section is either chronological or arbitrary, no editorial summary could confer a specious unity on the volume, and historians of the early church will judge it by the accuracy and completeness of its contents. Philosophers and theologians, on the other hand, may have a particular interest in the publisher's choice of a title for this volume – not “Early Christianity and Philosophy” but “Early Christian Philosophy” – which suggests that philosophy was an intrinsic element in early Christian thought, or in other words that the characteristic engagements of believers with philosophy in the Roman world were not apologetic or polemical but constructive, not passive or sequacious but dynamic, and even at times reciprocal.

To say this is to say something more than that Christians were “influenced” by philosophy, a metaphor which could easily imply that the church was merely the last receptacle in an automatic process of diffusion. It is to say that Christianity took its place beside the existing schools as a creed with its own foundations and entailing a distinct way of life, but at the same time capable of defining and communicating its tenets in terms that entitled it to a hearing not only in courts of law but at the bar of reason. Banal as it must seem to many, this thesis has been denied by both the friends and the enemies of Christianity, both consciously and unconsciously, from antiquity to the present; on the other hand, it has sometimes been maintained, by ancient as well as by modern apologists, with a vigour that belies the insistence of all the acknowledged

doctors of the church that human reason is blind without a divine revelation. This introduction therefore will attempt to explain how early Christian thinkers undertook to coordinate reason with faith without betraying either the Word of God or their likeness to God as rational creatures, with results that set them apart from the other schools without rendering them incomprehensible. The final section will argue that, although these results will not satisfy the majority of modern theologians, it remains possible to profit by the example of the first Christians even when we do not defer to them as fathers. We cannot treat them as they treated the Bible, but we can read them as patiently as they read Plato or Aristotle, and with a similar hope of gleaning the elements of a new philosophy that will at once supersede them and preserve them from obsolescence.

Why philosophise?

For more than one reason, it would be a fallacy to imagine that the adoption of philosophy was a means by which some Christians “came to terms” (Grant 1988: 9) with the ambient society. The texts that we call apologies, although this word signifies a defence in court, were not calculated to win the goodwill of readers whose religion they held up to sustained derision; they turn the charges back on their accusers with all the truculence of Socrates, and when any Christian prisoner addresses his “apology” to a Roman assize, it is with the intention of joining Socrates on the roll of martyrs (see further Frede 2006; Edwards 2009: 38–39). Plato in his *Gorgias* acknowledges that this is the likely fate of one who takes pleasure in baiting the sophists or teachers of political science, yet despises their forensic artifices; whereas his interlocutors warned Socrates that one day he would have nothing to say in court (*Gorgias* 486a–c), Christ positively enjoins his own disciples to prepare nothing for that occasion but leave all to the Holy Spirit (Luke 12.12). It might seem that the apologists have preempted his assistance by assuming the philosopher’s cloak (Justin, *Trypho* 1); but in doing so they were at best exchanging obloquy for ridicule, as Plato confessed in the *Theaetetus* (174a–176a), with his caricature of the sage as one who does not know his way to the agora, never hears the news of the city, and fails to perceive that his welfare depends on playing toady to his political masters. Cicero, the doyen of Latin philosophy, commends it as an occupation for leisure and a source of consolation, but denies that either a Stoic or an Epicurean can serve the state if he lives strictly by his own creed (*On Ends* 2.60; *Defence of Murena* 61–62). Seneca, who professes to be a Stoic, admits without shame that “little remained” of his youthful austerities when he took up urban life (*Letters to Lucilius* 18.108–115). The first apologists wrote in the era of the “second sophistic”, to quote the name conferred upon it by its historian Philostratus (*Lives of the Sophists*), and Philostratus was at pains to distinguish the sophist, who owes his livelihood to the cities and wealthy patrons whom he flatters with recondite eloquence, from the more angular type who cherishes his philosophy with no thought of his own advancement or the public good.

Why then be a philosopher when one was already an alien? One answer might be that even those who are willing to die for their faith might wish to persuade themselves and the world that they have not died without a reason. This was the indictment brought against the Christian martyrs by philosophers of all schools in the second century – by Galen the Platonist (*Differences of the Pulse* 3.3), Lucian the occasional Cynic (*Runaways* 1), Celsus the putative Epicurean, the rigid Epictetus (*Discourses* 4.7.6) and his eclectic fellow-Stoic, the Emperor Marcus (*Meditations* 11.3): philosophers, they argued, suffer execution or suicide when they must, as a demonstration of rational fortitude, whereas Christians quit the world only because they have not learned how to live (see further Gathercole 2017). No way of life in late antiquity was more distinctive than that of the Christians, who, for all their professed indifference to dress and diet, were

ostentatious to the point of recklessness in their abstinence from sacrifice, idolatry and the swearing of oaths to the emperor; proudly declaring that though they married they did not kill their children, they also commended lifelong virginity, broke up existing marriages between Christian and pagans, and gave further evidence of their unsocial tendencies by eschewing military service, condemning a number of other trades and refusing magistracies (Tertullian, *On the Soldier's Crown*; *On Idolatry* 5; Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.73). If all these affronts to the common sense of the pagan world were not to be ascribed to mere perversity or “hatred of the human race” (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.4), it was necessary to give them an intellectual foundation: this the apologists undertook to furnish by showing that the principles of Christian thought were in fact the very principles that had guided the best philosophers to their deaths.

For as we have been reminded by Pierre Hadot (1995), philosophy in the ancient world was more than an intellectual gymnastic: it was also a summons to moral endeavour, setting before the student a certain ideal of the good and equipping him to pursue it for all that the body, the world and the senses may say in mockery or remonstrance. The Stoic was known by his fortitude, the Epicurean by his equanimity, the Cynic by his indifference to precept and precedent; even the Peripatetic, who never disowned the logic, the natural science or the theology of his master as the Stoics disowned the theoretical writings of Chrysippus (Epictetus, *Discourses* 1.3), prized these studies only because he held that *eudaimonia* or happiness cannot be achieved without satisfying our natural thirst for knowledge. As Arthur Darby Nock (1933) observed before Hadot, philosophy is the true analogue in the ancient world to what we now call religion, if we understand by “religion” neither doctrine alone nor morality alone but a coinherent unity of life and thought in which each is master and servant to the other. A goal so much at odds with the vulgar craving for animal pleasures and social approval was not commonly sought, then or now, and still less commonly achieved. At the same time – and more perhaps than now – the amusement that it inspired was apt to be tempered by admiration for the philosopher’s self-sufficiency and his dauntless freedom of speech – his *parrhêsia*, in Cynic parlance – in the presence of those before whom most would tremble. The ancient republic of letters celebrated its philosophers as the Pharisees (according to the New Testament) revered the tombs of the prophets whom their own forefathers had slain (Matthew 23.29; Luke 11.47).

Parrhêsia, freedom of speech before God and his creatures, was also the boast of the primitive church: the more successful Christians were in assimilating themselves to the philosophers, the harder it would be for pagan writers to disparage them as ignorant desperadoes. The harder it would be, indeed, to put them to death at all, for, setting aside the few infamous exceptions of which we have spoken, the norm in the pagan world was to let the Cynic go his way and to laugh at the Stoic behind his back without depriving either of his right to differ. Philostratus, though he championed the public rhetorician against the thinking pedant, assumed that every reader of his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* would take the side of the barefoot sage, not only against the emperor but against his more parochial rivals, the temporising philosopher and the superstitious priest. He also assumes that the reader will agree with him that miracles are not the wise man’s currency but a bauble to be tossed now and then to the ignorant; that we make ourselves kin to the gods by attuning the mind to their inspirations, not by disavowing our natural fathers; and that when such a favourite of heaven is falsely arraigned, he will possess both the eloquence to refute the charges (8.6–7) and the power to escape at the moment of his choice (8.8). The parody of the gospels in this work, extending even to the unprecedented depiction of pagan exorcisms (3.38–39; Edwards 2006), indicates that he could no longer hope, like Galen, to dispose of the pretensions of Christianity in an aside. Half a century earlier, the *True Logos* of Celsus had borne reluctant witness to the necessity of meeting these claims with the weapons of philosophy. Lucian of Samosata, a friend perhaps

of this same Celsus, makes a similar concession when he compares the Christians to their disadvantage with the Cynics, hitherto the most maligned of the ancient sects (*Peregrinus* 11–14; Edwards 1989). By proxy he confers on them the distinction of being fellow-atheists with the Epicureans (Alexander 38). When Celsus taxes Christians with bad citizenship, he repeats an accusation that was levelled against both Cynics and Epicureans (Downing 1993); while the avoidance of pagan altars was mandatory for all Christians, Plotinus reveals that the Gnostics had become atheists twice over by compounding this offence with an Epicurean denial of any divine solicitude for the world.

From all of which it follows that, if the Cynic and the Epicurean are nonetheless philosophers, so is the Christian. There is no reason to suppose that in the last case, any more than in the others, the assumption of this persona was merely strategic. The recognised objects of the true philosopher were to understand the nature of the world and to live with integrity; a Christian, actuated as he must be by the same motives, would be discontented on his own account, and not only in his role as an apologist, if he failed to ground his faith on rational premises or to demonstrate its logical cohesion. In the novel entitled the *Clementine Recognitions*, the vision which converts the young protagonist fulfils his desire to understand his own origins and that of the universe that he inhabits. Both the *Apostolic Constitutions* and the *Catechetical Oration* of Gregory of Nyssa suggest that the instruction of a neophyte in the fourth century included a proof that the world was the product of a single creator; in the second century, most apologists took the complementary approach of exposing the patent absurdity of polytheism and the efforts of pagan sculptors to distinguish one counterfeit deity from another. Augustine in his *Confessions* leaves us the record of a mind that was driven from one phantasm of knowledge to another by his recurrent questioning of received opinions on the origin of evil, the nature of matter and the constitution of the soul. However skilfully Christians plied the tools of classical rhetoric, they styled themselves philosophers to show that, unlike the sophists, they valued the arts of persuasion only insofar as they led to knowledge.

On method

It is necessary to labour this point that philosophy commences with inquiry because it has all too often been deemed sufficient to stack up quotations from Plato or the Stoics to prove the adherence of an author to one of these schools. Where quotations fail, mere similarity of tenets (as perceived by the modern critic) will furnish a warrant for commending or denouncing him as a Middle Platonist or an Aristotelian; since, in many instances, the argument leaps from one proof-text to another, taking no account (for example) of the crude facts of chronology, it is hardly to be expected that the more abstruse question, “how did the author arrive at this opinion?” will be mooted, let alone answered. Yet even the Greek doxographers, superficial as they are in their juxtapositions of the dogmas held by each sect on successive items in a disjointed inventory of topics, are aware that each begins from different premises, some acknowledging only the evidence of the senses while others maintained that the intellect has access to a more permanent order of being, and some appealing first to common notions while others doubted all that they heard but advanced no dogmas of their own. We may say if we will that Plato and Aristotle both assert the primacy of form to matter, that Plato anticipates the Stoics in rejecting the necessity of external goods to happiness, and that at the same time he agrees with Epicurus in equating the greatest happiness with the maximum of pleasure. If we deduce that all thinkers in antiquity were Platonists, ignoring their disparate views on the number and nature of the gods and on the composition and destiny of the soul, we must consign to

the flames every history of Greek thought that has ever been written since the first book of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

It was Nietzsche who introduced the term “agonistic” (from Greek *agôn*, meaning a public competition) to describe the Greek world in its creative ferment (1890/1973). When a Greek wins fame by speaking, another Greek will aspire to fame by speaking against him, all the more so if his rival be a Homer or a Plato. Nothing is more Greek than to contradict another Greek, or even, as Plato sometimes does, the Greeks at large. And thus there could be no clearer manifestation of the Greek spirit in Christian thought than to set up a new philosophy which professed to explode the errors of the others while securing the ends for which they were established and affording a more secure rationale for the truths upon which they had come by accident. Again the point needs to be laboured because the uniform response among theologians to the appearance of recent monographs contending that Origen was not a Platonist has been to accuse the authors of a polarisation of Christianity and Hellenism which, we are given to understand, is long outmoded (see e.g. Martens 2015). One assumes that it is the hasty spirit of “advocacy” (Martens 2019: 188) that has blinded them to the obvious rejoinder that if opposition to Plato is opposition to Hellenism, the true barbarians of the ancient world would not be the Christians but Aristotle, Epicurus, Diogenes and the Stoics. Classicists, of course, oppose these figures to one another all the time without denying the Hellenic franchise to any of them, and also without implying that one must be wrong and the other right. Once we have laid aside our own convictions, the judgment that Origen is not a Platonist implies no more disparagement of the Academy than of the church.

The need for light, in a controversy that Origen himself has done much to obscure, can be gauged from the most recent farrago of evidence purporting to show that Origen “rejected a literal [that is, somatic] paradise” in his exegesis of Genesis 2–3. Some of these set the Garden of Eden apart from the present world, others locate the paradise of the saints in a new earth, others merely assert the preexistence of souls (among which some assert only preexistence in the womb), and the least relevant of all give an allegorical sense to paradise, as Origen does with all historical matter in the Old Testament, without either denying or ascribing any form of corporeality to the biblical paradise of Adam and Eve. If a belief in a heaven of strictly disembodied souls were the diagnostic of Platonism, none of these texts, except for those in the first group, would have any bearing on the question. On the other hand, it would be easy enough to reconcile both the first and the second groups with the eschatology of the *Phaedo*, in which the abode of souls after quitting the body is a terrestrial place, inaccessible to the mortal element in us, where all that deserves to exist is immune to change and endowed with a purity and intensity of which our senses now grasp only the shadow (*Phaedo* 90b–115a). That Origen held to some form of preexistence is common ground among scholars; his arguments for the rationality of the soul in the womb contradict our one surviving treatise on the subject by a Platonist, but the mere existence of Porphyry's *Ad Gaurum* testifies to disagreement within the school. The same author's *Cave of the Nymphs* reveals that Platonists were no less willing than Origen to treat the same text as a record of history and as a subject for allegorical reflection. Thus, if mere coincidence between elements of Platonic thought and elements of Origen's thought is sufficient proof, there can be no doubt that Origen is a Platonist; the price of proving the case in this way, however, is that we make it unfalsifiable, since any passage in Origen which strictly affirmed the incorporeality of paradise could be cited to show that he held to some other species of Platonism. A thesis worthy of academic discussion must be one that could be refuted, and for this reason if for no other the question of Origen's Platonism must be canvassed with respect to first principles, not with respect to anecdotal agreements, however specious.

Avoiding the genealogical fallacy

To borrow a striking instance from philology, the French for “water” is “eau”, and the Hittite is “watar”, but we do not for that reason deduce that the relation of English to Hittite is more organic than the relation of English to French. An analogue from modern philosophy may be instructive for those who are familiar with that discipline. In ethics it has been customary to distinguish deontologists, who hold that moral principles are normative without reference to any other factor, from consequentialists, who hold that an act should be judged by its consequences, which commonly (though not always) means by its tendency to increase the sum of happiness. While utilitarians measure happiness by pleasure, others appeal to an Aristotelian notion of eudaimonia, often translated as human flourishing. Among deontologists, some may invoke divine commandments, others a universal intuition; Kantians define a moral act as one that affirms our autonomy as rational beings. Opposed to all these schools are the emotivists, who contend that judgments of right or wrong are merely strong expressions of our liking or distaste. Debate between the partisans of each theory can be keen, but if one were to ask them collectively their opinion of murder, paedophilia, theft or vandalism, they would answer with one voice that these are actions to be eschewed. It would obviously be absurd to conclude that emotivism is merely a branch of intuitionism because exemplars of both agree that arson and shoplifting are crimes. It might be more illuminating to compare their views on abortion, adultery or benign deceit; but if this were our sole criterion, we might be surprised to find that two philosophers who agreed on almost everything were nonetheless engaged in ceaseless polemic because the judgments of one were based on intuition and those of the other on a calculation of social benefits. The typical question to students therefore would not be “is this action right or wrong?”, but “what is the premiss by which our calling it right or wrong is justified?”

This is not to deny that Origen, like Clement of Alexandria before him and like many of his future imitators, was conscious of affinities between the dogmas of Platonism and his beliefs as a Christian. In certain passages of his work *Against Celsus*, indeed, he accentuates and perhaps exaggerates these similarities. At the same time, throughout this lucubration he contrasts the beliefs of Christians – which to him are “our” beliefs – with those of all other Greek philosophies, and almost always with an assertion or implication of superiority. Thus Plato may speak well when he affirms that it is difficult to find out the Father and Maker of this universe, but not so well as the scriptures which declare this to be impossible without his own revelation (*Against Celsus* 7.42; Plato, *Timaeus* 28c). By this revelation the scripture means not only itself but the truth that was secretly embodied in its many words until the one eternal Word assumed our flesh and thereby rendered visible to the mind what remains invisible to the eye. Origen does not follow Justin and Clement in ascribing to Plato a surreptitious knowledge of the Old Testament; for him it is enough to note that, if a Christian quoting Moses happens to agree with Plato, only the Greek falls prey to the suspicion of plagiarism. At no point in his reply to Celsus does Origen concede that any doctrine can be accepted on the authority of Plato; at no point does he admit that the Christian has any use for pagan thought except when it contributes to the exegesis or vindication of the sacred text. In a letter to his disciple Gregory Thaumaturgus, he described the appropriation of philosophical and philological tools from the Greeks as a spoiling of the Egyptians – that is, a theft which is in fact no theft but a retrieval of those treasures which were loaned to the nations only until such time as they were required by the people of God (*Philokalia* 13).

The question is not in reality whether Origen subscribed to Plato’s theory of preexistence, since it is universally granted that he did not. Few students of his works would now accept the ancient charge that he taught the transmigration of souls; no one doubts that in his thought the

descent of this soul, whatever occasions it, is a descent from God, and not (as Plato taught) from an independent realm of forms (*Commentary on John* 20.162). And if we accept, on the testimony of his Byzantine critics, that he believed all rational beings to have begun their existence as disembodied intellects, some of whom then sank to the condition of angels, others to that of souls and others again to that of daemons, we are attributing to him a doctrine that could not even have been formulated by Plato. On the other hand, it is equally impossible to deny that he held some theory of preexistence – perhaps indeed more than one theory, since he manifestly affirms a fall of angels (*Against Celsus* 6.43), a descent – and at times a fall – of souls into bodies, a fall of the first two human beings in paradise (whatever this name may signify at *Against Celsus* 7.39), and a fall of the soul from innocence in its present state of embodiment (*First Principles* 1.3.8–1.4.1). A Platonic origin might be proposed for the second and fourth, but not so readily for the first and third. We need not doubt that Origen was conscious of philosophic antecedents, and it is plausibly surmised that he made use of nascent Platonic speculations in his attempts to conceive the body after death. It is possible that his own conjectures informed the thinking of Platonists after him, as they clearly informed the thinking of Didymus, Evagrius and other Christian authors (see Schibli 1992; Szymańska-Kuta 2015). No one is arguing, therefore, that he refused to engage in dialogue with the Platonists, any more than anyone is arguing that he was in all respects a disciple of Plato. What then is the true subject of this controversy, the prize for which we so often appear to be fighting a battle by night?

The issue, I would suggest, is whether Origen first devised a philosophy and then looked for a cosmetic legitimation of this in scripture, or whether he turns to philosophy, as he himself avers in his letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus (*Philokalia* 13), as a means of elucidating the genuine problems which the scriptures have thrown in his way as an exegete. Surely the onus of proof is on those who maintain the first view, in the teeth of Origen's statement of his own method, and in the absence of any writing in his name that admits a first principle other than scriptural testimony. Origen discusses nothing, not even the flight of birds, without appealing to a book, and it is surely his unshakable allegiance to the authority of every word in scripture that requires him to entertain some belief in the preexistence of souls and yet forbids him to hold any settled and uniform theory. Knowing that the church countenances no doctrine of transmigration, he nonetheless surmises that Esau sinned in a previous life (*First Principles* 2.9.6). Fear of self-contradiction would have forced him to be more circumspect were he merely a philosopher; as an exegete, however, he must account for the decision of a just God to love Jacob and to hate Esau before either of them had performed one work that could merit reward or reprobation. Where exactly Esau had lived his previous life – in the presence of God, in paradise, in another human body or in his mother's womb – he cannot say, because he does not have a prefabricated doctrine; he derives from Plato at most a dim intimation of a solution to a riddle that was not of Plato's making, since Plato does not have to defend a doctrine of special providence, administered by an almighty, omniscient and omnibenevolent God.

The scriptures thus play for Origen the role that the senses play for an Epicurean and common notions for a Peripatetic: if his goal, like that of the Platonists, is the vision of the invisible, he does not identify this object with the realm of ideas or with an impersonal form of the Good, but with God himself, the very God whom we meet as Logos when we apprehend the most profound, or “mystical”, sense of scripture. No true parallel can be found in pagan literature to this apotheosis of the text. It is true, as George Karamanolis has observed (2014: 14–15), that in late antiquity the commonest mode of reasoning for Peripatetics and Platonists is commentary on a magisterial corpus which is assumed to be free of error and contradiction. For all that, the infallibility of the text was not so much a matter of faith as a working hypothesis, and hence it was required of the expositor that his reading should make not only good sense but good

philosophy – that is, that he would be constantly reinforcing by his own arguments the authority of the man whom he called his master (see further Sedley 1989, 1997). It was not considered treason to avail oneself for this purpose of the best thoughts of other teachers: Plutarch wrote a treatise *On the [Epicurean Maxim] “Live Unknown”*, while Seneca could say of the Stoics, “we are under no king; each offers his own defence” (*Letters to Lucilius* 4.1.33.4; cf. Rist 1983). Since they meant by *haeresis* a legitimate choice of one’s own way of life from the rival schools, they would not have understood the contention of Hippolytus that philosophy is the root of every heresy; if they had said, with Tertullian, “what has Athens to do with Jerusalem?” (*Indictment of Heretics* 7), they would not have meant that nothing can be learned from Jews, but that nothing could be learned in the Jewish manner. To revere what is written simply because it is written was notoriously the way of both the old Israel and the new, but it was not, as Galen protested, the way of a Greek.

Christianity and philosophy in the modern era

Tertullian and Hippolytus were by no means the last to stigmatise philosophy as the nurse of error and mother of infidelity. Even Anselm, when he undertakes to prove from first principles not only God’s existence but the necessity of the atonement and the constitution of the Trinity, adds the caveat that he is writing only for the fool who does not believe, as a Christian’s faith requires no paper fortifications (Gasper 2004: 89–124). The church condemned the thesis of the Muslim Averroes that philosophy may lead us to one conclusion and theology to another (Hisette 1977); yet Scotus adopts a similar position, and even Aquinas grants that philosophy offers cogent arguments for the eternity of the world (Cross 2006). His own work helped to rescue Aristotle from the censures under which he had fallen because of his espousal of this and other heretical doctrines; and even thereafter, Aristotle’s dominion over the western mind was always contingent on his being thought to have furnished rational proofs for those things which are taught in scripture. Even before the western reformation, his supremacy was imperilled by the revival of Greek and consequent rediscovery of Plato. It hardly needed Gemistus Pletho to point out that the active role of God in creation, the immortality of the individual and the sufficiency of virtue for happiness even in the present are Christian dogmas which are written on the surface of Plato’s works but can be wrested only with brazen ingenuity from those of Aristotle (Woodhouse 1986: 192–214, 283–307). The coincidence between Plato and the scriptures had the further effect of persuading the reading scholars of Greece and Italy that a close approximation to revealed truth could be achieved by natural reason. While Ficino maintained the superiority of the church’s teaching, Pletho covertly prophesied that Christian and Muslim alike would learn to adopt a higher philosophy, while Pico della Mirandola insinuates in his *Oration on the Dignity of Man* that the Bible is at best one voice in the universal choir of truth.

The Protestant reformers thus had reason to abhor both Plato and Aristotle, the first as an enemy of revelation and the second as the sponsor of a counterfeit marriage between revealed and natural theology. Luther rejects both transubstantiation and the Aristotelian language of its exponents, forgetting perhaps that Aristotle himself would have found all sacramental theology incomprehensible. This is not an appeal from secularising logic to the mystery of the gospel, for there is nothing more mysterious, if we mean by this paradoxical and intractable to reason, than the Latin doctrine of transubstantiation. In his sacramental theology, as in his early defence of Augustinian predestination against the quibblers who refused to derive a consequent necessity from the necessity of the consequent, Luther is the enemy of all paradox that is not based on the plain sense of the gospel. No more than Augustine is he the enemy of reason, so long as it is understood that the lamp of reason is faith and that the pillars of faith are Paul and the

evangelists, studied in the original Greek. Had the geocentric arrangement of the planets been called into question in his hearing, he would certainly have sided with Aristotle against the Platonism of Nicholas of Cusa and his own disciple Johannes Kepler; but he would have demurred had Galileo's inquisitors given more weight to their prooftexts from the *De Caelo* than to Genesis 1.14–15 and Joshua 10.12.

Lorenzo Valla's discovery that the works of Dionysius the Areopagite were pseudonymous (Luibheid 1987: 38–39) delighted Luther because it deprived the papacy of its sole apostolic witness to the sacerdotal character of the priesthood. In the eyes of his 20th-century disciples, the crime of the author was not so much his assumption of a false name as his deft but dishonest permutation of diverse texts from scripture into a system indistinguishable from Platonism; only as neighbour to the school of Proclus did he deserve the title Areopagite, but according to Adolf von Harnack he was by no means the first professing Christian to make his spiritual home in Athens. The apologists were mere deists (1888: 460), and even those who purported, as Origen does, to be on the side of the apostles against the Gnostics were complicit in this substitution of the wisdom of the schools for the Word of God (1888: 571). Arguing a similar thesis, Anders Nygren (1930, 1936) proclaims that Christian agape is a selfless and sacrificial love, which seeks the good of all creatures but itself and is therefore wholly irreconcilable with the *eros* of the philosophers and their Pharisaic imitators, who cultivate solitary ecstasies in the present world as a foretaste of deliverance from the body in the next. Platonism is thus for both these Lutherans a distemper from which the church has yet to rid itself; they are far from agreeing, however, on the remedy, for Harnack's Jesus preaches the infinite value of the human soul (1900: 41–45), whereas Nygren, like his admirer Barth, maintains that no creature has any claim to worth except as an object of gratuitous divine love. Their English contemporary Dean Inge (1926: 1–27), perhaps the most zealous Protestant of the four, commends the Platonic strain in Christian thought on the grounds that it teaches us not to rely on lifeless sacraments but to seek the unmediated presence of God, as Luther himself enjoined in full accord with Christ.

Philosophy makes common cause with faith as Inge conceives it, whereas for Nygren and Harnack alike it is the antonym of a faith which they define in ways that are equally antonymic to one another. The Roman church, which looks more kindly on natural theology, has endorsed philosophy as a propaedeutic and ancillary to its own teaching, while asserting that there are also many truths which are not discerned without inspiration. So long as its preeminent philosopher is Aquinas, it cannot sever its ties with Greek philosophy, even if there is doubt as to whether the saint is more of a Neoplatonist than an Aristotelian. In the Anglican world, it seems that each new revolution has been hostile to the Greeks, whether the appeal has been made to common sense with Locke, to first principles with Bishop Berkeley, to the catholic tradition with the Tractarians, to the conscience of the nation with Arnold and Kingsley, to the power of the Cross with evangelicalism, to the wholeness of Christ with *Lux Mundi*, to Heidegger and Hebrew with John Robinson, to an undulant modernity with Don Cupitt or to a gilded pre-modernity with Radical Orthodoxy. Most of these movements are marked by a thoroughly English distaste for otherworldliness, which in recent times has often taken the form of polemic against the Platonic doctrine of transcendence. Whatever Plato himself may have said, this is generally understood as a denial of God's immanence and his love for his creation, the second of which at least is a biblical doctrine. In certain quarters, Augustine is interchangeable with Plato, and his appeals to scripture are dashed aside in a manner which suggests that detailed exegesis is no more germane than the teaching of the Lyceum or the Academy to the modern standard of Christian belief (see e.g. Gunton 1993: 54–56).

Indeed, paradoxical as it may seem, the failure of western Christendom to produce a new system of thought to vie with those of the modern era may be traced to its waning belief in

the authority, or at least the propositional truth, of scripture. Secure in the infallibility of the divine revelation, the Fathers and their mediaeval successors were armed in advance against all philosophical objections to their doctrines of divine freedom, the creation of all from nothing, the minute and pervasive guidance of mundane affairs or the sempiternity of the resurrection. The shaking of these foundations in the 18th century reduced much Anglican and Protestant teaching to a form that was deistic in all but name. Analytical philosophers in our own day have revived the deistic project of deducing from first principles the existence of a deity with all his classical attributes, and some have gone on, in the manner of Bishop Butler, to reason from this conclusion to the necessity, and hence the existence, of just such a revelation as is supposed by Christians to have been vouchsafed in the work of Christ and commemorated in the New Testament (Swinburne 2007). Whether or not it was true of Aquinas or Scotus, it is true of many modern controversialists that (to adapt the words of Macintyre 1990) their apologies for faith are based on reason, in defiance of the Augustinian precept that the basis of all reasoning is faith.

Even if such demonstrations have ever induced conviction in anyone but the author, it will not have been the conviction of an Augustine or an Aquinas since this very word implies to them that we are convinced not only of God's existence but of our absolute dependence on his creative purpose and redemptive love. For them, this dependence entails that we are impotent to overcome either our finitude or our sin, and hence to know our Maker or even to know of him, without some unsolicited condescension on his part. This took the form initially of his speech through the prophets, then of the incarnation of his Word, and finally of that shaping of the first revelation in the light of the second which bequeathed to us that text which we call the written Word of God. Faith is thus essentially, and not accidentally, grounded in the disclosure of the infinite to the finite. Consequently, we cannot preserve Christianity by proceeding from some other ground than revelation once we have found that the scriptures can no longer sustain the claim to infallibility. The rejuvenation of Christian philosophy is not so likely to be achieved by slighting the canonical texts as by embracing those features of them – their obscurity, their inchoateness, their dissonance – which have hitherto been regarded as an obstacle to reasonable belief.

What modern admirers are apt to praise in the "Fathers" (as some still call them) is not their metaphysical acumen but their ability to cast speculative reasoning into a form that, however technical it may become, remains at once profoundly devotional and movingly homiletic. The divorce between exegesis and philosophy has brought with it a divorce between ordained and academic ministry, hence between preaching and teaching. Of course it cannot be otherwise, unless we can require our theology faculties once again to shut their doors to Copernicus, Darwin and the higher criticism. At the same time, it is impossible, as David-Friedrich Strauss already saw (1902: 779–784), to proclaim one gospel in the church and another in the auditorium, if only because the ordinary believer is now educated enough to doubt the inerrancy of scripture. Even those who are bold enough to set Holy Writ against science cannot long remain immune to the social changes, and the corresponding changes in domestic and public morality, which have been occasioned by the economic unification of the world, the increasing miscegenation of peoples and the lengthening of life. We cannot restore the patristic age of innocence, when the earth was a mere six thousand years old, the stars revolved around it and every sin under which it groaned could be traced to a single act of theft; we cannot assume that everyone has a god and that those who do not yet worship our God are idolaters who will easily be laughed out of their delusions. We cannot simply retrieve an integration of faith and *gnōsis* from Clement of Alexandria, any more than we can use his works to justify the creation of a new *gnōsis* to supersede the historic faith.

Between mere atavism and the surrender to alien *gnōsis* is the way of those early Christians who, in a phrase that we are apt to employ too glibly, baptised the teachings of the Academy, the Lyceum and the Stoa (e.g. Rist 1994). Baptism in the early church, for those of a certain age at least, was performed by total immersion, signifying death to sin and rebirth to life in the body of Christ (Romans 6.4). Augustine and Origen might not have objected to expositions of the gospel that were couched in existentialist terminology – all the less so when they learned that the root of existentialism is the Lutheran, or rather Pauline and thoroughly catholic, principle that each of us stands alone in the presence of God – but they would have deplored any version of this philosophy that made us the only judges of our own conduct or appealed to a notion of personal authenticity against the authority of the prophetic word. In their interpretations of this word, they not only borrowed the pagan device of allegory but applied it with a thoroughness and a ramified ingenuity that was never anticipated or imitated by the philosophers of their own era; if the science of hermeneutics has restored the ancient primacy of the text in the 20th century, the theologian's appropriation of Gadamer and Ricoeur is a second spoiling of the Egyptians, a reminder that there is no Dilthey without Schleiermacher, no Schleiermacher without Augustine. Even postmodernism, grounded as it is in the veneration of the Torah as the surrogate of an absent God, is closer to patristic thought than its converse, the *a priori* attempt to grasp the signified in the absence of the signifier. Theology in the early church is always exegesis, but exegesis informed by philosophy, which was used with great ingenuity to shield the text from doubt. In the modern world, where doubt can be evaded only by subterfuge, and the questioning of norms has become as much a norm in life as in exegesis, the most fruitful use of philosophy may not to be extinguish scepticism and ambiguity, but to show how they can be welcomed as inseparable concomitants of faith.

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Section 1

Themes



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Sources of religious knowledge

Peter Van Nuffelen

Introduction

For a long time, clear lines of demarcation tended to be drawn between religion and philosophy in the ancient world. Ancient religion was said to be primarily defined by practice and not by belief. What mattered was participation in ritual, not whether one believed or not in the existence of the gods who were being worshipped (Scheid 2016). Philosophy, by contrast, was understood as the rational pursuit of knowledge to the exclusion of religious tutelage. Consequently, interest by the educated elite and philosophers in the “supernatural”, such as dreams and oracles, was deemed a turn towards the irrational. Such interests become very visible from the first century A.D. onwards, a period famously judged to be an “age of anxiety” by E.R. Dodds (1965). Against such a background, Christianity appears as one symptom of such anxiety and understood to be relying on revelation and sacred texts which it demanded its followers to believe whilst polemically and abusively claiming for itself the title of philosophy.

Most of the elements of this story have been nuanced and revised. Scholars have drawn attention to the much greater interplay or even lack of differentiation between early philosophical and religious discourses (Tor 2017). The identification of the distinction between practice and belief with that between Greco-Roman religion and Christianity has been called into question (Versnel 2011). The age of anxiety is vanishing, and scholars take the intellectual interest in religion seriously. On the one hand, cults start to draw on philosophical conceptions in the formulation of their myths and ideas, a process that has been labelled “la philosophisation du religieux” by P. Athanassiadi and C. Macris (2013). On the other, philosophers start to interpret religious traditions as containing philosophical knowledge, which was deposited there by wise men of old. This allows philosophers to use religious traditions as sources of knowledge. In addition, the greater emphasis on the transcendental nature of the supreme being in Neoplatonism goes hand in hand with a greater awareness of the limitations of language, and thus the adoption of silence, enigmatic language and other non-discursive means to talk about the One. In the light of this new body of scholarship, the older account is shown to be too indebted to dichotomies (rationality/irrationality, ritual/belief) that are rooted in modern assumptions about the nature of philosophy and religion.

As the preceding sketch shows, the sources of knowledge have played an important role in putting a particular thinker on either side of the divide. When the old narrative is rejected, we appreciate better the variety of sources used in philosophical reflection of the imperial period by Christian and non-Christian thinkers alike. Indeed, this chapter argues that we can understand Christian thinkers as adopting and adapting views current in imperial philosophy.

Before we survey the various sources of religious knowledge, a few preliminary remarks are needed. First, by “religious knowledge” I mean knowledge about the divine and not a particularly “religious” form of knowledge, if that were to exist. Second, my approach is formal and not substantial. I am interested in the sources of knowledge that philosophers themselves indicate, which does not need to imply that their thought was actually shaped by them. For example, when Plutarch finds philosophical knowledge in the cult of Isis, I take the cult of Isis to be a source of knowledge, even though it is doubtful if it had any real impact on his metaphysics. Third, sources of knowledge are rarely simply used, but normally accompanied by a discourse that justifies why they can be used and on what condition. In order to read a text metaphorically, one needs to justify that it can be read in that way and that meaning can be found under the surface. In addition, not everyone is capable of doing so. Thus, identifications of sources presuppose narratives (about how it comes about that a source is a source) and epistemologies (the conditions for being able to access the knowledge).

Tradition and community

In his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, Basil of Caesarea makes a distinction between *kerygmata* and *dogmata*. The first are based on the Scriptures, whilst the second is the tradition of the Apostles and the Church. Both have, so Basil states, the same authority, for many practices in the liturgy do not have a scriptural origin. To give but one example, “who has taught us in writing to sign with the sign of the cross those who have trusted in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ?” Basil then uses mystery language to emphasise the importance of the *dogmata*:

In the same manner the Apostles and Fathers who laid down laws for the Church from the beginning thus guarded the awful dignity of the mysteries in secrecy and silence, for what is bruited abroad random among the common folk is no mystery at all. This is the reason for our tradition of unwritten precepts and practices, that the knowledge of our dogmas may not become neglected and contemned by the multitude through familiarity.

(*On the Holy Spirit* 27.66, tr. NPNF)

Dogmata are surrounded by mystery in another sense: when Scripture refers to them, it is through veiled language. The distinction and vocabulary used by Basil find their roots in the polemical context of the treatise. He seeks to respond to a claim by his Macedonian adversaries that Nicene Christians introduce theological ideas without a foundation in Scripture. If the argument thus has a particular slant, it is built out of ideas current in earlier and later Christian authors and ties in with similar ideas in Greco-Roman philosophy. In a later section, we shall discuss Scripture, but here I wish to sketch the background to Basil’s appeal to *dogmata*, highlighting how it is found in other Christian texts and how it is rooted in imperial philosophy.

The idea that the correct Christian teachings are transmitted through the Apostles and their successors develops the self-presentation of Paul in his letters and is present in the earliest Christian writings after the New Testament, the Apostolic Fathers. It has many forms in patristic texts, such as the emphasis on episcopal succession in Eusebius’ *Ecclesiastical History*, from the Apostles until his own day, and the recurrence of writings that present themselves as handing

down the teachings of the Apostles (e.g. the first-century *Didache* or *Teachings of the Twelve Apostles*). In the fourth century, we see the argumentative recourse to Fathers of the Church develop, by which positions are justified with reference to figures of authority – the origin of our concept of patristics. From the fifth century, citations from earlier Church Fathers are a crucial element in most debates, and we see the production of excerpt collections that gather proof texts. Such debates often include source criticism to establish if a citation is truly by a particular Church Father and really says what it seems to say (Graumann 2002).

Yet emphasis on tradition in Christian texts is not simply a matter of tracing teachings back to Scripture and Apostolic tradition. Indeed, Christian thinkers understand Christianity as a renewal of the covenant that God concluded with the Hebrews. The Biblical patriarchs can, then, be understood as proto-Christians, and later Judaism as a degeneration of the original insights, with Christianity as their restoration. Such ideas are, for example, prominent in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Demonstration of the Gospel*. They manifest themselves too in the argument that pagan philosophy essentially depended on Hebrew (and thus Christian) thought, which chronologically preceded them (e.g. Tertullian, *Apology* 47; Justin, *1 Apology* 44; cf. Boys-Stones 2001: 176–202). Indeed, one of the aims of Eusebius' *Chronicle* was precisely to provide historical proof for such seniority.

Such claims to antiquity remain inadequately characterised if understood merely as reflections of the importance tradition had in ancient culture or as the normal outcome of the Christian appropriation of Hebrew Scripture. They reflect, in fact, how Christian authors engaged closely with the historical narrative that underpinned much philosophical thinking of the imperial period (Boys-Stones 2001; Van Nuffelen 2011). The basic idea was that earliest mankind had been able to discern the fundamental truths about the world. In the absence of a philosophical language, their insights were transmitted in other expressions, such as religious ritual, but also poetry, name-giving and art. Such a narrative helps to explain why texts but also other cultural products, including statues of gods, can be interpreted symbolically and allegorically as containing philosophical insights. Much is lost in transmission, and very few of the original insights have therefore been preserved without alteration. Transmission through time ran, as everything human, the risk of causing misrepresentation – in sum, degeneracy of the original truths. What great philosophers, such as Plato, did, was to rediscover the original wisdom and purify the extant traditions. Golden chains of philosophers, like the one linking Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato through to the second-century Platonist Numenius, were constructed, often linking these to wise poets and authoritative texts, such as Homer, Orpheus and the Chaldean oracles (e.g. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.8.10; Proclus, *On the Timaeus* 2.82.3–20). One of the few places where truth had been transmitted more faithfully were mystery cults, where the truth had been guarded by the commandment of mystical silence – a depiction also used by Christian thinkers (Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 5.21; Basil of Caesarea in the earlier example). Conversely, the polemic of Christian apologists and the Jew Philo of Alexandria against mystery cults as places of sin and untruth (*Special Laws* 1.319–323) has less to do with what actually happened there than with the fact that mystery cults had such a particular status in philosophical discourse.

Degeneracy even affected philosophy itself, which had split into schools combatting each other. Disagreement was, indeed, often interpreted as a sign of the absence of truth, as in the satirical representation of Lucian's *Icaromenippus*. Philosophers were willing to admit that other schools and philosophers might have noticed some elements of truth – the Platonist Plutarch, for example, is willing to grant Stoicism some correct insights – but tended to present themselves as having rediscovered the original truths. Similarly, Christian thinkers can find elements of truth in Greco-Roman traditions. Justin Martyr, for example, constructs layers of authority

in his *Dialogue with Trypho*, whereby Platonism is ranked highest, but still way below Christianity. By seeing human traditions as degenerations from a single truth, it is possible to locate different schools at different distances from the truth.

Two criteria to assess the truthfulness of a tradition recur throughout imperial and late antique philosophy: internal coherence within the tradition, on the one hand, and its continuity, on the other. Unsurprisingly, Celsus, the second-century critic of Christianity, noted that Christianity was defective in both respects: Christianity was torn apart by different sects, and it was two steps removed from a truthful tradition, being an offshoot of Judaism that was, in turn, an offshoot of the Egyptian tradition (Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.14). Christian authors could easily turn the tables and highlight the disagreement of philosophical schools to discredit their claim to the truth, for which they only needed to recycle the arguments that the philosophical schools had addressed to each other. To ward off the accusations, Christian thinkers developed a strong notion of heresy and orthodoxy, singling out the strands of Christianity that had deviated from the original truth. These notions, now often understood as the intellectual manifestations of attempts to maintain social authority, thus have deep roots in the intellectual environment of the imperial period and are closely linked to Christianity's potential to produce a convincing narrative of its own truthfulness in the intellectual terms demanded by imperial philosophy (Boys-Stones 2001: 151–175). In turn, this forged the notion of the Church as a guardian of truthful tradition: the Church is the community that guards and transmits the correct tradition.

Coherence and tradition was not demanded just of philosophy, but also of religious practice, as the following example shows. Augustine's treatise *On True Religion* (ca. 390) purports to bring his friend Romanianus, who had converted to Manichaeism with Augustine, back into the Christian fold. The preface argues that the Catholic Church represents the true religion, especially in contrast with paganism:

In this the error of those peoples who have preferred to worship many gods rather than the one true God and Lord of all, is most clearly understood, namely that their sages, whom they call philosophers, disagreed in the school of philosophy but shared their temples.

Every philosopher had his own view on the nature of the gods and tried to convince the others, so the argument runs, but together with his adversaries he attended the same cult. This contradictory intellectual attitude is compounded with a social distinction: "In matters of religion, they acknowledged different truths with the people, and they defended different positions, with that same people present, in their own name". Underlying Augustine's critique is a demand of coherence: religious practice and metaphysics should accord, as should the opinions of the masses and the "intellectuals". Of course, Augustine is aware of the counterargument that Christianity itself is pluralistic, given its many sects. He counters it by introducing the notion of orthodoxy. Again affirming as an axiom that there should be no disagreement between philosophy and religion, he states that "those whose doctrine we do not approve of, do not share the sacraments with us". Contrary to ancient philosophy, marked by a disagreement between the various schools, Christianity excludes those who refuse to accept the truth.

So far I have argued that the recourse to tradition is to be understood against the background of, on the one hand, a historical narrative about the origins of truth and, on the other, the requirements of coherence and tradition that such a narrative imposed on those claiming to possess that truth. Yet there is another, epistemological dimension to the idea that truth is a matter of tradition, namely that an individual can hardly acquire the truth on his own. Intuitively, modern individuals tend to oppose tradition and truth, identifying the former with uncritical acceptance of other people's views and understanding the latter as the product

of individual, rational recognition of what is the case. Leaving aside the questionable merits of such an opposition, it suffices to note that in antiquity, following a teacher was judged necessary in order to progress towards the truth. To give an example from a Christian text, Clement of Alexandria justified the idea in two ways. First, everybody has preconceptions strengthened by habit that may be an obstacle to seeing the truth, but it is hard to get rid of those on your own (Clement, *Exhortation* 4). A teacher helps to remove such obstacles. And, second, one cannot acquire knowledge without a preconception of what one wishes to know. Without the acquisition of such a preliminary notion, one cannot start the learning. The acquisition of knowledge presupposes the act of entrusting oneself to a teacher who is trusted. Hence faith is needed, whereby faith implies the entry into a community that is accepted to preserve truth. Variations of such ideas can be traced from the Pre-Nicene Fathers to Augustine and beyond (Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 1.8.1; Augustine, *On the Utility of Believing*; cf. Morgan 2015). Teaching implies thus not just demonstrating the truth but also overcoming the pupil's emotional attachments to falsehood. This is not a matter of submission to a truth simply imposed on the listener; rather, the process of learning presupposes a willingness to learn from someone who seems to represent knowledge. It is a leap of faith that can only be confirmed once one has developed the insight that what he teaches is indeed correct – or wrong, as Augustine's own exploration of Platonism and Manichaeism illustrates. Indeed, a maxim of ancient and patristic thought is that one cannot be forced to believe the truth: full assent to a proposition is always a free act, based on the rational insight that that proposition is indeed correct (Kobusch 2018: 116). As much as the notion of an orthodox community is the social manifestation of the importance of tradition for truth claims, the ubiquitous importance of debates in Late Antiquity is the social reflection of an epistemology that sees truth as an objective reality to which rational individuals will freely assent (Perrin 2017; Van Nuffelen 2018).

Oracles, prophecy and revelation

In this section, I discuss three related forms of knowledge given to men by the divine. In most religious systems, the divine communicates with man. Greco-Roman religion knew numerous forms of such communication, ranging from divination (whereby one had to interpret signs from birds, sacrificial victims, uncommon events etc.) to oracles, whereby a god actually delivered a message in language through a medium. Oracles were usually linked to a particular cult centre, such as Delphi. The priest transmitting oracles was called *prophetes* in Greek.

“Prophet” is now commonly used in a different sense, namely to refer to individuals who are inspired by the divine and transmit its message. Such individuals were known in classical antiquity, with the mythical Tiresias as the archetype. Prophecy in this sense was not institutionalised, and prophets needed to be recognised as being divinely inspired. The regular doubts expressed by Greek and Latin sources regarding the honesty of a prophet and the authenticity of his or her message find a parallel in the New Testament warning about false prophets (Matthew 7.15–20). The problem could only be solved by hindsight and institutionalisation: prophets and prophecies included in the Old Testament were considered truthful, whereas contemporary claims to prophecy were regarded with suspicion, as the controversy about Montanism (a Christian movement that accepted new prophets at the end of the second century) reminds us. Inspiration was, however, not the only explanation for prophecy. If one accepted a form of causal determinism, one could argue that a prophet was simply better at foreseeing the consequences of certain events. Some Christian authors use that idea to establish a fundamental difference between pagan and Christian forms of foretelling the

future: the former relies on insights in causal mechanisms, possibly transmitted to man by demons, whilst the latter is truly helped by God and thus able to predict things that go beyond causal relations.

The third term this section deals with, revelation, is central to Christianity and may, for that reason, lead to confusion. Revelation can be used by scholars in the broad sense to indicate the nature of the knowledge transmitted in oracles and prophecies. In that sense, revelation is a term applicable to all religions (Hadot 1987). Revelation is also often used as a generic appellation, derived from the *Apocalypse* of John (the term *apokalypsis* literally means revelation), for a type of text in which an individual is given knowledge of things that are normally hidden (about the world, past or future, and/or mankind) in dreams, visions and ecstatic experiences. Scholarship tends to associate such texts with moments of crisis, but they can also be understood as a particular literary form taken by the claim to prophecy. Finally, in modern discourse, revelation usually functions as the antithesis of rational discourse. A strong emphasis on Christianity as a revealed religion is the product of the strong dichotomies between reason and irrationality with which the history of religion in the Roman Empire tended to be written. Indeed, Enlightenment discourse constructed rationality in such a way that authority is its very opposite, and revelation can then only appear as the supreme form of authority (Gadamer 1972, vol. i: 284). In turn, when Christian theology accepted that science had, in a way, closed the book of nature and that knowledge of nature was not a road to knowledge of God, a strong notion of revelation became needed to allow mankind to access God at all. The opposition is, in fact, not helpful for antiquity. The opposition does not work for Greek thought (Tor 2017: 12–19), and a distinct theology of revelation in opposition to philosophy only exists since the thirteenth century (Kobusch 2018: 8). As we shall see, on the one hand, recourse to oracles and prophecies is important in later Greek philosophy too. On the other hand, in Christian texts prophecy is never irrationally accepted without reflection, for prophecy needs interpretation and verification.

These three types share that there is direct communication between god and man, almost always through written mediation, as oracles and prophecies were usually transmitted in written collections. Few philosophical arguments were built on direct experience of the divine, even if the union of the soul with the One was the aim of Neoplatonic philosophy. Of all philosophical schools, Platonism, especially Neoplatonism, is the one school that was most open to accepting oracles as a source of philosophical knowledge (Edwards 2006: 111–126). The symbol of this is the high status ascribed to the Chaldaean oracles, a now-fragmentary collection of insights received by a certain Julian in the second century A.D. and used as an authoritative text especially by Iamblichus and Proclus. Porphyry composed a work entitled *Philosophy from Oracles*, in which mainly Delphic oracles were explained as revealing philosophical tenets. Hierocles of Alexandria (fl. A.D. 430) composed a commentary on the *Golden Verses* ascribed to Pythagoras, treating them as a preparatory text revealing the same philosophical insights as Plato had formulated. Hierocles justifies such a reading with an account of history similar to the discourse of ancient wisdom that we have sketched in the previous section. The Pythagoreans are depicted as standing at the origins, with Plato as a Pythagorean who rediscovers their thought (*On the Golden Verses*, pr., pp. 5–7). Indeed, the idea that the knowledge found in religion goes back to primitive wise men can be traced in Neoplatonist authors (Johnson 2013: 168–170). Yet next to such accounts, we find in Neoplatonist texts an emphasis on revelation: the Chaldean oracles rely on insights received from God, and Porphyry also speaks of revelation (*Philosophy from Oracles* F317–319). Neoplatonism thus also espouses a theory of inspiration: the truthfulness of oracles and prophecies is assured by the fact that their creators participate in the *logos* when uttering or receiving them.

The increased importance of divine communication in Neoplatonism is also visible in theurgy, the reinterpretation of religious rites, often but not exclusively associated with the Chaldaean oracles, as actions by the gods that help the soul ascend to the One. Such rituals create direct contact between man and the divine. They are thus not just ways of worshipping the gods, but also occasions of real divine presence (Tanaseanu-Döbler 2013). Two elements condition the rise of theurgy from the fourth century onwards. On the one hand, man is now seen as unable to perform the ascent to the One entirely by himself through contemplation, as Plotinus still proposed. Theurgy creates, as it were, occasions for divine help. On the other, theurgy provides an answer to the criticism that Greco-Roman religion is not a truthful religion. There was a long-standing tradition of criticism by Greeks and Romans on their own oracles, myths and rituals, which was drawn upon by Christian polemic. Spelling out the conditions on which rituals were really effective and separating a particular kind of ritual out from the rest helped identify a truthful core in Greco-Roman religion.

It has been argued that Porphyry's emphasis on oracles as a source of knowledge was a means to answer Christian claims that the Bible had revealed the truth (Busine 2005: 294). This may be the case, but it is important to see that Neoplatonist and Christian appeals to oracles and prophecy partake in the same culture and reveal shared presuppositions. Both shared an increasing emphasis on the transcendence of the divine, identified with the highest metaphysical principle. This rendered revelation and mediation (in Christianity through Christ) necessary to avoid an unbridgeable gap being created between man and God (cf. Boys-Stones 2009: 19–21).

With the corpus of Old Testament prophets, Christianity inherited a clear delineated sense of prophecy, even if the terms “oracle” and “prophecy” could be extended to the whole Bible. For Christian authors, two problems presented themselves in respect to this corpus. Towards pagans it needed to be demonstrated that it contained true prophecies. Jews would accept that idea, but for them Christians did not offer a correct interpretation of their meaning. Against both types of scepticism, the same argument could be brought, namely that the prophecies had come true. This implied, mostly, showing how the Old Testament had predicted the life of Christ and his teachings through typological readings – developing, in fact, the interpretation of Christ already present in the Gospels. The other traditional argument was to emphasise the agreement of the prophecies (cf. Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 17; Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus* 3.17). Once a text was established to be prophetic, it could be subjected to deeper ways of reading than ordinary texts, especially forms of allegorical and typological reading (Young 1997; Dawson 2002).

In line with the epistemology sketched previously, the possibility of correctly interpreting a prophetic text was closely linked to the disposition of the individual. Clement of Alexandria used mystery cults and their purification of initiates as a symbol to signal that one needed purity in order to be able to understand the truth (*Stromateis* 1.13, 1.5). Origen demands meditation and prayer as preparation for interpretation of the Bible (Origen, *Letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus* = *Philokalia* 13.4). Emphasis on faith as a precondition for progress in interpreting Scripture is common. To a modern intellectualist understanding and a common interpretation of Christianity as a religion of faith, such ideas risk immunising interpretations from criticism, for it seems that one has to believe first before one can actually start interpreting. If that risk exists, such an interpretation fails to understand the concept of philosophy present in the background. For Christian thinkers as much as for their Greco-Roman counterparts, philosophy (and thus Christianity) was a way of life and not just an intellectual endeavour. Concepts and theory served to shape practice (Hadot 1996). Theory and practice do not stand in a hierarchical relationship whereby theory shapes practice. Rather, practice and theory form a hermeneutical circle: a correct understanding influences one's disposition, and one's disposition shapes

understanding. Man is not an unwritten sheet that simply needs to see reason, but is, when he starts philosophising, already affected by convictions and emotions. Indeed, the pagan Salutius opens his treatise on the gods (middle of the fourth century) by stipulating that in order for one to learn about the gods, one needs an excellent education from one's youth onwards and to be good and intelligent, so as to have something in common with the subject of study (*On the Gods and the World* 1). For Salutius, not all are capable of understanding the gods. In contrast, Porphyry situates in one passage belief at the very end of the ascent to the Good, it being the attitude of giving oneself over to the Good (*To Marcella* 24.5). T. Kobusch (2018: 127) argues that for Neoplatonists, belief completes the movement of knowledge, whereas in Christianity belief is located at beginning. Christianity's emphasis on faith as a starting point can, in fact, be understood as the counterpart of the elitist ideas of Salutius and the like – even if Christian groups could also assume an elitist position (e.g. *Authentikos logos* NHC VI,3 pp. 33.4–34.32). Whereas it is common in Greco-Roman thought to accept that not all can acquire full insight, Christianity understands its message as directed to all, knowing however that not everybody can grasp immediately the central tenets of the faith – hence the emphasis on initial confidence (faith) in the Church and the emphasis on teaching (catechesis) for those who have taken the step. Such a position does not immunise against rational argument, but rather creates the conditions for rational argument to take shape. Indeed, if there were some Christian groups who professed mere belief and excluded rational examination (Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.9), belief and knowledge were seen as needing each other (Kobusch 2018: 125). Indeed, as the *Book of the Laws of the Countries* (542) stated it: I cannot believe if I am not convinced.

Philosophy, nature and the inner self

As we have shown earlier, debates about the value of traditions were embedded in a discourse about the origins of knowledge and how later traditions kept close to, deviated from or recovered that original knowledge. Christianity's attitude towards Greco-Roman philosophy was shaped by that narrative. As we have seen, it was argued that Moses (as author of the Pentateuch) preceded Greco-Roman philosophy and that the latter depended on the former (Karamanolis 2013: 45). Especially the apologists presented Christianity as the best school of philosophy, as the tradition that had maintained and recovered the original truths, in a move that can be traced in Philo of Alexandria too, in the attitude of philosophers like Plutarch towards other schools, and in Celsus' critique of Christianity (Löhr 2010).

With Greco-Roman philosophy thus characterised as a degeneracy of the original insights, its relationship with Christianity could be configured in various ways. Tertullian's famous question what Athens has to do with Jerusalem relies on the identification of Greek philosophy as a source of deviation, disagreement and dispute. Its influence on Christianity thus risks causing heresy (*On the Prescription of Heretics* 7). The opposition is here not simply that between reason (Athens) and belief (Jerusalem); rather, the argument seeks to point out which community stands in the age-long tradition of truth. For that purpose, philosophy, identified as a Greco-Roman tradition, receives a blanket condemnation. More positive attitudes rely on the same ideas. Clement of Alexandria is willing to set Pythagoras and the Old Testament prophets in parallel (*Stromateis* 5.5.41–44, see also 1.18, 1.28, 1.32.4, 1.97), and Origen recognises that Greek philosophy has acquired correct yet incomplete insights, for without Christianity, nobody would know of Holy Spirit (Origen, *On First Principles* 1.3.1). Similar ideas can be found later, for example in Gregory of Nyssa's *On the Soul*, which judges Greek philosophy by its ability to agree with Scripture, which is similar to the way Greek philosophers judged the achievements of other schools – namely the extent to which their ideas agreed with their

own. Again it is important not to take Tertullian and Origen as representing two fundamentally different positions; rather, both are rooted in the same understanding of the history of philosophy.

From the philosophical tradition, Christian thinkers inherited two sources of knowledge, nature and the inner self. The cosmological argument was old and can be traced to Plato and the Stoics (Boys-Stones 2009: 8): it argued that the order of the world demonstrates that a divine mind or soul is its cause. Christian authors also drew on that tradition. For the exegete called Ambrosiaster, natural law, Moses and creation all offered the same evidence (*Commentary on Romans* 5.13). Theoderet of Cyr's sermons on providence develops its argument starting from the way the world functions. Nature could also be a normative source: it was not uncommon to argue that the hierarchical makeup of the world (man/angels or demons/God) should be reflected in the hierarchical structure of society (Van Nuffelen 2011). Besides nature, the second road to knowledge of God is the inner self. By turning inwards and paying attention to one's soul, one could discover the presence and principles of the divine (Kobusch 2018: 254–263). For example, drawing on Stoic ideas, Origen appeals to the presence of “common notions” (*koinai ennoiai*) written in everybody's mind (in *Philocalia* 9.2), and Justin Martyr speaks of seeds of reason planted everywhere (*1 Apology* 44.10). Both roads to God, the internal and external, were linked, as the soul was seen as the mirror of the cosmos (Edwards 2006: 106).

Scripture

Earlier we have touched upon Scripture, noticing how proof was given for the truthfulness of the prophecies and how interpretation was linked to the character of the interpreter. Here I wish to return briefly to the status of Scripture. Scripture is obviously the source of knowledge most commonly referred to and the most authoritative one, as the quotation from Basil of Caesarea, with which we opened the chapter, illustrates. The recourse to Scripture is often deemed a specificity for the traditions with a Jewish inheritance, as the term “religions of the book” shows. As such, these are often opposed to Greco-Roman religion (which is said not to have authoritative books) and to Greek philosophy (which is depicted as an enterprise of reason). If the status of Scripture in Christianity is indeed unmatched, it is not entirely without parallel in Greco-Roman tradition.

Historians of Greco-Roman philosophy have noticed that an important change in dealing with philosophical traditions occurred in the last century B.C. In particular, the founders of schools like Plato and Aristotle were elevated to positions of doctrinal authority, that is, they were not mere *maîtres à penser* but had expounded the correct doctrines. In addition, as we have seen, they were understood to have recovered primitive wisdom, thus giving their thought not just logical but also temporal priority. Philosophy therefore meant exegesis of their texts. Unsurprisingly, then, from the first century B.C. onwards, authoritative editions were published of the works of Plato, Aristotle and Zeno of Citium, and commentaries and handbooks written. As stated by M. Trapp, one “was expected to defer – on pain of incomprehension and contempt – to an authoritative past history of philosophical endeavour and achievement” (2007: 13). Philosophical schools can, then, be described as textual communities, within which canons developed of, for example, the most authoritative of Plato's dialogues (Boys-Stones 2018: 54–55). In turn, some religious groups did rely on authoritative texts and/or stories, such as Orphism, and these were now integrated into philosophical discourse. Indeed, the first century B.C. is also the moment when in Republican Rome authors, usually inspired by philosophy, start writing about Roman religion, producing texts like Varro's *Antiquities* that would become points of reference later (MacRae 2016).

The parallels in outlook between Christianity and Greco-Roman philosophy were sometimes perceived by patristic texts themselves. Justin Martyr, for example, parallels Scripture and Greek myth (*First Apology* 53). Comparisons between Moses and Plato derive from the representation of Plato as an inspired thinker. We notice also similar issues arising in Christianity and Greco-Roman philosophy regarding the way one should interpret authoritative texts. Assuming that Plato is always right, it was debated whether a literal or metaphorical interpretation is most appropriate, and it was common for an interpretation to work its way from lexical and stylistic matters up towards philosophical issues (Boys-Stones 2018: 51–52, 61–63), approaches that can be easily paralleled in Christian exegesis. As noticed earlier, allegorical interpretation was only deemed possible of authoritative texts, meaning that authority was first to be defended or to be assumed before successful interpretation could then effectively demonstrate that the text was indeed authoritative. Meaningful interpretation was embedded in a tradition and a community, which had acquired correct principles to understand a text, rendering it necessary that a novice be introduced step by step. For Christians, Scripture was to be interpreted in the light of the “rule of faith”, that is, the traditions of teaching and understanding within the Church (Ayres 2009: 79–84). As the evolution of late antique theology shows, this left still much room for diverging interpretations.

Christians inherited Scripture from the Jews, but the way they dealt with it was heavily influenced by Greco-Roman philosophy. How close both could be is visible in the fact that pagan criticism of Scripture focussed on the possibility that the Bible could be an inspired and hence authoritative text and thus be subjected to philosophical exegesis, but not on the fact that texts containing a higher meaning could exist (Cook 2004). Even so, in contrast to Greco-Roman culture, Christian Scripture did not tolerate competition from other inspired texts. As was put by Irenaeus of Lyons (3.18.6), the history of God’s engagement with men is summed up in Christ, that is, in the incarnation of God himself. Revelation achieved its summit and end in Christ, of which the New Testament bore witness. Christian Scripture is thus not merely the sum of the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, but the product of a narrative, which interpreted the Old Testament as the story building up towards the incarnation. As the story of God’s presence among men, the New Testament could claim unrivalled status. Nevertheless, it would take several centuries before the Biblical corpus was defined and canonised, and throughout Christian history, there remained variations between the various versions of Scripture, both in terms of what books were included but also differences in content between the same book in different languages. The human was always present in divine revelation.

Conclusion

In *Platonic Theology* 1.4, Proclus distinguishes between those who write about the divine by way of hints from those who speak openly. The former group is again divided into two: those who use symbols, like the Orphists, and those who speak by images, like the Pythagoreans. The latter group also contains two types of individuals: people like Plato, who speak according to science, and divinely inspired authors. As this chapter has shown, such catalogues of sources of religious knowledge are built on assumptions about tradition and authority – in this case, a tradition culminating in Plato and recovered by the authoritative predecessors of Proclus. Implicitly, the passage also assumes the existence of an authoritative interpreter, who has the necessary virtue and knowledge to interpret these four types of information. This chapter has charted the main sources of religious knowledge and narratives that supported the identification of such sources. It has argued that Christian thinkers were part of the intellectual culture in which these narratives flourished and that they used them, both to frame their own thought and to criticise

Greco-Roman philosophy. Indeed, as much as Christianity was part of Greco-Roman culture, it also understood itself to be different, which in this context is most visible in polemic against Greco-Roman philosophy with the tools offered by that philosophy. It claimed for itself the Jewish heritage and understood itself as aimed at all men and to be the guardian of the ultimate revelation. Such differences played out, however, within an intellectual and cultural context that was shared between Christians and non-Christians alike.

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Nature

Johannes Zachhuber

Introduction

For the perennial question of the relationship between Patristic philosophy and the Hellenistic tradition, the Christian use of the concept of 'nature' (Greek: *physis*, φύσις) is of unique importance. With the Christological definition adopted by the Council of Chalcedon (451), 'nature' became a central part of the Christian dogma; but by assigning such a foundational role to this term, the Christian Church adapted language that had been at the centre of Greek philosophical thought from its very inception. Ever since the alleged marriage between Christianity and Hellenism became controversial in Western modernity, therefore, debates about the legitimacy of the Christian use of *physis* terminology have loomed large as well, and Patristic authors from Origen to Gregory of Nyssa and Cyril of Alexandria have been accused of unduly pandering to this problematical heritage. The terminological and conceptual connection between the Patristic usage and modern controversies about natural law and natural theology have meant that these debates inevitably took on a confessional dimension as well.

This chapter will provide an overview of Patristic uses of this key term. No such account can be given without paying attention to the earlier philosophical tradition, from the Presocratics to the Middle and Neo-Platonists, but Christian debates will, nonetheless, turn out to have been remarkably independent of this influence. Their main non-Christian source was Philo of Alexandria, but from the second century onwards, Patristic authors, while obviously not sealed off from their intellectual environment, would largely engage with other Christian thinkers. In this sense, the history of the Church Fathers' engagement with *physis* terminology provides a fascinating test case for the understanding of Patristic thought as an autonomous philosophy emerging as part of Christianity's rise as the dominant religion of the Greek-speaking world during the first millennium of the common era.

An account of ancient views of nature is nearly tantamount to its history in Greek-speaking writers. *Physis* is a Greek word for which many other languages do not seem to have obvious equivalents. Most modern European languages, where they do not work with derivatives of the Greek term, have borrowed the Latin *natura*, but this was itself only coined to render *physis* and did not, for a long time, lose a somewhat artificial ring. Syriac and Hebrew writers invented technical vocabulary, once again with the overt purpose of translating Greek ideas

into their own idiom. Latin authors in late antiquity, such as Seneca, Epictetus, and Augustine, employed *natura* to develop their own ideas, but all major intellectual stimuli originated with Greek thinkers during this period. This was only to change in the Middle Ages and throughout early Modernity when Latin became the medium of theological and philosophical speculation on nature.

Greek philosophy

Greek philosophy began with reflection about nature. The fact that many of the Presocratic philosophers are supposed to have authored books *On Nature* (περὶ φύσεων) may not be historically accurate but evidently reflects the centrality this concept had for their thought. One may summarise the fascination this term possessed for Greek thinkers throughout the centuries by observing two main uses they made of it. On the one hand, *physis* could denote the essential being of a thing or the principle of its existence. When, in the *Odyssey*, Hermes points out to Odysseus the *physis* of a plant (φύσιν αὐτοῦ ἔδειξε) he meant to indicate its miraculous healing power which made the hero immune to the witchcraft of Circe, the sorceress (*Odyssey* X 303). We can render *physis* here with ‘nature’ in a sense that is recognisable even today: it was the nature that is, the essence or the particular character of this plant to have precisely such an effect. On the other hand, however, *physis* could also mean ‘origin’ or ‘generation’. In this sense, Empedocles denied that there was *physis* ‘of any of all mortal things, neither any end of destructive death’ (fr. B8 D/K); his most recent translator plausibly rendered *physis* here with ‘birth’ (Graham 2010: 347).

This dual meaning was and remained key for the adoption of *physis* terminology by Greek philosophers who were interested, in equal measure, in the essence or true being of things and in their ultimate origin. Employing *physis* served both ends; it was suggestive, moreover, of a common root connecting the two: understanding a thing’s character accordingly implied knowledge of its origin as well. Thus, Greek philosophy had a built-in tendency to assume that the world contained in itself answers to its fundamental questions insofar as knowledge of its true being or essence somehow also explained its cause and origin. Philosophical interest in *physis* was therefore closely related to the quest for the *arche* (ἀρχή), the origin and principle of all things. Both jointly emerged in our earliest philosophical sources, the so-called Presocratics.

Among these thinkers, it was Heraclitus who presented the most elaborate version of this kind of nature philosophy. He tasked the philosopher with an analysis of reality ‘according to its nature’ (κατὰ φύσιν: fr. B1 D/K). This was necessary because *physis* was the true ontological foundation of all things indicating their origin and the principle of their development; precisely as such, however, nature was also difficult to grasp and understand. In a celebrated phrase, Heraclitus ascribed to *physis* the desire to hide itself (φύσις κρύπτεσθαι φιλεῖν: B123 D/K). In direct opposition, Parmenides expressed reserve towards the concept of *physis*. From extant fragments of his didactic poem, it appears that he wrote of ‘nature’ only in its opinion part (fr. B4, 5–8 DK; Curd 1998: 24–63) which spoke of what was only seemingly true. Mockingly, Parmenides there referred to the familiarity with ‘the nature of ether and all the constellations of ether’ (αἰθερίαν τε φύσιν τὰ τ’ ἐν αἰθέρι πάντα σήματα: fr. B10, 1–2 D/K) as examples of vain pseudo-knowledge. The approach of traditional nature philosophy was thus radically critiqued: truth, according to Parmenides, was not to be found in the dynamic flux and fluidity of nature but, rather, in a stable and immutable vanishing point that was itself detached from the empirical realm.

With his emphatic opposition to nature philosophy, Parmenides wielded a strong influence over subsequent developments. For the history of *physis* terminology, however, his legacy was ambiguous: it led to a fundamental critique of nature as the realm of transience and instability which philosophical reflection did well to transcend, but also to a recalibration of the concept of *physis* by stipulating that nature in its truest and most fundamental form was identical with non-empirical, transcendent reality.

Support for both options can be found in Plato. Overall, references to nature in his dialogues are notable mainly for their scarcity; *physis* clearly was no central concept in Plato's thought. When Socrates in the *Phaedo* reported his early attachment to 'natural history' (τῆς φύσεως ἱστορία), the upshot of his narrative was a fundamental critique of this approach together with an affirmation of the theory of forms as a better alternative (95b–102a). Yet in the *Republic*, Plato indicated that and how *physis* could be integrated into his own philosophy referring to God, the creator of forms, as 'maker of nature' (φουτούργος) because he, unlike human artificers, produced what 'by nature is' (ἢ τῆ φύσει οὐσα: 597b) and what 'by nature is one' (μία φύσει: 597d). Thus far, God himself was beyond being as well as nature (cf. *Republic* VI, 509b), but the primary, true, and immutable being generated from this ultimate source was also paradigmatic nature. This notion, which preserved the centrality of *physis* in earlier philosophy but largely abandoned its traditional connotations of dynamic mutability and generative self-sufficiency, paved the way for the reception of *physis* terminology in Jewish and Christian thought.

There can be no doubt that Aristotle produced the most worked-out and the most influential account of *physis* up until his own time and, arguably, of ancient philosophy in its entirety (Bostock 2006: 1–18). Yet in early Christian thought, little evidence of its influence can be detected except where this is mediated through Stoic or Platonic authors. The Stoics recapitulated earlier Presocratic views of an immanent conception of *physis*; they employed the anti-dualist arguments Aristotle had developed against Plato and the Academy but turned them against the Stagirite himself to arrive at a radically monistic conception of the world. The ultimate vanishing point of their doctrine of nature, however, was human practice, individual as well as communal (cf. Annas 1993: 159–179). Stoic physics was based on the premise that the world as a whole was ontologically homogeneous. The cosmos was a dynamic body comparable to a living being. *Physis* was uniquely fine stuff spread equally throughout the all and connecting its parts into an overall unit. Some Stoics explained the effect of the whole on its parts with 'seminal principles' (λόγοι σπερματικοί: DL VII 148–149), a notion that was to become important for later Christian authors. Stoic ethics and politics demanded a life 'according to nature'; some of their most enduring ideas, such as theories of natural law, derived from this principle.

Stoic philosophy with its monistic ontology, its materialistic cosmology, and its determinism offered few direct points of contact with Jewish or Christian thought. If, nonetheless, Stoic ideas of *physis* were to cast a long shadow over Patristic thought, this was mainly due to their reception and transformation by Platonic philosophers of the Hellenistic and Imperial era. The interference of Stoic and Platonic ideas can be seen, for example, in the second-century Platonist Atticus, whose view of Plato's world soul is largely cast in Stoic terminology, thus aligning the dynamic concept of the 'physical' world with the ontologically layered account of the Platonic tradition (fr. 8, 17–19 Des Places; Köckert 2009: 76). In this trajectory, Neoplatonists, such as Plotinus and Proclus, conceived of nature as the lowest part of the intelligible world which, unlike soul, is directly in touch with matter shaping the latter on the basis of its intuition of higher parts of the intelligible cosmos (Plotinus, *Enneads* III 8, 4; O'Meara 1995: 74–76; Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, 10, 13–26 Diehl).

Philo

In Philo we find the most important early attempt to integrate the concept of *physis* into an overall theistic framework. Given the particular background of this concept in Greek philosophy, such an attempt was *prima facie* counterintuitive. After all, the adoption of *physis* terminology had been closely linked to a worldview rather different from that of the biblical religions with their emphasis on a personal God who radically transcended the cosmos as its creator. There were, in principle, two ways of dealing with this challenge: either that of restricting *physis* exclusively to creation while insisting on its radical separation from the divine, or the application of *physis* terminology to God himself, thus effectively aligning it with the language of being and substance (*ousia*). The latter, which was the more radical transformation of traditional usage, was only adumbrated in Philo but became dominant in the Patristic tradition. The former, which, similar to the strategy employed previously by Parmenides and Plato, would insist on a radical distinction between God and nature, thus understanding *physis* as the totality of created being, was Philo's preferred view.

This position was attractive insofar as it permitted an integration of the duality of meanings that had made the use of *physis* terminology philosophically desirable in the first place. After all, the theistic philosopher faced the problem of how the radically transcendent God could also be creator and originator of a world that was so different from him. Understanding the world as *physis* could help bridge this gap insofar as it introduced an element of dynamic generation, a principle of evolution and development which, while ultimately pointing to the world's creator, could explain the world's mutability and change on its own terms. Philo thus connected *physis* with the evolution of a plant from its seed (*Quis rerum divinarum heres sit*, 121), the growth and ripening of fruit (*De congressu eruditionis gratia* 4). He called nature the 'universal mother' of humanity to whom people owed their organs of sense perception, such as the tongue (*De decalogo* 41–42; *De specialibus legibus* II 4) and referred to the maternal womb as 'nature's workshop' (τὸ τῆς φύσεως ἐργαστήριον: *Legatio ad Gaium* 56).

In this specific sense, then, *physis* for Philo was the origin of all things, namely, their *direct* or immediate cause which, however, was itself subject to the authority of the divine creator. As in the earlier Greek tradition, this notion of origin or cause was connected with the notion of nature as a thing's essence or its ontological character. This was particularly the case for human beings whose 'nature' corresponded, as it did in Stoicism, to their task of ethical and religious perfection. As they could, however, either fulfil this task or fail to do so, Philo's references to human nature were ambiguous throughout. While he occasionally intimated the existence of a 'fleshly nature' in human beings that could explain their 'unnatural' existences (*Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat* 83–84), his preferred argument resorted to human free will (Wolfson 1947, vol. 1: 437; Martens 2003: 72). In this as in other views, Philo was clearly dependent on Stoic thought, but he only received it in a characteristic twist in which the notion of a physically determined and ontologically self-sufficient *physis* was replaced by a physical world created towards its perfection by a transcendent and benevolent God.

As in Stoicism, nature for Philo was, further, connected with ideas of order and structure, and for this, the Jewish thinker was happy to borrow from his Stoic predecessors the association of *physis* with *logos*. In other words, nature was not simply the direct cause of particular beings but the reason the world existed in a regularised and orderly fashion. In fact, Philo appears to have been the first author who with some consistency spoke of 'natural law' (νόμος φύσεως: Horsley 1978; Martens 2003: 75–77). This interest in nature as a source of rational order and structure was not without its theological motive insofar as it permitted aligning nature with the revelation of God's word (*logos*) in and through the Thora, the divine Law (*nomos*).

The philosophical reader of the Jewish law would thus observe a correspondence between the notion of universal nature inscribing rules into the cosmos as a whole and into human life in particular on the one hand, and the religious idea of a nomothetic God whose goodness is communicated to his human creatures through the revelation of his commandments.

Throughout most of his writing, Philo was keen to separate God from nature and reserve *physis* terminology for created being. Yet there are passages in which he wrote of ‘God’s nature’ (Martens 2003: 77–80). The interpretation of these passages within the entirety of Philo’s corpus is not wholly clear, but the most likely explanation would understand them as resulting from Philo’s biblically founded concern not to detach God too radically from the world and, in particular, from humanity as encountered famously in his description of human beings as ‘existing on the boundary’ (μεθόριον) between the created world and the divine (*De opificio mundi* 133–135). Elsewhere, however, Philo strongly insisted on a dualism between creator and creation, arguing, for example, that human beings could not be ‘in the image’ of God (cf. Gen. 1, 27) but only in that of his *Logos* (*Quaestiones in Genesim* II 62). As many of his Jewish, Christian, and Islamic successors, then, Philo vacillated somewhat between a tendency sharply to emphasise the utter transcendence of God and an attempt to bridge the ontological gap between creator and creation. This ambiguity has left its traces in his use of *physis* terminology too.

Philo’s importance for subsequent developments can hardly be overestimated. He drew on Stoic ideas but transformed them in a way that philosophically owed much to the Platonic tradition but was, ultimately, inscribed into the theistic framework of the Hebrew Bible. Without this particular form of transformative reception, later Patristic developments cannot be understood even though the Church Fathers pursued an intellectual path that was, ultimately, rather distinct from that of Philo himself.

From the New Testament to Origen

Physis terminology is almost entirely absent from the New Testament, which is all the more remarkable given its popularity in roughly contemporaneous Jewish–Hellenistic writers, such as Josephus (Koester 1973: 264–270). The only notable exception is the late text 2 Peter 1, 4, promising believers to ‘become participants of the divine nature’. Reception of physical language and related ideas began in earnest with those second-century authors that have conventionally been grouped together under the label of ‘Gnosticism’. These authors were soon attacked as deviating from standard, Catholic Christianity. It is not, however, apparent that their use of *physis* terminology was criticised as such even though their particular interpretation of it was. Rather, the Gnostics appear to have initiated a broader willingness among Christian writers to operate with this terminology.

The primary context in which Gnostic authors employed *physis* terminology was soteriological. The Valentinians, we learn from Irenaeus, distinguished three kinds (γενή) of human beings, pneumatic, psychic, and hylic, according to the three sons of Adam – Cain, Abel, and Seth. From them (ἐκ τούτων) descended ‘three natures, no longer individuals but races’ (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* I 7, 5; cf. Aland 1977). In support of this theory, the Valentinians cited Gen. 5, 1 (γένεσις τῶν ἀνθρώπων: *Excerpts from Theodotus* 3, 54). Nature, then, refers to unity in kind on the basis of genealogical descent. This conception is related to the older terminological history of *physis* with its combination of the notions of essential character and origin, but the latter is now conceived specifically as genealogy. On the basis of this community of origin, the pneumatics were ‘by nature’ destined for salvation (φύσει σωζόμενον), whereas the hylics were destined to perish (*ibid.*). A similarly genealogical relationship existed between the pneumatics and God whose nature was ‘immaculate, pure and invisible’ (Heracleon in Origen, *Commentary*

on John XIII 25) and who was worshipped ‘in spirit and truth’ (John 4, 24) by those who were ‘of the same nature with the Father’ (ibid., cf. Wucherpfennig 2002: 333–357).

With the anti-Gnostic Fathers of the late second and early third century, we stand at the beginning of a genuinely Patristic philosophy for which the use of *physis* terminology became increasingly pivotal. The most important among them was Origen, the first Christian author, as far as we can make out, who employed this language on a broad scale. In doing so, he drew on Philo but also on Stoic and Middle Platonic authors (Köckert 2009; Tzamalikos 2006). Nonetheless, it is arguable that his opposition to Gnostic ideas was particularly pertinent for this aspect of his thought as the tendency of his innovative adoption of physical language can best be explained against this backdrop.

The most characteristic, but also unexpected, observation in this connection is that Origen understood by ‘nature’ a plane or sphere of being. He could thus write that God created ‘two natures’, visible and invisible (‘duas generales naturas condiderit deus: naturam visibilem, id est corpoream, et naturam invisibilem, quae est incorporea’: *First Principles* III 6, 7). Against his Gnostic opponents, he would emphasise that all rational creatures are ‘of the same nature’ (‘unius namque naturae esse omnes rationabiles creaturas’: *First Principles* III 5, 4). At the same time, he denied – against Heracleon – that they are *homoousios* with God (*Commentary on John* XIII 25), who, as ‘uncreated nature’, had to be radically distinguished from all created being. The ‘nature of the Trinity’, Origen insisted, ‘had nothing in common with creatures except the good it does to them’ (‘nihil sit cum creatura commune nisi beneficentiae opus’: *Commentary on Romans* VIII 13, 7). He could therefore also say that the Son is ‘by nature’ (φύσει) like the Father (*Commentary on John* II 10, 76), anticipating later trinitarian language.

What is remarkable about all these passages is less their underlying theology, let alone their division of being into intelligible and sensible, but the way Origen integrated a particular concept of nature into each of these arguments. As we have seen, the use of *physis* for the Godhead had hardly any precedent in either pagan philosophy or in Philo. The latter had written of ‘nature’ as the totality of created being but retained for this the dynamic component so characteristic of the term’s use in earlier Greek thought. Origen introduced into Christian parlance a use of *physis* from which this dynamic dimension had almost completely disappeared. Also absent was the dual meaning of ‘character’ and ‘origin’. This is not to say that these terminological nuances could never be called upon by Christian authors; in fact, Origen himself retained the more traditional understanding of the term in other contexts. But henceforth ‘nature’ could be used without any of those connotations, simply to denote a particular ontological plane or sphere regardless of its particular place in the metaphysical hierarchy: there was divine as well as created nature; sensible as well as intelligible nature, visible as well as invisible nature, and so forth. This innovation in Origen soon became widely accepted among Christian authors and served as the basis for later doctrinal uses of the term.

More traditional was Origen’s use of *physis* terminology in the context of his doctrine of creation. Against the Valentinian theory of the three races of human beings, Origen developed an account of the creation of ‘human nature’ which, although not in itself material, contained the seeds (λόγοι) of future humanity (*Against Celsus* 4, 40). Here, the dynamic element of *physis* is as much in evidence as its relationship with notions of principle and origin.

In sum, one finds in Origen almost the whole gamut of future Patristic uses of *physis* at least *in nuce*:

- 1 *Physis* can be applied to any plane or sphere of being.
- 2 As such a sphere of being, *physis* is, inevitably, universal nature. Using the term in this sense will often, therefore, at least imply a generic sense.

- 3 When applied to created being, the more traditional, dynamic sense of *physis* is retained.
- 4 From all it follows that *physis* can also, quite traditionally, stand for the particular character of an individual thing.

Ultimately, *physis* was not, however, a key term in Origen's thought. While he used it in certain ways, which were partly traditional and partly innovative, and while he was evidently keen to weaponise it in his anti-Gnostic polemic, the term is not foundational for either his doctrine of God or for his accounts of creation and redemption.

Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nyssa's entire thought was deeply influenced by Origen, and this holds for his use of *physis* as well. His main, additional step beyond his Alexandrian forebear was the promotion of this concept to a central pillar of his own, elaborate version of Patristic philosophy (Zachhuber 1999, 2010). At the same time, Gregory had to reckon with more recent doctrinal developments in which *physis* terminology was directly implicated. Most important in this regard was the Nicene watchword *homoousios*. This had already been glossed with the terms *ὁμογενής* and *ὁμοφύης* in the third-century controversy between Dionysius of Rome and his Alexandrian namesake (ap. Athanasius, *On the Opinion of Dionysius* 18). In the mid-fourth century, Athanasius took for granted the identity of *homoousios* with 'of the same nature' (cf. *Tome to the Antiochenes* 6), an assumption that was, apparently, universally shared by that time. For Gregory, therefore, the use of *physis* terminology became inextricably intertwined with his defence of the Nicene trinitarian settlement.

In a second development during the same period, the soteriological use of *physis* terminology, which had already been central to second-century Gnostics, was re-emphasised in the context of the trinitarian controversy. Athanasius, drawing on Irenaeus, opposed his Arian opponents with the claim that only a radical affirmation of the Son's divinity would safeguard human salvation. In his early writing *On the Incarnation*, he used the metaphor of a king entering a city to advance the argument that Christ's assumption of 'human nature' in the Incarnation would subsequently lead to the transformation of humanity more generally and thus to human salvation understood as divinisation (*On the Incarnation* 9.3; cf. 54,3). This soteriological use of *physis*, it should be noted, served to solidify the novel, Christian understanding of 'nature' as sphere or plane of being; 'divine' and 'human' natures are merely different kinds of being entering into a uniquely intense union in the Incarnation, and this new state is passed on from there, on account of the ontological cohesion of humankind, to all those who are to be saved.

For Gregory, these trinitarian and soteriological uses of *physis* terminology were, therefore, already part of the Patristic tradition which he received. In a third main area in which he worked with this conceptual apparatus, the doctrine of creation, he equally followed earlier Patristic precedent. His main contribution, then, was not the introduction of *physis* terminology in areas to which it had not previously been applied, but the increased systematic coherence with which he worked *physis* into the conceptual backbone of his Christian philosophy. In fact, Gregory contributed comparatively little to the one doctrinal field in which *physis* terminology was to play a major role later, Christology.

Physis for the Nyssens meant, firstly, being at all its levels and in all its variations. As Origen, therefore, Gregory too employed 'nature' to denote planes or spheres of being using expressions such as divine or uncreated, created, intelligible, or material nature (*On Infants' Early Deaths* pp. 6–7, 77 Mueller). He could even write of 'wet' or 'warm' nature (in *Hexaëmeron*, *Patrologia Graeca* 44, 65D; 105B), meaning simply beings that are of such a kind. From this usage, Gregory transitioned, as easily as Origen before him, to an understanding of *physis* as universal being. Gregory's interest in the latter concept was, however, much stronger than that

of his Alexandrian forerunner or, in fact, that of any other, earlier Christian thinker, as far as we know. He developed a full-fledged theory of universal being on the basis of this notion of *physis*. In his cosmology, Gregory retained from Philo and Origen the traditional, dynamic understanding of *physis* indicating the coherence between unity and plurality of the created order (cf. in *Hexaëmeron*, *Patrologia Graeca* 44, 72B; 108A–B).

Gregory's specific understanding of *physis* took shape as part of his contribution to the final phase of the trinitarian controversy. In his writings against Eunomius of Cyzicus, he defended the neo-Nicene doctrine advanced originally by his older brother, Basil, conceptualising the Trinity as one *ousia* in three *hypostases*. Gregory, assuming the identity of *ousia* and *physis*, elaborated on Basil's idea that *ousia* was 'the common' (τὸ κοινόν) as opposed to hypostasis as 'the particular' (τὸ ἴδιον): divine nature was one, he urged, on account of the common 'account of being' that can be applied to all the three Persons. Divine *physis* was thus the community of ontologically coordinated individuals connected by a common origin in the Father. Nature is truly one, as Gregory argued against the charge that this doctrine amounted to tritheism, but only exists in its independently existing hypostases:

Nature, however, is one, unified with itself and a precisely undivided monad, not increased through addition nor decreased through subtraction, but in what it is it is one and remains one even though it appears in a multitude. It is indivisible, continuous, and complete and not divided alongside the particulars that participate in it. And just as a people, a community, an army, and an assembly is always said in the singular, but each is known in the plural, so according to the more precise formula, 'man' is properly said as one, even though those who are shown in the same nature are a multitude.

(*To Ablabius* 41, 2–12 Mueller)

Gregory was unusual among the early fathers in his willingness to inscribe this same philosophical theory into other main elements of his theology, especially his doctrine of creation and salvation. In the former, he argued influentially that Gen. 1, 27 must be understood of 'universal' (καθόλου) humanity which, in God's foresight, was 'potentially' contained in his first creation already (*Making of Man* 16; cf. Zachhuber 2005a: 94–97; but cf. Hübner 1974: 67–91 for a different interpretation). Human nature in this sense, is a unity-in-multiplicity existing in a limited number of individuals; once their full number (πλήρωμα) has been reached, the history of the world comes to its end and the whole of human nature will be resurrected (*On the Soul* = *Patrologia Graeca* 46, 128C–D). In this connection, Gregory also affirmed universal salvation since the injection of divinity into human nature in the Incarnation will inevitably spread to the entirety of the race (*Catechetical Oration* 16; 32).

In its conceptual coherence and its systematic potential, Gregory's doctrine of *physis* became foundational for the future development of Patristic philosophy. According to his theory, *physis* was both the totality of individuals as well as the common item identically present in each member of the class and expressed by a shared definition; it thus combined a concrete and an abstract aspect while avoiding transcendent, Platonic forms. Within a generation, this theory became widely accepted and shared by Eastern theologians regardless of their school affiliation although not, initially, in the area of Christology.

***Physis* and Christology**

For the introduction of *physis* terminology into the language of Christology, Gregory of Nyssa's older contemporary, Apollinarius of Laodicea, was crucial. From the fragmentary remains of

his work, it is evident that his philosophical ambition must have been a close match to that of the Nyssen. While his condemnation as a heretic at the end of the fourth century limited his influence on subsequent developments, his significance should not be underestimated. Apollinarius emphasised the unity of divinity and humanity in Christ by speaking of him as the ‘one incarnate nature’ (μία φύσις σεσαρκωμένη: *To Jovian; To Dionysius A2*). His preferred analogy was that of a human being consisting of body and soul. As Alois Grillmeier observed (1975: 334–335), ‘*physis* is here by no means the static, abstract “essentia”. [. . .] *Physis* is the “self-determining being” (ζῶον αὐτοκίνητον, αὐτοενέργητον)’. In other words, Apollinarius emphatically affirmed, within the context of a Christian philosophy, the dynamic element that had been characteristic of the earlier philosophical use of *physis*. His opponents mostly fastened onto his rejection of a human mind in the saviour, thus accusing him of teaching an ‘incomplete’ human nature in Christ. As part of this argument, Gregory of Nazianzus affirmed the need to speak of two natures in the God-man (φύσεις μὲν γὰρ δύο Θεὸς καὶ ἄνθρωπος: *Letters* 101, 19). In this context, however, the requirement that universal *physis* had to exist in concrete hypostases was neglected. While the Cappadocians can thus be said to have prepared the language of Chalcedon, they were also responsible for the regular charge that the teaching of two natures implied the existence of two hypostases as well as there could be ‘no *physis* without hypostasis’ (cf. Leontius of Byzantium, *Against the Nestorians and Eutychians* 1; John the Grammarian, *Apology for the Council of Chalcedon* IV, 82–83 Richard).

In the controversy between Apollinarius and the Cappadocians, the concept of *physis* was not yet central, but this changed in the conflict between Cyril and Nestorius half a century later. Significantly, both parties took the Cappadocian understanding of *physis* as their starting point. On this basis, Nestorius reasoned that the affirmation of two natures, divine and human, in Christ had to imply the existence of two hypostases as well whose union could only be mysteriously guaranteed by stipulating a single *prosopon* (Book of Heraclides, 231 Bedjan; see Grillmeier 1975: 507). Cyril, by contrast, emphasised the unity of hypostasis and thus affirmed the doctrine of ‘one incarnate nature’ in the saviour. In doing so, he drew on Apollinarius, whose writings he believed were written by orthodox Fathers. A significant part of his followers therefore saw the definition of Chalcedon with its affirmation of two natures in Christ as a betrayal of Cyril’s genuine position even though the Council Fathers inscribed their Antiochene language into a Cyriline framework.

***Physis* in the controversies after Chalcedon**

The parallel between the Christological use of *physis* and its use in the trinitarian context was suggested by the so-called ‘double homoousion’, the affirmation that Christ was ‘homoousios with the Father according to his divinity and homoousios with us according to his humanity’ (Wiles 1965). From the 430s onwards, this formula was widely used and, in 451, became part of the Chalcedonian formula (ACO 2,1,2, 129, 26–27). Nonetheless, there is no evidence that its affirmation at this point indicated a fundamental willingness to integrate Trinitarian theology and Christology into a single philosophical framework.

This only changed in the early sixth century, when John the Grammarian (of Caesarea) authored an apology of the Council of Chalcedon in which he sought to align the Christological use of *physis* with the older Cappadocian theory. The Grammarian argued that in Christology as in the Trinity, *physis* like *ousia* stood for universal being; the Chalcedonian formula thus merely affirmed the generally recognised truth that Christ was both divine and human, i.e. participated in both these natures. This was an ingenious move. Chalcedonians who, until then, faced the criticism that the Council had broken with Patristic precedent as represented

by Cyril, could now retort that their doctrine was simply the application to Christology of the Cappadocian conception of *physis* that was generally accepted as authoritative. While details of the Grammarian's view remained controversial, the principle that a single philosophical conception of *physis* was needed for both theology and economy soon became universally accepted by Chalcedonians as well as their opponents.

The leading miaphysite thinker of the early sixth century, Severus of Antioch, opposed the Grammarian's claim that the Incarnation was the union of universal natures as, in this case, the consequence would be that the whole Trinity was incarnate in the whole of humanity (*Against an Impious Grammarian* II 22; III 23). The only way to avoid this conundrum, Severus believed, was to accept that *physis* became individuated in each hypostasis. The single nature of Christ, which Severus considered to be the doctrine of the fathers, would thus be a 'unified nature' (φύσις σύνθετος) underlying the divine-human hypostasis of the saviour. This theory was consolidated by the leading Patristic philosopher of the sixth century, John Philoponus (Lang 2001a). He identified Severus' particular nature with the 'particular substance' (μερική οὐσία) which the Aristotelian commentators of late antiquity had introduced. Nature, Philoponus suggested, could be either universal or particular in the same way a universal term, such as 'human being', could be applied to the whole race or to the individual (*Arbiter* 7, ap. John of Damascus, *On Heresies* 83 addit.). In the Incarnation, divine nature became human only insofar as it was 'individuated' in the second Person, the Logos. Likewise, the object of the Incarnation was the human nature individuated in Jesus. As Severus before him, Philoponus supported this claim with the evident absurdity that otherwise the whole Trinity would have taken flesh in the whole of humanity.

At its time, the introduction of particular natures represented the most consequential transformation of the Cappadocian, classical theory in the interest of accounting for the individuality of the Incarnate Christ. It could, perhaps counterintuitively, claim the support of a considerable number of passages from unquestionably orthodox fathers who had used *physis* (or *ousia*) for the particular instance of a nature (e.g. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Poems on the Mysteries* 2.8) Yet its repercussions for Trinitarian doctrine were severe as it could be argued that the three trinitarian Persons were also three particular natures and thus three substances and three deities (Ebied et al. 1981: 34–43). Philoponus, who philosophically was a particularist (Erismann 2008), sided with these 'tritheists', thus discrediting the introduction of particular natures despite his philosophically rigorous argument in their favour (Lang 2001b).

***Physis* in Chalcedonian Christology**

Discussions about nature became so important during this period that no full account of it can be given in the present place. Practically every major Chalcedonian author between the sixth and the eighth century dwelled at length on questions directly or indirectly arising from the use of this terminology in the Christological controversy and in the doctrine of the Trinity with more or less attention to its more traditional uses in the doctrines of creation and salvation. In what follows, only a brief survey can be given of particularly characteristic positions that can be encountered in some of these writers.

a) In his *Epilyseis*, Leontius of Byzantium reported the question posed by his miaphysite opponent of whether Christ assumed a universal or an individual nature. His response was that it was an individual nature, but that this was the same as the universal nature (Leontius, *Epilyseis* 1). This response soon became popular; we find it repeated even in John of Damascus (see later). Few Chalcedonian authors, however, explained what they meant by it. Some, such as Anastasius of Antioch, evidently chose to ignore the conceptual challenge posed by their opponents

insisting that universal natures, as introduced by the Cappadocians were perfectly suited to explain the Christological dogma as well:

We call him God, not a God, and we call him man, not a man. For he is God and man, and the [use of the] universal terms indicates that of which he is [composed] – not of particular hypostases but of universal substances (*Oration III*, 54, 15–18 Sakkos).

In the face of Severus' and Philoponus' innovative teaching, Anastasius evidently sought to affirm the traditional, Patristic view according to which natures (or substances) were universal, not particular. Two natures in the saviour, therefore, did not make impossible the single hypostasis guaranteeing Christ's unified person. Yet this argument could only appear plausible because the additional assumption in Gregory of Nyssa, according to which universals could only exist in and through particular hypostases, was jettisoned. Universal nature as affirmed by Anastasius and other Chalcedonians was an abstract essence, a concept the Cappadocians had avoided as it could suggest that the trinitarian *ousia* was an entity separate from its three hypostases.

b) Other writers, such as Leontius of Jerusalem, were more willing to accommodate the conceptual challenges identified by Chalcedon's opponents. Leontius recognised that the union of two natures in one hypostasis could only be explained by severing the link in Cappadocian thought between the individuation of universal natures and their concrete, hypostatic existence. This he attempted by introducing 'individual natures'. It was such an individual nature (φύσιν ἰδικήν τινα) which the Logos assumed into his own hypostasis (*Against the Nestorians I* 20). At first sight, Leontius' individual nature seems utterly similar to Philoponus' particular nature. Yet while the latter was based on the ontological division of the universal – and thus imperilled ontological realism – Leontius' theory introduced a difference between the *concept* of individuals (the compound of universal plus particular properties) and their actual, hypostatic realisation. Characteristically, he illustrated his theory by appealing to fictional individuals or to people who had long dead but were still known to us 'according to their [individual] nature' but not in their hypostasis (*Against the Nestorians II* 19). In this manner, Christ could have had an individuated human nature including both generic and individual properties without possessing a second, human hypostasis. Leontius' conception is highly innovative (Richard 1944; Krausmüller 2006); he probably was the first thinker in antiquity to conceptualise 'existence' as such, in abstraction from individuating properties thus preparing the later convention of distinguishing essence and existence.

c) Yet another approach is to be found in Maximus Confessor, the single most influential Chalcedonian theologian up until the Arabic conquest. Maximus developed his own theory of universal nature harking back in major aspects to Gregory of Nyssa's Cappadocian philosophy (Balthasar 1988; Törönen 2007; Zachhuber 2005a). His purpose, while related to the doctrinal controversies of his time, was ultimately the integration into the Byzantine tradition of the speculative, Origenist heritage, endangered after the condemnations of the sixth century. Maximus therefore utilised universal nature to explain unity and multiplicity in the world as part of the process of salvation history in which all things have their origin in God to whom, also, they will ultimately return. Inscribed into this narrative is a description of universality and particularity as perfectly complementary. Universal natures could not exist without the individuals of whom they consisted (ἐκ γὰρ τῶν κατὰ μέρος τὰ καθόλου συνίστασθαι πέφυκε: *Ambigua II* 10,42), but by the same token, it was equally the case that no particulars existed or could ever exist without their universal kinds (*Ambigua II* 10, 32). Like Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus was a realist for whom the genera 'that are united in substance are one (ἓν), the same (ταυτόν) and indivisible (ἀδιαίρετον)' (*Ambigua II* 41).

This complementariness, however, was only possible due to the dynamic character of *physis*. Universal nature and its individuals were engaged in a permanent ontological movement of division and synthesis, from the highest to the lowest and back (*Ambigua* II 10, 37). Its theological basis was Maximus' doctrine of creation in which, as previously in Origen and Gregory of Nyssa, created being was initially only potentially (*δυνάμει*), not actually (*ἐνεργεία*) complete (*Questions to Thalassius* 2; *Ambigua* II 7). Thus, the single, divine Logos is manifold in the context of creation (*πολλοὺς εἴσεται λόγους τὸν ἕνα λόγον*), while the intellectual and mystical intuition of the world recognises in the many *logoi* the one Word as its creator, origin, and principle (*Ambigua* II 7; cf. Dalmais 1952; Larchet 1996: 112–124).

While the influence of Neoplatonic ideas, received mainly through ps.-Dionysius the Areopagite, is stronger in Maximus than in many other Patristic authors, the main contours of his appropriation of *physis* are, once again, inherited from the tradition of Origen and the Cappadocians.

d) John of Damascus was interested in *physis* mainly in the Christological context. Many earlier theories are encountered again and integrated into a thought-through, systematic presentation (Cross 2000; Zachhuber 2013: 466–469). In *The Orthodox Faith*, he distinguished three meanings of *physis* (*Exposition* 55): it is either universal nature which has no independent existence (cf. Simplicius, *Commentary on the Categories*, pp. 8–10, 83 Kalbfleisch); or it is nature 'as seen in the species' (*ἐν τῷ εἶδει θεωρουμένη φύσις*); or it exists in the hypostasis together with individual properties and is, as such, 'seen in the individual' (*ἐν ἀτόμῳ θεωρουμένη φύσις*). The Incarnation, Damascene argued, cannot be said according to the first of these, but both the second and third options have some claim to truth. With this solution, John seems to come close to Leontius of Jerusalem's position, but his statement that nature as 'seen in the species' and as 'seen in the individual' are the same echoes Leontius of Byzantium's more equivocal view.

Conclusion

Patristic reflection on nature was intense and diverse. The classical theory developed by Gregory of Nyssa was retained in principle but also critiqued and modified in the centuries after Chalcedon. Resulting theories included the particularism of John Philoponus and the intriguing distinction of essence and existence introduced by Leontius of Jerusalem. Among the various topics of Patristic philosophy, this was one of the most influential. John of Damascus' views were frequently quoted and much discussed in scholastic texts since the twelfth century. Dionysius Petavius in the early seventeenth century presented a lengthy overview of relevant texts in his *Dogmatic Theology* (*De trinitate* IV 9), influencing thinkers as diverse as Ralph Cudworth (1743, vol. IV: 34) and Isaak August Dorner (1839: 57).

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Time and eternity¹

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Time and eternity in the philosophers

After a short investigation into ancient philosophy, I shall pass on to Scripture and patristic thinkers. Among the Presocratics, the notion of “eternity/eternal” was expressed by *αἰδιος*, although without connotations of metaphysical transcendence. For instance, Heraclitus referred *αἰδιος* to the perpetual movement of things eternal and to the cyclical fire, which is god (T22A6DK; 8–10DK). Among the Eleatics, Parmenides is said to have described the universe as *αἰδιος*, qua ungenerated and imperishable (T22DK). Democritus too argued that time was *αἰδιος*, as ungenerated (T68A71DK), like the universe (*αἰδιον τὸ πᾶν*, T 100 DK) and the atoms (T37DK). The term of art for eternal things, ungenerated and imperishable, among cosmological thinkers before Plato, was *αἰδιος*. This is also the standard adjective meaning “eternal” in non-philosophical discourse of the fifth century as well.²

Plato introduced the notion of eternity not as infinite duration, but as transcending time, adiaematic. To this he applied the term *αἰών*, with *αἰώνιος* meaning “eternal” qua atemporal.³ His terminology was followed by all Platonists – and *only* by them, strictly speaking.⁴ His novelty was caught by the anonymous sixth-century *Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy* 9: it claims that Plato introduced the notion of eternity as distinct from time. Plato’s concept of metaphysical, timeless eternity refers to the model that the Demiurge followed in creating the sensible universe by looking “to the eternal” (*τὸ αἰδιον*). The created universe is moving and living, an image of the eternal gods (*τῶν αἰδιῶν θεῶν*, *Timaeus* 37C6), and itself an “eternal living being” (*ζῶον αἰδιον*, 37D1). It was the nature of the living being to be *αἰώνιος*, but this quality could not be attached to something begotten (*γεννητόν*). The creator therefore decided to make “a kind of moving image of eternity” (*αἰῶνος*), time (*χρόνος*, *Timaeus* 37D5), “an eternal image [*αἰώνιον εἰκόνα*], moving according to number, of the eternity [*αἰῶνος*] which remains in one(ness).” While time moves according to number, eternity remains in oneness. This is the eternity of the divinity, which is unbegotten, and the Ideas/Forms. *Αἰδιότης* is everlastingness throughout all times, like that of the soul, or of stars; sometimes it also refers to the transcendent Ideas. God is “immortal more than anything else” (*ἄθάνατος*, *Phaedo* 106D5–7), but souls are too (*Phaedr.*245C), being imperishable (*Phaedo*

88B; 95C1; *Republic* 608D3, etc.) and ungenerated (*Phaedr.*245C). Their creation by the Demiurge is more causal than temporal.

Plato's conception of a timeless eternity continued in Platonism.⁵ Ammonius, Plutarch's teacher, maintained that God, "being One, has filled eternity with one's now" (Plutarch *EDelph.*393BC). Alcinoüs describes the Ideas as "eternal [αἰώνια] paradigms of entities in nature" and "God's eternal thoughts" (*Did.*9.2), a typical Middle Platonic concept,⁶ developed in Patristic philosophy by Clement, Bardaisan, Origen, and others.

Plotinus, known to Nyssen, Augustine, and other Christian Platonists, rejected Aristotle's definition of time as the measure of movement (*Physics* 4.11–12) and identified time with the life of the soul (*Enneads* 3.7.12.20–25). While Nous and Noesis are atemporal, *dianoia* is temporal (*Enneads* 6.1.4.7–19).⁷ Plotinus defines eternity as "a life which is here and now, endless, being total . . . without past or future" (*Enneads* 3.7.5.25–28), linking it with the Nous (not the One: Proclus and Damascius later disagreed).⁸ He devoted *Enneads* 3.7(45)11–13 to the appearance of time and the cosmos, and emanation.⁹ Porphyry, who was familiar with both Plotinus' and Origen's ideas on time and eternity, supported the eternal creation of the world by the Demiurge and its eternal becoming ordered (*Commentary on Timaeus* F46Sodano) and knew and ridiculed the Christian promise of ζωὴ αἰώνιος (*Against the Christians* F69), while Iamblichus used the Platonic vocabulary of αἰών/αἰώνιος very little; he referred αἰδῖος to eternity and called eternal life ζωὴ αἰδῖος, not αἰώνιος.¹⁰

However, the meaning of αἰών and αἰώνιος was different in other philosophical schools, and in Greek in general, as well as in the Greek Bible. In Aristotle's oeuvre there are nearly 300 instances of αἰδῖος, Aristotle's preferred word for things eternal, while he used αἰών only occasionally, mostly in the traditional sense of "life". Aristotle was not moved to adopt Plato's novel terminology, whether because he perceived some difference between his own concept of eternity and that of his teacher, owing also to his theory of immanent Forms, or because he deemed αἰώνιος an unnecessary addition to the philosophical vocabulary, given the respectability of αἰδῖος as the technical term for eternity. His ideas and terminology were followed by his commentators.¹¹

In the Stoics,¹² who rejected Plato's metaphysics, αἰδῖος refers over thirty times to that which endures forever. It is applied to bodies and matter, the realities that truly exist according to Stoic materialism (τὰ ὄντα), and above all to god/Zeus. The Stoics employed αἰώνιος and αἰών, too, either to indicate a long period of time or in connection with their view of recurring cosmic cycles, marked by the periodic destruction and restoration of new worlds, where the events follow one another according to Necessity, always identical in each world (Origen will confront this Stoic theory). Thus, in Stoic terminology – as in all of Greek literature apart from technical Platonic language – αἰώνιος does not mean "absolutely eternal", a meaning reserved for αἰδῖος. Notably, to designate eternity, Marcus Aurelius does not employ αἰών alone, but αἰδῖος αἰών, meaning "eternal duration" (9.32).

The Epicureans, too, following Democritus, regularly employed αἰδῖος of the eternity of atoms and void, the imperishable constituents of the universe. Epicurus uses αἰώνιος in reference to the future life that non-Epicureans expect, with its dreadful punishments – an afterlife in which Epicureans do not believe, and which does not deserve the name "eternal" (αἰδῖος).

In non-philosophical Greek, in Homer, early lyric, and tragedy, αἰών principally bears the sense of "life", "a period of time", "generation"; in classical and Hellenistic Greek, it means "long duration", "perpetuity from one generation to the next", "lifetime", and the like; it sometimes indicates eternity only in reference to the divine, but this meaning is generally conveyed by αἰδῖος.

Biblical usage

In the Bible, the other and main source of inspiration to patristic thinkers, αἰών and αἰώνιος refer to eternity, sometimes, when modifying God and what directly pertains to God; otherwise, they indicate a long time, a remote time in the past or the future, the series of generations, or a lifetime. Αἰώνιος even means worldly/mundane, or belonging to the other world.¹³

Within the Septuagint, αἰώνιος and αἰών occur frequently; behind both is the Hebrew *'olām*, which has a wide range of meanings. Tobias 3:6 describes the place of the afterlife as a αἰώνιος – the first place in the Bible in which αἰώνιος unequivocally refers to the world to come. In the Septuagint, ἄϊδιος occurs only in the most recent books: in Wis 7:26, it refers to God, “eternal light”, and in 4Mac 10:15 to the eternal life. Here, the eternal (ἄϊδιος) life of the pious is contrasted to “the eternal [αἰώνιον] perdition of the tyrant”, where the eternal life is ἄϊδιος, really “eternal, without end”, whereas the death of the impious tyrant in the next world is αἰώνιος – a polysemous term indicating the other αἰών, “otherworldly,” possibly “long-lasting,” but not strictly eternal.

In the New Testament, too, αἰώνιος means “eternal” only in reference to God, otherwise it means “long-lasting” (χρόνοι αἰώνιοι in Romans 16:25–26 and 2 Timothy 1:9 cannot mean “eternal times”). Αἰών means “century, age” or indicates this or the next world. Only ἄϊδιος refers to eternity proper, e.g. in Romans 1:20.¹⁴ Αἰώνιος refers to life, death, punishment, and fire in the next world or αἰών (in opposition to this world, κόσμος or καιρός, or χρόνος, cf. e.g. Mark 10:30 and all John). Instead, ἄϊδιος refers only to life – never to death, otherworldly punishment of humans, or fire. In the Bible, only life is said to be properly eternal, without end, a characteristic that essentially and intrinsically belongs to God: “eternal life” is the participation in the life of God, by grace; Christ himself is said to be this life.

In the New Testament, there are only two uses of ἄϊδιος. In Romans 1:20, it refers to God’s power and divinity, absolutely eternal; in Jude 6, ἄϊδιος is employed of eternal punishment – not of humans, but of evil angels, who are imprisoned in darkness “with eternal chains [δεσμοῖς ἄϊδίοις] until the judgment of the great day”.¹⁵ We are not informed of what will happen afterwards. Why ἄϊδιος of the chains, instead of αἰώνιος, used in the next verse of the fire which the punishments of (human) Sodomites exemplifies? Perhaps because the angels’ chains continue from their incarceration, before the present world, until the judgment that signals the entry into the new αἰών: thus, the term indicates the uninterrupted continuity throughout all time in this world – this could not apply to humans; to them applies rather the sequence of αἰῶνες or generations.

In the Septuagint and the New Testament, death, punishment, and fire for humans are described as αἰώνια, pertaining to the αἰών to come or long-lasting, but never as strictly eternal (ἄϊδια). This point – which I made in *Terms for Eternity* and referred to the doctrine of restoration in *Apokatastasis* – had previously escaped scholars, but it is so important that most Greek Fathers followed the Biblical usage carefully and called death, punishment, and fire αἰώνια (“otherworldly” or “long-lasting”) but never ἄϊδια or “everlasting, eternal”. This distinction, as I thoroughly demonstrated,¹⁶ is maintained by many Greek Fathers, such as Tatian, Clement, Origen, Didymus, Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Evagrius, Theodore of Mopsuestia, John Chrysostom, Proclus of Constantinople, Dionysius, and Maximus.¹⁷ They apply both the Biblical αἰώνιος and ἄϊδιος to God – the latter from the apologists onward, e.g. Aristides and Athenagoras – but they refer ἄϊδιος only to the future life and bliss; to future death, punishment of humans, suffering, and fire only αἰώνιος. Since only αἰώνιος, and never ἄϊδιος, is applied to the punishment of humans in the afterlife in Scripture, Origen could find support in the Biblical usage for his doctrine of universal restoration and the finite duration of hell. Some Latin

theologians who – unlike Ambrose, Cassian, or Eriugena – did not know (enough) Greek, such as Augustine, relied on Latin translations of the Bible in which the differentiation of αἰώνιος and αἰδιος was completely blurred: both were generally translated with *aeternus* or *sempiternus*. Thus, we shall see, Augustine believed that in Scripture otherworldly death, punishment, and fire are declared to be eternal. His perspective proved immensely influential in the West, among those who did not know Greek. It is significant that, instead, the Latin theologians who knew Greek – such as Victorinus, Ambrose, Jerome, Rufinus, Cassian, and Eriugena – did not think that the Bible proclaims eternal punishment, death, or fire. Eriugena was even a radical supporter of universal salvation.¹⁸

Ante-Nicene Christianity

Many Greek Fathers followed the Biblical usage, from Clement onwards.¹⁹ Origen, an attentive exegete and philologist, one of the greatest Patristic philosophers and theologians, followed the Bible's linguistic usage closely, confirming it through his argument that, “if life is eternal, death cannot possibly be eternal”.²⁰ As in Scripture, in Origen's oeuvre αἰώνιος means “absolutely eternal” only if applied to God, but when Origen is not quoting Scripture, he usually employs αἰδιος in these contexts.²¹ He often refers to αἰώνιος life, in the NT formula: the emphasis seems to lie on the life in the next world/αἰών (“the life of the world to come”, as in the final clause of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed). In *Philocalia*, 1.30.21–23, αἰώνιος life is defined as that of the future αἰών. God gave Scripture as “body for those we existed before us [Hebrews], soul for us, and spirit for those in the αἰών to come, who will obtain life αἰώνιος.” So too, in *Commentary on Matthew* 15.25, the future life (αἰώνιος) is contrasted with the present (πρόσκαιρος). Again, Origen frequently opposes the ephemeral sensible entities of the present time (πρόσκαιρα) to the invisible and lasting objects of the world to come (αἰώνια, e.g. *Mart.* 44.16). Consistently with the Septuagint and the NT, Origen also applies αἰώνιος to attributes of God. He speaks of the eternal God (αἰώνιος) and the concealment of the mystery of Jesus for “times immemorial” (χρόνοις αἰώνιαις, *Commentary on Romans* [AthosLaur.184B64] 16.26) – not “eternal times”. So too, Origen mentions “αἰώνια days and years” or long periods of time, and εἰς τοὺς αἰῶνας here signifies “for a very long time” (*Commentary on Matthew* 15.31.37). Likewise, “very ancient” mountains, not “eternal” mountains, are the ὠρέων αἰωνίων in *Selections on the Psalms* 12.1536.

In Origen, αἰδιος occurs much less frequently than αἰώνιος, almost always in reference to God or divine attributes – God's power, divinity, kingdom, existence, mercy, etc. – meaning “eternal” strictly, limitless in time, or beyond time. Of “eternal life”, he uses αἰδιος ζωή to indicate its eternity more unequivocally than through αἰώνιος (*On Prayer* 29.13.9). In *First Principles* 3.3.5, Origen posits a succession of αἰῶνες prior to the final apokatastasis, which introduces eternity (αἰδιότης). This pertains to apokatastasis, not to the previous sequence of aeons. Origen's idea of a succession of aeons is different from the Stoic one, because in his view each of them does not repeat the events of the former ones by necessity and Fate, but is different and characterized by the free decisions of rational creatures. Moreover, contrary to the Stoic conception, the sequence of aeons will come to an end in the *telos*, at apokatastasis, when all will participate in the absolute eternity (αἰδιότης) of divine life.²²

This opposed not only Stoic fatalism, but also “Gnostic” predestinationism, against which Origen constructed his protology and eschatology. Aeons for him are the diastematic dimensions where rational creatures use their free will and experience the consequences of this, with the assistance of Providence. At the end of the aeons and of purification, they will participate in divine eternity. Origen rejected the “gnostic,” Valentinian concept of αἰών

(Aeon, each component of the Pleroma). Tzamalikos (1991) rightly noticed that Origen refused to call αἰών the divine life, but attributed this choice to Origen's refusal to adopt Plato's terminology. I suspect that Origen rather refused to appropriate *Gnostic* terminology: he opposed the "Valentinian" system of Aeons. The Valentinians drew on Plato's definition of αἰών, but developed it into the notion of "Aeon" as divine and living (Valentinus F5, etc.). Origen, who elaborated his philosophy of history and apokatastasis against Valentinian (perceived) predestinationism, refused to reproduce "Gnostic" terminology, in which every αἰών is a deity of the Pleroma. Therefore, Origen considers an αἰών to be not divine life, but a span of time; it does not belong to the divine sphere, transcending time, but to the diastematic sphere of time, space, dimensions, and extension. So, Origen scorns the gnostic "mythopoiesis concerning Aeons" supposed to exist prior to the Logos (*Commentary on John* 2.14; *Commentary on Matthew* 17.33).

Indeed, Origen's Logos preexists all aeons and is their creator: "before any time [χρόνος] and aeon [αἰών] existed, in the beginning was the Logos" (*Commentary on John* 2.1). Hebr 1:2 declares that the αἰών was created by Christ, so aeons are creatures, made through the Son-Logos (*Commentary on John* 2.10). "The whole aeon [αἰών] is long in relation to us, but very short in relation to God's life" (*Commentary on Matthew* 15.31). In *Or.* 27.13–14, Origen compares the extension (διάστημα) of a day with that of an entire aeon (αἰών). Indeed, time, according to Origen, depends on the freedom of rational creatures and on God's Providence, which respects their freedom but is also infallible in bringing all creatures to the eventual salvation (*Against Celsus* 5.21 etc.): the differentiation of the merits or demerits acquired by rational creatures through their free choices takes place in time, which is the explication of their free choices and extends through several aeons, but finishes with the αἰδιότης of apokatastasis (*First Principles* 2.3.5).

Indeed, what is absolutely eternal for Origen is only God and participation (by grace) in divine life (θέωσις). This is why, as mentioned, Origen applied αἰδιος ("eternal") only to the Trinity, her attributes, and eternal life. Christ-Logos-Son is the eternal creator of all aeons; even his historical sacrifice has a universal and eternal validity.²³ From cosmological, early imperial debates on time and eternity, Origen imported the formula (οὐκ ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν into Christian thought, and to the anti-"Arian" debate, where "There was no time when [the Son] was not" became an anti-Arian catchphrase; Origen and Alexander of Aphrodisias – likely well known to Origen – first used it.²⁴ Origen and the Cappadocians, who largely followed him,²⁵ use αἰδιος as "absolutely eternal" in the theological discussion on the coeternity and consubstantiality of the hypostases of the Trinity.

For Origen, the "coming αἰών" indicates the next world, where sinners will indeed be consigned to the αἰώνιον fire, the fire that pertains to the future world (*Sel.Ps.*12.1156); it may last for a long time, but it is not, for Origen, eternal. Origen, consistently with Scripture, calls the punishing/purifying fire αἰώνιον, never αἰδιον. For he does not deem it absolutely eternal: it is αἰώνιον because it belongs to the next world, as opposed to the fire in this present world, and it lasts as long as the αἰῶνες do. Similarly, Origen, like Scripture, never speaks of αἰδιος death, or of αἰδία punishments and torments and the like, although he does speak of αἰώνιος death and αἰώνιοι punishments: in the world to come and long lasting. That Origen followed the Bible in never calling death, punishment, or fire eternal is not surprising in the light of his own eschatology and soteriology: fire, punishment, and death imposed by God cannot be remedial, and therefore cannot be eternal; death itself is followed by resurrection, physical and spiritual, as Nyssen and Evagrius will develop.²⁶

Not only Origen, but, as emerges from *Terms for Eternity*, many other Patristic thinkers closely followed Biblical usage – among whom all the supporters of apokatastasis, such as

Didymus, Nyssen, Evagrius, Diodore of Tarsus, Theodore of Mopsuestia, etc., and others, usually not regarded as supporters of apokatastasis, such as Eusebius, Athanasius, Basil, Nazianzen, Dionysius, and Maximus. Now – as I argued extensively in *The Christian Doctrine of Apokatastasis* and elsewhere, not only on the grounds of their linguistic use – all these in fact likely had a penchant for the theory of apokatastasis.

Origen, Didymus, the Cappadocians, the Antiochenes, and Dionysius are the Patristic thinkers who most reflected on the Biblical meaning of αἰών/αἰώνιος, well aware that often they do not refer to eternity. Origen, or possibly Evagrius – a follower of his and of Nyssen – provided the Christian definition of αἰών: “the time coextensive with the constitution of this world, from the beginning to the end” (*Commentary on Ephesians* 403). Unlike the Stoic aeons, identical to one another, in infinite sequence, Christian aeons differ from each other, depending on rational creatures’ free choices; their succession terminates in the eventual apokatastasis. While postmortem retribution is commensurate to sins and limited to one or more aeons, blessed life after purification is God’s gift in Origen’s view (*Commentary on Romans* 22.11) and absolutely eternal, ἄϊδιος.

The Origenist tradition

In Patristic philosophy, and especially in Origen and his tradition, the end of the world was related to its beginning. An issue in both Patristic and “pagan” Platonism was whether creation is in time or not, and how to interpret both *Genesis* and Plato’s *Timaeus* in this respect. The use of the “perishability axiom” was paramount in this connection in both “pagan” and Christian Platonists.²⁷

Eusebius, an admirer of Origen, attacked, like Origen, those who conceived the cosmos as beginningless and endless (*Theophany* 1.1), stressing that time was created by God out of nothing (1.5). Origen had argued for *creatio ex nihilo*²⁸ and insisted that Christ was the creator of the aeons and only the Trinity is absolutely eternal. Likewise, Eusebius states that the Logos is “anterior to all aeons” (*Tricennial Oration* 1.6). Before the creation of the universe, Christ was generated: he is coeternal with the Father (*Theophany* 1.4; 2.3). Christ, God’s Logos, is a Mediator who, although eternal and beyond time qua God, can operate in time (*ibidem* 1.5); he is even eternally present in the cosmos (*Sepulchre of Christ* 13.1). Christ is a Mediator because he took up creaturely nature and, qua Logos, contains (Middle-Platonically) the models of all creatures (*ibidem* 1.4), as already Bardaisan, Clement, and Origen had described him, following Philo.²⁹ Eusebius supported the Son’s coeternity with the Father, calling him ἄϊδιος, who corules without beginning or end (*Tricennial Oration* 2.1), coeternal with the Father: so, Eusebius claims with Origen, it is impossible to state “there was a time in which He was not” (*Demonstration of the Gospel* 4.3.3; 5.1.15).³⁰

To describe the fullness of times inaugurated by Christ, Eusebius significantly uses Origen’s description of apokatastasis: God’s Logos is known by all humanity; Fate and necessity are defeated; humanity is reconciled to God, and peace and love are restored (*Theophany* 2.76). This is a prospective description. Time is the realm of history, and Eusebius with his *Chronicon* ordered it from Abraham to his own day, to show that Christianity had a more ancient pedigree than polytheism.³¹ His *Ecclesiastical History* developed this line.³² Whatever the date(s) of its composition,³³ Eusebius based his Christian history on Africanus and Bardaisan,³⁴ but projected his theology and eschatology towards eternity.

Didymus, a close follower of Origen, also shows awareness of the multiple meanings of αἰών and αἰώνιος (*Commentary on Job* 76.11ff.): if αἰώνιος refers to God, it means “absolutely eternal,”

beginningless and endless; when it refers to humans, it indicates this life or its continuation in the life to come:

It must be noted that αἰώνιος has many meanings: in “αἰώνιος God”, it means beginningless and endless; for God is called αἰώνιος by virtue of having neither a beginning nor an end of existence. But αἰώνιος is something different when used in “things unseen are αἰώνια”: for these are not αἰώνια in the way God is, but because they do not perish but remain forever in the same condition. Αἰώνιος is meant differently again when it is measured against present time, as when it is said: “the sons of this αἰών are wiser in their generation”; for the time that extends over the life of a human is also called an αἰών. Indeed, it is laid down concerning the Hebrew who did not wish to be freed in the seventh year, that “he will be your slave unto the αἰών”: for no slave of a human remains forever, even after his death. In this sense Paul too writes: “if flesh causes my brother to stumble, I shall not eat flesh through the αἰών,”³⁵ using this term in place of “throughout my life”.

Eternal life, which lasts beyond all aeons, is “*ὑπεραιώνιος* salvation” (*Commentary on Zechariah* 2.370): it goes beyond all aeons, which makes it clear that an αἰών is not eternity. Salvation, unlike punishment and death, which can only be αἰώνιοι, does not come to an end with the end of aeons. The same awareness was present in many other Patristic writers, including Origen and Nyssen.

Nyssen was deeply influenced by Origen and the most philosophically minded of the Cappadocians. He abundantly uses the philosophical adjective αἰδιος, in reference to the Trinity, for its eternity *a parte ante* and *a parte post*; its attributes, the Son – against “Neo-Arianism”³⁶ – and eternal life, which awaits all humans by Christ’s grace (*On the Three Days’ Interval* GNO 9.278.10).³⁷ Eternal life is God’s life, in which humans will participate (*Homilies on the Song* GNO 6.69.3) after the end of times and aeons. In *Or.cat.* 16.63, αἰδιος life is a gift that was awaiting us from the beginning and to which we ought to return; it is identified with God and Christ at *Against Eunomius* II 1.536. The αἰδιος life of God is that which traverses the αἰῶνες (*ibid.* II 1.457), and the life of God is that in which the blessed will participate. In *Homilies on the Song* GNO 6.69.3, it is promised to the human being that he will endure for eternity (πρὸς τὸ αἰδιον), together with him who is forever (αἰεὶ ὄντι). Examples could multiply. Gregory employs αἰδιος in connection with life because he conceives of it as a strictly eternal life in the αἰδιότης of apokatastasis, after the end of the αἰῶνες: it will last for eternity, beyond time, together with God, who is adiaematic.

Divine eternity, in which humans will participate, is not an infinite extension in time, but transcends all time. For Gregory, God’s eternity is closely related to God’s infinity, on which also Gregory’s conception of *epektasis* depends.³⁸ For God transcends every interval of space or time. God’s nature is absolutely eternal (αἰδιος) because it is not situated in time or place: it is ἀδιάστατος (*Against Eunomius* I 1.371). Origen mentions “this temporal extension” (τὸ χρονικὸν τοῦτο διάστημα, *Fragment on Matthew* 487), and employs διάστημα in reference to intervals of time repeatedly.³⁹ Indeed, another convergence between Origen and Nyssen is the description of eternal divine life as ἀδιάστατος, a term already used by Philo and, then, by Plotinus, who, like Origen, also employs διάστασις and διάστημα in reference to time. Gregory opposes the corporeal nature, διαστηματική, to the incorporeal one, which is ἀδιάστατος,⁴⁰ because it is uncreated and therefore anterior to the ages (προαιώνιος), which, as Origen already taught, were created by Christ.⁴¹ This is why the divine life “is not in time, but time comes from it” (ἐξ ἐκείνης ὁ χρόνος, *Aganst Eunomius*, I.365, GNO 1.135.2). For God “transcends creation”

(ὕπερ τὴν κτίσιν) and “has nothing to do with any dimensional concept” (παντὸς διαστηματικοῦ νοήματος κενωρισμένη, *Against Eunomius*, I.363; GNO 1.134.13–16).

The eternity [τὸ αἰδιον] of God’s life . . . is apprehended as always in being (ἀεὶ μὲν ἐν τῷ εἶναι), but does not allow the thought that it ever was not, or will not be [τοῦ δὲ ποτὲ μὴ εἶναι καὶ ποτὲ μὴ ἔσσεσθαι]:

(*Against Eunomius*, I.666; GNO 1.217.26–29)

Gregory takes on Origen’s formula οὐκ ἦν ποτε ὅτε οὐκ ἦν, applying it to all the Trinity.

Gregory posits God as ἄπειρον and evil as limited qua God’s opposite (*Making of Man* 21). He may be correcting Plotinus, who described absolute evil as ἄπειρον (*Enneads* 1.8.9), following Plato. Gregory realized that, if evil is ἄπειρον and the One-Good-God too is ἄπειρον, there is not enough opposition between the two. Like many Patristic thinkers, Gregory never refers αἰδιος to otherworldly punishment, death, or evil, which “is not from eternity [ἐξ αἰδίου] and cannot subsist eternally” (*On the Inscriptions of the Psalms* GNO5.100.21–5;101.3). Evagrius, who was influenced by Nyssen more than generally assumed, took on Nyssen’s tenet of evil’s finitude and adventitiousness: “There was a time/state when evil did not exist, and there will come one when it will no more exist” (*Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.40).⁴² This point came from Origen, who claimed that evil “is nonbeing . . . was not created through the Logos . . . did not exist in the beginning and will not exist forever” (*Commentary on John* 2.13); “there was a state in which evil did not exist, and there will come one in which it will no more exist” (*Exposition of Proverbs* 5). Also, Evagrius’ *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.1, “There is nothing opposed to the First Good, since it is Goodness in its essence; now, there is nothing opposed to the Essence”, comes from Gregory: “Good is limited only by its opposite, but Good’s nature is not susceptible of evil, so it will progress toward the unlimited and infinite” (*On the Soul*, GNO III/3.71.9–11).

Gregory employs αἰώνιος mostly in Biblical reminiscences, where it means “eternal” only in reference to God, whereas in philosophical discussions which demand their own vocabulary, he uses αἰδιος. It is often employed in reference to life in the world to come. Like Origen, Gregory, when he speaks of life in the beyond, uses “αἰδιος life” if he wishes to indicate its eternity, and “αἰώνιος life” to emphasize that it will be in the next world, in very many instances (so, too, “αἰώνιος home” in heaven, “αἰώνιος glory, αἰώνιος blessedness”, etc.).

The connection between αἰώνιος life and the αἰών to come is especially clear in *Christian Education*, GNO 8/1.79.4, where the αἰώνιος joy that characterizes the future life is “that which the souls of the saints will enjoy in the future age that is expected” (ἐν τῷ προσδοκωμένῳ αἰῶνι). Death, fire, and punishment are merely αἰώνια, for they will be commensurate to sins and will cease either earlier or at the end of the αἰών, with apokatastasis, in eternity. But when he speaks of destruction, death, misfortune, punishment, or the fire in the future life, Gregory uses only αἰώνιος (e.g. ὄλεθρος/κόλασις/αἰσχρὴ αἰώνιος, πῦρ αἰώνιον), never αἰδιος. For he holds that the purifying fire will be applied to sinners in the αἰών, which will end with the apokatastasis (absolute eternity: αἰδιότης), and since life will endure in eternity, but not death and punishment, and all evil will disappear, only life can be called really eternal (αἰδιος), not death. Already Origen argued so in *Commentary on Romans* 5.7, concluding: “if life is eternal, death cannot possibly be eternal” (*si vita aeterna est, mors esse non possit aeterna*).⁴³ Death, fire, and punishment are merely αἰώνια, for they will exist in the future αἰών, but will cease at the end of the αἰών.

In *Inf.* 91.23–92.2, the use of αἰώνιος in reference to purification in the next world makes it clear that it is not a question of eternal punishment, but of a purification which will have an end: “after long periods of time [χρόνων μακρῶν περιόδους], through purification in the future age [διὰ τῆς αἰωνίας καθάρσεως],⁴⁴ God will return this person again to the totality of those who

are saved. . . . This will be absolutely clear to all those who consider God’s power” and nature, with reference to Jesus’ assertion that the salvation of sinners is “impossible among humans, but everything is possible to God”. Gregory states explicitly that purification, far from being eternal, will come to an end with the sinner’s reintegration–restoration. In *On the Soul*, Gregory uses αἰών and αἰώνιος in reference to purifying punishment, while explicitly denying that it is eternal: the αἰών in question is that between the death of the individual and universal apokatastasis, after which there no longer is any aeon, but rather the perfect and immutable αἰδιότης of all creatures in God, when (in Origen’s words) “no one will be in the αἰών any longer, but God will be all in all”.⁴⁵

As seen, Gregory depends on Plotinus – treated earlier – in the understanding of eternity as endless life, but also on Origen: only God is eternal and infinite; evil is neither.⁴⁶ Since evil is not eternal, otherworldly punishment cannot be either. It may only διαωνίζεῖν or endure through aeons. Punishment “is measured [συνδιαμετρεῖται] out over an entire aeon [αἰῶνα]” (*On the Soul* 101.17–43). This parallels the expression εἰς αἰώνιον τι διάστημα, where διάστημα refers to a limited interval, as συνδιαμετρεῖται confirms, since infinite is beyond measure, eternity beyond διαστήματα. We shall pay our debts “up to the last coin”: thus, we shall come to an end of this payment and complete purification from sin. Precisely by πῦρ αἰώνιον (*On the Soul* 100A), souls will be purified for the purpose of salvation: it will destroy evil (*On the Soul* 157A) and cease when such purification is achieved. Even Epiphanius had to add αἰδιός to διαωνίζεῖν to mean “endure *eternally*” (Panarion 2.160.16), as διαωνίζεῖν per se did not imply eternity.⁴⁷

Some later Greek authors

Basil and Nazianzen, who stressed the coeternity of the Son to the Father against “neo-Arians”, as Nyssen did, also used αἰών in the sense of the whole of history, like Origen.⁴⁸ The Antiochene Diodore of Tarsus⁴⁹ was likewise aware that αἰών does not mean “eternity” in Scripture and adduces the following: “These shall go away into αἰώνιος [l-’*dlām*] punishment, the righteous into αἰώνιος life” and “You shall not wash my feet l-’*dlām*” and “No man shall dwell in Babylon l-’*dlām*”,⁵⁰ while many generations have dwelled there. Conclusion: “in the New Testament, l-’*dlām* [αἰώνιος] does not mean ‘without end’.”

Diodore’s disciple, Theodore of Mopsuestia, in the prologue to his commentary on Psalm 2, interprets “αἰώνιος condemnation” as “future condemnation” (*damnatio futura*), not “eternal” (*aeterna*). That of two aeons of divine economy is a characteristic of his thought: the present aeon is a training place for souls; due to Adam’s sin God made humans mortal, but providentially (*Commentary on Galatians* 1:4). Very close to Origen’s is Theodore’s definition of αἰών (*Commentary on Galatians* 1:4), not as “eternity” but as “an interval of time,” διάστημα χρόνου, from the short interval of a person’s life to the longest, from the foundation of the world to the second coming of Christ. Even in reference to Christ, Theodore refuses to understand αἰώνιος as “eternal” (*Fragment on Hebrews* 207.1): Christ is “the αἰώνιος high priest” (Hebrews 6:20) because all the aeons/generations (αἰῶνες), believing in him, will be led by him to God. In Theodore, αἰδιός never refers to future punishment, fire, or death in the next world – which Theodore describes only as αἰώνιος – but is applied to the future life, as in many Patristic authors.

Likewise, Maximus the Confessor used only αἰώνιος, never αἰδιός, to describe otherworldly punishment, death, or fire.⁵¹ Dionysius also alerts readers that in Scripture, αἰών often does not mean eternity: “in Scripture, sometimes there is mention of an αἰών that is in time and of an αἰώνιος time” to denote a distant time, remote, or indeterminate, long, but not eternal: “therefore, one must not consider things called αἰώνια in Scripture to be coeternal with God

[συναΐδια θεῶ], who is rather prior to every αἰών” (*Divine Names* 216.14), with Origenian reminiscences: “Jesus, being simple, became composed; the eternal [ὁ αἰδιος] took on a temporal extension [παράτασιν . . . χρονικήν]” (*ibid.* 1.4).

Proclus, who not only impacted the Christian Platonist Dionysius, but was also familiar with Origen’s ideas, including that of apokatastasis – which he related to ἐπιστροφή, like Dionysius and Eriugena later – elaborated on time and eternity in *Platonic Theology* and *Commentary on Plato’s Timaeus*. He spoke of a Day itself and a Year itself (ἐνιαυτός) by absorbing Aristotle’s theology of the unmoved mover into Platonic physics, and Porphyry’s discussions of eternity (αἰών), time, and the Year.⁵² The main difference between Proclus’ and Origen’s theories of apokatastasis resides in their concepts of time and eternity: an infinity of time with infinite apokatastatic cycles for Proclus, but a finite sequence of aeons for Origen, who believed in the Biblical “end of the world” after which there will come apokatastasis, once and for all.⁵³

The origins of eternal punishment

In the West, Augustine’s conception of time and eternity, the temporality of creatures and the eternity of God, and the relation between time and soul – already posited by Origen and Plotinus – are analysed in Books 11–12 of the *Confessions*.⁵⁴ Whereas eternity, far from being an infinite extension in time, is a “lack of extension” and thus timeless, time is an “extension/dimension of the soul” (*distentio animi*): *distentio* corresponds to διάστημα/διάστασις and “lacking extension” to ἀδιάστατος.⁵⁵ Eternity was not, nor will be, but is an eternal present, and so it represents the fullness of being. These are typical of God. The Plotinian background for this conception, in both Nyssen and Augustine, is evident: Plotinus too defined eternity as ἀδιάστατος, an eternal present, proper to the fullness of Being. Tzamalikos (1991) has also proposed to see Origen’s influence behind Augustine’s conception of time and eternity. Also in light of recent and ongoing studies on the influence of Origen on Augustine,⁵⁶ he may be right.

Augustine, knowing Greek poorly, missed the distinction between αἰώνιος and αἰδιος, lost in Latin Biblical translations of both with *aeternus*. This linguistic misunderstanding probably contributed to the condemnation of the doctrine of apokatastasis, which entailed the non-eternity of the otherworldly fire (Biblical πῦρ αἰώνιον is not πῦρ αἰδιον).⁵⁷ Augustine first attacked apokatastasis overtly in 413, in *De fide et operibus* 15.2, and attests that some *miseri-cordes* adduced 1 Cor 3:11–15 – on those who are saved immediately and those who are saved “through fire” – to support the saving aim of otherworldly punishments. In 415, Augustine published a short refutation of Origenism in *Ad Orosium*,⁵⁸ where he maintained that the sense-perceptible world was not created for the purification of fallen souls and *ignis aeternus* must mean eternal fire, otherwise the eternal beatitude of the righteous could not be eternal (8.10; cf. 5.5). This argument was already adduced against the doctrine of universal apokatastasis in a passage ascribed to Basil and will return again in Justinian.⁵⁹ Origen had refuted it in advance in his *Commentary on Romans* through a syllogism grounded in a metaphysical argument and on 1 Cor 15:26,⁶⁰ to the effect that, if life is eternal, death cannot be eternal – the opposite of Augustine’s claim. Augustine’s argument is weakened not only by Origen’s anticipated counter-argument, but also by linguistic data: as seen, in the Bible only life is called αἰδιος, absolutely “eternal”, whereas the otherworldly punishment, death, and fire applied to humans are described, never as αἰδία, but as αἰώνια. Αἰώνιος means “eternal” only in Platonic philosophical vocabulary, “atemporal”, whereas in the Bible and related literature it means “otherworldly”, “remote in past or future”, “of long duration”, or “mundane”. In the Bible, αἰώνιος means “eternal” only

if it refers to God, or what refers to God. This terminological distinction is maintained by many Greek Patristic authors,⁶¹ but in the Latin world it was blurred by the indiscriminate translation of both adjectives with *aeternus*, understood as “eternal, without end”, and thus fire, punishment, and death in the other world were considered to be eternal. So, Latin authors ignorant of Greek such as Augustine (not Ambrose or Eriugena) missed it.

This is why in *On the Acts of 1.3.10* Augustine states:

The Church very deservedly curses Origen’s doctrine that even those whom the Lord says will have to be punished with an *eternal* torment, even the devil and his angels, will be purified and finally liberated from their punishment, albeit *after a very long time*, and will join the saints who reign with God, sharing in their blessedness. . . . Whoever claims that their punishment, *declared by the Lord to be eternal*, can come to an end shares Origen’s abominable view.

Here *aeternus* renders αἰώνιος (in reference to κόλασις), which does not mean “eternal” but indicates that the punishment takes place in the other world, for a certain period, even long, but not necessarily eternal. In the Latin world, however, it was more difficult to grasp this, given that only one adjective, *aeternus* (or *sempiternus*), was used to render Greek αἰώνιος and αἰδίος, and was understood as strictly eternal.⁶²

Notes

- 1 Cushman 1953; Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013; Ramelli 2015a. On theories of time and eternity in Greek philosophy see Lloyd 1976; Wilberding 2016.
- 2 Analysis in Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 5–11.
- 3 These terms also kept more traditional meanings, such as “age” (*Gorgias* 448C6) and “continuous” (*Republic* 363D2).
- 4 See Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 12–17.
- 5 Analysis in Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 17–28.
- 6 Boys-Stones 2018: ch. 5.
- 7 See Smith 1996; Remes 2008: 89–93 on time and eternity in “pagan” Neoplatonism, esp. Plotinus.
- 8 Smith 1996: 198–203.
- 9 Majumdar 2007.
- 10 Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 21–23 on Porphyry; 23–26 on Iamblichus.
- 11 Analysis *ibidem* 28–30.
- 12 Examined *ibidem* 30–33; Ramelli 2015a: 36–44. Further work on pagan philosophical notions of apokatastasis is progressing.
- 13 Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 37–49.
- 14 On Paul’s view of time, eternity, and restoration: e.g. Ramelli 2013a: ch. 1; “Relevance”; “Philo and Paul”; Still 2017, esp. ch. 1, by L. Ann Jervis on Paul’s view of time and Rom 9:1–13; ch. 6 by Jonathan Linebaugh on time in Rom 9–11.
- 15 Cf. 2 Peter 2:4, evil angels have been sent by God to Tartarus, “to be held for judgment”.
- 16 Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 82–240; see also Ramelli 2008a, 2009a, 2010, 2015a: “Αἰώνιος and αἰών”.
- 17 Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 82–225.
- 18 Ramelli 2013a: 773–815. Further work ongoing.
- 19 Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 108–116; Ramelli 2012b.
- 20 Analysis in Ramelli 2013a: 162–168.
- 21 Ramelli 2008a; Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 116–128.
- 22 Ramelli 2015a: 10–13.
- 23 See Ramelli 2008b.
- 24 Argument in Ramelli 2014b; a monograph on Origen in preparation, ch. 5.

- 25 See, e.g., Ramelli 2011b, 2015c; Dakovac 2016: 819; Suh 2018; Mikhail 2016.
- 26 Ramelli 2017b.
- 27 As argued in Ramelli 2018.
- 28 *Origen; Dialogue of Adamantius*.
- 29 See my “Clement’s Notion of the Logos”.
- 30 Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 142–157.
- 31 See also Grafton and Williams 2006, with my review in *Adamantius* 14 (2008) 637–641.
- 32 Cameron 1983: 71–88.
- 33 E.g., Louth 1990 hypothesised that the work was first published late in 313, reedited around 315, and finalised in 325/6.
- 34 See my *Bardaisan; Narrative*.
- 35 1Cor 8:13.
- 36 Characteristic of his usage is *Against Eunomius* 1.9.4, where, in reference to the Son, ἄδιος is made to correspond to ἀγέννητος and ἀτελεύτητος; “eternal” means ungenerated and imperishable.
- 37 Full analysis in Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 172–184.
- 38 This in turn partially depends on Origen. See Ramelli 2019a.
- 39 *Commentary on Matthew* 15.28;34.
- 40 *On the Soul* 48; *Making of Man* 23.3; *Against Eunomius* 12, where his adherence to Origen’s vocabulary is evident.
- 41 *Against Eunomius* I 361; GNO 1.133.27–134.8.
- 42 Full commentary in *Evagrius’ Kephalaia Gnostica*. For the debt to Origen, see my “Biographical and Theological Relations”.
- 43 Commentary in Ramelli 2013a: 162–165.
- 44 If people are said to be saved after this purification, then the latter cannot be “eternal” and αἰώνιος means long lasting or pertaining to the future aeon.
- 45 See Ramelli 2010 and full commentary in Ramelli 2007a.
- 46 Ramelli 2019a.
- 47 See Ramelli 2019b.
- 48 E.g. Gregory Nazianzen 5.25.136 = *Patrologia Graeca* 36.160D. On time and eternity in Basil and Nazianzen: Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013: 184–199.
- 49 *Ap. Solomon of Bostra, Book of the Bee* 60.
- 50 Matthew 25:46, John 13:8, Isaiah 13:20.
- 51 Ramelli & Konstan 2007/2013: 222–226.
- 52 See Vargas 2017.
- 53 Ramelli 2017a; Gerson 2018; a work on “pagan” theories of apokatastasis is in progress.
- 54 On Augustine’s treatment of time see Ramelli 2015a: 189–200; Karfiková, *Von Augustin*, 32–46 on Plotinus and Augustine on time.
- 55 Van Dusen 2014 interprets *distentio animi* as a “dilation” not of the mind, but of one’s sensory experience.
- 56 Ramelli 2013b; Heidl 2003. Further work is underway concerning Origen’s influence on Augustine.
- 57 Ramelli 2013b.
- 58 *Patrologia Latina* 42.669–678.
- 59 For Basil’s and Justinian’s passages analysis in Ramelli 2013a: 344–372; 731–732; for Justinian, research on the rejection of apokatastasis and its multiple causes is underway.
- 60 In the end, “the last enemy will be annihilated: death”.
- 61 Demonstration in Ramelli and Konstan 2007/2013.
- 62 Indeed, only *after* his rejection of the doctrine of apokatastasis did Augustine adopt a tripartition into hell, purgatory, and paradise. The evolution of his thought helps explain scholars’ disagreement concerning the presence of the doctrine of purgatory in Augustine. This seems to emerge e.g. in *Confessions* 9.13, *Enchiridion* 110, *City of God* 21.13, on *poenae temporariae* along with eternal punishment, and 21.24, on punishments that the souls of the dead suffer before resurrection. Augustine thinks that impious unbelievers and Christians who have sinned very seriously will never be released from punishment (*City of God* 21.24,27; *Fid.op.* 16.30; *Enchiridion* 69). He deems liberation from punishment in purgatory possible only before or after the resurrection, but not after the condemnation to eternal fire ratified by the final Judgment. In *City of God* 21.13, Augustine, after criticising the “Platonists” who denied the eternity of hell (*sempiternas poenas*) and maintained that suffering will have only a cathartic function, remarks upon temporary punishment (*temporarias poenas*) in the present and the future world.

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Creation in Early Christianity

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Introduction

The question of creation or cosmogony was central to Christians from very early on. This becomes clear from the fact that early Christian thinkers devote considerable space in their works in addressing this question. The task, however, turns out to be very demanding as well as the source of continuous debate among them. One source of difficulty was the close connection of the question of how the world (the *kosmos*) has come into being with the question of which the principles in the world are. Christians tend to see the two questions as part of the bigger issue of how God relates to the world.

In connecting the two questions, a cosmological and an ontological one, Christians continue the tradition of the *Timaeus*, a very influential text in antiquity and also the one on which Philo of Alexandria based his explanation of the cosmogony in Genesis. In this work, Plato investigates how the world has come about and speaks of a special kind of principle that accounts for its generation, the divine craftsman (demiurge; *Timaeus* 28b6), an intellect that crafts the *kosmos* by modelling it on the totality of intelligible Forms.¹ A further principle involved is the necessity (*anankē*), because the divine craftsman needs first to craft his materials, the four elements of Empedocles, earth, air, fire and water, using a formless medium (50c2), the so-called receptacle (*hypodochē*; 49a6). Plato speaks of the elements as “principles of all” (48b7–8), yet he names the demiurge as “the main principle of generation” (29e4), while he speaks of the Forms as being instrumental to creation (28a7), and he specifies that necessity is an “auxiliary cause” (46c7, 46e6).

The connection of the question of how the world has been created with that of the principles in the world was facilitated by the ambiguity of the term *kosmos*: it can refer to the earth,² the heaven,³ the sensible universe as a whole,⁴ or the totality of beings, including gods, intellects and souls.⁵ In the *Timaeus*, Plato speaks of the generation of *kosmos* in the sense of the universe, which includes sensible beings in earth and heaven, but also souls, including the world soul, which accounts for the world’s life and orderly motion. The principles, then, of which the *Timaeus* speaks, are principles of both the sensible and the intelligible worlds. This idea guides Origen to do the same in his *First Principles*, to speak of principles of the sensible world but also of souls, angels, and spirits – God is the creator of both the intelligible and the sensible realms.⁶

However wide the application of the term *kosmos* may be, though, its meaning clearly is order, good arrangement: the *kosmos* is the successful outcome of an ordering activity, expressed by the verb *kosmein*,⁷ an activity that reveals wisdom and goodness, as the *Timaeus* emphasizes (29ab, 29e1, 37a1).

The Platonist version of principles was appealing to Christians, as it had been already to Philo of Alexandria, who, as I have said, drew heavily on the *Timaeus* in his interpretation of Genesis.⁸ The reasons for this appeal are, first, the obvious similarity of Plato's demiurge to the creator God of Genesis. For while the majority of ancient philosophers agreed that the universe is marked by order, intelligibility and goodness, only Plato suggested that God creates the world by imposing on it these features from outside. Second, the Christians were attracted by the teleology of the *Timaeus*, the idea that the world is created as expression of God's goodness and is meant to be good and beautiful.

This view, however, was resisted by the Gnostics, who in one way or another maintained that the world as a whole or in large part is essentially bad. Marcion, for instance, probably claimed that "God . . . is the creator of bad things, takes delight in wars, is inconsistent also in temper and at variance within himself" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.25.1). For Valentinus and his followers, on the other hand, the sublunary region, which is created by the creator, is bad, while higher, non-created regions, are perfect.⁹ Marcion and the Gnostics distinguished sharply between God-the-creator-of-this-world, the God of the Old Testament, whom they considered ignorant, bad, irascible and envious, and a higher God, the Christian God of the New Testament, whom they considered wise and essentially good (Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 1.6). Both Platonists, such as Plotinus,¹⁰ and many early Christian thinkers fought hard against the view that the world is bad, the product of an ignorant and bad creator.

Both the advocates of the essential goodness of the world and of its essential badness agree, however, that the world involves features of both kinds: order, harmonious change, and virtue; and disorder, disastrous change, and vice. And they also agree that the world must be similar in character to its creator. Those who maintain that the world is predominantly good and ordered postulate a creator of similar nature that accounts for these qualities, while their opponents who held that the world is essentially full of badness paint the creator accordingly. Their common element is the belief that inferences can be made from the nature of the world about the nature of its principle on the grounds that the latter accounts for the world's essential characteristics. We find this tendency in the ps.-Aristotelian *On the World*,¹¹ which sets out to show that the universe is harmoniously and wisely arranged by God, who, however, accounts for the orderly universe not directly but through a power stemming from him (396b28–396b30). The treatise wants to teach is that God is responsible for the kind of being the world is and that he is constantly present in the world, albeit distant from it. This tendency becomes heightened with the Christians, Gnostics and not-Gnostics alike, who insist that the world is a reflection of God himself,¹² yet they disagree about what the essential features of the world that can be then ascribed to God.¹³ Tertullian, for instance, claims that God created the world so that he can be known (*Against Marcion* 2.6), and he further suggests that creation is the only evidence through which we know God (*On Penance* 5.4); it is the creation, he argues, that manifests the divine attributes, such as goodness, rationality, justice (*Against Marcion* 2.5, 7, 12).

It was the concern to establish such a relation between God and the world's constitution that motivated many Christian philosophers to focus on cosmogony. Irenaeus, for instance, suggests that denying creation amounts to erring about God (*Against Heresies* 1.12.1), for creation, he claims, teaches us what kind of being God is, namely wise, loving and providential (3.24.1–2, 25.1). This reasoning must be inspired by *Timaeus* 29e, which can be understood as implying

that the world's beauty points to a good creator as its cause. This Christian strategy, however, has its limits. For no matter how God's involvement with the world is explained, there remains the question of how badness occurs in the world, since the non-Gnostic Christians wanted to deny that God as the principle of the world is responsible for it too.¹⁴ Badness, however, is arguably also a feature of the world, and as such it needs to be accounted for.

One possible way out would be to opt for a form of dualism, namely the positing of two principles: God, who is responsible for goodness, and some other principle responsible for badness in the world. An alternative strategy would be to defend various forms of monism, which basically amounts to positing God as either the only or as the highest principle in a hierarchy. Either approach, however, is beset with serious difficulties. It was ultimately impossible to escape the horn of unwanted implications that God is either not completely powerful or not completely good. More concretely, Christians had to decide whether matter is a principle in the universe or not, i.e. whether it contributed to the generation of the world or not. The account of Genesis is ambiguous on this point. It can be, and has indeed been, interpreted in two ways: (a) that God created the world by imposing order into a primeval chaos; or (b) that God brought the world about from nothing (*ex nihilo*). On either interpretation, God is responsible for the creation of the universe, which is thus ontologically different from God.

The distinction between two ontological realms, of intelligible principles and of sensible, created entities, was primarily Platonic. The Christians sharpen this distinction further by distinguishing between ungenerated and generated beings, and they employ the term *ktisis* and its cognates for the latter,¹⁵ instead of the cognates of *gignesthai* (*gegonen*, *genētos*) of the Hellenic tradition. The latter terms are ambiguous as to the kind of causation involved, whether efficient, formal or final,¹⁶ which is why Platonists long debated about the sense in which God creates, whether in a literal sense of creation as generation by God, or in a non-literal sense according to which God is the formal and final principle of an always-existing world. The Christians wanted to make clear that God is the efficient cause of the world and that creation amounts to generation. They also wanted to make clear that God and world are ontologically radically different entities, which was not the case for Hellenic philosophers – in the *Timaeus*, the world is said to be a god, a view taken also by Aristotle, the Stoics and Plotinus.¹⁷ The Christians, however, were still facing the problem of whether matter exists eternally, as God does, or not.

The options were roughly two: if matter is ungenerated as God is and accounts also for creation, God's power and responsibility for creation is diminished. Besides, if creation is an act of God's goodness, his goodness is conditional on the existence of matter. If, on the other hand, God is the only principle of the generated universe and he also creates matter, then God is responsible for all the features of the world, including badness, which Christians wanted to deny. Furthermore, on this scenario there is the issue of how an intelligible being, God, can bring about matter, given their ontological disparity. Early Christians were initially split between the two options. Puzzlement also characterizes the first surviving thinker in the Jewish tradition, Philo, who addresses this issue in treatises such as *On the Creation of the World*, *On the Eternity of the World* and *On Providence*. In the first of these, Philo introduces two principles, an active and a passive one, God and matter respectively (*On the Making of the World* 8), which is reminiscent of Stoicism, but, unlike the Stoics, Philo calls only the former a cause (21). In his view, matter is disordered and qualityless (22), and creation consists in the divine act of ordering it (22–30). In *On Providence*, Philo argues that God makes use of the right amount of matter in order to create (*On Providence* fr. 1; Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel* 7.21), but it is unclear whether he considers matter eternal or created.¹⁸ This ambiguity also characterizes the first Christian thinkers.

I Justin, Athanagoras, Tatian, Theophilus

Justin presents what he takes to be the Christian received doctrine (1 *Apol.* 10.1),¹⁹ but his account on cosmogony bears the mark of his own philosophical mind. Justin maintains that God created everything out of his goodness and from unformed matter (1 *Apol.* 10.2), which he transformed (67.7). Such statements suggest that Justin takes matter to be eternal and devoid of quality, in which case creation amounts to the divine act of imparting form on to unformed matter.²⁰ Justin says explicitly that the view according to which everything has been created by God is Plato's doctrine (1 *Apol.* 20.4), and he rejects the relevant Stoic position, according to which no creation took place.²¹ Later, however, Justin claims that Plato borrowed his account of cosmogony from Moses (1 *Apol.* 59.1), and he repeats that the universe was made by God's word out of underlying materials (*ek tōn hypokeimenōn*). In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, though, Justin argues that only God is uncreated and what comes after him is created and perishable (*Dial.* 5.4–6). This passage has been taken to suggest that for Justin matter is also created, which would be at odds with the statements in the *Apologies* just mentioned.²² This, however, is not the case. In this passage of the *Dialogue*, Justin does not address the issue of cosmogony as such, nor is he addressing the question of the status of matter; the passage, rather, is part of the investigation into the question of whether the soul is mortal or immortal, and Justin's appeal to the *Timaeus* aims to show that the soul is immortal in the same sense that the world according to Plato is imperishable, namely because of God's will. The idea he defends is that God is substantially different from everything he is the cause of, including man's soul.

A younger contemporary of Justin, Athenagoras of Athens, also speaks of two principles, God and matter, and his concern is how to distinguish them (*Embassy* 7.1, 10.1). Athenagoras employs the image of the craftsman and his materials in order to illustrate the gap between the two (15.2). His imagery, however, suggests that he might well believe in eternal matter, although this is not entirely clear. This would make sense, since Athenagoras addresses Marcus Aurelius,²³ who, as a committed Stoic, accepted God and matter as distinct, eternal principles. Like Justin, Athenagoras also speaks of the Son of God as an entity through which God creates, and he specifies that the Son is the *Logos* of the Father in form and activity (*Embassy* 10.3).²⁴

Tatian and Theophilus argue unequivocally for the view that God created out of nothing and not from preexisting matter. In his sole extant work, the *Oration to the Greeks*, Tatian suggests that there are three causes involved in the creation of the universe, God, *Logos* and matter (ch. 5), a view comparable with the Platonist account of three principles, God, Forms and matter.²⁵ Tatian maintains that God has always existed and is the only entity without beginning (*anarchos*; chs. 4–5), while matter has come into being, and for that reason matter is not a principle, because only what is without beginning qualifies as a principle (ch. 5, ll. 24–27). Yet Tatian does not say that God created matter; he rather says that matter is projected by the creator (*hypo tou dēmiourgou probēlēmenē*). Most probably Tatian distinguishes two stages in creation, one in which the divine creator created matter and another in which matter is projected by the creator so that all beings come about.²⁶ This is possible in view of his reference to disordered matter (*akosmēton*), while earlier he refers to matter as being in a state of confusion. In the same context, Tatian clearly distinguishes between the creation of disordered matter and the ordering of matter. Tatian's view, according to which God created out of nothing else outside God himself, but in two stages, which correspond to the creation of matter and that of bodies, is still inspired by the *Timaeus* (e.g. 31b, 34c, 69b–c).

Although the account of the *Timaeus* is still very influential, Christian thinkers try to break away from it and develop a properly Christian theory of cosmogony because they want to escape from the problems associated with it, such as the question whether there had been an

act of creation, as they wished, or whether matter preexists creation. Theophilus is critical of the cosmogony of the *Timaeus*. He argues that the view according to which God created out of preexistent matter diminishes God's power by assimilating him to the human craftsman (*To Autolytus* 2.4). Theophilus maintains instead that God is the only principle (2.10) and claims that "God created all things whatever he wished and in whatever way he wished" (2.10). Theophilus, however, speaks in a way that implies the existence of two further causes apart from God, matter and God's *Logos*, both of which are dependent on God; matter was created by (*hypo*) God, who created the universe from (*apo*) matter (2.10) and through (*dia*) his *Logos* (2.10, 2.13), which is God's wisdom and instrument in creating the world. Theophilus' language does not necessarily imply two stages in creation, as is the case with Tatian. He actually warns us against a human, process-like conception of creation (2.13). His approach, however, still is strikingly Platonist, since, like Platonists, he marks different causal relations through the use of prepositions;²⁷ he distinguishes the efficient cause, the creator God, from the material cause and the instrumental cause, the *Logos*, yet in contrast to the *Timaeus*, matter here is dependent on God (and the *Logos*).

II Irenaeus and Tertullian

With Irenaeus and Tertullian, the question of cosmogony and how God is related to it becomes the most central issue in Christian thought. Their preoccupation with it is strongly motivated by their polemics against the Gnostics. Irenaeus' main work, *Against Heresies*, is a systematic refutation of the Gnostic accounts. In their polemics against them, Irenaeus and Tertullian target specifically the Gnostic view of God. According to this view, of which there were several variants, the creator God is not the highest God but rather a subordinate craftsman, who follows the orders of a higher God, he executes them, however, with little skill and shows little concern for his creatures.²⁸

Irenaeus sets out to argue against the view that there is a God above the creator and that the latter is a mere craftsman who takes orders from above and in this sense a product of deficiency. The thrust of his argument lies in demonstrating the goodness of the divine creator. He seems to believe that goodness is an essential feature of divinity that also characterizes God's creative activity. This is manifested when he says that "there is no God unless he is good, because there is no God without goodness" (*Against Heresies* 3.25.3).²⁹ Irenaeus considers God as revealing himself in the world through creation (4.20.7), insisting that "creating is proper to the goodness of God" (4.39.2). Crucial in this view of goodness is that reason is a necessary condition for goodness to exist.³⁰ For Irenaeus and Tertullian, God is good to the extent that he operates with reason and the evidence of creation illustrates precisely this. God, Irenaeus claims, created for the benefit and for the sake of man, that is, in order to lead man to salvation (5.18.1, 5.28.4, 5.29.1).³¹ Irenaeus stresses the ethical dimension in the creation of the world through which God becomes knowable to man and guides man towards him, which is a point already made by Justin and Theophilus, because he has a certain conception of goodness such that the latter consists in the exercise of reason and beneficial activity (3.5.3, 3.24.2).³²

Central in Irenaeus account of creation is his view that God creates through his *Logos* (*Against Heresies* 1.11.1, 2.2.4), God's Word and Wisdom.³³ He actually distinguishes between God the Father, Word the Son, and Wisdom the Spirit (3.24.2, 3.25.7, 4.7.3). Irenaeus argues, however, that God the Father is the only cause of the entire creation (4.20.4), since Word and Wisdom depend on God. Irenaeus actually claims that God created the universe out of his own substance: "And he took from himself the substance of things that were created and the model of the things made and the form of things ordered" (4.20.1). Thereby Irenaeus wants to suggest

that God created matter out of himself, although he expresses ignorance as to how this happened (2.28.7). At this point Irenaeus criticizes Plato along with the Gnostics for postulating a principle of creation outside God (2.14.2–4), namely matter, insisting that God created alone out of nothing and the creation of matter is not a distinct stage in creation either (2.2.4, 2.30.9, 4.20.1–2).³⁴ Irenaeus' claim that God creates through his *Logos* means to confirm that God realizes his will without resorting to anything outside himself.

Tertullian's position was also shaped by his polemics against the partisans of the view that God is neither the only source of the created world nor creator himself. His two main opponents were Marcion and Hermogenes, who represented two versions of dualism. Both Marcion and Hermogenes maintained that the creator God creates out of preexisting matter, which is bad (*Against Marcion* 1.15.4, 4.9.7), and this means that they postulated God and matter as necessary principles for creation, while Marcion also postulated two Gods: a higher one who is good, and an inferior creator. Tertullian's argument against Marcion is along the same lines as those of Irenaeus.³⁵ while his attack against Hermogenes is unique.

Apparently Hermogenes considered three options: a) that God made the world out of himself; or b) God made the world out of nothing; or c) out of something else, namely matter. If one opts for (a), then, Hermogenes suggests, one admits that the world is part of God. This, however, is impossible, first because God has no parts, is indivisible and unchangeable, and second, because if we admit that a part of God comes into being, this means that God does not always exist (*Against Hermogenes* 2.2–3), which is impossible. Option (b) is also impossible, because God is essentially good and creator of only good things, but the world is not completely good; rather, there are all kinds of evils in it, and this could not have happened out of God's own decision. There must be, Hermogenes claims, something else involved in the creation of the world that accounts for its bad features, and this should be matter (2.4). Thus option (c) is left.

Tertullian attacks Hermogenes's dualistic view step by step.³⁶ Given that Hermogenes equates matter to God by attributing independent existence to it, it is difficult to see on what grounds matter should be considered also subordinate to God, as Hermogenes claims (*Against Hermogenes* 7.3). Actually, on Hermogenes's view it is God who needs matter, while matter does not need God, and as a result, matter appears to be more powerful than God (8.1). Tertullian also tries to show that Hermogenes's thesis leads to contradictions. For if matter is bad and contributes badness to the world, as Hermogenes claims, the fact that God used it makes God accountable for the existence of badness (9.3–5) and shows God to be collaborator with badness (10.1–4). Such a view not only diminishes the status of God but also leaves unexplained the goodness of the world, which Hermogenes assumes. If matter remained true to its nature, the good features of the world could not have come about (12): either matter changed from bad to good by itself, or it contained elements of goodness from the start (13.1–2). In either case, God did not produce anything out of his own nature, and he is thus redundant (13.2). But this is an absurd view. Tertullian's final conclusion is that creation *ex nihilo* is the only view that does not lead to absurdities. Tertullian, however, does not explain how exactly God's creative activity should be conceived. Like Irenaeus, he does not tell us how God brings about matter and material entities. A certain theory of matter is needed here. Tertullian does not seem to have such a theory.

III Clement of Alexandria

Clement of Alexandria does not articulate a detailed theory of matter either, but he does offer a more articulate theory about creation. Apparently Clement sets out to defend such a view in a treatise on the origin of the world, which, if he wrote (*Stromateis* 4.1.3.1), has not survived. The aim of the treatise was to carry out the *physiologia* of the Christian Gnostic, that is, to articulate

what the Christian wise man should know about nature. Clement suggests that the *physiologia* amounts to contemplation (*epopteia*) and depends on the study of cosmogony, which leads to theology (*Stromateis* 4.1.3.1).³⁷ Such a statement indicates Clement's attachment to the *Timaeus*.

Clement follows the *Timaeus* in approaching the question of cosmogony through a distinction between the intelligible and sensible realm (*Timaeus* 27d–28a). Clement suggests that Genesis 1.1–3, which describes the earth as “invisible”, refers to the intelligible world (*Stromateis* 5.14.93.4–94.3), and only from i.6 onwards it refers to the sensible world. Clement also argues that the intelligible world is the model for the creation of the sensible world (5.14.93.4),³⁸ an idea that he credits to Hellenic philosophy, especially to Plato and the Pythagoreans, but he argues that Plato in the *Timaeus* follows Moses in maintaining that the world was created by God (*Stromateis* 5.14.92.1–4). Clement points specifically to the *Timaeus* first when he suggests that the world has been created by a creator who is also the father of the world, a reference to *Timaeus* 28c (5.14.92.3); second, when reviewing the ancient theories of matter in which it is classified as a principle (5.13.89.4–7), Clement singles out Plato's view according to which matter qualifies as “non-being”.

But while Clement agrees with this Platonist conception of matter, he disagrees with the Platonist view that matter qualifies as principle. Clement rather claims that in the *Timaeus* the only principle is God (*Stromateis* 5.13.89.6, citing *Timaeus* 48c2–6).³⁹ Clement's motivation is to show that Scripture and Plato agree in acknowledging God as a single principle in creation. The fact, however, that Clement accepts the view that the creator is like a craftsman (*Protrepticus* 4.51), has been taken to suggest that Clement considers matter as preexisting.⁴⁰ Yet the craftsman analogy does not necessarily imply acceptance of preexisting matter, as the case of Irenaeus mentioned earlier shows.

In an important passage in his *Protrepticus*, Clement stresses that God creates only through his will (63.3), and he distinguishes his view from that of early Greek philosophers who postulated a material cause (64.1–2). Clement makes clear that God's will is identical with his *Logos*, the Son of God, and he further identifies the *Logos* with the wisdom, power and will of God (*Stromateis* 5.1.6.3; *Protrepticus* 63.3), or with the wisdom, the knowledge and the truth of God (*Stromateis* 4.25.156.1). Like other early Christian thinkers, Clement makes the *Logos*, the Son of God, rather than God the Father, immediately involved with the creation (*Stromateis* 5.3.16.5).⁴¹ He claims that God's Son is the one “through whom everything was created” (*di' hou panta egeneto; ibid.*). Elsewhere Clement calls God “the principle of everything” (5.6.38.7), apparently of everything created, the “cause of creation” (5.3.16.5), or the “cause of all goods” (*Protrepticus* 1.7.1). Such passages show that for Clement only God is the principle of creation.

Clement, however, avoids a straight answer to the question of how God carries out the creation through the *Logos*. In a cryptic passage, he seems to be saying that the Forms are concepts of God (*Stromateis* 5.3.16.1–4), which suggests that the divine wisdom hosts the Forms of everything created.⁴² In the same context, he says that the *Logos* generates himself when he becomes flesh (5.3.16.5). But we do not have any clear evidence about how, according to Clement, God's wisdom realizes creation. The first to address this question is Origen.

IV Origen

With Origen, the issue of cosmogony acquires new dimensions, as he understands that there are at least two levels of complexity in it, the status of the Christian God as a principle of being and generation of the universe, and the implications of cosmogony for human nature.⁴³ The second concern arises from the realization that the question regarding the existence of evil in the world cannot be addressed unless one appreciates and adequately explains human vice. It does not

suffice to say, as Tertullian did, that God is not responsible for evils in the world but only man is. For man is part of God's creation. One must have a theory of man's creation as part of a general theory of creation, which would explain how man is able to determine himself and his actions; otherwise the blame for man's vice would still be laid, at least partly, on the creator.⁴⁴ Origen is the first to construct such a theory.

Origen's overall approach is characterized by the determination to clarify the content of the concepts involved in the enquiry. One such concept is *kosmos*. After listing various senses that the term admits, he claims that takes *kosmos* in the broad sense of "the entire universe and everything that exists in it", which includes the celestial and supra-celestial sphere, earthly and infernal regions, since all this is within God's jurisdiction (*First Principles* 2.3.6). The other important notion that required clarification, according to Origen, is that of "creation" in the specific sense of divine creation. Origen suggests that the proposition "God created the world" makes sense only if we assume that God created *ex nihilo*. The view of those who maintain that God created out of preexisting matter rests on a notion of "creation" that leads to absurdities. Origen tries to show which these are.

If we assume that matter preexisted creation, Origen argues, then we also admit that creation took place because God happened to have matter at his disposal; this means that if there was no matter, God could not have been a creator and thus a benefactor (in Eusebius, *Preparation* 5.2.20.2–3). Such a belief diminishes God's potency, freedom of decision and God's goodness (5.2.20.3), because God's goodness exists to the extent that God is beneficent, and on that belief God's beneficence is contingent on matter. Origen goes on to point out that the view of creation from preexisting matter is absurd in other regards too. For, he says, it is not the case that the world is created out of matter; rather, the world is created out of a certain kind of matter, informed matter, and there is no inert, remaining matter, as in the case of human craftsmen. Origen argues that the matter used in creation was not only of a certain quantity (*First Principles* 2.1.4) but also of a certain kind (in Eusebius, *Preparation* 5.2.20.5, 8). Matter, he claims, was plastic enough to admit of the properties bestowed on it by the creator (*Preparation* 5.2.20.5, 9). The ability of matter to take such different forms suggests that it is not a product of chance but of wisdom (*sophia*) and providence (*pronoia*). This explains why matter is of such nature and is characterized by measure (*First Principles* 2.9.1, 4.4.8); otherwise matter would not be able to contribute to the order of the world (*First Principles* 2.1.4). The fact that it does suggests that matter has a nature such that it contributes to the orderly arrangement of the world (in *Preparation* 5.2.20.4).

Clearly, then, it is God's wisdom on which the orderly arrangement of the world arrangement of the world depends. Origen appears to be speaking of two kinds of creation. The first is the creation of the principles, patterns and reasons (*initia, rationes, species*; *First Principles* 2.2.2) of all created things. It is in accordance with them that everything is created, in the same way that a house or a ship is built in accordance with some principles or rules and a certain model of house or ship.⁴⁵ These reasons are created by God and feature in his wisdom, in which all created things are prefigured (*First Principles* 1.2.3, *Commentary on John* 1.19.113). Origen identifies divine wisdom with God's Son, Christ (*First Principles* 1.2.1), who is said to be a principle of creation to the extent that he is the wisdom of God (*sophia*; *Commentary on John* 1.19.111).⁴⁶ For Origen, though, the most fundamental sense of creation is that of the creation of the patterns in accordance with which everything is made, since "it is because of this creation that all creation has also been able to subsist" (*Commentary on John* 1.34). Origen claims that the cause of this fundamental or primary creation is God the Father. To the extent that the product of this primary creation amounts to the contents of the divine wisdom, we understand why Origen says that God's wisdom, the Son, was created by God (*First Principles* 1.2.3; *Against Celsus* 5.39). The

term “created” is not to be taken literally here, since it applies to an eternal being (*First Principles* 1.2.4, 4.4.1). The term is rather used to distinguish between cause and effect.⁴⁷

Origen is careful, however, to name God in the singular as the cause of creation (*First Principles* 3.6.7); God and his *Logos* are distinguished only in terms of function – God is not a composite. The former is primarily the creator of the intelligible reasons, or the creator of being, and only secondarily the creator of the sensible world, to the extent that he acts through the *Logos*,⁴⁸ who brings about the sensible world. Origen maintains that the world as such is eternal, being a testimony to the divine goodness, but this particular world, given its sensible, corporeal nature, would perish. He thus distinguishes between the world that has always been there, that is, the intelligible reasons, and its ages or *aeons* of the world, which succeed one another in sequence (*First Principles* 2.1.3, 2.3.4–5).

However this is, Origen sees one considerable danger in his theory, which is that the principle of creation is accountable also for the badness in the world. As I said earlier, Origen is extremely sensitive to this idea, and his account of cosmogony is shaped by his effort to find a way out on this. Origen maintains that the diversity in rational creatures, including humans, in terms of natural features, talents and inclinations, is neither arbitrary nor the result of God’s decision, but rather due to the choice of individual intellects (*First Principles* 2.9.6), which are living beings (1.8.4). Their living amounts to having thoughts and desires for the good or the bad. It is the propensities they develop as disembodied intellects, Origen suggests, that determine their future embodied lives. On such a theory, God emerges as absolutely righteous, because he created all human souls equal and they are alone responsible for their fortune.

V Basil and Gregory of Nyssa

Basil and Gregory of Nyssa are particularly concerned with the issue of creation. Basil’s main work on this topic is the *Hexaemeron*, nine homilies exegetical of the opening chapters of Genesis.⁴⁹ Basil takes issue both with those who maintain that formless matter preexists creation and with those who argue that matter did not preexist but God is the creator of the world only in the sense that he is the cause of it. Against the former, he argues that such a view implies God’s inability to create alone (*Hexaemeron* 2.2), and he adds that matter, insofar as it is privation matter, cannot be a principle of something as good as the world.⁵⁰ The latter view undermines God’s ontological status as a unique entity and denies to him the exercising of his will. Those who portray God as a cause of a coeternal creation claiming that the world has come into being spontaneously (*automatōs*; *Hexaemeron* 1.17, 17C), imply that creation took place without God’s wanting it (*aprouhairetōs*; *ibid.*). On this view God’s being alone was sufficient for the world to come into being.⁵¹ This, however, Basil argues, is not what Genesis suggests. Basil claims that Genesis employs the term *epoiēsen*, “made”, and not *enērgēsen*, “actualized”, or *hypestēsen*, “brought about” (1.7, 17BC). Such a terminology, Basil argues, indicates the deliberate intervention of a willing divine craftsman. This does not have to mean that creation took place at some point in time. With regard to Genesis 1.1, Basil argues that the beginning (*archē*) of X is not yet X; neither does it indicate a tiny part of time, but a timeless moment in which creation takes place at once (*athroōs*; 1.6). Basil thus rejects a temporal interpretation of creation, arguing that creation took place outside of time. Time, Basil claims, came about with the world (*Against Eunomius* 1.21, 360ab), yet he argues for a temporal priority between God and the world (*Hexaemeron* 1.1, 4A).

The question, though, is to what exactly cosmogony amounts on this view. Basil argues that God created the heavens and the earth as the foundations and the limits of the created world (*Hexaemeron* 1.7). He claims that the world is a sum of qualities mixed with each other

(1.7, 20AB; 4.5, 89BD). These qualities in their mixture make up everything there is; heaven and earth are created in this sense. Thus, Basil argues, there is no need to assume a material substrate (1.8, 21B). Addressing the question what keeps these qualities together, Basil argues that qualities stay with the things they qualify because of God's power that consists in unifying them (6.3, 121C). Basil does not specify how God's power unites everything. Basil probably maintained that God creates by providing the *logoi* of all bodies and by keeping them together. Gregory of Nyssa will develop this theory further.

Gregory focuses on the question that neither Origen nor Basil directly address, namely how it is possible for an immaterial principle like God to create the material universe. An answer to that question requires an answer to the question of the nature of matter. Gregory of Nyssa takes up precisely this task. He maintains that matter as such does not really exist; what does exist, he claims, are qualities such as cold and hot, dry and humid, light and heavy, colour and shape, and their convergence constitutes what we call matter (*Apology for Hexaemeron* 69C). These qualities are not themselves of material nature; rather, they are concepts (*ennoiai*) or thoughts (*noēmata*) in God's intellect and have always existed in that form (*ibid.*). God did not actually create matter, but he rather created all beings out of the thoughts in his intellect. Gregory articulates his theory in his *Apology for Hexaemeron*, in *On the Soul and Resurrection* and *On the Creation of Man*.

In *On the Soul and Resurrection* (124 CD) in particular, Gregory argues that bodies are intelligible to the extent that they are made up of intelligible entities, the qualities or *logoi*, which are hosted by the divine intellect but also by the human intellect. While creation of sensible, corporeal entities amounts to the combination of the *logoi* of God, we, humans, in turn get to know these entities by combining the *logoi* that constitute them. Although qualities or *logoi* are presented to us united, we distinguish them nevertheless remarkably clearly. Our ability for such a distinction suggests to Gregory that qualities are also distinct in reality as constituents of matter. This, in his view, means that they are distinct in the divine mind too. In Gregory's view, God does not create by combining his own thoughts; rather, God's thoughts combine as qualities when they are out of the divine mind. For Gregory, it is an act of divine will that is primarily responsible for the establishment of the *logoi*. Gregory's idea seems to be that as soon as the *logoi* are established in God's mind they are projected out of it, and this amounts to the world's coming into being.

Gregory's answer, then, to the question of how an immaterial God created a material world is that the question is misguided, because the world is not actually material at all, but rather is constituted of reasons or qualities (*logoi*), which are generated in the divine mind and are recognized by the human mind.⁵²

Conclusion

The previous outline has hopefully shown how central and how complex was the issue of cosmogony for early Christian thinkers. It had implications and repercussions on several other topics that early Christians debated, such as that of human nature and especially on human freedom of choice, on the nature of evil, on ethics. The more early Christians realized that, the more sophisticated their positions on cosmogony progressively became.

Notes

- 1 On the *Timaeus*' cosmogony, see Cornford 1937; Johansen 2004, 2008; Broadie 2011. A good survey of ancient cosmogonical theories is that of Sedley 2008. For more details on how the *Timaeus* bears on the discussion about creation among early Christian thinkers, see Karamanolis 2013: 60–74.
- 2 Alexander for instance speaks of the “order [*kosmos*] that pertains to earth” (*On the Meteorology* 43.28–29).

- 3 See Anaxagoras DK 59 A 43, A 12, Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics* 1216a11.
- 4 *Timaeus* 27a5–6, 28b2–3, Posidonius in Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 7.138, Philo, *On the Eternity of the World* 4, ps.–Aristotle, *On the World* 391b9–10.
- 5 The Stoics define *kosmos* as “a system consisting of gods and humans and the things existing for their sakes”. See Chrysippus in Stobaeus, *Excerpts*. 1.184.8 (*SVF* 2.527).
- 6 Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.19, *Against Celsus* 5.39.
- 7 See *Phaedo* 97c4; *Philebus* 30c5; *Timaeus* 53b1.
- 8 On this issue, see Runia 1968.
- 9 On Valentinus’ cosmology, see Thomassen 2006.
- 10 I refer to Plotinus’s long anti-gnostic treatise, comprising *Enneads* 3.8, 5.8, 5.5, 2.9.
- 11 On this, see Moraux 1984: 6–77. Its date remains controversial (a date in the first or second c. AD is possible).
- 12 This was already pointed out in the Old Testament, Wisdom of Solomon 13:5. See further Tertullian, *On the Resurrection* 2.8, *Against Marcion* I.10.1–4, 2.3.2, 5.16, Athanasius, *Against the Nations* 44–45.
- 13 This tendency starts already with the New Testament (Acts 17, Romans 1.7)
- 14 Christians are in line with Plato on that (see e.g. *Republic* 379c, *Theaetetus* 176a).
- 15 The Christians do so from early on (Rom. 1:20, Marc. 10:6, 13:19) and later, e.g. in Athanasius’s *Against the Nations*.
- 16 On the ancient debate on the interpretation of the *Timaeus*, the standard work is Baltes 1976.
- 17 See *Timaeus* 34b1, 55d5, 69e3–4; Aristotle, *On Philosophy*, fr. 26 Ross (=Cicero, *Nature of the Gods* 1.33); Chrysippus, *SVF* 2.227; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.1.41–42.
- 18 On Philo’s interpretation of cosmogony, see Runia (1968) and (2003), esp. 136–139.
- 19 Cf. I Cor. 11.23, 15.1. Similar vocabulary occurs throughout *First Apology* (e.g. 14.4, 46.1); cf. *Second Apology* 4.2.
- 20 Justin uses the verb *trepsas* (“alter, change”). Similarly Philo, *Making of World* 21 uses the term *tropē* for the imposition of order in matter.
- 21 See May 1978: 124–125.
- 22 See e.g. Osborn 1973: 46–47; 2001: 66–67.
- 23 This is announced at the title of Athenagoras’ work, setting its date between 176 and 180.
- 24 See further Rankin 2010.
- 25 E.g. in Alcinoüs’ *Didascalicus* chs. 6–9 and in Apuleius, *On Plato* 1.5.190. See further Pepin 1964: 17–58.
- 26 See Runia 2003: 142.
- 27 See Dörrie 1976.
- 28 See Irenaeus, 1.27.2; Tertullian, *Against Marcion* 1.6.1, 3.3.23.
- 29 *si non et bonus sit, non est Deus, quia Deus non est cui bonitas desit* (*Against Heresies* 3.25.3).
- 30 Cf. also Seneca, *Letters* 66.12. See Osborn 1997: 95–96.
- 31 See Steenberg 2008: 6–7, 145–150, who stresses Irenaeus’ anthropocentric view of creation.
- 32 See May 1978: 168.
- 33 On this see Osborn 2001: 51–53, and Steenberg 2008: 62–71.
- 34 See Runia 2003: 133–151.
- 35 Tertullian’s polemic against Marcion is well outlined by Mejerling 1977 and by Osborn 2001: ch. 5.
- 36 On Tertullian’s polemics against Hermogenes, see Waszink 1955; May 1978: 143–145; Karamanolis 2013: 82–87.
- 37 See Lilla 1971: 189–191.
- 38 For similar descriptions, see Plutarch, *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus* 1013C; *On Isis and Osiris* 373A; Alcinoüs, *Didascalicus* 167.5–11; Apuleius, *On Plato* 1.192–199.
- 39 See further Osborn 2005: 32.
- 40 See Lilla 1971: 193–194.
- 41 On the status of *Logos* in Clement, see Edwards 2000: 159–177.
- 42 See further Le Boulluc 1981: 84–88.
- 43 On Origen’s cosmology see Tzamalikos 2006; Boys-Stones 2011.
- 44 This was already realized by Irenaeus (e.g. *Against Heresies* 4.37–8) and Clement (e.g. *Stromateis* 6.9.96.1–2).
- 45 *Commentary on John* 1.19.114; *First Principles* 1.2.2; *Against Celsus* 5.37.
- 46 On this passage, see Tzamalikos 2006: 84–85, 165–172.
- 47 Origen gives the standard example of such a relation between coeternal beings, the light as cause of brightness (*First Principles* 1.2.4); cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.4.2.27–30, Porphyry fr. 261 Smith. One

- could compare this distinction with that between first and second God among Platonists (Numenius fr. 16 Des Places; Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 164.31–3; Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.2.6.23–6). See Waszink 1969: 155–158.
- 48 On the metaphysics that is here involved, see Dillon 1982.
- 49 On Basil's interpretation of cosmogony, see mainly Köckert 2009: 312–399 and also Zachhuber 2006.
- 50 *Hexaemeron* 2.2. See also Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.4.16.3, I.8.5.23, I.8.911–914.
- 51 This is what Porphyry claims (in Proclus, *Commentary on Timaeus* 1.395.11–13 Diehl).
- 52 Gregory's cosmology has attracted much interest. See Sorabji 1983: 292–294; Karamanolis 2013: 101–107.

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Providence and evil

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Introduction

The issue of providence (Grk. *pronoia*; Lat. *providentia*) was ubiquitous and of chief importance in ancient Greek philosophy (Dragona-Monachou 1994). Already in Presocratic thought one sees the term *pronoia* used on occasion to describe not simply the human act of caring, but divine forethought for the world and human beings (Parker 1992). Plato, in *Timaeus* 29e–30b, emphasizes not only that the world has a creator, but that this creator is good, and has a faculty of care (*pronoia*) in the act of creation. While Aristotle, to the best of our knowledge, denied that God cares for human affairs, the Stoa identified God with divine creative activity, and indeed providence itself, even going so far as to refer to contemporaneous divinatory practices as proof of the existence of providential nexus called God (generally, see Frede 2002). ‘Providence,’ in short, came to refer to the gods’ various activities in interaction between the human and the divine – including the human *niveaux* occupied by cultic and political mediators. By the time that speakers of Latin began to adapt Greek thought into Roman idiom, the notion of specifically providential deities was axiomatic to Greek and Roman civic cult, and so arguments that the gods are in fact absent from worldly matters were often taken to be ridiculous and even dangerous (e.g. Cic. *Nature of the Gods* 1.3–4, Atticus, frg. 3.49–63 des Places). Conversely, Hellenistic autocrats were partial to calling their rule *pronoia*, a strategy taken up in early Roman imperial propaganda, which tirelessly promoted the emperor’s rule as *providentia deorum* (Martin 1982). When the translators of the Septuagint rendered the Torah into Greek, they used the term *pronoia* to describe God’s activity despite the fact that there was no such comparable word in their Hebrew source-texts (cf. Scheffczyk 1963: 11).

During the initial three centuries CE, the first Christians to practice philosophy were never distant from the apologetic project of presenting and explaining their emergent religion to the Roman authorities, fellow elites, and competing worshippers of the God of Israel (cf. Bergjan 2002: 81–83).¹ Providence was a subject about which they were forced to present very clear arguments, since it describes not just divine but earthly administration. Providence went directly to the heart of the (at times dangerous) choice to worship outside of the civic sphere, and one of the burdens of the apologists was explaining how God could permit the persecution of His followers (Minucius Felix, *Octavius* 12, 27–28; Tertullian *Apology* 5; Clement of Alexandria,

Stromateis 4.11; Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.70). At the same time, early Christian philosophers were also deeply interested in developing their own ideas concerning the providence of the God of Israel in tandem with the biblical texts they read and contested. While they were nearly unanimous on the question of divine care for individuals, they were deeply split when it came to the concomitant problems of theodicy its ramifications for understanding God's relationship to creation, as our evidence regarding the figures of Hermogenes, Marcion, and the Gnostics makes clear.

Omnipresent gods

While many philosophers agreed that the gods care, the questions of *which* gods care *for whom*, and *how much*, presented much occasion for disagreement. As often, the terms of debate were set by Plato, who in the *Laws* (900d–904b) presents the issue as one of care for the “whole” (*holos*, i.e. the greater scope of things, the entire universe) versus the “part” (*meros*, each and every little thing). The dialogue's protagonists entertain different possibilities, before settling on the thesis that “the supervisor of the universe has arranged everything with an eye to its preservation and excellence. . . . Creation is not for your benefit; *you* exist for the sake of the universe” (*Laws* 903b–c, tr. Saunders in Cooper and Hutchinson 1997: 1560, italics mine; cf. Louth 2007: 280). Stoic philosophers struggled with the question, presenting different answers at different times, although their approach was dictated by an overarching belief in God's involvement with everything (Bénatouïl 2009, esp. 36–44; Sharples 2003: 115 *passim*). Chrysippus argues that while providence is present throughout the world, it is present in some parts more than others, particularly with respect to virtue (D. L. 7.138–139 = von Arnim 1924, 2:634 = Long and Sedley 1987: 47O), and he likens the cosmos to a great manor that functions wonderfully, despite small problems (Plutarch, *Stoic Contradictions* 1051c = von Arnim 1924, 2:1178 = Long and Sedley 1987: 54S).

In more pantheistic moments, though, other Stoa focused on the immanence of providence. The grand sequence of causes, Marcus Aurelius marvels, conspired from the start to produce even the most minute individual experiences (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 10.5). The coexistence of these arguments within the Stoic tradition indicates diversity, but also that the question of providential care for wholes versus parts may really be one of perspective. Cicero's Stoic character ‘Balbus’ says that God cares not only for humanity as a whole, but for individuals as well – and then a few paragraphs later pivots, granting that the gods *parva neglegunt* (*Nature of the Gods* 2.164, 167, respectively). Similarly, Seneca states that the gods care for individuals, but not every little thing (*Letters to Lucilius* 95.50; *Nat. quaest.* 2.46). Nonetheless, it is fair to speak of a certain anthropocentrism to Stoic philosophy, especially Epictetus, insofar as the providential god is most present where there is human virtue (Frede 2002: 108; also Dragona-Monachou 1994: 4430; Bénatouïl 2009: 40; Karamanolis 2014: 155).

Christian philosophers are striking in their shared emphasis on the reach of divine care to individuals, even as they explored a variety of possible mechanisms. Justin Martyr mentions in passing a criticism of prayer as mutually exclusive with Christian belief in care for individuals, clearly taking the latter as axiomatic (*Trypho* 1.3–4; Pépin 1976; Burns 2014b). Similarly, Minucius Felix, in his dialogue *Octavius*, arms the critic Caecilius with Epicurean arguments to attack the Christian God's care for individuals:

Yet again what monstrous absurdities these Christians devise! This God of theirs – whom they can neither show nor see – carefully looks into everyone's habits, everyone's deeds, even their words and hidden thoughts, no doubt in a hurry and present everywhere; they

make him out a troublesome, restless, shameless and interfering being who has a hand in everything that is done, stumbling by at every turn, since he can neither attend to particulars because he is distracted by the whole, nor to the whole because he is occupied with particulars (*cum nec singulis inservire possit per universa distractus nec universis sufficere in singulis occupatus*).²

Caecilius's Christian opponent, Octavius, invokes the metaphor of a well-run household and replies that God's singular providence does indeed care for the individual parts of the world (*Oct.* 18.3–7; similarly, Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 7.2.8.3). Notably, the unique and monarchical character of providential rule is emphasized across a wide range of second- and third-century Christian writers (*Letter to Diognetus* 7.2; Origen, *Celsus* 4.99, 8.70; additionally, Herm. Vis. 1.3.4 (3.4)), as is the deeply Stoic notion of God's enveloping of the totality of the universe (Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 1.5; Athenagoras, *Embassy* 8; see Spanneut 1957: 325–327; Louth 2007: 285).

The specter of Stoic pantheism looms large behind these debates (Louth 2007: 283–284), and some Christian thinkers explicitly sought to distinguish their view of providential care for particulars from that of the Stoa. Clement of Alexandria argues that the divine administration (*oikonomia*) is carried out by a staff: “for regiments of angels occupy nations and cities – and perhaps some of them are established over individual persons as well.”³ Thus, God need not inhabit the body of the universe to act everywhere:

Nor do the Stoics speak nobly, when they say that God, being a body, inhabits even the vilest matter (*tēs atimotatēs hylēs pephoitēkenai*). . . . For the teaching which is in accordance with Christ deifies the Creator, attributes providential care even to particulars, knows that the nature of the elements is both subject to change and generation, and teaches us to devote our conduct to that power which brings similitude to God, and to welcome the divine plan as the directing agent of all education (*tēn oikonomian hōs hēgemonikon tēs apasēs paideias*).

(*Stromateis* 1.11.51.1–52.3)

Thus, the entire purpose of the studies of the ‘true Gnostic’ is to serve as a pastor, who, by caring for the flock, “actually preserves a faint image of the true providence” (*Stromateis* 7.12.70.7; see also Bergjan 2015: 85–87). Origen took up similar lines of argument regarding the implication of divine omniscience for God's character in *Against Celsus*, where he denies that the omnipresent deity of the Christians is simply that of the Stoa (*Celsus* 6.71), tarring his opponent with the brush of the Epicurean rejection of providence (*Celsus* 1.8, 1.10, 4.74–75; see further Bergjan 2001). Even so, Matt 10:29–30⁴ was a favorite prooftext of his, wheeled out in early and late works alike in support of divine care for individuals (*First Principles* 3.2.7; *Commentary on Romans* 3.1.15; *Homilies on Luke* 32.3; *Celsus* 8.70).

Origen's fondness for the sparrows reminds that, while Stoic arguments about God's omnipresence likely offered a useful framework for early Christians seeking to explain their ideas in a philosophical context (Scheffczyk 1963: 29, 39), their inspiration for doing so stemmed from the bible at least as much as the Greek philosophical tradition (rightly Louth 2007: 286). Such a dynamic is observable in one of Clement and Origen's favorite writers, Philo of Alexandria, who affirmed providential care for the whole and parts alike (*Special Laws* 3.189; generally, Frick 1999), identifying this care as most present when humans choose to behave virtuously: “Scripture says that they (i.e., the virtuous) who do ‘what is pleasing’ to nature and what is ‘good’ are sons of God. For it says, ‘Ye are sons to your Lord God’ (Deut 14:1), clearly meaning that He

will think fit to protect and provide for you as would a father” (Special Laws 1.318, tr. Colson 1929: 285. See Frick 1999: 172–173). The idiom is that of Deuteronomy, but the argument is one to which Chrysippus or Epictetus would have readily assented. Extra-philosophical Christian literature of the apostolic era, too, presents a view of divine activity the Stoa would have recognized. The oldest church order, the *Didache*, instructs (3.10, tr. Holmes 2007): “accept whatever befalls you as good, knowing that nothing transpires apart from God.” Marcus Aurelius could not have put it better.

Theodicies: demonology and dualism

While Clement was primarily interested in human actors as God’s agents in providential work, other Christian philosophers focused more on the mediating activity of superhuman beings. In his *Embassy to the Greeks*, for instance, Athenagoras of Athens states that

these angels were called into being by God to exercise providence over the things set in order by him, so that God would have universal and general providence over all things whereas the angels would be set over particular things.

(*Embassy* 24.3, tr. Schoedel 1972: 59)

The assignment of providence over universals to God and a lower sort of care over particulars to semidivine beings recalls Middle Platonic divisions between providence and fate (*heimarmenē* or *anagkē*) and their administrators – God and *daimones*, respectively – a model that goes back at least to the early second century CE (*inter alia*, [Plutarch] *On Fate* 572f–573f; see recently Sharples 2003; Opsomer 2014). Among the model’s purposes appears to have been the insulation of God from having to be (in the words of Minucius Felix’s character ‘Caecilius’) a “troublesome, restless, shameless and interfering being,” and from being culpable for the faults manifest in the everyday world of human experience (the ‘parts’ of the cosmos). *Daimones* run this part of the household, which helps explain its imperfection.

It may initially appear curious that the Middle Platonic model was not adapted more widely by early Christian philosophers. The matter is clarified by Athenagoras’s own discussion of the angelic administrators: the *daimones* of the Platonists were regarded by philosophers of all stripes as the gods of traditional Greek and Roman cults, and this was a problem for Christians, who regarded these same gods not only as subordinate, but as the malevolent forces hungry for the sacrifices rendered unto their idols (cf. 1 Cor 10:6–22; Justin, *First Apology* 5.2–6.1; Tatian, *Oration to the Greeks* 7; Russell 1987: 70–76).⁵ A popular explanation for the existence of such demons among Jews of the Hellenistic period was the myth of the fall of the angels (Gen 6:1–4), developed at length in the pseudepigraphic works *Jubilees* and the *Book of the Watchers* (*1 En.* 1–36). The *Book of the Watchers* was popular among Christian writers of the first three centuries (VanderKam 1996), but even the most casual hearer of Gospels knew that demons were agents of Satan, responsible for sickness and ill fortune, successfully combatted by Jesus during his life in myriad exorcisms (e.g., Mark 3:22–26/Matt 12:24–28/Luke 11:14–20; Luke 10:17–18). Athenagoras had to explain the relationship between God’s angels and the *daimones*, and did it with recourse to the myth of the fallen angels, as well as Deuteronomy 32:8’s influential account of God’s apportioning of worldly administration to “the angels of the nations.” Angels, Athenagoras writes, are responsible for their own behavior (see also Tatian, *Oration* 7.1), and while some of them have always carried out their duty, others were overcome by desire for human women, became wicked impostor-deities, spawned giants, and to this day tempt people to take up evil ways (*Embassy* 24.4–5; cf. Bergjan 2002: 316–324). Athenagoras’s discussion of fall of the

angelic administrators of providence was an influential one, quoted by Methodius of Olympus (*Resurrection* 37). Origen described demons as angels assigned to govern nations and individuals, but who became evil beings (*Celsus* 4.92; see further 3.35, 5.30–31, 8.31–36, 8.39, 8.70; Russell 1987: 133–135). Yet, Origen insists, it is not God who is at fault for creating beings as capable of sin; rather, it is the created beings themselves who are responsible for sinning (*Principles* 1.5.4–5; *Celsus* 7.68; so Russell 1987: 128; Scott 2015: 66–69). If demons are evil because they are capable of sin, it is sin, rather than demons, that is the ultimate source of evil.

Despite their flirtation with Middle Platonists' notions of daemonic administrators of fate, early Christian philosophers articulated the question of personal responsibility vis-à-vis evil in largely Stoic terms. One set of Stoic arguments (occasionally called 'concomitance arguments' – *takata parakolouthēsin*) hold that evil is necessary, echoing Plato's view that evils in the parts of creation are necessary for the good of the whole (thus Cic. *Nat. d.* 2.86–87). Chrysippus argues that virtue's existence is contingent on that of vice; therefore, there is vice (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 7.1.2–6 = von Arnim 1924, 2:1169 = Long and Sedley 1987: 54Q).⁶ Chrysippus's later detractors mocked him for having esteemed the providential benefits of bedbugs and mice (Plutarch, *Stoic Contradictions* 1044d = von Arnim 1924, 2:1163). Philo employs several of these arguments in his work *On Providence*, arguing that apparent evils such as the profit of wickedness or natural disasters are actually goods for the sake of the whole, which is ordered like a good household (*Providence* 2.3–22, 53–55; cf. Seneca, *Providence* 1.5–6; further, Dragona-Monachou 1994: 4457–4460; Frick 1999: 146). Similarly, in *Against Celsus*, Origen famously employs the 'concomitance argument' to explain biblical passages which identify God as responsible for everything, including evils (Job 2:10; Is 45:7; Micah 1:12–13), by way of comparing the experience of worldly evil to the wooden detritus and sawdust left by a skillful carpenter at work (*Cels.* 6.55; cf. Marc. Aur. 8.50; see also Russell 1987: 129). Dangerous beasts are not evil, but challenge people to become tougher and more courageous (*Cels.* 4.75; similarly, Philo, *Prov.* 2.56–61; Tert. *Marc.* 1.14.1–2). Platonic demonology could also be adapted to the concomitance argument: demons that appear to be harmful contribute to the whole, just as a public executioner, however fearsome, plays a role good for a city (*Cels.* 8.31; similarly Clem. Alex. *Strom.* 6.3.31.1; see further Karavites 1999: 42–43).

Another, related set of Stoic arguments focus on moral evil as distinct from the attendant problems of the natural world, thus isolating evil as a strictly human phenomenon for which humans alone are to blame (Chrysippus *ap.* Plut. *Comm. not.* 1050f = von Arnim 1924, 2:1181 = Long and Sedley 1987: 61R; also Marc. Aur. 8.55). Philo used such arguments as well (*Post.* 133; *Sob.* 60, 62, 68; Dragona-Monachou 1994: 4458–4459; Frick 1999: 168). This Stoic conception of evil was central for the first Christian philosophers (Karamanolis 2014: 156), who often rendered the question specifically in terms of sin and moral pollution. While some writers explained human responsibility for sin with recourse to the tale of the fall of Adam and Eve (Tatian, *Oration* 11.2; Theophilus, *Autolytus*, 2.27; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.22.4; Tert. *Against Marcion* 2.6.5, 2.9.9; Russell 1987: 83; Karamanolis 2014: 161, 164–165), others described sinful forces in more explicitly philosophical terms. Athenagoras does not describe demons simply as monsters, but as the external forces which trip people up and lead them to make erroneous decisions (Giulea 2007, re: *Leg.* 25), and Clement did the same (*Strom.* 2.20.110–11, 6.12.98.1; see Russell 1987: 115; Karavites 1999: 46). Origen, meanwhile, went further and adopted a privative view of evil, wherein sin is ultimately a participation in nothingness (*Commentary on John* 2.92–99; see Scott 2015: 24–25). A standard perspective in the Platonic tradition from Plotinus onwards (Opsomer and Steel 1999; also Scott 2015: 26–32), Augustine made the conception of evil as privative famous in his chilling exposition of his experience of utter abnegation when stealing pears as a youth (*Confessions* 2.8).

Plato, too, lay responsibility for unfortunate circumstances in the present life on human choices – made prior to birth. In several of his eschatological myths, he emphasizes that “the blame lies with the chooser” when the soul is in heaven, between incarnations (*Laws* 903d; see also *Phaedrus* 248d–e; *Republic* 617d–e; Alt 1993: 13, 123; Dragona-Monachou 1994: 4421; Frede 2002: 93–95; Louth 2007: 281–282). Some early Christian writers embraced the doctrine of metempsychosis, such as the author(s) of the Sethian Gnostic *Zostrianos*, a treatise known to Plotinus’s school (NHC VIII,1.42–44; Burns 2014a: 96–106). Others turned the Platonic position on its head instead: Theophilus of Antioch, for instance, argues that the Greek poets’ depictions of the afterlife serve as evidence of the wicked receiving their just deserts in the afterlife, and of the Final Judgement (*Autol.* 2.38; cf. also Bergjan 2002: 109–154).

Another Platonic theodicy which gained much wider currency in early Christian philosophy was the notion of matter as related to evil, owing to the *Timaeus*’s designation (30b) of matter as chaos in need of ordering by a demiurge. Some Middle Platonists read this passage next to Plato’s description of what appears to be an evil world–soul (*Laws* 896e, 898c), postulating a second active, causal principle responsible for worldly evil. Plutarch of Chaeronea explicated this view with reference to the Egyptian myth of Seth–Typhon’s dismemberment of Osiris, whose body is reassembled by his wife, Isis; the nefarious deity Seth represents the evil part of the world–soul, while Isis signifies matter (*Isis and Osiris* 370f; see Armstrong 1992: 38–39; Alt 1993: 23–24; Karamanolis 2014: 67). Numenius of Apamea also identifies a second, active cause in the cosmos, explicitly dubbing chaotic matter the evil product of a malicious world–soul (frg. 52 des Places; see Armstrong 1992: 39). In a passage preserved by Chalcidius, he describes how the second, demiurgic intellect is warped and split off from itself as it enters matter’s chaotic ‘field,’ in its providential enterprise to beautify it and form a world (frg. 11 des Places).

The influence of such Middle Platonic ‘dualism’ on early Christian philosophy is so well known as to constitute a cliché: the identification of evil matter with flesh, a central vector by which sin operates in Hellenistic Jewish thought, led many writers to determine the material or fleshly body to be a source of evil (for survey, see Fredriksen 2012, esp. 50–90). However, one ancient Christian philosopher, Hermogenes, stands out in having adapted a bicausal, dualistic physics closely resembling the models of Plutarch or especially Numenius (Greschat 2000: 173–191; Pleše 2014: 102 n. 2; Karamanolis 2014: 87). Our only significant source for the thought of Hermogenes is the treatise written against him by Tertullian.⁷ According to Tertullian, Hermogenes took as his point of departure the idea that the cosmos could have three possible sources: from a source coexisting with God, from divine nature, or from nothing (Tertullian, *Against Hermogenes* 2.1–4).⁸ He opted for the source coexisting with God: eternal, disorderly matter which God orders into a cosmos. There are therefore two active principles, eliminating the need for a *creatio ex nihilo*, which is exactly the position Tertullian seeks to defend (Karamanolis 2014: 83–85). A close parallel to Numenius emerges in Hermogenes’s statement that “it is not by pervading matter that He makes the world, but merely by appearing to it and approaching it, just as beauty affects something by merely appearing to it, and a magnet by merely approaching it.”⁹ Tertullian mocks Hermogenes on this point, asking “what similarity is there between God fashioning the world and beauty wounding the soul. . . ?” (*Against Hermogenes* 44.2), perhaps a confused allusion to Numenius’s description of the world–soul approaching matter in its effort to order it and so make it beautiful. Yet the point of Hermogenes’s speculations was ethical: it is matter that explains the presence of sin in human beings and their souls (Tertullian, *Marcion* 2.9.1–2; *An.* 1.1, 3.4, 11.2; Greschat 2000: 280; Pleše 2014: 102 n. 2).

Tertullian counters that belief in eternal matter elevates matter to the level of the creator, or even renders matter superior to the creator (although Hermogenes appears to have held

otherwise – Tertullian *Hermogenes* 4, 7.1; Theophilus, *Autolytus* 2.4; [anonymous] *Refutation* 17.1; Greschat 2000: 191–194). Interestingly, Tertullian’s argument is here bound up with one directed against “heathens” who believe that an absolute God may coexist with lower, inferior deities: “no, divinity has no degrees because it is unique; and if divinity is also present in matter, because matter is equally unborn and unmade and eternal, it must be present in both” (*Herm.*, 7.3, tr. Waszink 1956: 36). Rather, Scripture tells us that it is by Wisdom that God has made and ordered the world (Proverbs 8:22; Jeremiah 28:15 – *Hermogenes* 45). Yet Hermogenes did not only see eternal matter as necessary to explain a creation that is not divine, but to explain creation as a work of divine craftsmanship, in good Platonic fashion (Tertullian, *Hermogenes* 8.2–3; Greschat 2000: 277).

Controversies over creation: Marcion and Gnosticism

The complex of questions regarding providence, evil and personal responsibility was also central to early Christian philosophical discussions of creation. While the Platonic demiurge delegated creation of human bodies and the material world to fallible ‘young gods’ – taken by later Platonists to be *daimones* – the Stoic deity, the *logos*, is directly responsible for the creation it permeates. For many Christian thinkers of the second and third centuries, the identification of all creative activity with the preexistent *logos* was sure (Justin, *Trypho* 61.3, 129.3; Athenagoras, *Embassy* 10.2; Theophilus, *Autolytus* 1.3; Tertullian *Hermogenes* 33; idem, *Marcion* 1–2; Clement, *Protreptic* 63.3 and *Stromateis* 5.1.6.3; see Scheffczyk 1963: 16–17, 36; Karamanolis 2014: 86–89, 92).¹⁰ A problem for this group was the degree to which this identification put God’s own role as creator into question, or, conversely, implicated God in creation at the cost of transcendence. Origen, for instance, identified divine power (*dunamis*) with the Son or Word, and further with the pre-existent Wisdom (*Sophia*) by which He created everything (*Principles* 1.2.10; further, *ibid.*, 1.2.3; Origen, *Celsus* 4.98). By identifying this divine power with God *in a sense* – like “a flawless mirror,” he writes – Origen seeks to insulate the Father from the ignobility of mundane action while maintaining divine providence (*Principles* 1.2.12). This method of ‘squaring the circle’ of a deity who is transcendent yet providential contributed to the occasional outbursts of bitheism that pop up in third-century theology, like a climax of Origen’s *Dialogue of Heraclides*, written in the 240s:

Origen said: Do we confess two Gods (*homologoumenon duo theous*)?

Heraclides said: Yes. The power is one (*hē dunamis mia estin*).¹¹

Irenaeus, on the other hand, emphasized God’s singular creative capacity, describing the *logos* as one of his ‘hands’ (*Against Heresies* 4.20.1). Yet the bitheism of Father and *logos* does not appear to have been his concern, as much as a distinction between a ‘true’ God and a lower deity:

He alone is omnipotent and alone the Father who, by the Word of his power, created and made all things. . . . He ordered all things by his Wisdom. He comprehended all things, but himself alone . . . cannot be comprehended by anyone. He is the Builder, he is the Creator, he is the Originator, he is the Maker, he is the Lord of all things. Neither is there anyone beside him nor above him; neither a mother, as they falsely assert, nor another God, whom Marcion imagines.

(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.30.9, tr. Unger and Steenberg 2012: 100)

Other Christian writers, then, rejected a single creator-God in favor of a sharper division between the deity and a lower creative being – in this passage, the ‘second god’ of Marcion, and the Valentinian ‘mother,’ Wisdom.¹² The respective positions of Marcion and the Gnostics concerning creation and worldly evil are similar but not identical, and neatly clarified when rendered in terms of providence. For Marcion, our chief source is again Tertullian. According to Tertullian, heretics are obsessed with the problem of evil, above all Marcion, whose exegesis of Scripture led him to distinguish between a loving, superior God and a lower, vengeful deity: the God of the Jews, responsible for worldly evils and indeed for the creation of the cosmos out of matter (*Marcion* 1.2.2, 2.14, 1.15.4, respectively; see Pleše 2014: 102–103; Karamanolis 2014: 82; Scott 2015: 35–36). Tertullian also alleges that Marcion believed this same vengeful God to have created human beings, whom the loving God sent Jesus Christ to save (*Marcion* 1.23.1, 1.23.6–8; Norelli 2002, esp. 116–117, 122). While Marcion was occasionally pilloried as an Epicurean for having described God as demiurgically inactive (Tertullian, *Marcion* 2.16, 5.19.7), this is misleading. To be sure, Marcion appears to have employed Epicurean arguments denying providence (*Marc.* 2.5.1–2; Gager 1972), but only directed against the *lower*, vengeful god and his creation. The loving God is hardly a *deus otiosus* (‘idle deity’), but sends a savior to redeem humanity – the act of a providential God indeed (Norelli 2002: 119, 129–130; cf. Gager 1972: 57).

If the human race is, like the rest of creation, a product of the lower god and thus alien to the greater God, why should the divine act on humankind’s behalf? Unfortunately, the record is silent as to how Marcion explained this intervention of the loving God. The matter is more clear in the descriptions of creation and salvation history in the myths associated with the teaching of the so-called *gnōstikoi*, ‘knowers’ (on whom, see Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.29–30; Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16; Brakke 2010). One such myth is preserved in the *Apocryphon of John*, a compilation some of whose parts were known in some form to Irenaeus, and which survives today in two recensions across four Coptic manuscripts of the fourth–fifth centuries CE, indicating its popularity in antiquity (long recension: NHC II,1 and IV,1; short recension: NHC III,1 and BG 8502,2).¹³ Language about *pronoia* is widespread in this work, but also diverse. The theogony of the text, for instance, refers to *pronoia* interchangeably with Coptic nominal phrases that describe a “first thought” (= forethought) of God the Father (“Spirit”): the generative mother-deity Barbelo, who gives birth to the aeons that comprise the preexistent, noetic realm (NHC II,1.1.4–6.30 and par., passim). This complex of terminology about ‘forethought’ used to describe generation in the noetic realm has parallels in third-century Platonism, particularly Plotinus (Burns 2017: 38–41).

Then one of these aeons, Wisdom, unwisely acting “without the will of the Spirit” (NHC II,1.9.28–35), brings forth another being. Her progeny is the monster Yaldabaoth, who steals his mother’s generative power and creates subordinate angels to assist him in constructing his own heaven – a sad reflection of the true creation and heaven that precedes him. Ignorant of the aeonic realm, he declares, “I am a jealous God, and there is no other God beside me” (NHC II,1.13.8–9; cf. Ex 34:14, Isa. 45:5):

And a voice came forth from the exalted aeonic heaven (saying): “Man exists, and the Son of Man (exists).” And the first archon, Yaldabaoth, heard it, thinking that the voice had come from his Mother. And he did not know from where it had come. And He, the holy and perfect Mother-Father – He, the perfect providence (*pronoia*), He, the image of the Invisible one, (the image of) the father of the universe, in whom the universe came into being – He, the First Man, taught them; for he revealed his likeness in masculine form (*tupos* ‘*nandreas*). . . . And when all the authorities and the first archon looked, they saw the

lower part (of the abyss) illuminated; and thanks to the light, they beheld in the water the form of the image. And he (Yaldabaoth) said to (the) authorities before him, “come; let us make man after the image of God, and after our own likeness, so that his image might become a light for us.”

(NHC II,1.14.13–15.14)

Through her (androgynous) theophany, *pronoia* here inspires the creation of spiritual humanity, who is made in her likeness. Yaldabaoth and his archons grow fearful of the divine human Adam, and try to imprison and corrupt him in various ways, such as throwing him into matter, encasing him in a body, and implanting sexual desire in him (NHC II,1.19.34–20.9, 20.32–21.14, 24.26–34, and par., respectively). Each time, an agent of the aeonic realm intervenes on his behalf, particularly in the implanting of a rational faculty in him – a mythologization of the Stoic belief that divine care accompanies rational action (NHC II,1.20.9–31, 23.20–31 and par., *passim*). The long recension of the text glosses some of these interventions as providential (Barc and Painchaud 1999, esp. 330–331), and concludes with a remarkable “hymn” where the figure of Pronoia herself describes her three descents into “Hell” (the world) to save humanity.¹⁴

Ap. John presents us with an understanding of providence and creation that is entirely distinctive when compared to the theorizations of these issues presented earlier in this study: the world was created entirely apart from the will and care of God, but the divine realm intervened in the creation and subsequent fate of human beings, whose noetic or rational faculties are modeled upon the divine. This split in the reach of providential care – to human beings, complete with interventions in salvation history on behalf of individuals, but not to the rest of the created cosmos – has no parallel in the Greek philosophical schools, but is characteristic of other myths resembling the thought of the ‘Gnostics’ known to Irenaeus and Porphyry (Burns 2016; cf. Scheffczyk 1963: 19).¹⁵ Other evidence seeks to modulate this ‘Gnostic’ approach to providence and creation, such as Valentinian literature, where the demiurge is sometimes presented as an instrument of providence rather than a being functioning entirely outside of providence’s purview (see e.g. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.7.4; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 33.3.6; *Tri. Trac.* NHC I,5.100.31–32). Our sole complete, surviving Valentinian tract, *The Tripartite Tractate*, actually emphasizes that the aeonic error which ultimately resulted in creation was nonetheless in accordance with divine will (NHC I,5.77.6–35; cf. also *ibid.*, 107.19–28; see Armstrong 1992: 45; Pleše 2014: 113). *Ap. John* and other Gnostic texts also differ from the dualism of Marcion, insofar as they identify human beings in some way as native to the divine realm beyond the cosmos, rather than as alien to it (Brakke 2010: 96; Norelli 2002: 122, 124–125; cf. Karamanolis 2014: 64, 78). They also differ from the thought of early Christian philosophers discussed in the previous section, who identified various sources of the experience of evil without divorcing care for the world from care for human beings.¹⁶

Conclusions

It is thus meaningful to speak, from the standpoint of the history of philosophy, of a ‘Gnostic’ approach to providence and evil; similarly, one can sketch broad trends in early Christian philosophy regarding these same questions, distinct from the other schools of the day. A broad spectrum of early Christian thinkers appear to have affirmed divine care for individuals, a perspective held only on occasion by the Stoa, put at a distance by the Platonists, and rejected wholesale by the Peripatetics and Epicureans. A similarly broad spectrum denoted matter as a source of sin and evil, while identification of *daimones* with evil demons, stimulated by the popularity of

the *Book of the Watchers* amongst early Christian writers, led to ambivalence towards or outright rejection of Middle Platonic models where gods of traditional cult administrate providence. Again, theodicies popular among the Stoa, such as the concomitance argument or the assignment of blame for evil to humans alone, were favored by early Christian thinkers. Stoicism, rather than Platonism, furnished the primary point of reference for Christian debate about providence and evil in the first centuries CE.

At the same time, it is instructive to recall the social context for these debates. All early Christian practitioners of philosophy belonged, by virtue of their education, to the elite strata of society, and so much of their discourse about providence appears in apologetic contexts where Christianity is being explained by elites to elites, all of whom understood providence as the expression of not only divine but worldly rule. Other pockets of discourse, meanwhile – such as the Marcionite and Gnostic dossier – appear to concern more esoteric questions of Scriptural exegesis, often presuming an investment in Scripture one could only expect of someone on the spectrum of ancient Judaism and Christianities. The importance of social background to these various explorations of providence and evil is also crucial to understanding developments beyond the first two and a half centuries CE explored here: to take the example of demonology, Porphyry, presents ideas about *daimones* in his *De abstinentia* that appear to reflect his engagement with Christian (Enochic?) sources, even if he deigned to cite them (Timotin 2012: 208–215, esp. 213). Conversely, the Platonist view of ‘trickle-down’ administration of providence by intermediary entities was awkward for pre-Constantinian writers like Athenagoras to adapt, but unproblematic by the time of Pseudo-Dionysius’s *Celestial Hierarchy*, written in an era (fifth–sixth cent. CE?) when it was easy to superimpose a Christian imperial administration upon the ‘angels of the nations’ working in heaven. While the Platonic tradition shut itself off from explicit engagement with biblical prooftexts following Plotinus and Porphyry’s conflict with the Gnostics (Burns 2014a: 147–154), early Christian philosophers were permitted by their new social circumstances to appropriate and innovate the thought of the Platonists in novel ways (cf. Bergjan 2002: 264–306), even as the Stoicizing valence of their thought on providence and evil, so pronounced in the second and third centuries, receded ever further into the horizon.

Notes

- 1 In the interests of space, this chapter thus omits sustained discussion of post-Constantinian Christian sources. In any case, most – but not all (see conclusion later) – of the arguments regarding providence and evil in late ancient Christian writers (for whom see Walsh and Walsh 1985) go back to the period under discussion here.
- 2 Min. Fel. *Oct.* 10.5, tr. Rendall in LCL 250:341, significantly modified; see also Pépin 1976: 118 n. 33.
- 3 *Strom.* 6.17.157.5. Translations of this work given here are mine (text: Stählin 1960–1970). See also Spanneut 1957: 329; further, *Strom.* 6.16.148.6 (on secondary causes mediating universal providence).
- 4 “Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. And even the hairs of your head are all counted. So do not be afraid: you are of more value than many sparrows” (tr. NRSV; see further Louth 2007: 286; Scheffczyk 1963: 22).
- 5 Notably, the Platonic notion of *daimones* as administrators of providence was unproblematic for Philo (*Somm.* 1.140–141; *Opif.* 71).
- 6 Ael. Gell. *Noct. att.* 7.1.1–13 = von Arnim 1924: 2:1169–1170 = Long and Sedley 1987: 54Q. On this passage, see Bergjan 2001: 198; Opsomer and Steel 1999: 242.
- 7 See also [Anon.] *Haer.* 8.17.1; Eus. *Hist. Eccl.* 4.24.14.
- 8 This schema is also known from Plut. *Plat. quaest.* 1003a; Ir. *Haer.* 2.1–2; Clem. *Strom.* 2.16.74.1, cit. Patterson, *Methodius*, 43 n. 15.
- 9 *Herm.* 44.1, tr. Waszink 1956: 82; Greschat 2000: 198–199. For the parallel to Numenius, see Num. frgs. 11, 16; cf. Greschat 2000: 198.

- 10 The question is more vexed in Philo, who conceived of the relationship between God, the *logos*, and subordinate angels in creative activity in a variety of ways throughout his corpus. See Frick 1999: 73–87, 108–116; O’Brien 2015: 37–82.
- 11 *Dial.* 2.18–27, tr. mine, text in SC 67:58; see Karamanolis 2014: 95. Nonetheless, God qua God alone is to be regarded as a cause, and this is not bicausality, in Origen’s view (so Karamanolis, op. cit. 95, re: *Princ.* 3.6.7).
- 12 See also Just. Mart. *Dial.* 35.4–6; Ir. *Haer.* 4.18.4, 4.27.4; Karamanolis 2014: 78–79.
- 13 Translations of *Ap. John* are my own, with reference to the Coptic text in Waldstein and Wisse 1995.
- 14 Another Nag Hammadi treatise is a revelation-discourse where this same figure (here called “First Thought,” *Prōtennoia*) narrates her descents on humanity’s behalf (*Three Forms* NHC XIII,1*). See further Burns 2017: 45–48.
- 15 It appears to have also been recognized by Plotinus, to whom it appears to have made little sense (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 16.15–17; see Burns 2014a: 88–94).
- 16 This is not to say that Gnostic literature did not explore ‘non-Gnostic’ theodicies – *Ap. John*, for instance, includes a narrative of the angels’ descent to seduce human women dependent on the *Book of the Watchers* (NHC II,1.29.17–30.11 and par.), even though a further explanation for the introduction of sin into the world beyond the evil demiurge is perhaps superfluous. The same work (as well as *Orig. World* NHC II,5) appears indebted to the tripartite model of gradated providence of the Middle Platonists (Williams 1992).

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History as the assurance of things hoped for

In the preface to his 1889 translation of Christoph Ernst Luthardt's *History of Christian Ethics*, William Hastie welcomes the 'methodical cultivation of Christian Ethics' as one of the achievements of the modern German research university.¹ Every age, says Hastie, faces its own ethical problems, and '[t]he student of Christian Ethics is thus thrown back upon the whole historical movement as the natural enlargement of his own individuality and experience'.² Only by studying the past can Christians understand what Christian ethics should be today.

Luthardt's pioneering survey gives an account of Christian ethics as a system, together with its main themes, in its complex cultural context. Volume 1 begins with Greek philosophy, the 'popular moral theory' of Rome, Buddhism, and ancient Israelite religion, before treating the New Testament, the early Church, and the Middle Ages. Luthardt considers the shape and logic of patristic thinking: how human beings relate to God and nature, and how those relationships shape the possibilities for right human attitudes and actions. Examining a huge range of Christian (including 'Gnostic') writings, he identifies the major concerns of early churches as including love, covetousness, patience, marriage, celibacy, humility, and murder. He sums up the 'moral state of the ancient Church' as characterized by the cultivation of charity, a positive attitude towards slaves, protection of the poor, the care of orphans and foundlings, asceticism, and a general concern with palliating the evils of this world.³

Luthardt's inductive reading of the sources leads him to discuss a wide range of topics, to take an interest in the structures and processes of ethical thinking, and to reflect on Christianity's evolving relationship with its environment. His approach raises the questions how we define early Christian ethics and what we should include in a volume on early Christian philosophy.

The study of ethics is the study of how individuals and groups discuss how they should live: what, for instance, it is right or good, sweet or desirable, necessary or possible to do, and why.⁴ Ethics is studied especially within philosophy, theology, history, anthropology, and sociology. Sometimes these disciplines seek to distinguish their subject matter from that of their neighbours', and sometimes they treat the same material in different ways.

In a volume about Christian philosophy, should our sources meet certain criteria of intellectual sophistication, determined by themselves or us (so that, for instance, Augustine's *On the*

Trinity might be included but the *Didache* or *Sentences of Sextus* excluded)? Should works with a strong interest in the practical application of their ideas be included or not? Modern academic philosophy does not tend to preach, but ancient philosophers frequently did, and most, if not all early Christian writers had an interest in the practical application of ethical ideas.

Where should we draw the boundary between philosophical ethics and ethics as an aspect of social life and thought, or is drawing any such boundary in early Christian thinking unjustified? When Clement of Alexandria, for instance, calls *pistis* a virtue (*Strom.* 2.1), he catches the attention of philosophers, but in the same chapter he calls *pistis* the beginning of Christian action. When he tells a wife that she is helping her husband in *pistis* by fulfilling her sexual obligations to him (*Strom.* 3.18.108), he catches the attention of historians, but for Clement a wife's behaviour is as theologically based as any other consequence of *pistis*. Which do we include in a study of Christian philosophy?

Should we take the disciplinary affiliations of modern scholars into account in deciding what to discuss? When Peter Brown writes about Augustine's view of the body, his approach is historical; when Rowan Williams writes about it, his approach is theological: should we include only the latter, or both? Should we prefer an 'insider' or 'outsider' approach to the material, or make use of both?⁵ 'Insider' approaches tend to focus on topics of current Christian concern and how patristic writings may shed light on them; 'outsider' approaches seek to understand patristic writings on their own terms, in historical context.⁶ Both approaches have long pedigrees in modern scholarship, but not all scholars would validate both.⁷

What follows will take an inclusive approach to both ancient and modern writing. I will assume that all early Christian writers understand right Christian attitudes, actions, and relationships as rooted in the salvific relationship between God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, and the faithful. As such, all early Christian ethical thinking, however sophisticated or otherwise, is rooted in theological thinking, and theological thinking is at least informally or implicitly philosophical, in the sense that it seeks a coherent understanding of the divine-human relationship. I shall include in the discussion the large body of recent scholarship that takes a historical and sociological approach to the sources, because it discusses ethical topics which early Christian writers would have recognized as theologically and philosophically grounded. What this chapter cannot do, however, is to offer a systematic, up-to-date account of patristic ethics of the kind which Luthardt pioneered, because Luthardt's and Hastie's enthusiasm for the subject proved to be a false dawn.

By 1890, patristic ethics seemed poised to become a major field of research. Several other monographs, less ambitious in scale than Luthardt's but similar in approach, appeared around the same time.⁸ A flurry of more detailed studies followed the discovery of the *Didache* in 1873 and the *Apology of Aristides* in 1878.⁹ Then, for several decades, very little happened. A handful of essays emerged comparing early Christian with Stoic ethics.¹⁰ The interwar years provoked some writing on two consuming contemporary concerns, war and sex, which referred to early churches.¹¹ Scholars of Augustine took an increasing interest in his moral theology.¹² But it became a *topos* of patristic scholarship to lament how little work had yet been done on ethics. H. H. Scullard regrets it in 1907.¹³ In 1912, Ernst Troeltsch claims that he felt compelled to write a history of early Christian ethics because none existed.¹⁴ In his preface to *Ethical Patterns in Early Christian Thought*, Eric Osborn quotes Ian Ramsey, in 1966, asserting the urgent need for a study of early Christian moral theology as a basis for modern principles.¹⁵ In 2008, Francine Cardman, writing on early Christian ethics for the *Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, could still describe ethics as an emerging field with, as yet, no clear parameters.¹⁶

For Osborn, the major difficulty is the sheer volume of patristic writing (though this has not noticeably deterred scholars from studying patristic theology). His solution is to identify what

he argues are four key ‘ethical patterns’ in early Christian thinking – righteousness, discipleship, faith, and love – and to sample them in the writings of Clement of Alexandria, Basil the Great, John Chrysostom, and Augustine. Osborn’s approach proved fruitful and has been followed by most scholars since the 1960s. The study of early Christian ethics is currently largely the study of a limited number of themes which are seen as important both in early churches and today.¹⁷

Rather than devoting the rest of this chapter to a survey of the field as it stands,¹⁸ I will trace recent developments relatively briefly before turning to some of the developments in adjacent disciplines which might productively inform future research. In the last section, I will suggest how study of this vast, fascinating, and centrally important aspect of early Christian thought and practice might evolve in the next generation.

Recent developments in patristic ethics

The second significant phase in the study of early Christian ethics was prefigured by Troeltsch and the History of Religion School which, informed by the new discipline of sociology, treated ethical thinking in the context of the social and institutional evolution of Christian communities. It developed substantially, however, in the 1960s. Several tides in scholarship and wider society converged to create the new wave. Historians were becoming increasingly interested in late antique history, including in Christian institutions, patterns of behaviour, and social relations. Women’s history, the history of the body, and the history of gender and sexuality were gaining recognition as new fields. From the 1950s, liberation theology began to give a voice to the poor and oppressed; churches, especially the Roman Catholic Church, responded with increasing interest in a range of ethical issues, from justice and peace to wealth and equality, and sought foundations for their thinking in New Testament and patristic writings.¹⁹

The bulk of scholarship over the past fifty years has clustered around a small group of topics with their roots in the social and intellectual concerns of the 1960s: notably the body and sexual ethics; the lives of women; wealth and poverty; euergetism; sin and repentance; and the justice of war. Most, though not all, of these are also major topics of discussion in patristic writings, but between them they by no means offer a comprehensive picture of early Christian ethical thinking. Recent years have seen relatively little interest, for example, in such topics as faith, love, obedience, and humility and also relatively little interest in the foundations and logic of ethical ideas which connect them with theology and ecclesiology.

In studies of early Christian women, ethics is largely subsumed under what has become a large and complex field encompassing studies of women’s lives and representations of women, virginity, marriage, martyrdom, monasticism, asceticism, wealth, power, privilege, and dress.²⁰ Most of this work identifies itself as belonging to social history rather than the history of ethics, though it deals constantly with discourses about how women should behave. The study of early Christian women is also, of course, part of women’s history, and as such takes a nuanced approach to power, exploring how various Christian styles of life affected women’s power, status, or freedom in relation to their families, churches, and wider society.

Scholarship on the body and asceticism took a leap forward with Peter Brown’s *The Body and Society*, which linked ideas about the body, asceticism, marriage, virginity, martyrdom, spirituality, politics, and society in a characteristically bold and influential synthesis.²¹ Brown’s view of Christian understandings of the body as highly political, first challenging Greek and Roman values and behaviours and later reimagining them, has informed almost all subsequent work.²² Recent writing has often focused on individual authors and works, from the apocryphal gospels to the Cappadocian Fathers, adding to our understanding of their thought and sometimes connecting it more closely with their theology.²³

In contrast with both the study of Christian ideas about gender and the study of Greek and Roman sexuality, which has become a large field since the publication of Foucault's *History of Sexuality*, rather few studies explore patristic ideas about sexuality or the erotic.²⁴ The reason lies at least partly in the location of contemporary discussions about sexuality. Much of the keenest debate focuses on homosexuality in the modern sense, and has taken place in reformed churches, above all churches which identify as evangelical. These take a high view of the authority of scripture, and in debate appeal to the Bible rather than to patristic writings.²⁵

Another field in which Catholic social thought has fostered interest, and which Peter Brown has helped to shape in a series of monographs, is that of early Christian thinking about poverty, wealth, and euergetism.²⁶ The broad outlines of patristic thinking here are reasonably clear: spiritual wealth is superior to temporal; poverty of spirit is always to be embraced; material poverty is to be embraced in certain contexts, such as monasticism, though it is never preached for all; those who are unavoidably poor should be supported by their communities. Within these outlines, recent studies have revealed both how complex a phenomenon poverty is in the world Christians inhabited, and how nuanced patristic thinking about it can be. They have shown how care for the poor becomes especially the responsibility of bishops, and drawn out both the similarities and many subtle differences between mainstream Greek and Roman euergetism and Christian almsgiving.²⁷ Connected with writing about poverty, though properly a topic in its own right, is slavery, where writing has focused on locating early Christian ideas of slavery in their contemporary context to help us separate ancient from modern perspectives.²⁸

Sin and repentance are central to Christian thinking from the beginning of the tradition, and sin and repentance among community members continue to be concerns throughout the patristic period, even when crises such as the Donatist controversy do not throw them into high relief. As Allan Fitzgerald has observed, given the importance of the topic for early Christians, the wide range of attitudes to it in early writings, and the volume of scholarship on it in New Testament studies, it is surprising that more has not been written on sin and repentance in early churches. Fitzgerald characterizes the trend in patristic thinking as broadly moving from severity to mercy.²⁹ Subsequent scholarship has focused on the complexity of ideas in individual authors and writings, and sought tentatively to identify other longer-term trends in thinking.³⁰

Early Christian attitudes to war are also very varied, and – until Augustine's discussion of just war – less heavily theologized than many ethical themes. They have attracted attention, nevertheless, because war and peace are key topics of contemporary ethical debate.³¹ Augustine's writing about war has been discussed extensively since the early twentieth century, and linked, among other themes, with his theologies of love, freedom, penitence, and social justice.³² In the early twenty-first century, discussions of just war have been extended to inform discussions of new practices of espionage and counter-terrorism.³³

A list of topics, identified by Luthardt and his contemporaries as important to patristic writers, which have subsequently been relatively little discussed, or which have been discussed as part of theology or political thought rather than ethics, would be long and (at least superficially) centrifugal; it might include, for example, evil, love, the just society, corruption in public life, and the common good. A number of studies explore early Christian ideas of free will, which is treated as part of ethics by Greek philosophers.³⁴ A great many studies touch on ethical themes in the course of discussing an author's or a work's theology: the list of Augustinian studies, alone, that could come under this heading would be enormous. A handful of studies pursue themes and debates which are important in the New Testament – such as whether *pistis Iēsou Christou* carries an ethical meaning – into the patristic period, more with the aim of illuminating New Testament usage than because the topic is central to later writings.³⁵

Recent scholarship has tended not to share the interest of the early generation in investigating the internal logic of Christian ethics or explicating its relationship with theology. There has, though, been some interest in the moral reasoning of individual writers and in the Church fathers' use of scripture as a basis for their views.³⁶ There continues to be a good deal of interest in the relationship between Christian and Greek philosophical ethics, and since philosophers are deeply interested in the coherence or otherwise of Greek thinking, these studies point to ways in which Christian thought may be more or less systematic. The steady growth of interest in virtue ethics in philosophy has prompted some studies of early Christian thinking as a form of virtue ethics.³⁷

In addition to studies whose primary focus is early Christian writings and society themselves, patristic writings have been invoked (with more or less nuance and more or less attention to their original context) in support of a wide range of contemporary ethical concerns. These include the ethics of big business, markets, and management,³⁸ economics,³⁹ evolution and ecology,⁴⁰ and the treatment of disabilities.⁴¹ A significant number of doctoral theses have also been written in the past decade, especially in Europe and North America, on aspects of patristic ethics, which suggests that the subject may gain more momentum in the next generation. Most of these take up familiar subjects (women's lives; asceticism; poverty) and follow well trodden paths of analysis, but a handful are notable for striking out in new directions: among them studies of Augustine's moral reasoning, John Chrysostom's ethical relationship with his congregations, and second and third century treatments of suffering.⁴²

Developments in related disciplines

Away from patristics, the study of ethics has evolved significantly in recent decades in a number of fields relevant to the study of early Christianity.

The relationship between Christian ethics and Hellenistic philosophy has interested scholars since the nineteenth century, and recent studies have compared diverse aspects of Stoic, Platonist and Cynic with Christian ethical thinking.⁴³ It is now well recognized that for many Greek philosophers, philosophy is not only a way of thinking but a way of life – even a way of spiritual life – which often involves following in the footsteps of a charismatic leader.⁴⁴ There is scope for exploring further the parallels and interactions between philosophical schools and early churches. George Boys-Stones' *Post-Hellenistic Philosophy*, for example, sheds new light on the relationship between history, genealogy, and intellectual debate, by showing how philosophical schools invoke myths and traditions about wise individuals and groups to validate philosophical positions, very much as Jews and Christians do.⁴⁵

A handful of studies of early Christian ethics have compared them with ancient or modern versions of 'virtue ethics',⁴⁶ but no study that I know of has made use of the relatively new and fast-growing field of the 'ethics of care'.⁴⁷ The ethics of care begins from the recognition that human beings are created and nurtured in and by relationships.⁴⁸ Care is fundamental to human life and flourishing, and as such is argued to be the fundamental human good. The theory recognizes that human beings have different kinds and degrees of interdependence and care for one another, and that one's position in a caring relationship determines much of what else is good or bad for one. A child or an elderly person who is being looked after, for example, may have less power of self-determination than does an adult who does not need looking after, and this may be appropriate and good.

The ethics of care has obvious potential as a model for thinking about Christian ethics, which is based on human beings' foundational relationship with the God who created them, saves, and continues to sustain them. What constitutes a good attitude or activity for a Christian

is by definition what (re)creates and maintains a good relationship with the triune God, and with other parts of God's creation. Exploring Christian ethics as decisively shaped by these relationships has the potential to shed new light on early Christian thinking.

In the past half-century, ethics has become a major field of anthropology. The foundations were laid by Ruth Benedict in *Patterns of Culture*, Mary Douglas in *Purity and Danger*, and by theologian Abraham Edel and anthropologist May Edel in *Anthropology and Ethics*.⁴⁹ All four are interested in the socially specific shape of ethical systems in different societies: where ethical ideas come from, what the key ideas and terms are in different societies, and how ethics relate to other social structures and cultural practices. All take for granted that ethical ideas are acknowledged and articulated not only by social, intellectual, or religious elites, but up and down the social scale. They are interested in the many forms in which ethical ideas are transmitted, including proverbs, injunctions, metaphors, myths, and fables, and in how members of a society use such material to reason with. Their approaches have been adopted widely by anthropologists and sociologists. Some of these have also taken an interest in the role of time and place in morality, and in the dynamics of power between those who assume responsibility for the ethics of a social group – such as rulers, priests, intellectuals, interpreters of texts – and other members of the group.⁵⁰ Many of the themes explored by anthropologists have been touched on in studies of early Christian ethics, but there is scope for them to be much more thoroughly explored.

In a recent study, I adapted the methods of ethical anthropology to the study of Roman 'popular' morality: the ethics of those below the level of the social and intellectual elites who wrote most of our surviving texts. *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire* looks for patterns in sub-elite moral thinking: which values, for instance, are central or peripheral and which are validated, regarded as important but problematic, or marked negatively. It explores the terminology of popular moral thinking, which distinguishes between absolute, natural, social, and functional goods, and the wide range of moral authorities to which sub-elite sayings and stories appeal. It considers sub-elite understandings of time, which include a strong doctrine of the *kairos*, the 'right time' which, if one responds rightly to it, may radically change one's situation and prospects. These ideas are the common currency of Greek and Roman society under the principate.⁵¹ Characteristic of sub-elite groups, and in many cases almost certainly arising in them, they also 'trickle up' to influence the ethical thinking of philosophers.⁵² As such, they form a large part of the ethical background and assumptions of early Christians, and are as significant as Hellenistic philosophy as context for Christian thinking.

In the past two generations, there has been increasing interest in the ethical thinking of Hellenistic and Roman civic elites, especially as expressed epigraphically: in records, for instance, of interstate diplomacy, in honorific inscriptions, and on tombstones; in city centres, religious centres, and necropoleis. Richmond Lattimore's groundbreaking *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs* drew on sources from across the classical world and revealed their often widely shared attitudes to family, fortune, fate, and death.⁵³ Elizabeth Forbis' study of the language of virtue and praise in honorific inscriptions and patronage lists of the early principate shows how distinctive patterns may emerge in the ethical thinking of certain groups.⁵⁴ An ongoing series of studies explores networks of ethical thinking in the cities of Asia Minor, from where particularly rich evidence survives.⁵⁵

Comparing groups of inscriptions from around the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean – whether by location, date, or genre – and setting them against literary evidence of different social groups, including philosophers and sub-elites, has changed and enriched our understanding of the ethical landscape in which Christianity developed. This material now forms essential context for students of early Christianity as they investigate what was conventional or unconventional, familiar or radically novel about Christian ethics. In *Against Apion* (2.170–171),

Josephus strikingly asserts that Moses did not make piety (*eusebeia*) a department of virtue (as, he implies, it is for the Greeks), but made the virtues parts of piety.⁵⁶ For Jews, it is devotion to God – which Josephus might equally have characterized as love, obedience, service, or worship – that is the focus of the human side of the divine–human relationship. If Josephus had Greek philosophy in mind when he made the comparison, it is not unfair, though one might argue that, in the context of cult practice, piety, or worship dominates Greeks’ and Romans’ sense of their relationship with the divine as strongly as it does that of Jews.⁵⁷ For this chapter, however, Josephus’ distinction is apropos, because it makes the double point that, for Jews, ethical thinking is not the first route one would take into thinking about divine–human relations, and that it is not irrelevant. A similar observation has led a number of scholars of rabbinic Judaism to develop the field of rabbinic ethics.⁵⁸

In 1998, Louis Newman observed, in an unconscious echo of a series of writers on Christian ethics, that one would have expected Jewish ethics to emerge as a field from the late nineteenth-century *Wissenschaft des Judentums* in German universities, but that somehow it never did.⁵⁹ He seeks to create a field of rabbinic ethics by focusing on the relationship between ethics and the law: specifically, the idea of *lifnim mishurat hadin*, moral actions which go beyond the requirements of the law.⁶⁰ In his 2010 study *What is Good, and What God Demands*, Tzvi Novick develops this approach further, arguing that although Tannaitic normativity is in principle deontological – it tells one what to do and not to do – in various ways the rabbinic schools go beyond it, introducing elements of ethical choice into the keeping of the law. He compares the schools of Rabbi Akiva and Rabbi Ishmael, showing how their different visions of the relationship between the law and the world allow for different approaches to keeping the law which involve different attitudes, for instance, to free will, duty, and enthusiasm.⁶¹ He analyses how tannaitic literature employs diverse ethical genres, drawing especially on the tradition of exemplarity in Greek and Roman popular morality.⁶²

Writing on rabbinic ethics is important for scholars of early Christianity on two levels. It explores the thinking of rabbis with whom some Christians continued to be in contact throughout antiquity, and offers a model of how to write the ethics of a community for which piety, together with love and worship, are the most important ways in which the human side of the divine–human relationship is articulated. And rabbinic studies do not, like much writing about early Christianity, typically begin from contemporary concerns; they follow the ethical concerns of the sources, their categories of thought and forms of reasoning. As a result, they sometimes reveal the rabbis thinking in ways, or about topics – suffering, duty, ageing, or death – that surprise us, or which we only realize after some consideration are relevant to modern concerns. Since the early twentieth century, few studies of patristic ethics have taken this approach, but it has rich potential.⁶³

Conclusion: What might a future field of patristic ethics look like?

These observations raise a further question: granted that patristic ethics, as a field, is currently still inchoate and fragmentary, what might it look like in the foreseeable future? What should it look like? As a starting point, I propose the following:

- 1 It should approach the sources inductively as well as deductively, seeking to understand their ethical concerns in their own terms as well as using them to illuminate topics of current interest.
- 2 It should pay attention to the diverse styles of ethical thinking employed by Christian writers, as well as seeking the most illuminating modern theories through which to read them.

- 3 It should recognize the significance of the many genres in which ethical ideas are expressed, from stories and sayings to discourses and sermons, buildings and images.⁶⁴
- 4 It should not seek *a priori* to segregate intellectually sophisticated Christian writings from the less sophisticated, the productions of other genres, or the everyday concerns of Christians as ethical agents. Ethical thinking takes place in many genres and contexts, and Christian writers and craftsmen are also community members, so ethical ideas and practices are always likely to be in dialogue across genres and contexts.⁶⁵
- 5 It should take account of the interactions between Christian ethical thinking and that of other groups within the Roman empire and beyond, including imperial and local elites, sub-elites, and groups who do not identify primarily as Greek or Roman (especially Jews, but also, for example, Egyptians, Syrians, or Celts).
- 6 It should be alert to variations and tensions in ethical thinking and practice both within and between Christian groups, including groups which differ theologically, socially, or in geographical location.
- 7 It should pay attention to both continuity and change in Christian thinking through time.
- 8 Recognizing that Christians describe every aspect of the divine–human relationship using ethical language, it should explore systematically the relationship between ethics, theology, ecclesiology, and eschatology.
- 9 It should explore the ways in which Christians who hold the same doctrines may colour their accounts of the divine–human relationship in ethically different terms, or in different terms for different purposes. It should reflect on how these variations shaped Christians’ sense of their faith. One writer, for instance, may emphasize the importance of trust, another that of knowledge; one may emphasize the importance of practising the cardinal virtues where another speaks of the importance of honouring God in the language of patronage. The same writer may use a different *colour* in addressing catechumens or fellow clergy, or in scriptural commentary. All these variations may affect community members’ sense of what being a Christian involves.
- 10 It should attend to the ways in which patristic writings and art interact with scripture and the developing canon.
- 11 It should consider the varied ways in which patristic sources characterize the relationship between faith and religious practice, or faith and works.
- 12 It should look for both coherence and miscellaneity in ethical thinking, and seek to interpret both.
- 13 It should recognize its own importance. Ethical concepts and practices are intrinsic to relationships, both divine–human and intra-human, and ethical thinking is fundamental if any community is to organize itself, negotiate its inevitable tensions and difficulties, and survive. Like all sociocultural systems from language to law, ethics has a structure – a grammar – which is distinctive and constitutive of the group it belongs to. The structure and operation of Christian ethics merit as much attention as other formative aspects of Christian life and thought as we seek to understand how early churches developed in a formative period of their history.

Notes

- 1 Christoph Ernst Luthardt, *History of Christian Ethics*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1889 (German edn. 1888), vol. 1, p. vii. There is no consistency in the usage ‘ethics’ and ‘morality’ across or within disciplines. Sometimes ‘morality’ is used of ‘religious’ ideas and ‘ethics’ of ‘secular’; sometimes the reverse; some scholars use them interchangeably.
- 2 Luthardt, *History*, vol. 1, p. xvii.
- 3 Luthardt, *History*, vol. 1, pp. 256–270.

- 4 For an interdisciplinary discussion of definitions and approaches, see Teresa Morgan, *Popular Morality in the Early Roman Empire*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–3, 9–13.
- 5 On this debate in the study of religions in general, see Russell T. McCutcheon, *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion*, London: Cassell, 1999.
- 6 Some ‘outsider’ approaches go further and, rather than seeking to interpret the sources in their own terms, focus, for instance, on what the researcher understands as their social function. This approach has been widespread in the study of other ancient religions, but has not tended to characterize writing on early Christianity.
- 7 My own view is that both are valid and that historical approaches can also usefully inform theological approaches, because they may draw attention to issues that do not currently concern community members but are worth discussing.
- 8 Notably Theobald Ziegler, *Geschichte der christlichen Ethik*, Strassburg: Karl J. Trübner, 1886; Henry Sidgwick, *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1886.
- 9 E.g. Adolf von Harnack, *Die Lehre der zwölf Apostel*, Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1884; Gaston Boney-Maury, *La doctrine des douze Apôtres*, Paris: Librairie Fischbacher Société Anonyme, 1884; Philip Schaff, *The Oldest Church Manual*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1885; Alfred Seeberg, *Die Didache des Judentums und der Urchristenheit*, Leipzig: Deichert, 1906; Helen Balkwill Harris, *The Newly Rediscovered Apology of Aristides, Its Doctrine and Ethics*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1891.
- 10 Leonard Alston, *Stoic and Christian in the Second Century*, London: Longmans, Green, 1906; Theodor Rütger, *Die sittliche Forderung der Apatheia in den beiden ersten christlichen Jahrhunderten*, Freiburg: Herder, 1910; Heinrich Greeven, *Das Hauptproblem der Sozialethik in der neueren Stoa und im Urchristentum*, Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1935.
- 11 Robert Briffault, *Sin and Sex*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1931; Walter J. Carey, *Thinking Straight About This War*, London: A. R. Mowbray & Co., 1939; Cecil John Cadoux, *The Early Christian Attitude to War*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1940.
- 12 James Bissett Pray, “The Ethics of Augustine”, *International Journal of Ethics* 13 (1903), 222–235; Jean Rohmer, *La finalité morale chez les théologiens de saint Augustin à Duns Scot*, Paris: J. Vrin, 1939; Thomas Deman, *Le traitement scientifique de la morale chrétienne selon saint Augustin*, Montréal: Institut d’Etudes médiévales, 1957; Franz Körner, *Vom Sein und Sollen des Menschen: die existenziologischen Grundlagen der Ethik in Augustinischer Sicht*, Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1963; Cornelius Mayer, Alexander Eisgrub, and Guntram Förster eds., *Augustinus – Ethik und Politik: zwei Würzburger Augustinus-Studentage, “Aspekte der Ethik bei Augustinus” (11. Juni 2005), “Augustinus und die Politik” (24 Juni 2006)*, Würzburg: Augustinus-Verlag bei Echter, 2009; Kerem Eksen, “‘Ethics’, ‘morality’, and the Augustine *liberum arbitrium* debate”, *Problemas* 76 (2009), 74–85.
- 13 H. H. Scullard, *Early Christian Ethics in the West, from Clement to Ambrose*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1907: 1.
- 14 Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1931 (German edn. 1912), pp. 23–25.
- 15 Eric Osborn, *Ethical Patterns in Early Christian Thought*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976, p. vii. Cf. Eric Osborn, “Ethics”, in Angelo di Berardino and Adrian Walford eds., *Encyclopedia of the Early Church*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- 16 Francine Cardman, “Early Christian Ethics”, in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 932–956, 932.
- 17 Peter van Nuffelen, “Social Ethics and Moral Discourse in Late Antiquity”, in Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and Johan Verstraeten eds., *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics*, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2011, pp. 45–63, 35 argues that there is no coherence in patristic moral discourse as there (arguably) is in theology. In fact, considerable coherence is visible in the topics that have been well worked in the past fifty years. Until the field is better explored, it is unclear how coherent ethical thinking is elsewhere. A large group of sources created in diverse circumstances with diverse agendas will not be entirely coherent, but there is nothing unusual or problematic about this in the field of ethics.
- 18 For recent surveys see Cardman, “Early Christian Ethics”; J. Philip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction*, Louisville: Presbyterian Publishing, 2011, pp. 25–62; George Forell, *History of Christian Ethics, Volume I from the New Testament to Augustine*, Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1979; Jan Womer, *Morality and Ethics in Early Christianity*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987.
- 19 On the problems of applying patristic ethics to modern situations, see Susan R. Holman, “Out of the Fitting Room: Rethinking Patristic Social Texts on ‘the Common Good’”, in Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and Johan Verstraeten eds., *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges*

- for *Twenty-First Century Christian Thought*, Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 2011, pp. 103–123.
- 20 E.g. Gillian Clark, *Women in Late Antiquity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993; Willy Rordorf, “Marriage in the New Testament and in the Early Church”, in Everett Ferguson ed., *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality and Discipline in the Early Church*, New York: Garland, 1993, pp. 141–158; Kate Cooper, *The Virgin and the Bride*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996; Michael L. Budde and Karen Scott eds., *Witness of the Body: The Past, Present and Future of Christian Martyrdom*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011; Kristi Upson-Saia, *Early Christian Dress: Gender, Virtue, and Authority*, New York: Routledge, 2011; Candida Moss, *Ancient Christian Martyrdom: Diverse Practices, Theologies and Traditions*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012; Thomas J. Heffernan, *The Passion of Perpetua and Felicity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; Catherine M. Chin and Caroline T. Schroeder, *Melania: Early Christianity Through the Life of One Family*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
 - 21 Peter Brown, *The Body and Society*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1988.
 - 22 Amy-Jean Levine and Maria Mayo Robbins eds., *A Feminist Companion to Patristic Literature*, London: T&T Clark, 2008; Rebecca Krawiec, “Asceticism”, in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 764–785.
 - 23 E.g. Pascal-Grégoire Delage ed., *Les Pères de l’Eglise et la chair*, Royan, Carispatrum, 2012; Raphael Cadenhead, “Corporeality and *Askesis*: Ethics and Bodily Practice in Gregory of Nyssa’s Theological Anthropology”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2013), 281–299; Yves Tissot, “Encratism and the Apocryphal Acts”, in Andrew Gregory, Tobias Nicklas, Christopher M. Tuckett, and Joseph Verheyden eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, pp. 407–423; Judith Hartenstein, “Encratism, Asceticism, and the Construction of Gender and Sexual Identity in the Apocryphal Gospels”, in Andrew Gregory, Tobias Nicklas, Christopher M. Tuckett, and Joseph Verheyden eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, 389–406.
 - 24 Though see e.g. Kyle Harper, *From Shame to Sin: The Christian Transformation of Sexual Morality in Late Antiquity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.
 - 25 Exceptions include John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980; Richard Numan, “Catholics and Evangelical Protestants on Homoerotic Desire: Augustine vs. Pelagius”, *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 40 (2010), 37–51; Naomi Koltun-Fromm, *Hermeneutics of Holiness: Ancient Jewish and Christian Notions of Sexuality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010; William R. G. Loader, *Making Sense of Sex: Attitudes Towards Sexuality in Early Jewish and Christian Literature*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2013.
 - 26 Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire*, Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002; Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of the Needle*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012; Peter Brown, *The Ransom of the Soul*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015. For an overview of studies of the body and euergetism up to 2008, see Cardman, “Early Christian Ethics”, pp. 937–941.
 - 27 Notably Geoffrey de Ste Croix, *Early Christian Attitudes to Property and Slavery*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1975; Valerio Neri, *I marginali nell’occidente tardoantico*, Bari: Edipuglia, 1998; Susan Holman, ‘*The Hungry Are Dying*’: *Beggars and Bishops in Roman Cappadocia*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001; Richard Finn, *Almsgiving in the Later Roman Empire*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006; P.-G. Delage ed., *Le Pères de l’Eglise et la voix des pauvres*, Paris: Cerf, 2006; Sophie Lunn-Rockcliffe, ‘A Pragmatic Approach to Poverty and Riches: Ambrosiaster’s *quaestio* 124’, in E. M. Atkins and Robin Osborne eds., *Poverty in the Roman World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 115–129; Lucy Grig, “Throwing Parties for the Poor: Poverty and Splendour in the Late Antique Church”, in E. M. Atkins and Robin Osborne eds., *Poverty in the Roman World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 145–161. On the connected but separate topic of usury, see e.g. Robert P. Maloney, “The Teaching of the Fathers on Usury: An Historical Study of the Development of Christian Thinking”, *Vigiliae Christianae* 27 (1973), 241–265; Thomas Moser, *Die patristische Zinslehre und ihre Ursprünge*, Winterthur: H. Schellenberg, 1997; Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen, “‘That Which Has Been Wrung from Tears’: Usury, the Greek Fathers, and Catholic Social Teaching”, in Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and Johan Verstraeten eds., *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First Century Christian Thought*, Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 2011, pp. 124–160.
 - 28 Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; Chris L. de Wet, *Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity*, Oakland:

- University of California Press, 2015; Marianne Bjelland Kartzow, *The Slave Metaphor and Gendered Enslavement in Early Church Discourse: Double Trouble Embodied*, London: Routledge, 2018; cf Pauline Allen, “Changes in Approaching Patristic Texts from the Perspective of Contemporary Catholic Teaching”, in Johan Leemans, Brian J. Matz, and Johan Verstraeten eds., *Reading Patristic Texts on Social Ethics: Issues and Challenges for Twenty-First Century Christian Thought*, Washington: Catholic University Press of America, 2011, 30–42, especially 38–40.
- 29 Allan D. Fitzgerald, “Penance”, in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, 786–807.
- 30 E.g. Franz van de Paverd, “Disciplinary Procedures in the Early Church”, pp. 267–292; Maurice Bévenot, “The Sacrament of Penance and Cyprian’s *De lapsis*”, pp. 293–331, both collected in Everett Ferguson ed., *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality and Discipline in the Early Church*, New York: Garland, 1993.
- 31 Ronald H. Bainton, “The Early Church and War”, in Everett Ferguson ed., *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality and Discipline in the Early Church*, New York: Garland, 1993, pp. 193–216; Edward A. Ryan, “The Rejection of Military Service by the Early Christians”, in Everett Ferguson ed., *Christian Life: Ethics, Morality and Discipline in the Early Church*, New York: Garland, 1993, pp. 217–232.
- 32 E.g. Richard Shelly Hartigan, “Saint Augustine on War and Killing: The Problem of the Innocent”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 27 (1966), 195–204; Robert Dodaro, *Christ and the Just Society in the Thought of Augustine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- 33 Peter Lee, “Selective Memory: Augustine and Contemporary Just War Discourse”, *Scottish Journal of Theology* 65 (2012), 309–322; Eric Gregory, “What Do We Want from the Just War Tradition? New Challenges of Surveillance and the Security State”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 27 (2014), 50–62.
- 34 Eric Osborn, “Clement of Alexandria: A Review of Research 1958–82”, *The Second Century: A Journal of Early Christian Studies* 3 (1983), 219–244; James Wetzel, *Augustine and the Limits of Virtue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992; Simon Harrison, *Augustine’s Way Into the Will: The Philosophical and Theological Significance of De libero arbitrio*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006; Gerald Bonner, *Freedom and Necessity: St. Augustine’s Teaching on Divine Power and Human Freedom*, Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2007; Corbin, *La grâce de la liberté: Augustin et Anselme*, Paris: Cerf, 2012.
- 35 R. Harrisville, “*Pistis Christou*: Witness of the Fathers”, *Novum Testamentum* 36 (1994), 233–241; Mark Elliott, “*Pistis Christou* in the Church Fathers and Beyond”, in Michael F. Bird and Preston M. Sprinkle eds., *The Faith of Jesus Christ*, Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2010, pp. 277–290.
- 36 Julia Fleming, “The Helpful Lie: The Moral Reasoning of Augustine and John Cassian”, PhD Thesis, Catholic University of America, 1993; L. Michael White, “Moral Pathology: Passions, Progress, and Protreptic in Clement of Alexandria”, in John T. Fitzgerald ed., *The Passions and Moral Progress in Graeco-Roman Thought*, New York: Routledge, 2008, pp. 284–321; Margaret Atkins, “‘Heal My Soul’: The Significance of an Augustinian Image”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 23 (2010), 349–364; Peter Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012; J. Warren Smith, *Christian Grace and Pagan Virtue*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013; Jennifer Strawbridge, *The Pauline Effect: The Use of the Pauline Epistles by Early Christian Writers*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015. Eerdman’s ‘Church’s Bible’ sourcebooks of patristic commentaries on biblical texts offer a useful resource for those investigating connections between theology and ethics: notably Judith L. Kovacs, *1 Corinthians* (2005); D. H. Williams, *Matthew* (2018).
- 37 Perry T. Hamalis and Aristotle Papanikolaou, “Towards a Godly Mode of Being: Virtue as Embodied Deification”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2013), 271–280; Paul M. Blowers, “Maximus the Confessor’s Virtue Ethics”, *Studies in Christian Ethics* 26 (2013), 333–350. Against virtue ethics as a useful tool cf. Nicholas Peter Harvey, “Christian Morality?” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 52 (1999), 106–115; Cadenhead, “Corporeality and *Askesis*”, 281–299.
- 38 Grace Natoli, “Augustinian Moral Consciousness and the Businessman”, *Journal of Business Ethics* 78 (2008), 97–107; Adrian Walsh, “The Morality of the Market and the Medieval Schoolmen”, *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 3 (2004), 241–259; Yazdani, “Toward an Ethical Theory of Organizing”, *Journal of Business Ethics* 127 (2015), 399–417.
- 39 Daniel K. Finn, *Christian Economic Ethics: History and Implications*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013.
- 40 John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Foltz eds., *Towards an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives on the Environment, Nature and Creation*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2013; Kenneth A. Reynhout, “Human Evolution and the Nature of Morality”, *Theology Today* 72 (2015), 135–140.
- 41 Nico Koopman, “The Dis-(otherly)abled and Public Morality”, *Scriptura* 82 (2003), 72–81.

- 42 E.g. Fleming, “The Helpful Lie”; James Cook, “Preaching and Christianization: Reading the Sermons of John Chrysostom”, D.Phil. Thesis, University of Oxford, 2016; Aaron Kilbourn, “Justin Martyr, Irenaeus of Lyons, and Cyprian of Carthage on Suffering”, PhD thesis, Liberty University, 2017.
- 43 Surveyed by Hubertus R. Drobner, “Christian Philosophy”, in Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Ethics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008, pp. 672–690; Mark Edwards, ‘Early Christianity and Philosophy’, in Jeffrey Bingham ed., *The Routledge Companion to Early Christian Studies*, London: Routledge, 2010, pp. 38–50; cf. John Whittaker, *Studies in Platonism and Patristic Thought*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1984; Jean Pèpin, *De la Philosophie ancienne à la théologie patristique*, London: Variorum Reprints, 1986; J. C. M. van Winden, J. den Boer, and David Runia eds., *Arché: A Collection of Patristic Studies*, New York: Brill, 1997; Tuomas Rasimus, Troels Engberg-Pedersen, and Ismno Dunderberg eds., *Stoicism in Early Christianity*, Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010; Runar M. Thorsteinsson, *Roman Christianity and Roman Stoicism: A Comparative Study*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.
- 44 P. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, 2nd ed., Paris: Études augustiniennes, 1987; David Sedley, “Philosophical Allegiance in the Graeco-Roman World”, in Miriam Griffin and Jonathan Barnes eds., *Philosophia Togata*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989, pp. 97–119; Richard Shusterman, “Philosophy as a Way of Life: As Textual and More Than Textual Practice”, in Michael Chase, Stephen R. L. Clark, and Michael McGhee eds: *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns: Essays in Honour of Pierre Hadot*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 40–56; Constantinos Macris, “Charismatic Authority, Spiritual Guidance, and Way of life in the Pythagorean Tradition”, in Michael Chase, Stephen R. L. Clark, and Michael McGhee eds.: *Philosophy as a Way of Life: Ancients and Moderns: Essays in Honour of Pierre Hadot*, Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013, pp. 57–83.
- 45 E.g. Almut-Barbara Renger and Alexandra Stellmacher eds., *Übungswissen in Religion und Philosophie: Produktion, Weitergabe, Wandel*, Berlin: W. Hopf Verlag, 2018.
- 46 Earlier, n. 34.
- 47 Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982; Virginia Held, *The Ethics of Care: Personal, Political and Global*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- 48 As well, of course, as sometimes being damaged by them.
- 49 Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1934; Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, London: Routledge, 1966 (both influenced by Durkheim); Abraham Edel and May Edel, *Anthropology and Ethics: The Quest for Moral Understanding*, Springfield: Charles C. Thomas, 1959.
- 50 See especially Signe Howell ed., *The Ethnography of Moralities*, London: Routledge, 1997; Rebecca Langlands, “Roman *Exempla* and Situation Ethics: Valerius Maximus and Cicero *De officiis*”, *Journal of Roman Studies* 101 (2011), 100–122.
- 51 Though micro-societies within a society as large and complex as the Roman empire may adapt certain ideas and practices to their own uses: cf. Teresa Morgan, *Roman Faith and Christian Faith*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015, on early Christian treatments of trust.
- 52 Morgan, *Popular Morality*, ch. 11.
- 53 Richmond Lattimore, *Themes in Greek and Latin Epitaphs*, Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1942.
- 54 Elizabeth Forbis, *Municipal Virtues in the Roman Empire*, Stuttgart: Teubner, 1996; cf. Robert A. Kaster, *Emotion, Restraint and Community in Ancient Rome*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.
- 55 E.g. Angelos Chaniotis, “Public Subscriptions and Loans as Social Capital in the Hellenistic City: Reciprocity, Performance, Commemoration”, in Paraskevi Martzavou and Nikolaos Papazarkadas eds., *Epigraphical Approaches to the Post-classical Polis: Fourth Century BC to Second Century AD*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 89–106; Aneurin Ellis-Evans, “The Ideology of Public Inscriptions”, in Paraskevi Martzavou and Nikolaos Papazarkadas eds., *Epigraphical Approaches to the Post-classical Polis: Fourth Century BC to Second Century AD*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 107–122; B. D. Gray, “Philosophy of Education and the Later Hellenistic Polis”, in Paraskevi Martzavou and Nikolaos Papazarkadas eds., *Epigraphical Approaches to the Post-classical Polis: Fourth Century BC to Second Century AD*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012, pp. 233–254; see also Morgan, *Popular Morality*, pp. 301–304.
- 56 Cf. *Ap.* 2.181–3: piety is the motivation of all Jewish activities; 2.293–4: piety is the most beautiful thing and obedience to the law the greatest justice. At 2.192, Jews worship God by means of virtue. At 2.145–146, the Jewish law is designed to promote piety, along with a number of other virtues, to the world at large.

- 57 Cf. 1.162 (Pythagoras exceeds other philosophers for his wisdom and piety).
- 58 E.g. Ephraim E. Urbach's survey of rabbinic thought, *The Sages*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987, has no chapter on ethics, though it discusses (ch. 15) ethical themes including justice, mercy, inclinations to good and evil, and righteous and wicked people.
- 59 Louis Newman, *Past Imperatives: Studies in the History and Theory of Jewish Ethics*, Albany: State University of New York, 1998, pp. 4–5.
- 60 *Past Imperatives*, especially chs. 1, 3; cf. Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005; Lon L. Fuller, *The Morality of Law*, rev. edn, New Delhi: Universal Law, 2006; Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *Confronting Vulnerability: The Body and the Divine in Rabbinic Ethics*, Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2010.
- 61 Tzvi Novick, *What Is Good, and What God Demands: Normative Studies in Tannaitic Literature*, Leiden: Brill, 2010, chs. 5–6.
- 62 Novick, *What Is Good*, ch. 8; cf. Amram Tropper, *Wisdom, Politics and Historiography: Tractate Avot in the Context of the Graeco-Roman Near East*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, discussing the rabbinic wisdom treatise Tractate Avot in its sociopolitical and ethical contexts.
- 63 Though see e.g. Jacques Liébaert, *Les enseignements moraux des pères apostoliques*, Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1970, and (implicitly, though it is a sourcebook rather than a monograph) Abraham J. Malherbe, *Moral Exhortation: A Graeco-Roman Sourcebook*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1986.
- 64 Many studies now touch on ethical aspects of art and architecture, though few make it their main focus: e.g. Glanville Downey, “Ethical Themes in the Antioch Mosaics”, *Church History* 10.4 (1941), 367–376; Kathryn A. Smith, “Inventing Marital Chastity: The Iconography of Susanna and the Elders in Early Christian Art”, *Oxford Art Journal* 16 (1993), 3–24; Ellen Swift and Anne Alwis, “The Role of Late Antique Art in Early Christian Worship”, *Papers of the British School at Rome* 78 (2010), 193–217, 352–354; Troels Kristensen, *Making and Breaking the Gods: Christian Responses to Pagan Sculpture in Late Antiquity*, Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2013; Robin M. Jensen, “Compiling Narratives: The Visual Strategies of Early Christian Visual Art”, *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 23 (2015), 1–26.
- 65 Making the same point about ancient philosophers, see e.g. Miriam T. Griffin, *Seneca: A Philosopher in Politics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976; Teresa Morgan, “*Doxa, Praxis* and Graeco-Roman Religious Thinking”, in J. Carleton-Paget, S. Gathercole, and J. Lieu eds., *Christianity in the Second Century: Themes and Developments*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 200–213.

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Logic and religious language

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Introduction

It seems fair to assert that in our “Plantinga” and “post-Plantinga” era, working on religious language has become less problematic for scholars, as they no longer find themselves required to defend its very meaningfulness. It was not so long ago that every sentence associated with such language stood accused of “cognitively meaninglessness,” as lacking verifiable criteria of meaning. Such charges were disputed by scholars like R.M. Hare (1952), Ian T. Ramsey (1975) and many others. Yet, thanks to Plantinga’s theory of warrant (1984, 2000, 2015), “simplistic verificationism” has given way to more subtle approaches to linguistic expressions of religious belief. He showed that claims expressing such beliefs are no less products of the proper functioning of the human cognitive faculties than are claims about tomorrow’s weather. Relieved from the need for constant apology, one can at last inquire into logical issues pertaining to such language.

The question of the relationship between logic and religious language can be translated into two separate topics. The first concerns the inner logic of religious language, its essential characteristics, rules etc. Accordingly, the religious language of early Christian philosophers can be investigated in regard to the meaning of sentences and utterances referring to a religious subject-matter, and above all to God. Thus, the logic in question is that of language used to describe what lies beyond the sensible realm: in other words, that which, by its very essence, is hard, if not impossible, to describe and express. The point of contention in this case is the possibility of referencing something that, according to the beliefs expressed through religious statements, does not belong to the sensible realm and transgresses the human capacity for understanding and expression. The second is about what kinds of logic have been applied within theological discourse as tools enabling the construction of arguments and explanations in relation to the questions raised by and within theology, and why. In the present study, I shall discuss both topics, though concentrating mainly on the first, as less studied in regard to Patristics.

The inner logic of religious language

(a) The Cappadocian Account

Religious language, just like any language, necessarily has its own inner logic, otherwise it would not perform its main function, which is communication, be it internal (teaching and

transmitting doctrine, etc.) or external to religious communities (teaching about accepted beliefs, activities aiming at conversion, interreligious dialogue etc.). However, because religious language differs from conventional language on account of its very subject, its inner logic already became an important issue in early Christian theological discourse. Patristic thinkers, although they did not entitle their deliberations “the logic of religious language,” in fact addressed the issue quite directly and in depth. In order to exclude possible misrepresentations of their thought, their account will be analyzed here in a somewhat hermeneutical fashion: i.e. within the framework of philosophy characteristic for the era, without referring to theories and conceptions formulated significantly later on, such as reductionism, fictionalism etc.

From almost the very beginning of the formation of theological discourse, i.e. since the second century, Christian apologists and writers, in accordance with established philosophical and theological tradition in Judaistic thought, had recognized that names used in reference to God do not reveal who He really is. Names, being parts/elements of human language, were coined to refer to created objects, and therefore could not possibly provide information about the Divine essence of their Creator. Thus, names used in reference to God do not signify His very essence, but rather His attributes/characteristics as revealed through His actions towards humans and the created realm.¹ However, the question of the very possibility, rules and criteria of predication of an object that not only is unknown, but also could not possibly be cognized and apprehended by the human mind, did not arise until the Eunomian controversy.

Eunomius’ questionable Trinitarian claims of Arian provenance were supported by, among other arguments, his understanding of human language and the nature of a word’s reference. He rejected the opinion that names in general, and names of God such as, in particular, the name “Unbegotten,” evince human rational activity rather than reality (cf. Demetracopoulos 2007). Were that so, what is said in accordance with thought (*kat’ epinoian*) would not then be connected with its object, would exist as a name only and would cease to exist with the dissolving sound of the uttered words (*Apology* 8.1–5). Thus, Eunomius claims that words are adjusted to the nature of things (*Apology* 18.7–9). Accordingly, the essence of the apprehended thing (be it God) does not differ from that which signifies it. In consequence, if an appellation is properly asserted of a substance, then the name that signifies it has the same particular real existence (*Apology* 12.7–1). Eunomius gives a theological justification for this position: he states that it is by the Providence of God that words are bestowed upon their subjects, while the first created man was given the knowledge of the nature of created things as well as knowledge of their proper names (*Apology for the Apology*. II.ii.J 282, J 346.20–7.1, II.vi.J 86.5–7, II.i.03.1–6).² Words of human language, therefore, do not express results of our thought and cognitive activities, but seem to reveal conceptions (*ennoiai*) of the subjects named by those words (*Apology* 18.4–7; *Apol. Apol.* II.v.J 368.6–18, III. J ii 168.11–12). The notion of *ennoia* is of special import here, since Eunomius also seems to be claiming that human beings are endowed with a natural conception (*fusikē ennoia*) of God, that He is one, as well as unbegotten (*Apology* 7.1–3). The notions of *ennoia* or *fusikē ennoia* are well known for their Stoic origin, but had been adopted since Antiochus of Ascalon by the Medioplatonists, and had then entered Neoplatonic discourse. Given the extreme insufficiency of evidence, it is very hard to say whether Eunomius would have been aware of the subtle differences in how different philosophical traditions understood that conception. Stripped of those differences, in the most general way, the notion of *ennoia* implies that the human intellect possesses, as impressed on it, conceptions of things and their nature. Eunomius believed that those conceptions had been imposed by God. Thus, since the human intellect had been given the knowledge and proper appellations of both God and created things by God Himself, one could safely, justifiably call God by the name “Unbegotten.”

Even acknowledging attempts to point to particular philosophical sources of Eunomius' account, such as the Neoplatonic commentary on Plato's *Cratylus*, his approach stands out as rather eclectic. He gathered elements and philosophical vocabulary from various philosophical traditions, but gave these a theological justification. His account was not a theory, but rather a theology of language. And as theology of language, it could be seen as a further interpretation and development of the Jewish tradition, accepted within the Church, regarding the Divine language of creation, as well as primordial language construed as manifesting the sacred and as revealing truth.³

Nevertheless, while trying to show that his own argumentation was not arbitrary, Eunomius made a claim that is hard to accept. He relied on a mutilated version of what was originally a Stoic conception of reference. In Chrysippus, cognition *kat' epinoian*, i.e. "in accordance with thought," pertains to our experience of things, rather than things themselves. Things are grasped conceptually either by way of resemblance to things presented in experience, or by enlargement thereof, or by diminution, or by composition (*Fr.* 88). Eunomius misses the point that human rational activity and usage of language are rooted in experience and perception of reality. For him, what is conceptual is a human invention that has little basis in reality and no existence of its own (cf. Vaggione 1976: 221–223). Therefore, employing yet another Stoic conception, he states that his usage of the proper names of God does not arise from the process of human thought, but flows from the naturally given notion (*ennoia*) of God and His essence. And indeed, here lies the main problem of Eunomius' theory. From the philosophical point of view, to say that one is endowed with a certain notion (either by God or by nature), e.g. an *ennoia* of man, means that one is able to state correctly what man is (Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 9.8). Possessing a common or connatural notion of a given thing entails having a complete comprehension of that thing (Cicero, *Academics* 2.21; *Tusculans Disputations* 4.53).⁴ In other words, to state that human intellect has been endowed with the notion of God, even if this was provided by God himself, is to state that a human being knows and understands what God is in regard to His essence.⁵

The Cappadocian Fathers' response to Eunomius is of special importance in the present context. Basil of Caesarea offered some highly coherent and philosophically well-based counter-argumentation. He accepted a view, known for its Epicurean and Stoic roots, according to which human intellect is endowed with a common conception of the existence of God: namely, that God exists (*to einai*). However, Basil strongly denied that there is any kind of common or natural knowledge or understanding of the essence (*to ti einai*) of God (*Against Eunomius* 1.12).⁶ In his opinion, an understanding of God's substance lies beyond absolutely all rational natures of created beings, and not only of humans. For creatures, to understand Divine substance means to realize its incomprehensibility. This, however, need not entail that one who confesses that he or she has no understanding of the Divine essence is completely ignorant of God. For a person of faith is led up to knowledge of the Divine attributes from God's powers and actions, through what He has created and revealed. Thus, our conception of God is made up of many attributes manifested and revealed to us, although understanding of His substance as such remains unattainable. It is worth stressing, however, that according to Basil knowledge of the Divine attributes is granted first and foremost by faith, and does not come as a result of pure rational activity (*Against Eunomius* 1.14; *Letters* 234.1–3).⁷

While rejecting Eunomius' views on the possession of a natural conception of God's essence, Basil also pointed out that the assumption that human beings are endowed with a natural conception of God makes any further argumentation about his nature and features simply senseless. For, seeing that common conceptions are universal and shared by all human beings, it implies that every single one of us would have a clear and self-evident (as well as probably a very similar)

understanding of the Divine essence and its attributes (*Against Eunomius* 1.5).⁸ Going through many other inconsistencies and errors in Eunomius' argumentation that are of less importance for our study, Basil comes to criticize his understanding of *epinoia*.

In Basil's opinion, Eunomius, without explaining what this term actually means, refers it only to a construction of a mental image picturing things that have no existence in reality. In doing so, Eunomius in fact omits the primary and common usage of *epinoia*. In the latter, things seen as simple in the context of general apprehension by the intellect and of sense perception, when considered by *epinoia*, are revealed to be complex. Basil proceeds by explaining the meaning of *epinoia* in accordance with its Stoic/Chrysippian account.⁹ Namely, ἐπίνοια is a name given to a more detailed and precise inner consideration of what has already been known intellectually, which comes after the initial conception (*noēma*) emerging from sensation. According to Basil, all that is said is considered according to *epinoia* and, therefore, remains as thoughts in the soul of the one who apprehends it rather than dissolving together with the sounds produced by the tongue (*Against Eunomius* 1.6).¹⁰ In other words, *epinoia* is an intellectual activity that engages with the common conceptions of existing things, both those possessed naturally and those received via perception, through which intellectual analysis and/or understanding of different aspects of the thing under consideration is achieved.

In line with this view of the role of *epinoia* in cognition, Basil accepts that names of things are posterior to things themselves: names, to be sure, do follow the natures of things, and not otherwise (*Against Eunomius* 2.4).¹¹ However, meaningful utterances are vehicles of human conceptions, through which we can communicate to one another our thoughts and the counsel of our hearts (*Homily on the words: 'Give heed to thyself'* 23). That is to say, words convey the meaning received through acts of reflecting on perceived and cognized content. The words reflect and refer to the results of our intellectual acts, and not the things directly. The other thing of the utmost importance is that, in Basil's opinion, names and appellations neither refer to things directly, nor signify things' substances in the sense of their material substrates. Instead, he claims that appellations (*prosegoriai*) and names signify the properties (*idiōtētes*) that characterize particulars. It also seems that any conception of a certain thing that has been impressed on us will pertain to those properties that have been observed in regard to that particular thing (*Against Eunomius* 2.4).

Here exactly lies the other error of Eunomius: not only does he assume that what is said about God according to *epinoia* is completely different from, and even opposite to, what He really is, but he also postulates that what, in his opinion, is rightfully attributed to God is said in regard to his substance (*Against Eunomius* 1.7–1.8). Yet the actual situation when it comes to speaking about such an object as God is not different from the common usage of human language. Firstly, names and appellations are referred to God as expressive of how we conceptualize Him and, as such, are themselves "fruits of conceptualization." Secondly, when Jesus Christ speaks about himself and employs names like "light," "bread," "door" etc., he points to different aspects of His divinity. All those names are different in their meaning, but he himself is not a polyonym. He is one, as subject of predication and appellation, and as a substance. When those appellations refer to him, they express various manifestations of His benefactor engagement with created reality, of the sort conceptualized in thought-processes antecedent to any verbalization. It is as such that they testify, "according to truth," to what belongs to God (*Against Eunomius* 1.7).¹²

Basil was well aware of the limitations of theological expressions, seeing them as a part of human speech that he found inferior to human thought, and poorly suited to properly expressing the fruits of our comprehension (*Letters* 7.1.–9). Still, on his understanding, theological language and talk of God (whose nature was beyond the understanding of any created intellect) were not senseless or groundless. The fact that God, as a subject of predication, lies beyond

our knowledge, does not contradict the very possibility of predicating appellations of Him, even though it is the predication of features/appellations of a subject that de facto in itself is unknown to us. For what is predicated does not refer directly to God. God reveals to humans his own characteristics and features and, when revealed, they are perceived by the human intellect. Afterwards, what is revealed is subjected to a process of analyses and comprehension. The intellect, reflecting on received perceptions, constructs a conception of God, which comprises His characteristics as discerned by and present in our thinking. Thus, appellations, which are applied to those characteristics and which we use with reference to God, express our own thoughts and reflections concerning God. The reference to an object absolutely transcending the intellectual capacities of any created being is not direct. Nevertheless, it is not that our idea of God lacks genuine substantiation or is untrue: God Himself is the guarantor of the truthfulness of our appellations, but this is possible only on condition that we possess true faith. That faith is, in this case, the primary principle, and a necessary requirement for cognizing (and, subsequently, for proper deliberation about) God and Divine matters. Faith can be viewed in philosophical terms as a fundamental openness to revelation, and shows our comprehension of how to interpret what we learn from our experience and from sacred texts.

Basil's brother, faithful follower and advocate, Gregory of Nyssa, did not introduce many essentially new ideas regarding the issue of how we can speak about God. His work on this subject can rather be viewed as rephrasing Basil's analyses in appealing formulations and drawing practical conclusions from the latter's stance. Gregory's account has come to be sanctioned by theological tradition, attracting the attention of many scholars, who frequently study Gregory and his philosophical sources while disregarding his unambiguously articulated indebtedness to Basil.¹³ Here, therefore, we can focus exclusively on those elements in Gregory's approach to speaking about God that are indeed innovative and consequential.

In Gregory's opinion, comprehension as such, as well as the ability to name cognized objects, is implemented in humans by God. That does not mean, however, that God imposed on us language in its entirety, providing each and every word for any existing thing, activity or feature. Any language is a human invention, just as any given word or name within that language is a product of human intellectual activity. Understandable names are produced with reference to human conceptions of already existing entities (*Against Eunomius* II.252.1–3, 37.11–38.1, 395.8–6.10, 401–402, 164.6–6.5). Language and words are, obviously, needed for human beings to communicate with each other, but words are also required to preserve unconfused our human memories of cognized things, which are not constantly present to the intellect. For things are distinguished in our thought through their signification by names (II.282. 391–393).

Using rather Porphyrian logical terminology, Gregory states that things are named through significant utterances in accordance with the specific customs of each nation (II.270.8–271.1). For the human intellect, the Divine activities through which God reveals and manifests Himself are real existing things, experienced through and within the sensible realm. Therefore, their appellations, just as all other names of regular objects, are significant utterances produced and invented by humans. Not only are the appellations we use in relation to God of human origin, but God himself also communicates with us in our own terms (II.238). Given the nature of such appellations, it should not be expected that they will perfectly and completely match a proper description of the Divinity, which is unexplored, inexpressible and beyond the reach of human reasoning. Thus, Gregory clearly envisioned the possibility of grave errors ensuing from speculations about God based on human conceptions and argumentations (II.97). On the other hand, he was fairly positive as regards the human ability to use language. In his opinion, in everyday life only people whose brain is affected by drunkenness or inflammation completely misuse names and call a dog by the appellation "human" (II.319.3–8). Thus, even with all the

limitations of our human cognitive capacities and language, Gregory still found discourse on God to be possible and most profitable, albeit wanting. Through speculation as, in part, the fruit of intellectual reflection on the perceivable actions of God, one comes to understand precisely the truth that the Divine existence and essence is beyond any knowledge and comprehension. But one can also come to understand what cannot be ascribed to God, and what is proper and reverent to attribute to him (II.136.7–10; 138–140; 157.4–158.1).

To be sure, it must be accepted that Divinity unconditionally exceeds what names can signify and convey. However, “to be spoken of” is different from “to be.” God is who he is in regard to his substance and nature, but we can still speak of him in a limited manner. The possible pitfalls of speaking about God can and must be avoided by refraining from inquiry into his essence and existence, as what is unachievable, incomprehensible and inexpressible in principle (II.98; 161.1–5; III.1.105.1–3). The Divinity is to be addressed by the names we give to the Divine activities revealed and manifested to human beings (II. 304.5–8).¹⁴

Furthermore, every name said of the Divine nature must be understood as if it were accompanied by the verb “is” (*to esti*): e.g. “God is just” or “Divine nature is imperishable,” etc., even if in practice it is omitted, as in the case of invocations of His titles. Otherwise, a name for Him would refer to nothing. This claim of Gregory entails that each name of God amounts to a categorical proposition of classical logic, in which “God”/“Divine nature” serves as the subject, accompanied by the copula “is.” The latter connects the subject with a predicate such as “just,” “imperishable” etc. However, categorical propositions can be used in any kind of predication, including predication in essence – the one Gregory wants to avoid. Gregory, therefore, suggests that propositions of the form “A is x” do not ascribe feature *x* directly to A, but are verbal reports drawing their meaning from what is perceived about A. “Is” does not make a predicate a part of the very “account of being” (*to einai logos*). Accordingly, what is predicated of God is no more than an extrinsic attribute (*to prosōn*). We only apprehend and predicate attributes of his nature, which are not equivalent to the nature as such (III.5.57–59).

Gregory’s arguments for non-essential predication in the case of the Divine can be treated as conclusive only if completed by Basil’s epistemological premises, which, in my opinion, Gregory appears to assume.¹⁵ Firstly, names applied to God correspond to our own reflection on activities through which He reveals himself, and not directly to God. A name expresses the fruit of our intellect’s analyses of our perception of Divine activities. It refers to what can be deduced from this activity as a basis for attributing it to God as one of his features. Secondly, the source and justification for such an attribution is the Divine revelatory activity, not his very essence and existence, which are in principle incomprehensible.¹⁶ It is that revelation that guarantees that our nonessential predication pertains, in fact, to God. Basil’s and Gregory’s complementary arguments substantiate the possibility of speaking about the Divine nature, as well as that of theological speculative discourse generally. However, this a conditional possibility: one needs to believe that God does exist and that He is not the ultimate deceiver, who would equip us with malfunctioning cognitive and communicative tools and lie to us about Himself, to boot.

(b) The Christocentric logic of religious language

The problem of the inner logic of religious language can also be approached from a different angle: the veracity of language within theological discourse can be substantiated by John Damascene’s Christocentric interpretation of epistemology and language.

John’s work the *Fount of Knowledge* contains positive systematical expositions of theological doctrine, preceded by (1) an outline of Neoplatonic logic, which serves as a tool for the

explication of theological truths, and (2) a critical compendium of false doctrines. He delineates there some epistemological premises of theological discourse, and describes what knowledge, truth and falsity are. He relies on a quite traditional Greek philosophical understanding of true and false knowledge. “Knowledge” means, strictly speaking, the true knowledge of beings, as opposed to the false knowledge of non-being which, as such, is rather a lack of knowledge. For the false is nothing else but that which is not or does not exist. On the other hand, the truth itself is defined not philosophically but theologically: it is Christ, who is hypostasized wisdom and truth, while human intellect and soul have only the capacity for receiving cognition and knowledge (*Dial.* 1.10–25, cf. Plato *Soph.* 260c1–4). In this way, Christ is the truth, its source and the teacher of truth. It seems possible to say that John clearly expresses one of the fundamental rules of speculative theological discourse: while the understanding of knowledge as such applied in it is identical with the understanding of knowledge in philosophy, which is a field of human rational activity, what is truth is ultimately established in and through relation to revelation. In other words, the criterion of truth within theological discourse is nothing else but content revealed in, through and by Christ.

The Damascene’s account of the comprehensibility and knowledge of God, as well as of the issue of naming and speaking of God, presents a synthetic account of Basil and Gregory, with recognition given to apophaticism as developed by Pseudo-Dionysius. However, John also put forward a particular teaching that might seem unrelated to the issue of religious language, but which in fact allows us to elucidate it from a significantly different angle. The teaching in question is his theology of Icons, which he developed as a result of his struggle with Iconoclasm. John put his finger on the main problem concerning the depiction of the Deity, which is the very impossibility of representing the true God, who is in principle invisible, incorporeal, uncircumscribed and unportrayable (*Exposition of the Faith* 89.24–25).

To be sure, John accepted arguments in defence of icons that were produced within Church tradition, among which was the principle that as an assertion of the doctrine of incarnation, Christ can and ought to be depicted as human (Trullan Council in 692, Canon 82). He found this principle reasonable but still insufficient to justify making images of the true God, who, as the source of all created beings, is beyond any substantial being, incomprehensible, formless and also one Divine Godhead in the three hypostases of Father, Son and Holy Ghost (*Apol.* 1.4 = 3.6, 1.8, 2.5 = 3.2, 2.7 = 3.4, 3.24). Since Christ was not merely a man, the argument only covered depictions of the human nature of the Incarnate Logos.

In John, the possibility of depicting the Deity is justified because the Divine nature was united with a complete human nature for all eternity in a preexistent hypostasis of the Incarnated Word of God. The hypostasis of God remains the principle of existence for both. The natures do not subsist independently, but as hypostatic components of the one hypostasis of the Son of God. Consequently, the preexistent hypostasis of God the Word constitutes the existential principle of its essential components (*Exposition* 53.7–17, 71.18–28).¹⁷ The Son of God not only was a human, but remains truly God and truly human. He can be depicted, above all, because He truly remains human, with human flesh, while simultaneously truly being God. Since Christ’s Divine nature is inseparable from his humanity, being united with it in the one hypostasis of God the Word, a depiction that begins with the humanity of Christ, will inevitably reveal His Divinity, for an image of the Incarnated Word that has become visible is also an image of the invisible God (*Apology* 1.4 = 3.6, 1.16, 3.24, 26).¹⁸ The incarnate Son of God is the first, natural (*fyssike eikōn*) and unchangeable image of the invisible God the Father, revealing the Father in Himself. He conveys in Himself the whole Father, being equal to Him in everything, and differing only in His being begotten by His Father, His Begetter (*Apology* 1.9, 3.18; also *Exp.* 13). An image of Christ, therefore, is not just an image of His humanity: on the one hand,

it is an image of the entire hypostasis of the Incarnated Word, while on the other, it represents the first, natural and consubstantial image of the Godhead.

We can draw a parallel with this argument by asserting that Divinity, which, as far as its very existence and essence is concerned, lies absolutely beyond our human capacities of perception and understanding, can nevertheless be spoken of, thanks to Incarnation. The unattainable Divine essence became, for the sake of our salvation, visible and describable in our language. The incarnate Son of God can be referred to using the names furnished by human language, but He is the first and true image of the invisible God the Father, and is not different or unequal to the persons of Father and Holy Spirit in regard to the Divine essence. Predicates and names relating to Him are not appellations pertinent only to his humanity. In speaking about His human hypostasis, we are speaking about one and the same Divine hypostasis of God the Word. In other words, Incarnation provides us with theological justification for speculative discourse, in which Christ as the Incarnated Word is the source of the content of Revelation, and also the criterion of correct denomination.

This justification for speaking about God in positive terms can hardly be recognized as appropriate for a philosophically grounded logic. Like the justification offered by the Cappadocians, it is ultimately rooted in faith. While it relies on some philosophical prerequisites, including a traditional definition of truth and a logical description of language as the truth bearer, the ultimate endorsement for the possibility of language referring to the transcendent God stems from the Incarnation of God the Logos. Thus, as the Icons give a true depiction of God, and as letters of the Scripture depict words (*Apology* 3.23=1.13), so these words can be viewed, in light of John's theology, as a true account of the Incarnate God. The language of theology is truthful thanks to the Incarnation that is seen, through faith, as a fact. In this specific way, theological language meets the criteria for meaningful speech. Furthermore, as someone who rejects religious images also thereby denies the truth of Incarnation and refuses Christ and his salutary grace, so, according to the principles of John's theology, someone who rejects positive language used about God would be rejecting the core doctrines of Christianity. For in Christianity, we see the Lord's glory face-to-face. If we view the positive statements of speculative theology as essentially meaningless, we should probably, as John advises the iconoclasts, go back to keeping the Sabbath and practising circumcision (*Apology* 1.16.84–91, 1.21.76–93).

Logic within theological discourse

The final topic of our investigation concerns the logic applied in Christian theological discourse. First of all, there is a need to point out that theology, just like any other discipline in the field of human activities in which any kind of reasoning and argumentation concerning certain objective structures takes place, is a discipline in which logic, semantics and methodology are applied (Bochenski 1965: 5–9). Secondly, there are several studies showing that from the earliest stages of the formation of the doctrine, Christian writers (1) possessed knowledge of Aristotelian and Stoic syllogistics, the Porphyrian theory of imposition and predication, etc., and (2) did not shy away from employing this knowledge in their argumentation, even if they theoretically reprimanded any use of the fruits of pagan philosophical thought. Whilst one might allege, especially on the basis of earlier Patristic texts, that elements drawn from disparate logical and philosophical systems were employed by their authors in a rather inconsistent way, during the theological debates of the fifth and sixth centuries a consistent attitude towards logic as applied in theology came to be worked out.

By the fifth century, Porphyry's logical interpretation of the Aristotelian categorical system, presented in the *Isagoge* and the commentary *On Aristotle's Categories*, had become extremely

popular and widely known, offering intellectuals of the era a clear and concise work of reference. Neoplatonic logic had already been introduced into theological discourse by Cappadocians as a conceptual tool in Trinitarian questions: i.e. they are credited with having established the famous distinction between, on the one hand, nature and substance, described in terms of what is common and universal, and, on the other, hypostasis and person, characterized as what is proper and particular.¹⁹ Yet it seems that they only adopted in somewhat different terms elements of the well-known Neoplatonic account of universals and Porphyry's logical interpretation of Aristotle's categorical doctrine of substance. In Neoplatonism, universals such as genera and species were elucidated as terms denoting what is common to the particulars of which they are predicated (Ammonius, *Commentary on the Categories*, 49.5–11; Simplicius, *On the Categories*, 53.6–9, 5.32–56.4). In Porphyry, in turn, a substance of a certain kind is predicated as a universal of a particular or individual (Porphyry, *On the Categories*, 71–74).²⁰ Besides, especially in Gregory of Nyssa, the manner in which he approaches issues such as substance, nature, hypostasis etc. resembles the methodological stance adopted by Porphyry in the *Isagoge* and commentary on *Categories* regarding primary and secondary substance ([Basil], Letter 38; Gregory, *To Ablabius* and *To the Greeks*). Just as Porphyry did, Gregory discusses the aforementioned notions in terms of predication (*to legomenon*, i.e. what is said). Accordingly, the term “hypostasis” is the name given to predications made in the mode of particularity, as opposed to generic predication of such terms as “substance” or “nature” (cf. Edwards 2015).

Furthermore, Cyril of Alexandria incorporated into his teaching some terminological determinations of Aristotle's Neoplatonic commentators, developed for the purposes of their logic. In his Trinitarian as well as his Christological works, Cyril uses and understands the conception of substance/nature in a manner closer to the Neoplatonists than to Aristotle. In particular, he construes “substance,” in the meaning of genus, not as something abstract, but as a real being, common to individuals of the same kind. These are “common substances,” close to Neoplatonic genera. Yet Cyril also applies the name “substance” to individuals of a species, broadly in line with the Neoplatonic definition of “primary substance.”²¹

During Christological debates over the doctrine proclaimed at the Chalcedon Council, according to which Christ is elucidated as “acknowledged in two natures” that “come together into one person and one hypostasis,” usage of the Neoplatonic apparatus was fairly accepted by defenders and opponents of this doctrine, as already sanctioned by the tradition and the highest ecclesiastical authorities. Pro-Chalcedonian as well as anti-Chalcedonian stances – represented, respectively, by such Neo-Chalcedonians as John Grammarian and Leontius of Byzantium on the one hand, and by no one else but the famous Neoplatonist John Philoponus on the other – relied on Porphyry's logic to even a greater extent than their predecessors. Taking into account that the Council of Constantinople endorsed not only Chalcedonian Christological doctrine but also its Neo-Chalcedonian defence, which was to a considerable degree constructed with the assistance of the philosophical apparatus and solutions of Neoplatonic logic, it possible to say that the utilization of Neoplatonic logic within theological discourse received the highest ecclesiastical approval. Therefore, it should not be surprising that by the end of the Patristic period John Damascene had actually outlined – in his *Philosophical Chapter*, meant by him as an introductory chapter to his *Fount of Knowledge* – a traditional Neoplatonic curriculum based on Porphyry's *Isagoge* and commentary on *Categories*. The philosophical, or rather logical, purpose of this introductory part, in John's opinion, was to provide a needed clarification of terms and definitions, allowing us to understand arguments employed in theological issues. In other words, John presented and used Neoplatonic logical works as an instrument and a tool of theological discourse. The question that should be addressed, however, is why Neoplatonic logic was considered by Patristic authors to be so useful for Christian theology.

First of all, Porphyry's commentary on *Categories* and in his *Isagoge* offered clear and concise expositions of difficult logical issues. A philosophically less sophisticated reader could easily be convinced that they were presenting a set of self-evident claims, pertaining to both logic and ontology. The Neoplatonic tradition that Porphyry inaugurated treated Aristotle's philosophy as such, and especially his categorical doctrine, as an introduction to more complicated philosophical issues. Thus, commentaries that served as preparatory understanding or elucidation of the most basic questions were a proper point of reference for the clarification of terminology. But perhaps more important here was that the Neoplatonists treated logic as a part of philosophy – counting it as a discipline in its own right, but also as one that could be instrumental for various different disciplines. In their opinion, it was the Aristotelian logic that could also be employed as such an instrument in philosophy and other disciplines.²² By “logical,” Neoplatonists understood investigations consisting in the analysis of categorical propositions (Ammonius, *On the Categories* 43.10–24, 44.11–45.22).²³ Porphyry's intention in the *Isagoge* was to address issues concerning the terms and conceptions that needed to be correctly understood by someone attempting a reading of Aristotle's *Categories* from a logical rather than an ontological point of view. Besides, he defined the theoretical aim of the *Categories* as being concerned with significant expressions that signify things, not with things as such. Thus, both of his treatises, as well as other Neoplatonic commentaries, can be seen as providing an inquiry into a theory that classifies terms according to their syntactical and semantic roles in propositions within the network of colloquial language.

Neoplatonism offered not a new ontology, but a logical approach, terminology and method. And precisely this logical approach was of the most value for theological discourse, as it provided a rationally substantiated and systematized mode of speaking about, and describing, things that cannot be rationally explained. The mysteries of the Holy Trinity and Incarnation cannot be ontologically explicated. There are no philosophical solutions for something that by its very nature is a mystery and a subject of faith. Doctrines proclaimed by Ecumenical Councils, for instance, do not explain the mysteries, but rather express, in appropriate formulations, truths revealed and comprehended within Church tradition. Patristic authors used the tools offered by Neoplatonism to express those truths in the most adequate and proper manner, and to further develop Christian discourse, and they did so precisely because Christian theology justified the possibility of speaking positively about the Divinity even while respecting its incomprehensibility.²⁴

Notes

- 1 Aristides, *Apology* 2.1 Syr.; Justin, *Second Apology* 5.1.–2; Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 1.3.2–12. Cf. van den Broek 1988; Dillon 1988. See also the study of Philo's account of naming the Divine and its connections with early Christian thought in Runia 1988.
- 2 See Vaggione 1976: 173–174, 227–228.
- 3 Rubin 1998. For scholarship on the philosophical roots of Eunomius' conception, see Karfíková (2007: 294–299).
- 4 Cf. Long and Sedley 1987: 239–253.
- 5 It is not surprising, then, that he was accused of claiming that he knew perfectly the Divine essence; see Vaggione 1987: 167–170 on *Fr. II*. Vaggione's defense of Eunomius (1976: 278) would suggest that Eunomius did not understand the philosophical vocabulary of the era, which viewed a conception as tantamount to knowledge and comprehension of its object.
- 6 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 10.123–24; Cicero, *Nature of the Gods* 1.43–49, 2.12–3; Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1075e 2–7.
- 7 This is exactly the point that makes Basil's conception essentially different from the one found in Epicurus and the Stoics, who maintained that there are imprinted conceptions and a common understanding of certain Divine attributes, while others can be discerned by the human intellect through reasoning and observation.

- 8 Cf. Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius* 117.6; Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions*. 1060A.
- 9 I disagree here with Mortley 1986: 135–136, who thinks that Basil rejects Eunomius' conception of *ennoia* as reductively limiting it to a narrowly philosophical meaning. Mortley's interpretation of both Eunomius' account and Basil's response neglects the patent references, especially in the latter, to Stoic theory of knowledge and language. This leads Mortley to read Eunomius' account as founded in Platonic and Neoplatonic premises, and Basil's response as non-philosophical.
- 10 Cf. Chrysippus, *Fr.* 88, 9, 404, 501. In my opinion, Basil's elucidation can be traced to the account of Chrysippus, but this issue calls for more in-depth study. Also, it is worth noting that John Damascene, in basically transmitting Basil's account of *epinoia*, refers to it as *ep-ennoia*, i.e., as to something adding to an *ennoia* (Dial.=Dialectic 65.84–5). See also Demetracopoulos 2007: 390–391, where he argues that Basil draws on a lost logical part of Arius Didymus' *Epitome*, and Demetracopoulos 1999, where he shows some parallels with Plotinus' usage of the Stoic conception of *epinoia*. Also Karfiková 2007: 299–300.
- 11 Cf. also Meredith 2007.
- 12 Basil possibly alludes here to Origen's account of the appellative functioning of names of Christ in *Commentary on John*, esp. I:52–53, I:136, I:200. Cf. Kuhner 2017: 196–198; on Basil in relation to Origen's account, see also Studer 2007). I refrain from analyzing this issue here, seeing as Origen discusses the names of Christ in purely theological terms. I also refrain from discussing positive and negative kinds of appellation here, as they are, in fact, particular cases of one and the same mechanism of predication. See *Against Eunomius* 1.10, 4.
- 13 On the question of his philosophical influences and sources, cf. Karfiková 2007: 300–305; Arabatzis 2007. See also Douglass 2005 on the role of the gap (diastema) between Creator and its creation in the comprehension and expression of the Divinity and several studies on the subject in Karfiková et al. 2007.
- 14 As with Basil, according to Gregory names applied to God fall under two categories: affirmative appellations and appellations in the form of negation. See *Against Eunomius* II.131–6, 142–146.
- 15 Scott, analyzing and criticizing Gregory's account from a logical point of view, interprets it as an instance of fictionalism and reductionism, but he does not take into consideration Gregory's epistemological premise. See Scott and Citron (2016). On the other hand, Dolidze 2007 presents a rather ontological reading of Gregory's account of language, hardly paying attention to its logical and epistemological significance.
- 16 These two epistemological assumptions invalidate the criticism of Cappadocian theory in Scott 2013: 17, based on his interpretation of the language of Cappadocian “positive theology” as directly representational and naturalistic.
- 17 On the ontological and logical premises of the Damascene's conception of hypostasis, and its role in his theology of Icons, see Zhyrkova 2017.
- 18 Noble 1987: 103.
- 19 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 21. 1124.44–7; *Oration* 39. 345.41–4; Basil *Letters*. 214.4.6–15; Gregory of Nyssa *Against Eunomius* 205; [Basil] *Letters* 38.2–3, passim in *To Ablabius, To the Greeks*. Cf. Lienhard 2002; Meredith 1995: 44.
- 20 Universal and particular substance are equivalents of secondary and primary substance, respectively. See Porphyry, *Commentary on the Categories* 88.33–89.17, 90.5–10.
- 21 For more on that subject, see Zhyrkova 2016.
- 22 Porphyry's *Isagoge*, being intended for elucidation of the five predicables, most obviously is preoccupied with kind of formal logic's issues. See Ammonius, *On the Isagoge* 23.2–4; Elias, *On the Isagoge*. 26.36–27.1, 39.1–3. Cf. Lee 1984; Lloyd 1990.
- 23 Cf. Ebbesen 1990: 146; Strange 1987: 961–962.
- 24 The chapter presents some results of the author's research carried out within the framework of the project “Neochalcedonian Philosophical Paradigm,” financed by Poland's National Science Center (grant UMO-2016/22/M/HS1/00170).

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The mystical element

Andrew Louth

The concept of mysticism

To speak of the ‘mystical element’ is to evoke the shade of Baron von Hügel. His *The Mystical Element of Religion as Studied in Saint Catherine of Genoa and Her Friends* (first published 1908) was very influential (Louis Massignon claimed that he took it as a model for his own great work on the Muslim mystic and martyr, al-Hallāj (Massignon 1982: I, lx)). In his book, von Hügel introduces the ‘mystical’ element alongside two other elements: the ‘institutional’ and the ‘intellectual’ (though von Hügel only rarely identified them so concisely). In the book, he presents them as a kind of Hegelian triad. The first element is the ‘institutional’, corresponding to the child: ‘Religion is here, above all, a Fact and Thing’. The second is the ‘intellectual’, when the fact and reality of religion is questioned and argued over, corresponding to the youth: ‘Religion here becomes Thought, System, a Philosophy’. Thirdly, and finally, there comes the ‘mystical’, where religion becomes a matter of felt experience, leading to a ‘deeper personality’, which corresponds to the mature person: ‘Here religion is rather felt than seen or reasoned about, is loved and lived rather than analysed, is action and power, rather than either external fact or intellectual verification’ (Hügel 1923: 50–53). Though they are seen as a developmental triad, at any one time the three elements are present in different proportions. Nevertheless, it is not rash, I think, to see in this analysis an attempt to respond to his own times and the controversies in which he was caught up. Von Hügel was bound up with the Catholic modernist controversy (his *Mystical Element* was published the year after the papal decree, *Lamentabile*, condemning modernism), and he was in touch with the main protagonists of the crisis (Marlé 1960). That controversy could be seen, in terms of von Hügel’s analysis, as a conflict between the institutional and the intellectual, which could be resolved by drawing on the third, mystical, element of religion. Thus, to speak of the mystical element of early Christian philosophy might suggest discerning this third element in early Christian experience, to be distinguished from the institutional and the intellectual. If one were to embark on this quest, one would find plenty to go on, for twentieth-century research on the Fathers was exceptionally open to the ‘mystical’: one thinks of titles such as *Origène et la “connaissance mystique”* (Crouzel), *Platonisme et théologie mystique* (Daniélou), *Saint Augustin et le désir de Dieu* (Bochet), even *Dogme et spiritualité chez Cyrille d’Alexandrie* (du Manoir de Juaye), the enormous interest in Evagrius, Völker’s series of

monographs (Philo, Clement, Origen, Gregory of Nyssa, Dionysios the Areopagite, Maximos the Confessor, John Climacus, Symeon the New Theologian, Nikolaos Kavasilas), the *Dictionnaire de Spiritualité*. It almost begins to look as if the rediscovery of the Fathers amounted to the recovery of mysticism, or the ‘mystical’.

The point of this digression on the ‘mystical element’ is that such a notion has become so important in our contemporary understanding of religion that we can easily forget that it has a strictly contemporary context and go on to make the ‘mystical element’ central to our understanding of the Fathers, to import into them von Hügel’s sense of the mystical experience of (inevitably) the individual, in contrast to the readily universalizable experience of the institutional and the essentially universalizable claims of the intellect, or even to think of the mystical as the real heart of the faith, in contrast to more external nature of the institutional and the generally abstract nature of the intellectual. What then are we seeking to understand when we consider the ‘mystical element’ in early Christianity? An alternative to carrying von Hügel’s notion of the mystical element back into the early Christian centuries might be to explore, to begin with, the Greek words from which the modern ‘mystical’ is derived: that is, words such as *μυστήριον*, *μυστικός*.

In a seminal article called (in English) ‘“Mysticism”: an Essay on the History of a Word’, Louis Bouyer demonstrated without much difficulty that the word *μυστικός* is used in patristic Greek in three distinct ways (Bouyer 1956). The first, and most common, way uses the word to designate the ‘mystical’ meaning of scripture; the second way is in the context of the liturgy, where from the fourth century onwards, the word *μυστικός* is frequently used to designate the words used, and ceremonies, and indeed items of liturgical furniture; the third meaning is least common and refers to the Christian life. But what does the word mean in these various contexts? The word itself comes from the Hellenistic mystery religions: the root of the word is *μυ-*, which seems to be an onomatopoeic root suggesting – through keeping the lips together – silence, a secret kept. The noun *μυστήριον* means, most simply, a ‘secret’, so the adjective *μυστικός* suggests something secret or hidden; the one who initiates others into a secret is a *μυσταγωγός*, the one initiated a *μύστης*, the process of initiation *μυσταγωγία*. There is certainly an increase in the use of such terminology in the fourth century when, to prevent the Christian faith being dissolved by the influx of the half-converted, the Church seems deliberately to have enhanced the awe-inspiring aspect of the Christian liturgy, not least the liturgy of Christian initiation (Yarnold 1971), but it was, as we shall see, then already long established. Bouyer argued that any similarity with Hellenistic mystery religions is superficial, the real context of this language being quite different. At its heart is the understanding of Christ as the divine *μυστήριον*, which is central to the epistles of the Apostle Paul (cf. Colossians 1:26–27, 2:2, 4:3; Romans 16:25; Ephesians 3:4). This secret is a secret that has been declared; but despite that it remains a secret, because what has been declared cannot be simply grasped since it is *God’s* secret, and God is beyond any human comprehension. The secret of the Gospel is the hidden meaning of the Scriptures: for Christians the whole of what they came to call the ‘Old Testament’ finds its true meaning in Christ. God’s plan for humankind to which the Scriptures bear witness is made plain in the Incarnation. And this is the most common context, as we have seen, for the use of the word *μυστικός*: it refers therefore to the hidden meaning of the Scriptures, the true meaning that is revealed in Christ, a meaning that remains mysterious, for it is no simple message, but the life in Christ that is endless in its implications. Christians, however, share in the life in Christ preeminently through the sacraments – *μυστήρια* in Greek – and the word *μυστικός* is used therefore in relation to the sacraments as a way of designating the hidden reality, encountered and shared through the sacraments. The final use of the word *μυστικός* refers to the hidden reality of the life of baptized Christians: a reality which is, as St. Paul put it, ‘hid

with Christ in God' (Colossians 3. 3). If the 'mysticism' of the Fathers is what these various uses of *μυστικός* refer to, then it is very different from what we call mysticism nowadays: it does not refer to some elite group, or elite practice, within Christianity; it simply refers to the lived reality of Christianity itself. It is not something separate from the institutions of Christianity: it is the meaning that these institutions enshrine. It is not something distinct from the dogmas of Christianity (the 'intellectual' element), for the 'mystical' meaning of Scripture, in this sense, is often enough precisely such dogmas, which are the hidden meaning of the Scriptures. 'Mystical' and 'sacramental', from this perspective, are interchangeable: which is hardly surprising, as *sacramentum* is the Latin word used to translate *μυστήριον*.

Bouyer's purpose, in the article referred to, was primarily to refute the idea of an intrinsic connection between the Hellenistic mystery religions and the Christian sacraments: an association made much of by Protestant scholars of the *religionsgeschichtlich* school, and also by the great Benedictine liturgiologist, Dom Odo Casel, whose approach to the liturgy (at that stage, at any rate), Bouyer regarded as misguided. This led him to draw the conclusion that his survey of the patristic notion of the mystical had shown that 'true mysticism' was ecclesial, not individualistic. The danger with that way of putting it is that the modern use of the term mysticism is not at all challenged: it is endorsed, even as it is baptized. But there is more to the history of the term 'mysticism', and that, I suggest, points to a more radical conclusion.

A further shift in the register of the term 'mystical' to Western Latin ears, at any rate, was explored many years ago by the great Jesuit theologian, Henri de Lubac, in his book, *Corpus Mysticum* (de Lubac 1949; see Certeau 1964, 1982: 107–155). Put very briefly, *corpus mysticum Christi* ceases to refer to the sacramental body of Christ, and instead refers to the hidden, invisible body of the predestined, while the sacramental body comes to be called *corpus verum*, the true body of Christ. The links that existed between the deeper meaning of Scripture, the sacramental reality, and hidden life of the believer in Christ, signified by the term *μυστικός/mysticus*/'mystical', have been removed. What we have discovered, I venture to suggest, is the kind of fragmentation that von Hügel's analysis of the three elements of religion is seeking to repair.

What then is there to discuss in a chapter on the 'mystical element' in a chapter of a book on early Christian philosophy? What I suggest – belatedly, the patient reader might be thinking – is to look at how the early Christians sought to understand knowing and participating in God, which both they and their pagan contemporaries would have agreed involves a transformation of the one seeking such participation, and indeed a transformation of what it is to know at all. It is very easy in doing this to slip into concentrating only on those aspects where there is some evident overlap, but we can perhaps avoid that by bearing in mind the unity represented by the notion of the mystical element that we have already discovered. Two approaches seem to me worth pursuing and capable of being pursued concisely: one the role of love in the Christian understanding of coming to know God, the other a discussion of the role Moses comes to play as a model of the soul in search of God.

Love

Consideration of the place of love in Christian reflection has been deeply affected in modern scholarship – utterly confused, might be a better way of putting it – by Anders Nygren's book, *Agape and Eros* (Nygren 1957). It is certainly true that the commonest word for love in Greek, *ἔρως*, is never found in either the Septuagint or the New Testament, where the usual word of love is *ἀγάπη*, a relatively colourless word in classical Greek, but to regard these words as 'fundamental motifs', and indeed opposed motifs, is to impose on ancient usage a distinction

hard to find there; indeed, when discussed, the two words are regarded as closely, if not exactly, equivalent. For our purposes the words are important as the human relationship to God or the divine is considered, both in Christianity and in classical philosophical reflection in terms of love: love inspires the quest for God, and love's purification is important in both the Christian and the classical tradition. Nygren's distinction overlooks, among much else, the fact that there is an asceticism of, or training in, love in the New Testament, as in the classical tradition, for example, the progress the Apostle Paul envisages in Romans, where the Christian passes from tribulation to patience, from patience to testing, from testing to hope, which is not disappointed for the 'love of God is poured out in our hearts through the Holy Spirit that is given to us' (see Romans 5:3–5, which Maximus the Confessor makes the basis of his asceticism of love: cf. *On Charity* 1.2–3). Nygren's claim that here 'the love of God' means exclusively God's love for us, and not ours for God, was rightly called in question by Burnaby.

If there is, in Christianity, a quest for God (even if inspired first of all by God's love for us), a quest in which God is loved and that love purified in the course of the quest, then it is not difficult to see how Greek thinkers who were Christians found themselves drawing on Greek and especially Platonic themes as they sought to explore the nature of the quest. Plato's most famous and influential discussion of the human quest for the ultimate, seeing it in terms of love, is found in Diotima's account given to Socrates in the *Symposium*. There we have an account of the ascent of the soul to the ultimate conceived of as the beautiful, an ascent in which the soul's love, or ἔρωσ, is gradually purified as the soul passes from loving one beautiful body, to seeing that what constitutes the beauty of one is common to all, passing thence to love for the immaterial beauty of the soul, then to what makes the soul beautiful, namely its capacity for understanding and knowledge, and finally finding itself drawn to the 'great ocean of the beautiful', where suddenly/immediately – ἐξάφνης – there is revealed 'a wondrous vision, beautiful in its nature' (*Symposium* 210DE). In the soul's ascent to the beautiful through love, there is both purification of the soul's love, and also a purification, simplification, of the beauty that draws it. The soul's ἔρωσ remains a longing, but as it passes beyond the beloved one to beauty in itself possession *for oneself* is transcended, for all share in the one beauty. The beauty sought is also transformed from bodily charm to something 'that is eternal in being, neither coming into being nor perishing, neither waxing nor waning, not partly beautiful and partly ugly', nor relative to the beholder, but αὐτὸ καθ' αὐτὸ μεθ' αὐτοῦ μονοειδὲς αἰεὶ ὄν – 'itself eternally being of one form according to itself with itself' (*Symposium* 211B). There are other accounts of such a quest, for instance in the *Phaedrus* (246A–247C), and in the *Republic* with the allegory of the cave (VII. 514A–521B); there are also remarks that resonate within the Platonic tradition, and picked up by Christians, such as Socrates' remark in the *Theaetetus* that 'flight [from the world] is assimilation to God as far as is possible' (*Theaetetus* 176A). These accounts inform Christian understanding of what is involved in coming to know God: for Christian consideration of love, beauty, and purification very often draws on the reflection by Plato and later Platonists.

One of the first to draw on Platonism in this way is Clement of Alexandria. In a well-known passage, he seems to envisage a meditative practice in which the soul withdraws from the world and enters into the divine (it is not surprising that one of Clement's favourite passages from Plato is the passage from the *Theaetetus* just quoted):

We shall understand the method of purification by confession, and the visionary (ἐποπτικὸν) method by analysis, attaining to the primary intelligence by analysis, beginning at its basic principles. We take away from the body its natural qualities, removing the dimension of height, and then that of breadth and then that of length. The point that remains is a unit (μονὰς), as it were, having position; if we take away position then we have the concept

of the monad. If then we take away everything concerned with bodies and the things called incorporeal, and cast ourselves into the greatness of Christ, and so advance into the immeasurable by holiness, we might perhaps attain to the conception of the Almighty, knowing not what he is, but what he is not.

(*Stromateis* 5.11.71, Chadwick's tr., corrected, in Chadwick 1965: 430)

Henry Chadwick compares this passage of Clement's with similar accounts of meditative abstraction (or analysis) in Celsus (on whose text, quoted by Origen, he is quoting), Albinus (Alcinous), and Plotinus (Chadwick 1965: 429–430, n. 4). Three points should be noted: first, that the method of analysis leads to *ἐποπτεία*, the term used for the highest degree of initiation in the mysteries, truly here we have something we could call the 'mystical'; secondly, this (meditative, or contemplative) practice of abstraction, a form of prayer, enables us to cast ourselves into the 'greatness of Christ'; thirdly, what is revealed is not a form of conceptual knowledge, but 'not what he is, but what he is not': what later will be called 'apophatic' knowledge of God.

Another passage from Clement to look at is also from *Stromateis*, where he says that

Philosophy according to Moses is divided into four: into the historical, and what is properly called the legislative, to which belong matters of ethical practice, the third is the priestly, which is also natural contemplation, and the fourth, beyond all the rest, is the theological form, contemplation (*ἐποπτεία*), which Plato says belongs to the truly great mysteries; this form Aristotle calls metaphysics (*μετὰ τὰ φυσικὰ*).

(*Stromateis* 1.176.1–2)

It is most likely that Clement is saying that there are four kinds of writing in the Pentateuch, regarded as Moses' work: history, legislation, accounts of liturgical ceremonies, and a fourth section concerned with theology, but this distinction is soon applied to the whole of the Pentateuch, indeed the whole of what Christians by this time called the Old Testament, each part of which was held to have, first, an historical or literal meaning, then a moral application, then something concerned with natural contemplation, and finally its deepest theological or contemplative meaning – foreshadowing the medieval four senses of Scripture, but also suggesting an approach to Scripture in which, as Henri de Lubac put it, 'there is expounded as ascesis and a mysticism which can be characterized as Christological, ecclesial, and sacramental: it is a veritable history of the spiritual life, founded on dogma' (Lubac 1959: 203). Furthermore, we find in Clement's account a sense that, in this case, the highest meaning of Scripture can be regarded as equivalent to initiation into the highest of the mysteries.

This approach early on finds its archetypal expression in relation to the Song of Songs. In his *Prologue* to the commentary on the Song of Songs (which survives only in the fairly free Latin translation of Rufinus, and then only the prologue and the first three books, out of a total of ten), Origen discusses first the nature of his interpretation of the Song, secondly his understanding of the nature of love, the first discussion we have of the relation of *ἀγάπη* and *ἔρως* (somewhat veiled as the Latin words for love do not match the Greek words exactly), and thirdly, returning to the hermeneutical question, how the Song relates to the other books of Wisdom in the Hebrew Bible: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (or *The Preacher*). On the first question, Origen states that the Song is an epithalamium, that is a song about marriage, celebrating the love between the bride and the bridegroom; however, it is to be interpreted as about the relationship between the Word of God, as the bridegroom, and the soul 'made in his image' or the Church, both of whom are accompanied by companions or friends. He remarks on the danger of understanding the Song as about sexual love, commenting that such danger is recognized 'among

the Hebrews', so that it is included among the four biblical passages known as δευτερώσεις ('repetitions'), only to be read by the mature – that is, the account of the creation in Genesis (the 'Hexaemeron'), the first chapters of Ezekiel, with their account of the Cherubim, and the end, with its account of the building of the Temple, and the Song of Songs. Origen then turns to the second question, the theme of the Song, which is love. The Scriptures use, he argues, homonyms, and so it is when referring to love, the Scriptures avoid words that might apply to sexual love (*cupido* or *amor*, in Rufinus' translation, presumably ἔρωσ in Origen's Greek) and instead used *caritas* or *dilectio*, in Rufinus' translation, ἀγάπη in Origen. There are a few exceptions, where words related to ἔρωσ are used, which Origen gives (Proverbs 4:6; Wisdom 8:2); and in 2 Kings 13, the love that led Amnon to rape his sister Tamar is called ἀγάπη (2 Kings 13:15). There is, then, he argues no difference between ἀγάπη and ἔρωσ, save that ἀγάπη is 'so exalted that even God himself is called ἀγάπη', referring to 1 John 4:7–8. He goes on to argue that, nevertheless, these words are homonyms, quoting Ignatios, who said of Christ, 'my ἔρωσ has been crucified'. This discussion is referred to by later Christian writers, such as Gregory of Nyssa and Dionysios the Areopagite (who more or less summarizes Origen's argument in *Divine Names* 4), and opens the way for the Christian use of ἔρωσ, which thereby makes easier Christian assimilation of the Platonic use of ἔρωσ. The third point concerns the place of the Song in the three books ascribed to Solomon in the Hebrew Bible: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song. He draws a parallel between these three books and the three branches of learning among the Greeks: *philosophia moralis, naturalis, inspectiva* in Rufinus' translation (to which some 'among the Greeks' add a fourth branch, logic) and explains this sequence thus:

That study is called moral which inculcates a seemly manner of life and gives a grounding in habits that incline to virtue. The study called natural is that in which the nature of each single thing is considered; so that nothing in life may be done which is contrary to nature, but everything is assigned to the uses to which the Creator has brought it into being. The study called inspective is that by which we go beyond things seen and contemplate somewhat of things divine and heavenly, beholding them with the mind alone, for they are beyond the range of bodily sight.

This sequence is then applied to the three books of Wisdom – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song – so that Proverbs teaches morality, which is understood as purifying, Ecclesiastes explores what is natural, leading to a sense of transcendence of the created, the Song instilling in the soul love for things divine and heavenly, leading to union and communion with God. We have here the beginning of the threefold division of the soul's ascent, characteristic of much later Christian spirituality (and sometimes called the three ways of the mystical life). The third term, *inspectiva*, is puzzling; in some parallel accounts it becomes the contemplative, or even the theological. It has sometimes been suggested that Rufinus misread (or a copyist mistranscribed) ἐποπτική as ἐνοπτική/*inspectiva*, so that the third term refers to the highest initiation in the mysteries, which would make sense and assimilate Origen to Clement, but it is no more than a guess.

Origen's understanding of the progress of the soul as a progress of deepening and purified love reveals the influence of Platonic ideas on his thought; they were to be enormously influential. His advocacy of the Song of Songs as celebrating the love that unites the soul or the Church with God was similarly powerfully influential, initiating a tradition of such commentaries (the earlier commentary on the Song by Hippolytus treats it quite differently). His most important successor in the Greek world was Gregory of Nyssa, but in the Latin world Origen's Latin version inspired a host of commentaries on the Song, reaching its peak in the twelfth century (Astell 1990; Matter 1990). Gregory of Nyssa's commentary (in the form of homilies) was

clearly inspired by Origen. By common consent, it belongs to the last decade of his life, along with his not-dissimilar *Life of Moses*. The differences from Origen include greater awareness of Plotinus, Origen's near-contemporary, with its much more coherent contemplative view of reality. The dependence of Gregory on Plotinus is difficult to calibrate, and seems to be more an awareness of one or two of Plotinus' treatises, rather than comprehensive knowledge of the six books of the *Enneads*, as they were collected and arranged systematically by his disciple, Porphyry. Certain images that Plotinus used attracted Gregory's attention, not least the comparison in *Enneads* 1.6.9 of purification to a sculptor cutting away at his block of stone and polishing it to reveal the beauty of the statue within, as it were: an image evoked in the *Life of Moses* 2.313, and found also in the *Inscriptions of the Psalms* 2.11, and the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* 14 (Daniélou 1954).

Gregory takes over from Origen his account of the three stages in the progress of the soul towards union with God, relating them to the three stages of Moses' encounter with God, as he finds it in Exodus: first, in the light, φῶς, then in the cloud, νεφέλη, and finally in darkness, γνόφος (*Song of Songs* 11:1000–1001). The three stages have, however, been transformed. Whereas Origen sees a progress from darkness to a greater and greater illumination, Gregory sees a progress into darkness. For him the first stage, conversion and turning to God, is experienced as light, but thereafter as the soul comes closer to God the experience is one of deeper and deeper darkness, for the soul moves away from what is familiar to what is less easy to comprehend; as it comes close to God it experiences still deeper darkness, for it comes to realize how great is the distance between God and itself, for God having created it and all else out of nothing, the soul realizes that God is utterly invisible and incomprehensible. The difference between Origen and Gregory in this is a result of the deeper awareness of the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* that emerged in the course of the theological debates of the fourth century: this awareness leading to a realization that there is nothing in common between God's being and that of the creature. Knowledge was based on the principle that 'like knows like'; the utter unlikeness between God and the creature rendered nugatory any achieved knowledge of God by the creature. God could become known through the restoration of the image of God in accordance with which the human was created, but this was the realization of something given, and furthermore the restoration of the image, damaged by sin, could only come about through God's initiative, manifest at its deepest in the Incarnation of the Word of God and his triumph over death on the Cross. To come to know God was not the realization of a possibility hidden in the depths of the soul – the realization of its natural affinity with God – but entry into an encounter in which the normal ways of knowing were defeated and the soul baffled, that is, entry into a darkness that became deeper and deeper the closer the soul came to God. The contrast, discontinuity, between the uncreated God and the creature was also experienced as a sense of God's boundlessness or infinity, the realization of which, beyond the natural powers of the creature to comprehend, amounted to bafflement and disorientation. So, in contrast with some other ways of negotiating the incomprehensibility of the ultimate, the solution for Gregory could not lie in some ecstatic release or rapture; all that is left for the soul, as it comes closer to God, is a continual reaching out to God, a longing that is never ultimately satisfied, for it is a longing for a God that is infinite. In one homily on the Song, Gregory insists that

the apostolic words are shown to be true: through the stretching forward to the things that are before what has already been attained is consigned to oblivion. Eternally discovering the greater and transcendent good holds the attention of those who enjoy it and prevents them from looking to the past; their delight in what is much to be preferred erases all

memory of what is inferior. Such is the notion we derive from explanation of the philosophy of the bridegroom.

(*Song of Songs* 6: 888A)

Moses' ultimate encounter with God is told in Exod. 33. When the cloud descended on the Tabernacle, God had appeared to him and 'spoke with Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend' (Exodus 33:11). This is, for Gregory, the manifestation in the cloud. Moses, however, wants more: 'Show me yourself', he asks (33:18). God replies that he cannot see his face, for a human cannot see his face and live; but he continues:

Behold this place beside me, stand on this rock. When my glory passes by, I shall put you in the cleft of the rock and cover it with my hand until I have passed by. And I shall take away my hand, and then you will see my back, for my face shall not be seen by you.

(33:21–23)

The highest revelation made to Moses is to see God's back, not his face: to follow him, that is. In another place in the Commentary on the Song, Gregory speaks of the soul's experience of the coming of God in the night; he does not reveal himself for 'how can that which is invisible reveal itself in the night?' – being both invisible and in the night, apprehension is doubly impossible. Nevertheless, there is revelation of a presence: for

he gives the soul some sense of his presence (αἴσθησιν μὲν τινα δίδωσι τῇ ψυχῇ τῆς παρουσίας), even while he eludes her clear apprehension, concealed as he is by the invisibility of his nature. What then is the mystic initiation (μυσταγωγία) that comes to the soul in this night? The Word touches the doors [of the soul].

(*Song of Songs* 11:1001)

A 'certain sense of his presence', revealed through the touch of the Word, leading to μυσταγωγία, already used in the late fourth century of the Eucharistic liturgy.

This reaching out of the soul for God is longing love, ἔρωσ, even ἀγάπη, for Gregory, like Origen, treats them as homonyms, or at least near homonyms. He speaks of the bride being 'wounded by a spiritual and fiery dart of ἔρωσ', going on to comment: ἐπιτεταμένη γὰρ ἀγάπη ὁ ἔρωσ λέγεται ('for *agape* that is strained to intensity is called *eros*': *Song of Songs* 13:1048CD).

Moses

We have already encountered Moses, for he appears, alongside the bride, as the model of the Christian seeker after God in Gregory's homilies on the Song (for this section, see Daniélou 1950: 131–200). The reason for this is not far to seek, for if one consults the account of Moses in the Pentateuch, we find an account of one called by God, from his birth: a call repeated in the theophany at the Burning Bush (Exodus 3), where God reveals himself to Moses as 'the One who is' (ὁ ὢν), which invites parallels with Greek conceptions of the God or the divine, leading to a life in which he is represented as being close to God, speaking with him face to face, and ultimately, in some sense, 'seeing God' (the inverted commas are necessary for, as we have seen, there is something paradoxical about Moses' ultimate vision of God: a seeing, and not seeing). Moses' presence in the Pentateuch, the Hebrew Torah, is not limited, however, to what is said about him (what he says about himself), for he was regarded as the author of the Pentateuch, so that the whole teaching of the Torah was regarded as revealed to Moses, and expounded by

him. The beginnings of such exaltation of Moses can be found in the Wisdom of Sirach, where Moses is praised for his favour with God, which raised him to glory like that of the holy ones, and manifested itself in his power before kings and his command over the people of Israel: this is because God

showed him part of his glory, sanctified him through faithfulness and obedience, chose him out of all mankind; He made him hear his voice, and led him into the thick darkness (γνόφος), and gave him the commandments face to face.

(*Ecclesiasticus* 45:3–5)

Sirach does not exactly single Moses out, for he places him among ‘famous men’, that is, the patriarchs and prophets. The decisive step in such treatment of Moses was made by Philo; in his *Life of Moses*, he discussed the significance of Moses in the two parts of the book, the first giving an account of his life, the second expounding the significance of his life: his displaying the kingly and philosophical faculties (for Moses, Philo claims, fulfils Plato’s hope expressed in the *Republic* that kings should be philosophers and philosophers kings (473D)), which had been manifest in the account given in the first part of the *Life*, but also his activities as legislator, in connexion with the high priesthood, and as a prophet: the subject of the second part of the *Life*. The overriding purpose of Part II of the *Life* is to demonstrate the way in which everything the classical philosophers have discovered about the nature of the cosmos is present, in a symbolical way, in Moses’ own account; as Numenius is reported (by Eusebius of Caesarea) as saying: ‘What is Plato, but Moses in Attic Greek?’ (*fr.* 8). A great deal is made of the way in which the four elements, and their symbolic significance, are contained in Moses’ account of the creation of the cosmos in Genesis 1 (cf. *Life of Moses* 2.88), as well as in the elaborate account given in Exodus (and elsewhere) of the Temple and everything associated with it, not least the detailed symbolism to be discerned in the robes of the high priest (cf. *Life of Moses* 2.118 ff.), where Philo is concerned to bring out the cosmic significance of the priestly vestments (and the Temple, and everything to do with it). Compared with some of the later Christian appropriations of Moses as a model for the spiritual life, Philo makes much less of Moses as one who through contemplation is admitted to a close relationship with God than in his account of the episode of the Golden Calf (Exodus 32). Moses ‘had gone up into the mountain, and was there several days communing with God’. The people grew weary of waiting and persuaded Aaron to make a Golden Calf for them to worship. The echoes of their shouting and revelling reached

even to the mountain top, Moses, as they smote upon his ear, was at a loss at once loving God and loving humans. He could not bear to leave his converse with God, in which he talked with Him, in private, alone with the alone, nor yet disregard the multitude, filled with the miseries anarchy creates:

very much the dilemma of Plato’s philosopher-king, resolved for Moses by God’s command to descend, which after making prayers and supplications he did (*Life of Moses* 2.163–166).

Philo’s work was read by the Christian philosophers of Alexandria, and one can find echoes, not, it has to be said, very striking echoes, in Clement and Origen. Clement remarks on Moses’ request to see God in Exodus 33,

Therefore Moses, persuaded that God will never be known to human wisdom, says, ‘Show me yourself’, and is forced to enter ‘into the darkness’, where the voice of God was, that is, into the inaccessible and formless concepts concerning the One who is; for God is not in

darkness or place, but transcends place and time and anything connected with what comes into being.

(*Stromateis* 2. 6. 1)

Origen has a whole homily on Moses – on the radiance of his face and the veil he placed over it: this, too, is quite reticent, very much conscious of Paul's treatment of Moses in 2 Corinthians 3, where he mentions the inability of the Israelites to bear the radiance of Moses' face, for which reason he places a veil over his face, this contrasted with the reading of the Torah by Christians, who in turning to Christ have the veil removed. He comments, too, on the difference between Moses, in the Law, whose face alone is radiant, while at the Transfiguration, when Moses appears beside Christ, he is entirely glorified (*Homilies on Exodus* 12).

It is with Gregory of Nyssa that we find Moses taken as a model of the spiritual life. His inspiration is clearly Philo, for his *Life of Moses*, like Philo's, is in two parts: the first telling the story of Moses, the second exploring its significance for the spiritual life. As we have seen, Gregory had already taken Moses as the model of one in search of God in his homilies on the Song of Songs, placing him alongside the bride. Shortly after writing these homilies, he composed his treatise of the *Life of Moses*, one of his last works (he comments on his *πολλία*, grey hairs: *Life of Moses* 1.2), and fills out in greater detail the account of Moses' progress through light, to the cloud, and finally in the darkness. This greater detail covers aspects of Moses' life, for instance, the fashioning of the tabernacle that is not so prominent in the Homilies on the Song, but it is interesting to note the difference between Philo's treatment and Gregory's: Philo is primarily concerned with the cosmic dimension of the tabernacle and its fittings, as well as of the high priestly vestment. Gregory, in contrast, passes over this quite swiftly, concentrating rather on the spiritual lessons for the soul that are to be found here. The tunic of the high priest is dyed blue (ὑάκινθος), for which Philo gives a cosmological significance – it signifies the element of air – Gregory remarks on this, but gives his own meaning, about the way the one who seeks God must make his body thin like a spider's web by the purity of his life, so that he comes 'near to the one who is without mass and as light as air' (*Life of Moses* 2.191). Of the experience of Moses in the cleft of the rock, when in response to his request to see God, he is granted to see God's back, we read in the *Life of Moses*, that 'therefore Moses, seeking to see God, is now taught what it means to see God, that is, to follow God wherever he might lead: this is to see God' (*Life of Moses* 2.252). As Puech long ago remarked, allegorization of episodes in Moses' life is a characteristic of Gregory's (Puech 1978: 137).

The figure of Moses is also important to Dionysios the Areopagite, and this importance he doubtless owes to Gregory. Moses is described as 'the foremost initiator and leader among the hierarchs according to the law' (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 5.1: 501C). But his importance for Dionysios extends into 'our' hierarchy, and he is the central figure of the *Mystical Theology*, which focuses on his ascent. Whatever the *Mystical Theology* is about, Moses is the model and exemplar. The ascent in *Mystical Theology* 1 shifts from talking in general about those who seek to ascend to God and the figure of Moses himself:

For not simply is the divine Moses bidden first of all to purify himself and then separate himself from those not just purified; but after all purification, he hears the many-sounding trumpets and sees many lights which flash forth pure and widely diffused rays. Then he separates himself from the multitude and with the chosen priests he reaches the summit of the divine ascents. But not even here does he hold converse with God himself, for does he behold him (for he is invisible), but only the place where he is. And this, I think, means that the most divine and exalted of the things that are seen with the eye or perceived by

the mind are but suggestions that barely hint at the nature of that which transcends any conception whatsoever, a presence which sets but its feet upon the spiritual pinnacles of its most holy places. And then Moses is cut off from both things seen and those who see and enters into the darkness of unknowing, a truly hidden darkness, according to which he shuts his eyes to all apprehensions that convey knowledge, for he has passed into a realm quite beyond any feeling or seeing. Now, belonging wholly to that which is beyond all, and yet to nothing at all, and being neither himself, nor another, and united in his highest part in passivity with Him who is completely unknowable, he knows by not knowing in a manner that transcends understanding.

(*Mystical Theology* 1.3: 1000B–1001A)

This is a passage that for centuries has been taken to describe the ascent of the soul to union with God in a darkness of unknowing, a passing in ecstasy beyond anything within created powers. But there is more to it than that. Puech noticed long ago that the verbs used to describe Moses' entry into the darkness are not, as one would expect, taken from Exodus, which uses the simple verb εἰσήλθεν, whereas Dionysios uses εἰσδουμένοις (1000C) and εἰσδύνει (1001A), forms of a verb he has adopted from Gregory of Nyssa; furthermore the other examples of words using the root δυν- bear liturgical associations (Puech 1978: 132). Rorem has pointed out that the way Moses' preparations for ascending the mount are described also suggest a liturgical context (Rorem 1984: 140–142, 1989): which entails that the 'mystical element' encountered here has everything to do with the *μυσταγωγία* of the Church, as well as with the modalities of the Christian life 'hidden with Christ in God' (Col. 3:3).

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Section 2

Doctrines



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The Trinity

Giulio Maspero

Introduction

In the realm of Christian philosophy, the doctrine of the Trinity fulfils a role analogous to that of metaphysics in Greek thought. However, the proof of this thesis has to be preceded by two premises, both of them of an antireductionist type: (i) the first refers to the overcoming of an epistemological approach which understands the relationship between philosophy and theology in a dialectical sense; (ii) the second indicates the impossibility of conceiving the Trinitarian and Christological doctrines as separate spheres and ones that were even chronologically distinct in their development. The first, methodological part of the present chapter will be devoted to these premises. It will be followed by a section which will attempt to prove the thesis by showing that the term *theology* came to indicate the doctrine of the Trinity in the fourth century A.D. starting from its initial identification with metaphysics in the fourth century B.C. A final section will be devoted to illustrating, on the level of content, the ontological novelty introduced by the work of the Fathers of the Church in their task of formulating the Trinitarian dogma with their work on categories, in particular that of relation. The association of the doctrine of the Trinity with Christian metaphysics will thus be presented in two stages: after having showed the identification of the two and so the existence of an ontology founded on revelation, we shall indicate its content by referring to some of its essential characteristics.

Epistemological premises

(i) As Johannes Zachhuber has clearly shown,¹ patristic theology can be considered a real philosophical school if and only if the binary opposition between the “dependency thesis” and the “opposition thesis” is overcome. The former would attribute Christian doctrine to the philosophical forms which preceded it from which it would have developed. By contrast, the second considers the philosophical elements taken up by patristic thought as a source of corruption with respect to the original purity of the revealed datum. It is enough to think of the difference of perspective between Chadwick² and Harnack.³ For the question under examination, however, it is essential to integrate both these approaches in a more relational perspective like

that proposed by Christian Gnilka. The latter has demonstrated both the points of contact and the work of attaching new meaning performed by the Fathers with regard to their philosophical sources. The use (*chrêsis*) of the different elements is founded on a judgement (*krîsis*) which adopts the components of truth discovered by the pagan authors on the basis of their valuation in the light of Revelation.⁴

(ii) Analogously to how theology cannot be conceived anachronistically as a separate discipline from philosophy, according to that academic scheme which arose in the medieval period, so, within patristic thought itself, Trinitarian reflection cannot be isolated from Christological thought. In fact, it is the paradox created by the claim to divinity advanced by Jesus of Nazareth to propose inescapably the metaphysical question of the relationship between the one and the many. As incarnate Logos, Christ refers to his *Abba*, that is, to God, as his Father in a perfect identity of nature. As Émile Benveniste has observed, there normally exist two different terms to indicate paternity in the Indo-European area of human institutions: the generic, which can also refer to the fatherland, the king etc., and the familiar, which always implies connaturality.⁵ This is the essential difference between *patêr* and *abba*, a difference which also explains the evangelists' choice in not translating the term. The crucifixion itself was the result of the clear understanding of Jesus' contemporaries that he was calling himself "son" in a way that was substantially different from that which was acceptable for the Hebrew people. Thus, the Trinitarian question arises from Christology and returns to it. Lewis Ayres's identification of a Christological epistemology at the base of Augustine's *On the Trinity* is significant.⁶ Moreover, from the chronological point of view, the difficulty of clearly separating the development of the patristic Trinitarian doctrine from the Christological one is shown, positively, by the anticipation by Gregory of Nyssa in the fourth century of some Christological elements developed in the sixth century around the Second Council of Constantinople⁷ and, negatively, by the accusation of tritheism directed at John Philoponus.⁸

Both the premises just mentioned are dictated by the need to avoid anachronism, a particularly acute risk when one is looking at the philosophy of Late Antiquity in its relationship with Christianity from the contemporary perspective. In fact, the latter is characterised by a difficulty in perceiving the religious and salvific dimension of classical philosophical study, a dimension which is only intensified in the comparison with Christianity, precisely in Late Antiquity. The Fathers' criticisms of philosophy are never directed against the use of reason, not even in Tertullian, whose "certum est quia impossibile est" goes back to the Aristotelian tradition,⁹ but on the inadequacy of the salvific proposals offered by the different schools of philosophy. As Pierre Hadot has masterfully demonstrated, the ancient thinkers' search for the first principle had as its aim the determination of the form of life which could be lived in fullness.¹⁰

Otherwise, it would be impossible to understand the closeness of Neoplatonism to Christianity, starting from the dialectical positions such as those which characterise the *Contra christianos* of Porphyry. On the one hand, the gradual emergence of the religious dimension in this philosophical school is clear to the point where, in Iamblichus, theurgy, prayer and purifications form an essential part of the philosophical life.¹¹ Moreover, Proclus defines metaphysics as theurgy.¹² On the other hand, the thesis of an absolute distinction between philosophy and theology would make it impossible to explain historically the request addressed to the emperor by the Neoplatonic philosophers in Nicomedia, in the *Consilium Principis* of 302/303, to unleash the final great persecution against the Christians.¹³

A fortiori this impossibility of an epistemological approach to patristic thought which would separate the spiritual dimension and that of prayer from doctrine would turn out to be heavily vitiated by anachronism. In this connection, absolutely convincing are Sarah Coakley's

criticisms of Maurice Wiles on the presumed pneumatological deficit of the first centuries.¹⁴ The former's prayer-based approach¹⁵ demonstrates that the absence of treatises and texts explicitly devoted to the third divine Person does not indicate the absence of the third Person from the faith of believers but rather the calm acceptance, and even the evidence, of his presence for the multiplication of charismatic phenomena in the early Church. In fact, only when a question becomes controversial do texts appear which debate it; silence, for the most part, can indicate exactly the opposite of what some claim to deduce from it, all the more when the liturgical data and the traces of spiritual life indicate a full knowledge of the divinity of the Holy Spirit among believers.

Metaphysics and theology

The impossibility of considering the Trinitarian doctrine regardless of philosophical reflection in metaphysics is demonstrated by a first macroscopic datum: in the course of their development, both are indicated by the Greek term *theologia*. To go back over the history of this semantic shift briefly could also serve to make still more evident the previously-mentioned connection between religion and metaphysics.¹⁶

According to the evidence in Greek literature, *theologoi* is the name given to the first poets such as Orpheus, Homer and Hesiod, or the prose writers who transmitted the myths of the gods explaining the origin and foundation of the world. Thus *theology* arose as *theogony* according to what was written about Pherecydes.¹⁷ Later, the birth of the gods is represented in theatrical works where *theologeion* is the name of that upper part of the stage from which the gods enter.¹⁸

However, the Sophist criticism of the fifth century B.C. was to put these traditions into crisis through Protagoras's work of demythologisation and rational criticism. The reaction of Plato and Aristotle marked the birth of metaphysics as the study of what is truly beyond the appearance of the cosmic realities (*ta physika*) and of the narrative and imaginary clothing of the myths. Thus, the rational arsenal of the Sophists was to be used to show exactly the opposite of what they tried to affirm: man as the centre of all things, as proposed by Protagoras, is opposed by Plato's God as the centre of everything (cf. Jaeger 1947).

Homer and Hesiod already contained an embryonic rational reflection in that the various divinities were organised hierarchically and attributed to a *theogony*, and so to a system of gods. Subsequent rational developments came with the pre-Socratic physicists, investigators of the principle of nature, who were to demolish the anthropomorphism of the myths. Their arguments were to be taken up both by Plato and by the Fathers against the pagan gods, in connection with the oneness of God, for example. However, Plato and Aristotle see the real moves from the gods to the Divinity, providing substantial support for Christian thinkers and their anti-idolatrous criticism (cf. Jaeger 1947: 42–50).

Extremely significant is the following text from the *Republic* in which Socrates maintains the need to transmit to the young a theology alternative to that of the poets:

And I said: O Adimantus, you and I are not poets but founders of a city: founders ought to know the forms with which the poets of myths should speak (*mythologeîn*), not allowing them to exceed their limits, but it is not their business to compose myths. – You are right, but just what would be these forms of theology (*theologia*) in which to speak of the gods? – And I said: those, I think, in which the Divinity is always represented as he is whether that is in epic songs, in lyrics or in tragedy. – Certainly.

(Plato, *Republic* 378e7–379b1).

Thus, from the opposition between *mythologeîn* and *theologeîn* arises metaphysics as representation of the Divinity as it is, for the search, therefore, for the true, ultimate foundation of the real.

This is Aristotle's course in his *Metaphysics*, which inherits the connection between the terminology bound to theology and the poet-authors of the myths (*Metaphysics* 983b27–983b30) but chooses to follow the master's practice in the classification of the sciences on the basis of the materiality and the movement of causes:

So that there are three types of philosophy: mathematics, physics and the theological (*theologikê*) – it is clear that, if one can say that the Divinity exists, he exists in this nature.
(*Metaphysics* 1026a 18–21)

The ultimate form of philosophy is the highest science because its object is the most elevated. This classification is restated in book 11, in 1064.b, where he takes up again this epistemological subdivision, having restated that the divine principle is Being (*Metaphysics* 1964b1–4).

Some authors have questioned the importance of Aristotle's contribution to the history of the term *theologia* on account of the scarceness of references and questions of authenticity.¹⁹ The proposed alternative would be the Stoics who developed the idea of a tripartite theology divided into mythology, physics and politics. The first would belong to the poets, the second to the philosophers and the third to the priests. Present also in Eusebius (*Preparation for the Gospel*), this idea passed into the Latin world thanks, above all, to Varro, as Augustine testifies in books 6–7 of the *City of God*.²⁰ However, Werner Jaeger claims it very probable that the Aristotelian development of this terminology began in the Platonic school since Aristotle's interest in theology derives from his Platonic phase.

In any case, the passage of the terminology linked to *theologia* in the language of the Fathers of the fourth century A.D. is certainly connected to the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition.²¹ The essential role of this tradition is clear also in Philo: although knowing the origin of the term in pagan religion, in his comment on Ex 3:14, he applies *theologos* to Moses, affirming that the tetragrammaton is the name of God.²² The strict Jewish criticism of idolatry would not have allowed an operation like this if the Platonic tradition had not already radically transformed the term in a monotheistic sense.

This is confirmed by the example of Justin after the hesitation of the Apostolic Father in the face of the semantic family bound up with *theologia*.²³ Commenting on Abraham's encounter with the three angels at the oak of Mambre (cf. Gen 18), he compares his interpretation with that of Trypho. The latter affirms that this concerns only three angels since God appeared before they did. Justin denies this, showing that one of the angels is God:

Now, if you say that the Holy Spirit calls God and Lord (*theologeîn kai kyriologeîn*) someone other than the Father of all things and his Christ, answer me and I will engage in demonstrating to you, starting precisely from the Scriptures, that the one whom the Scripture calls Lord is not one of the two angels who go to Sodom but the one who is with them and who is called God when he appears to Abraham.²⁴

This text is particularly important because it presents the perfect equivalence between *theologeîn* and *kyriologeîn*, based on that between *theos* and *kyrios*: to do theology means *recognising as God* in conformity with ancient thought. The absolute novelty lies in the fact that now it is the Holy Spirit who speaks: the Divinity reveals itself.

For the identification of *theologia* and Trinitarian doctrine, the school of Alexandria was to be fundamental. It leaned explicitly on the Platonic-Aristotelian tradition. Clement opposes the

false polytheistic theology-theogony of the poets and the true theology (*theologian alêthinên*)²⁵ of the philosophers:

So then, pagan Greek philosophy extracted a fragment of eternal truth not from the mythology of Dionysius but from the theology of the *Logos* who always is.
(Clement, *Stromateis* 1.13.57.6.1–4)

Christianity itself is thus seen as the true philosophy because Being and God coincide: real philosophy and the most authentic theology are inseparable (Clement, *Stromateis* 5.9.56.3.1–2). Then, the effort to bring together the fragments of truth was to imply that the allegorical method and the symbolical interpretation are essential to arrive at the right theology (*tên orthên theologian*).²⁶

That is why Moses can be called theologian and prophet (Clement, *Stromateis* 1.22.150.4.2) and his teachings described as *philosophy*, especially regarding that form of theology, which Plato says “constitutes the really great mysteries” and which Aristotle calls metaphysics (*ibid.* 1.28.176.2.1–3.2).

Origen was to see the powerful emergence of the connection between theology and Scripture. If metaphysics arose as the exegesis of the myth by Plato and Aristotle, now the Christian is called to learn directly from the voice of the *Logos* as it speaks of God starting from Scripture:

He [Jesus], speaking of God (*theologôn*), announced to his true disciples the truths about God: finding their traces in the Scriptures, we have been prompted to speak of God (*theologeîn*).

(*Against Celsus* 2.71.5–7)

Thus, the theology of the Word assumes a central role in Origen’s thought: this consists in interpreting the Scriptures correctly to give Christ the divine attributes which correspond to him following what he revealed in his person. Therefore, there appear expressions like “the theology of the Saviour” (Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.24.157.1) and “the theology of Jesus” (*Commentary on Matthew* 12.38.23).

The recognition of the divinity of Christ leads directly to the Trinity: both doctrines remain inseparable. Origen is one of the essential links in the chain which was to lead to understanding *theologia* in its particular sense as Trinitarian doctrine:

Perhaps the prophetic testimonies are not limited to the coming of Christ and do not teach us this and nothing else, but it is possible to learn much theology (*theologia*) and the relation of the Father with the Son and of the Son with the Father from the Prophets, through what they announce of him, no less than from the Apostles who proclaim the magnificence of the Son of God.

(*Commentary on John* 2.34.205.1–7)

This is why John the evangelist begins to be called *theologos*:²⁷ the prologue of the Fourth Gospel becomes a key text in the labour for the recognition of the Trinitarian mystery. Origen is the first to use an expression which would later be very widespread.

In the fourth century, the occurrences of the terminology linked to *theologia* increase enormously: it assumes a technical value, moving to the heart of the Arian controversy. For example, Athanasius accuses his enemies of being like the pagans when they place the creation as an object of *theologeîn* (*Epistles to Serapion* 1.29.2). Thus, Athanasius’s *theologia* is opposed directly

to the Hellenic *mythologia* (*Against the Nations* 19.34–35). It is no longer a question of opposing true and false theologies like Clement of Alexandria: now the true theology is that which regards the Trinity and the single divine nature of the three Persons; all the rest is only mythology, because it confuses the creature and the Creator.

The *homoousios* itself is presented as a traditional datum to express the *theologia* of the Father and the Son (*Decrees of Nicene Synod* 33.13). It is unity of essence which makes the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit inseparable in such a way that theology is perfect only if the honour given to the Three is the same, and this principle is immutable:

Whoever takes away honour from the Son, takes away honour also from the Father. But when theology (*theologia*) is perfect in the Trinity, then it is also the true and only piety. And this is the good and the truth: and it had always to be thus, so that the good and the truth were not accessories, and the full perfection of theology (*theologia*) was not achieved through additions.

(*Orations against the Arians* 1.18.3–4)

Basil was to follow Athanasius's approach but perfected it by introducing the fundamental distinction between *theologia* and *oikonomia*, developed precisely in the wake of Arian criticism. Debating with Eunomius that "He made him Lord and Christ" of *Acts* 2:36, he says:

It is clear to whoever wants to examine the apostle's text even a little that he is not transmitting a form of theology (*theologia*), but is clarifying the economy (*oikonomia*).

(Basil, *Against Eunomius* 2.3)

The Arians cited the passage from *Acts* as proof of the Son's subordination to the Father. If he was "made" Lord, that would necessarily mean that he was not this before. However, Basil distinguishes what scripture refers to the divinity of Christ and what it refers to his humanity as in the case of the quotation discussed. Gregory of Nyssa was to take up this distinction developed by his brother (Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 3.3.49.3–9), one which was to rise to a structural principle of theological thought.²⁸

The three divine Persons are identified with the one eternal nature and cannot be confused with the creation which began to be. In this way, only the incarnation of the Son could overcome the abyss separating the Creator from his creatures, but that does not mean that he is in an intermediate position between God and the world, or that he began to be:

Tell the evangelist, replying to these statements, tell him your wise affirmations, Eunomius: how can you use the name of *Father* and *Only Begotten* when every corporal generation is effected through a passion? Certainly truth answers you in his name that the mystery of theology (*theologias mystérion*) is one thing, another the physiology of bodies subject to becoming. And these things have been separated as though by a barrier set in the great distance which separates the one from the other. Why do you unite with your discourse what cannot be united? How can you stain the purity of the divine generation with your filthy discourse? How can you contrive to subject the incorporeal to the laws of the bodily passions? Do not give a physical explanation to heavenly realities on the basis of inferior ones.

(Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 3.2.24.1–10)

This explains why Gregory of Nyssa calls Eunomius a "carnal" theologian (*Against Eunomius* 6.43.7), as well as a "neo-theologian"²⁹ and, with ferocious irony, a "wise", "authoritative"

and “sublime” theologian.³⁰ The point is that the latter projects creaturely categories onto the eternal generation, confusing God with the world. However, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit constitute and exhaust *theologia*, that is, the eternal and infinite dimension which characterises the divine nature, and it alone.

It is clear, therefore, that *theologia* arises as a term to designate the works of the poets which make up the mythologies and theogonies, to be transformed, with Plato and Aristotle, into metaphysics. Then, the Fathers developed its Trinitarian meaning which, in the fourth century, leads to the identification of the immanent dimension of God with *theologia* itself, distinct from the history of salvation.

However, to grasp the fundamental value of this semantic shift, it could be useful to propose a narrative which shows how, at the level of content, the Trinitarian thought of the Fathers can be understood in all its ontological significance only against the background of the metaphysical parabola which led from the classical age to the philosophy of the later period.

A new ontology

For the classical Greek world, there existed a single finite metaphysical order which, from the Pythagoreans until Plato and Aristotle, was governed by a double principle corresponding to identity and multiplicity, whether these are found under the form of the pairs One and Dyad,³¹ idea and matter, or act and potency. However, this ontological dualism was to undergo a substantial transformation in the passage to Middle Platonism through the effect of Philo and neo-Pythagoreanism.³² Specifically, Eudorus seems to have been the first to place a One as first principle above the pair Monad-Dyad,³³ thus establishing an authentic monism.³⁴

That “demolished” the structure of the single ontological order of the previous metaphysics, raising the issue of how to relate the one and the many. We are thus at a real crossroads: Philo could not accept a degenerative conception of the material world on account of the Jewish doctrine of creation which he attempted to reconcile with Platonism.³⁵ In the thought of Moderatus, on the other hand, the negative nature of matter, already implicit in Eudorus, is made explicit in a hierarchical system made up of successive degenerations. To a certain degree, these anticipate Plotinus’s structure towards which the new metaphysical monism tends through its internal logic.³⁶

This is where a triadic rhythm appears with the passage to the doctrine of the three gods in fragment 24 of Numenius, an author read in the school of Plotinus. One thinks too of the example of the three lights from lamps lit from one another in fragment 14. This was to have a direct influence on patristic Trinitarianism.³⁷

From the monist point of view, the distinction within the single ontological order between the first principle and the many is necessarily conceived of as degeneration: the derivation of one cause from another superior to it is translated into an ontological descent. There is no longer a double principle from whose interaction there emerges the real with its dynamic. Thus, in Numenius, the tension is downloaded onto matter: he postulates such a perfect transmission of the intelligible as to identify souls with parts of the divine Being; but that obliges him to emphasise the negative nature of the material world to save the distinction between God and the world.³⁸

Therefore, within Neoplatonic thought, Porphyry was to formulate the need for the inferiority of the generated with respect to the one generating³⁹ and the absence of relations between the two.⁴⁰ The Trinitarian importance of this metaphysical step is clear because monism requires a new solution to the question of the relationship between the first principle and the world.

In the Christian sphere, however, starting from its Jewish heritage, there emerge two essential metaphysical novelties which characterise the development of Trinitarian theology: a) whereas in the Greek conception, the first principle and the world are connected necessarily, the doctrine of creation introduces an absolute discontinuity between Creator and creature, a discontinuity which, in the last text cited at the end of the previous section, is translated in terms of a barrier or gap which separates the Trinity radically from the cosmos; b) whereas the single metaphysical order of the Greeks which comprised the first principle and the world was finite and eternal, Christian theology was to distinguish God as the unique eternal and infinite nature from the finite created nature subject to the limits of temporality.

From an ontological point of view, these new principles brought about primarily the overcoming of the identification between being and the intelligible. Obviously, God remains metaphysically bound to truth in that the *Logos* himself characterises him in his intimate nature, but neither God nor the world created by Him can now be understood by going back along the chain of necessary causes which, in the Greek perspective, linked the cosmos to the first principle. In this way, for the first time, ontology and gnoseology became really distinct.

Obviously, this new metaphysical conception was the result of a process which took its cue from the first attempts of the Apologists. The latter were impelled to make explicit the philosophical content implicit in the Revelation in order to defend their own faith. Thus, Theophilus and Justin referred to the Stoic distinction⁴¹ between *logos endiathetos* and *logos prophorikos* to speak of the Word and his role in creation.⁴² Before creating, the Father, like a craftsman, must have a design, a thought about what he is making, and this thought must be eternal like Him. However, Irenaeus and the subsequent Fathers criticised this because it risked yet again binding the *Logos* to the creation in a necessary way in that the Son seems to be thought of as a function of the creation.⁴³ It was a question of avoiding understanding the second divine Person along the lines of the Platonic *eros* as ontological mediator between God and the world, as a *metaxu* metaphysically between the Creator and the creature.

Yet the metaphysical categories to express this novelty were lacking. Essential for this is the work of Origen, expert in the philosophical tradition,⁴⁴ and so able to elaborate new concepts and terminological elements. His thought succeeded in overcoming the limits of the Apologists' *Logostheologie*.⁴⁵ In his epinoetic analysis, he brought the *Logos* on to a second logical plane, giving priority to the Son and to Wisdom. He was impelled to this also by the need to deny, against the Valentinians, that the divine *Logos* was a *prophora* of the Father (*Commentary on Matthew* 1.151.7–11). Similarly, in the Trinitarian field, he avoided using the distinction between *logos prophorikos* and *logos endiathetos*, which he knew well and applied on the level of exegetical method (*Commentary on Matthew* 11.2.8–14). He thus highlighted that barrier or gap that was totally absent in the gradual and degenerative ontology of the gnostics. It was this absence which rendered possible to human reason conceptual access to the essence of the first principle. Origen makes clear, however, that only the second divine Person enables knowledge of the Father:

If through *logos* is understood what is in us, whether interior (*endiathetô*) or expressed (*prophorikô*), we also say that God is not accessible to the *logos*, but, if we think of "In the beginning was the Logos and the Logos was with God and the Logos was God" (Jn 1:1), we are declaring that God is accessible to this *Logos*, and that he is understood not only by Him, but also by the one to whom "He reveals the Father" [Matthew 11:27]. We thus prove false Celsus's claim that God is not accessible to the *Logos*.

(Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.65.8–16)

The *logos prophorikos* and *logos endiathetos* are applied here to the human, not the divine *Logos* so as to exclude the possibility of access to God without recourse to revelation. This indicates clearly the authentic transcendence of the second divine Person with respect to the created, and his belonging, together with the Spirit, to the authentically divine sphere. Yet there remains a tension because the intratrinitarian distinction is still expressed through recourse to participation. The distance between the Father and the other two Persons is actually greater than that of these two with respect to creation.⁴⁶ In sum, in articulating the relationship between God and the world, Origen neatly overcomes every possible gradual conception. However, this remains at the expressive level in the intradivine dimension because of the simple inadequacy of the metaphysical tools available. For example, it is significant that, by contrast with fourth-century developments, for him the distinction between the Trinity and the world is not expressed in terms of nature but by having recourse to pure spirituality.⁴⁷ Only the Father, the Son and the Spirit are purely spiritual whereas both the angels and human beings are characterised by a subtle body. The difference of nature between these last ontological orders is vague in that both the first and the second are essentially “souls”.⁴⁸

This was to have serious consequences on the architectural level because access to the Trinity would be considered possible through the *Logos* himself and not through the *Logos* incarnate, that is, in history and thanks to the sacraments. The Eucharist would be considered necessary only for the simple people, while for the true gnostic it would be possible to ascend to God through Scripture.⁴⁹

However, all this cannot obscure the radical ontological novelty introduced by his exegesis. In his commentary on Jn 1:1, Origen has to make clear that the *in* which opens the verse “In principle was the *Logos*” (Jn 1:1) should be read from the perspective of eternity.⁵⁰ This can be understood against the background of the identity between the accidental dimension and the expression “to be in something else”. Origen felt the necessity to explain that the *Logos* in the Johannine prologue is according to the substance (*kat'ousian*) one with God.⁵¹

It is clear that every charge of subordinationism addressed at Origen, like the Arian claim to be inspired by his thought, cannot be sustained.⁵² Ilaria Ramelli has argued very effectively along these lines.⁵³ But, with regard to the issue in question, the most important point is that these accusations do not take into account the clear ontological innovation introduced by Origen. He affirms that in the Trinity there is no “more or less”,⁵⁴ making use of an Aristotelian formula⁵⁵ which was to be taken up again in Cappadocian theology in the response to Eunomius.⁵⁶ The point is crucial because in the tradition of Aristotelian commentators, the sphere of the “more and less” coincided with that of the accidental.⁵⁷

This explains why Eusebius, in his polemic with Marcellus, focuses on the exegesis of the preposition “in” in the first verse of the Prologue. John wrote “The *Logos* was with (*pros*) God” instead of “The Word was in (*en*) God” so as not to lower the *Logos* himself to the human condition, that is, to the accidental level.⁵⁸

The subtlety of the argument is based again on the discussion of the prepositions in the Johannine expressions. The use of *in* would have referred directly to the inhering of an accident in the substance. That is why Eusebius explicitly excludes that the divine *Logos* belongs to relatives.

[The evangelist] is saying: do not think that He [the *Logos*] belongs to relatives (*tôn pros ti*), like the *logos* in the soul or like the *logos* which is heard thanks to the voice or like the *logos* which is found in the material seeds or exists in the mathematical entities. All these, which are relatives (*tôn pros ti*), are considered in another substance pre-existing them. Whereas

the *Logos* who is God has no need of anything else pre-existing him so as to be subsisting in it, but he is of himself in that he lives and subsists as God.⁵⁹

Thus, the subsequent Cappadocian identification between the *pros* and the *en* of the Johannine Prologue can be read as the result of a process of ontological reshaping which, having reformulated the structure of metaphysics from the perspective of Revelation, leads to a real rethinking of the Aristotelian categories. Relation, like *schêsis* and *pros ti*, is given a new meaning so that it can be introduced into the divine substance.

This question is an essential element of the dispute with Eunomius, who places reciprocal relation (*pros allêla schêsis*) at the heart of the graduated structure of neo-Arian metaphysics⁶⁰ as the necessary element distinguishing the different *ousiai* of the divine Persons.⁶¹

Gregory responds describing Eunomius's argumentation as the "technology of blasphemy".⁶² In doing so, he refers to the Aristotelian tradition⁶³ while accusing Eunomius of deliberately forgetting the revealed names of the divine Persons which necessarily indicate the identity of nature:

Every human being who hears the name *father* and *son* immediately recognizes from these very names their reciprocal relation (*pros allêla schêsin*) of kinship and of nature.⁶⁴

The Greek term *schêsis* is not understood here as something external to substance but as immanent. Indeed, it cannot in this context be understood as a relationship with another, with some other nature or substance. This alters the ontological stature of relation itself, as is proved by the repetition of the Origenian formula "there is no more or less in the Trinity".⁶⁵

This directly challenged Aristotle's doctrine that no substance can be counted among the relative entities (*tôn pros ti*),⁶⁶ as well as his affirmation that relational realities are minimal with respect to other realities from a perspective of ontological density (Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1088a23–1088a24).

The metaphysical significance of the preposition *en* is here changed by the new ontological value assigned by Gregory of Nyssa to *pros*:

The Father is principle (*archê*) of all things. But it is proclaimed that the Son is also *in* this principle, since he is by nature that which the principle is. In fact, God is principle and the *Logos* that is in the principle is God.⁶⁷

The Son can be in the Father, that is, in the first principle, characterised now by an immanence, thus being identified with the same substance and nature with each of the three divine Persons is identified. Thus, contrary to Eusebius, the *Logos* belongs to relatives (*tôn pros ti*),⁶⁸ which now cease to have an ontological value that must be accidental.⁶⁹ The principal metaphysical novelty introduced by the Fathers with their Trinitarian doctrine is thus formulated.

Conclusion

We have sought to show how, in the realm of Christian philosophy, the doctrine of the Trinity fulfils the role of metaphysics in classical Greek thought. The very term *theologia*, born in mythology, is later adopted by Plato and Aristotle as the name for metaphysics itself. From here it was taken by the Fathers of the Church who identified it with Trinitarian theology. That led to the development of a new ontology inspired by revelation. It was not opposed to what preceded, but revised some of its fundamental principles: (a) the distinction of God and the world in two orders of which the first is eternal and infinite whereas the second is finite

and had a beginning; (b) the consequent recognition that the *arché* has an immanence; (c) the relational reunderstanding of the divine Persons, thanks to which the *schêsis* itself with the *pros ti* is referred to the very heart of the divine substance. These three characteristics are only some of many which could be pinpointed from the Fathers' metaphysical work in their rereading of the Aristotelian Categories. However, these ones have the virtue of being connected with the beginning of the Johannine Prologue where the *arché*, the *Logos* and the *pros* make their appearance. It is extremely significant that these very terms underpin an awareness on the part of the author of the double value of the first two, both in Greek and in Hebrew.⁷⁰ The *in principio* which begins the Prologue clearly recalls the beginning of Genesis but through that Greek term which was at the basis of metaphysical enquiry. Similarly, the *Logos* recalls both the special nature of the Hebrew *dabar* and that philosophical element which was considered the very sum of the Greek heritage. However, the giving of new meaning to both these terms takes place starting with *pros*, which alludes to the more particularly Christian dimension of a God who has relations in that He is relation.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Zachhuber 2019.
- 2 See, for example, Chadwick 1966; Ivánka 1964; Merki 1952.
- 3 Cf. Harnack 1901; and, for a specific but particularly significant question, Nygren 1982.
- 4 Cf. Gnilka 2012.
- 5 Cf. Benveniste 1969: 209–215.
- 6 Cf. Ayres 2010: 142–173.
- 7 Cf. Maspero 2004: 359–373.
- 8 Cf. Lang 2001.
- 9 Cf. Tertullian, *De carne Christi*, 5.4, who would be referring to Aristotle, *Rhetoric* II. 23.21. For an analysis of the subsequent corruptions of the expression, see Harrison 2017.
- 10 Cf. Hadot 1995.
- 11 On the shape of a real authority and of similar texts on the philosophical front, see Cerutti 2012.
- 12 Cf. Kobusch 2005: 27.
- 13 Cf. Sodano 1993: 103–116, which records the witness of Lactantius in *Divine Institutes* V, 2. See, more generally, Frend 1965.
- 14 Cf. Wiles 1975: 79–80.
- 15 Cf. Coakley 2013: 116ff., 116ff.
- 16 A valid reference is still Kattenbusch 1930.
- 17 Pherecydes, *Testimonia* II, 11; DK I, p. 44.
- 18 “Locus supra scenam in quo dii ostendebantur spectatoribus”: s.v. *theologeion* in Stephanus 1954: c. 298.
- 19 Cf. Kattenbusch 1930: 166–167.
- 20 Cf. Pépin 1956.
- 21 Cf. Jaeger 1947: 10.
- 22 Philo, *Life of Moses*, 115.1–2. The expression is repeated in *On Rewards and Punishments* 53.3 and *Quaestiones in Genesim* II.59.7 and III.21.1.
- 23 There is a unique occurrence in a pagan sense in *Clementine Homilies* 3.5.2.1–3.5.3.1.
- 24 Justin, *Trypho* 56.15.1–7.
- 25 Cf. Clement of Alexandria *Protrepticus*, 6.72.1.
- 26 Clement, *Stromateis* 5.8.46.1.3.
- 27 Origen, *Fragmenta in evangelium Joannis (in catenis)* 3, 3 (GCS 10, p. 483).
- 28 See Gregory of Nazianzen, *Oratio* 38, 8; *Oratio* 45 = Patrologia Graeca 36, 628C and Pseudo-Athanasius, *Quaestiones aliae*, Patrologia Graeca 28, 788A.
- 29 Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 2, 8, 2 e 8, 9, 11 (GNO II, 54, 9 e 242, 1). See also *Against Eunomius* I.250.4 (GNO I, 100, 3) and *Contra Eunomium* II.42.1 (GNO I, 238, 9).
- 30 Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* I, 610, 4 (GNO I, 202, 19); *Contra Eunomium* II, 365, 3 (GNO I, 333, 6) and 389, 6 (GNO I, 339, 27); *Contra Eunomium* III, 10, 41, 12 (GNO II, 305, 22) and III, 9, 52, 7–9 (GNO II, 283, 21–33); *Refutation* 105, 3 (GNO II, 356, 7).

- 31 This is linked to the unwritten doctrines, on which see de Vogel 1988.
- 32 It is significant that Philo himself was described by Clement of Alexandria as “neo-Pythagorean” because of his closeness to Aristobulus the peripatetic, with whom he shared the idea that the Greek metaphysicians had drawn from the Mosaic revelation. Cf. Runia 1995.
- 33 See Simplicius, *In Aristotelis physicorum libros commentaria* (Berlin 1892), 9, 181,28–30.
- 34 Cf. Kahn 2001: 98–99. See also Stead 1996: 152–154.
- 35 On the dyad in Philo’s thought, see Lévy 2007.
- 36 Cf. Kahn 2001: 109–110.
- 37 Numenius, Fragment 14, in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.18.15–16.
- 38 Perhaps we have here the roots of Plotinus’s aporia of the soul which has not descended: cf. Chiara-donna 2009: 104.
- 39 Cf. Porphyry, *Sentences* 13.
- 40 Cf. [Porphyry], *Commentary on the Parmenides* 3.32–4.4 (Sodano 1993: 67).
- 41 Cf. Mühl 1962; Matelli 1992.
- 42 Theophilus, *Tō Autolykus* 2.22.12–17; Justin, *Second Apology* 6, 3.
- 43 Cf. Scheffczyk 1967: 209–209.
- 44 Cf. Edwards 2002: 53–55.
- 45 See Pazzini 1999.
- 46 Cf. Origen, *Commentary on John* 13.25.151.6–153.8 (Sch 222, p. 114).
- 47 See the discussion of Jn 4:24 in response to the Stoics according to whom the *pneuma* was material: cf. *ibidem*, 13.21.124.
- 48 Cf. *ibidem*, 2.23.144 and 146.1–9. The theme is taken up by Philo, *On the Sacrifices of Abel and Cain*, 5.4–5 and *On the Giants* 16.
- 49 Cf. Daniélou 1948: 74–79.
- 50 Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.130.1–9.
- 51 Idem, *Fragmenta in evangelium Joannis*, 1, 63–67.
- 52 The texts could be multiplied. See, for example, Idem, *Expositio in Proverbia, Patrologia Graeca* 17, 185A.
- 53 Cf. Ramelli 2011.
- 54 Cf. Origen, *First Principles* 1.3.7.
- 55 Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1044a9–11; *Topics* 115b9–10 and *Categories* 3b33–4a9.
- 56 See, e.g., Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* II 165.5–6 and 591.1 (GNO I, 334.18–19 and 398.29)
- 57 Cf. Porphyry, *Isagoge* 19.21–20.6; *Commentary on Categories* 115,1–4; Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Topici* 212,2; 213, 13.15; 362, 10.12.19; 460, 22.27; 461,1.4; 508, 23 and Eustratius, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* 47,27–36.
- 58 Eusebius, *On Ecclesiastical Theology* 2.14.4.1–5,1 (GCS 14, p. 115).
- 59 *Ibidem*, 2.14.21–23,1 (GCS 14, p. 114).
- 60 It seems that Eunomius had no emanationist notions: see Rist 1981: 185–188. On the origins of Eunomius’s thought, see also Batllo 2013.
- 61 Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, I, 151,1–152,1 e 154, 2–3 (GNO I, 71,28–72,10 and 73, 4–5).
- 62 Cf. *Ibidem*, 155, 1 (GNO I, 73,16).
- 63 Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* III, 5, 6,7 (GNO II, 162, 11).
- 64 Idem, *Against Eunomius* I, 159, 3–5 (GNO I, 75, 3–5).
- 65 Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* I 232, 5–6 (GNO I, 94,27–95,1).
- 66 Aristotle, *Categories*, 8b 21.
- 67 Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Eunomium* III, 6,22: GNO II, 193, 23–26.
- 68 Idem, *Greta Catechetical Oration* 1, 73–77.
- 69 An analogical operation was begun in the Western world by Augustine in the fifth century. His metaphysical arsenal was less developed than Latin Neoplatonism itself. In fact, the tradition of the commentaries on Aristotelian Categories was preserved in rhetoric and dialectic. Cf. G. Maspero, “Relazione e ontologia in Gregorio di Nissa e Agostino”, in *Scripta Theologica* 47 (2015), 607–641.
- 70 In a discussion with us, Christian Gnilka pointed out that the very method of *chrēsis* developed by the Fathers could hark back to the author of the fourth gospel, who in the Prologue itself anticipated such an approach (personal communication).

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The philosophy of the incarnation

Dirk Krausmüller

Scope of this chapter

This chapter deals primarily with the Late Patristic period, the sixth and seventh centuries, because it was only then that philosophical terms and concepts were regularly used in order to explain the incarnation. The discussion will focus on perceived conceptual problems and on attempts to solve them. Such an approach has the advantage that one can include anonymous texts and thus get a better sense of the dynamics of the debate. It does, however, also have a drawback. It gives no clear idea of the achievement of particular authors who engaged in a whole range of topics. Yet this is less of a problem than it may seem since Patristic theologians rarely constructed coherent theological edifices. Much more often they reproduced arguments that they had taken from earlier texts even if they contradicted each other.

The early Christological discourse

In the first half of the fifth century, a controversy broke out between the patriarchs of Constantinople and Alexandria, Nestorius and Cyril, about how one should conceptualise the incarnation. The two men represented radically different theological traditions. Nestorius harked back to Diodore of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, whereas Cyril took his inspiration from Athanasius and, although he was unaware of it, also from Apollinarius of Laodicea. For Nestorius, the Word born from the Father and the flesh born from Mary were two sons, which were united in will and honour. By contrast, Cyril insisted that there was only one son and that one must therefore call Mary God-bearer.¹ In order to make his position intelligible, Cyril had recourse to two explanatory models. Firstly, he declared that the preexisting Word assumed the flesh and made it his own. Secondly, he compared the incarnated Word with the human being as a compound of body and soul.² There is no doubt that Cyril would have preferred to leave it at that. Yet Nestorius' arguments forced him to employ more formal language. Nestorius used the terms 'nature' and 'hypostasis' interchangeably and applied them both to the Word and to the flesh. For him, each carrier of a set of qualities, which defined a species, was automatically a separate being.³ Cyril, whose Christology required the incarnated Word to be one, could not accept this conceptual framework. He denied that the incarnated Word was one nature in the

sense of one single set of qualities. In a second step, he then tried to explain how one could nevertheless predicate the two sets of qualities of the one incarnated Word. In his refutations of Nestorius' arguments, he frequently spoke of hypostasis instead of nature. This term played an important role in Trinitarian theology, where it denoted the separate being of Father, Son and Spirit. Cyril appears to have used the term in the same sense when he spoke of the one hypostasis of the Word, which had become incarnate and of a union of Word and flesh according to hypostasis. Yet his terminology was not consistent. When he envisaged a case where two hypostases were confused, he evidently used 'hypostasis' not in the sense of separate being but in the sense of carrier of a set of qualities.⁴ Moreover, he continued to employ the term 'nature' in the sense of separate being, speaking of the one nature of the Word that had become incarnate and of a union according to nature.⁵ A clear distinction between the two concepts was made only at the Council of Chalcedon, where it was decreed that 'nature' should be used exclusively for the carrier of a set of qualities and 'hypostasis' should be used exclusively for the separate being. Yet no attempt was made to establish coherence with Trinitarian theology. When the Council of Chalcedon spoke of hypostasis, it did not consider the Cappadocian teaching that hypostasis was established through characteristic idioms. Even more striking is the fact that neither Cyril nor his adversaries nor the Council of Chalcedon made use of contemporary philosophy in order to clarify their positions. This is in stark contrast to the controversy between the Cappadocians and Eunomius of Cyzicus. This discrepancy can be seen very clearly in the writings of Cyril. When Cyril discussed the Trinity, he used a wide variety of philosophical terms and concepts.⁶ By contrast, his Christological oeuvre is free from such elements. A case in point is his contention that the divine Word made the flesh his own. It has been claimed that this argument was inspired by philosophical texts where the term 'proper' plays an important role.⁷ Yet it seems more likely that Cyril followed the lead of Athanasius, who had declared that the Son was the Father's own.⁸

The irruption of Aristotelian philosophy into the Christological discourse

The decades that followed the Council of Chalcedon were a fallow period in Patristic theology. Authors bandied about the slogans 'one nature and one hypostasis', 'two natures and two hypostases', and 'two natures and one hypostasis', but made no attempt to establish the precise meaning of the two key terms. Change came only in the early sixth century when a controversy broke out between a Chalcedonian teacher of grammar, John of Caesarea, and the Monophysite patriarch Severus of Antioch. John imported into the Christological discourse the distinction between nature and hypostasis on which the Cappadocians had built their Trinitarian theology, whereas Severus turned to Cyril's writings in order to show that the two terms were synonymous.⁹ Both men had a good knowledge of the theological tradition but did not engage with the contemporary philosophical discourse. It did not, however, take long before this further step was taken. One of Severus' contemporaries, the Syrian Sergius, constructed a Monophysite Christology on the basis of Aristotelian concepts. A few decades later, another Monophysite, the Alexandrian John Philoponus, followed suit. Both authors saw philosophy in a very positive light. Sergius claimed that one could learn much from Aristotle on whom he bestowed the laudatory epithet 'the Mind',¹⁰ whereas Philoponus averred that the debates about Christology had only arisen because the participants had not received sufficient philosophical training.¹¹ It is surely significant that like John of Caesarea, Sergius and Philoponus were teachers at secular schools. Their shared profession evidently made them receptive to philosophical reasoning, even though only Philoponus can be considered a true philosopher. Severus' letters

to Sergius and the response to Philoponus' speculation shows that most Monophysite prelates did not take kindly to the challenge to their position as the official interpreters of the Christian faith.¹² Yet they found it difficult to silence the teachers effectively because they were used to supporting their views through florilegia of Patristic texts and did not have the wherewithal to construct philosophical arguments.¹³ Severus sought to defend the autonomy of the theological discourse, but this was a lost cause since the dynamics of the debate led to an ever greater reliance on philosophy. Sergius only turned to Aristotle after discussions with the Chalcedonians had convinced him that traditional Monophysite Christology was contradictory.¹⁴ Philoponus, on the other hand, put pressure on his Chalcedonian counterparts. Their exasperation finds its expression in a treatise by Theodore of Raithou, which dates to the late sixth century. There we are told that it would have been better not to have recourse to philosophy at all but that this was no longer possible because the Monophysites would not accept arguments that were not derived from Aristotle's works.¹⁵

This does not, however, mean that there were no speculative theologians in the Chalcedonian church. Already in the second quarter of the sixth century Leontius of Byzantium combined the Cappadocian framework with concepts taken from Aristotelian commentaries. Unlike John of Caesarea, Leontius was not a city-dwelling teacher but a member of a monastic community in the Palestinian countryside. His penchant for speculative thought was unusual for monks of the time. It explains itself when we consider that Leontius belonged to a group that devoted themselves to the study of the writings of Origen and Evagrius.¹⁶ This background would have prepared him for his theological activity, although one must be careful not to posit too close a link. The main source of inspiration for Origen and Evagrius had been Plato, whereas in the Christological discourse Aristotle played a predominant role. A similar background can be assumed for three further authors who flourished in the later sixth and seventh centuries: Pamphilus, Leontius of Jerusalem and Maximus the Confessor. These men showed greater aptitude at constructing coherent arguments than did Chalcedonian bishops such as Eutychius of Constantinople or Anastasius of Antioch, who do not seem to have received formal training. Yet we cannot be certain that the Chalcedonian contribution was confined to the Palestinian Origenist milieu because a great number of texts have not come down to us. A voluminous Christological treatise by the metropolitan Heraclianus of Chalcedon, which employed Aristotelian concepts, is only known to us from short excerpts.¹⁷ Often we do not even have this much information. The handbooks of Pamphilus and Theodore of Raithou and the letters of Maximus contain definitions of key terms, which are taken from now-lost earlier sources, whose authors are not identified. This poses problems for the interpretation because such definitions are not merely ripped out of context but also often misunderstood. Even less is known about the Nestorian contribution to the debate. All we have is a treatise from the late sixth century, which has survived because it was refuted by Leontius of Jerusalem. Analysis of this text shows that Aristotle had also become an authority in Nestorian circles.¹⁸

Assumption vs. composition

Despite their disagreements, Severus of Antioch and John of Caesarea accepted Cyril's teaching that the Word assumed the flesh and made it his own. Yet this model had a serious drawback. It implied that the flesh was nothing more than a property that acceded to the substance of the Word.¹⁹ The problems came to the surface when theologians began to have recourse to philosophical terms and concepts. The first step was taken by the Monophysite Sergius the Grammarian, who sought to find a place for the incarnation within the framework of the *arbor Porphyriana*. The argument is rather confused since Sergius compares the Word once with the

highest genus and once with the lowest species. Yet even so, it is clear that the participle ‘incarnated’ has become a specific difference.²⁰ Greater coherence was achieved by the Chalcedonian theologian Leontius of Jerusalem, who argued that the idiom ‘begotten’ of the divine Son should be understood as a substantial quality of the divinity, analogous with ‘rational’ in the case of the human being, whereas ‘becoming incarnate’ should be compared with the acquisition of a profession such as ‘musician’, which is a separable accident.²¹ This understanding of the incarnation, however, does not seem to have been very popular in the sixth century, no doubt because it was felt that it did not do justice to Christ’s humanity. Indeed, it was explicitly rejected by Leontius of Byzantium, who insisted that the Word and the flesh must not be conceptualised as a substance and a set of substantial qualities that completes it.²²

Leontius of Byzantium then proceeded to propose an alternative model. He argued that the incarnation was a coming together of two entities, which were complete substances but existed only in conjunction with one another, and he gave as an example soul and body, which together constitute the human being. In this model, the incarnation is understood as a composition of the flesh with the Word. This was, of course, also good Cyrillian teaching. Yet it was now turned against the equally Cyrillian model of an assumption of the flesh into the Word. Leontius of Byzantium’s recourse to the traditional anthropological paradigm amounted to a conscious rejection of attempts to situate the incarnation within an overarching ontological framework. Later Chalcedonian theologians were not satisfied with this solution. In the writings of Patriarch Anastasius of Antioch, mention is made of a threefold distinction of being: ‘being by itself’, ‘being with something else’ and ‘being in something else’.²³ The first and the last case correspond to the Aristotelian concepts of primary substance and accident. By contrast, ‘being with something else’ is an innovation. It is arguable that this framework is derived from philosophical texts where ‘being by itself’, ‘being for the sake of something else’ and ‘being in something else’ are mentioned side by side.²⁴ By replacing ‘being for the sake of something else’ with ‘being with something else’, a new category was created, which applied to two cases, soul and body in the human being, and divinity and humanity in the incarnation. Thus a way was found out of an ontological straightjacket that only recognised two forms of being, substance and accident.

The concept of composition triumphed at the fifth Ecumenical Council when the formula of the ‘one composite hypostasis’ was enshrined in dogma.²⁵ Yet it quickly fell from grace. This is perhaps not surprising when one considers how unsuitable it is. Soul and body constitute the human being. Applied to the incarnation, this would mean that the Word and the flesh also form a new entity. Leontius of Byzantium makes such a distinction, calling the compound ‘Christ’ as opposed to the divine ‘Word’ or ‘Son’.²⁶ Yet in the seventh century, Chalcedonians such as Leontius of Jerusalem and Maximus the Confessor insisted that the result of the composition must be identical with one of the components. According to them, the incarnation was a special type of composition, which had nothing in common with composition in the created order.²⁷ This development was at least in part caused by changes in the understanding of what the human being is. Cyril had thought that it was first and foremost the soul whereas the body was only an instrument.²⁸ In the sixth century, Philoponus held a similar view.²⁹ Yet at that time, it was not the only anthropology available. Others insisted that the soul could not function without the body. This view had antecedents in Syriac Christianity but may also have been influenced by Aristotle’s teachings.³⁰ The Nestorians used it to launch a frontal attack on the concept of composition. They declared that if the Word were subjected to the ‘law of compound beings’, he would be dependent on the flesh.³¹ This relentless polemic had its effect. Whereas Leontius of Byzantium had still believed that he could defend the anthropological paradigm, Maximus saw it as a liability and excluded it from his theological model.³² The Monophysites who used the formula ‘one composite nature’ also came under attack. Indeed,

the anonymous Nestorian author refuted by Leontius of Jerusalem criticises both formulae, refusing to acknowledge a difference between them.

Monadic species – monadic hypostasis

Following Cyril of Alexandria, Severus insisted that in the Christological discourse the term ‘nature’ denoted the concrete individual.³³ For this he was taken to task by the Chalcedonian theologian Heraclianus, who pointed out that such usage was at odds not only with Cappadocian Trinitarian theology, where nature equals species, but also with Aristotelian philosophy, where the term ‘nature’ is never used to denote the concrete individual.³⁴ In order to rebut this criticism, an unknown Monophysite author had recourse to the concept of *monadikon*, which had a respectable philosophical pedigree.³⁵ He claimed that the incarnated Word was indeed a species but that this species was instantiated only once, just as there was only one sun. This argument was rejected by another Chalcedonian theologian, Leontius of Byzantium, who declared that in the created order each species had many members – even the sun was a hypostasis within the species of stars – and that the concept of *monadikon* was therefore a chimera.³⁶ A century later, this argument was faithfully reproduced by Maximus the Confessor, who insisted that nature always presupposed a multitude, and thus concluded that the incarnated Word could not be a nature because no other incarnated Words existed.³⁷ Yet this does not mean that all Chalcedonian theologians thought alike. Pamphilus, Patriarch Eutychius and Leontius of Jerusalem compared Christ to the sun or the sky, thus effectively adopting the Monophysite position, with the only difference that they spoke of monadic hypostasis instead of monadic nature.³⁸ It is not difficult to see why the three authors took this step. According to Cappadocian teaching, one could only speak of hypostases if there was also a species to which they belonged. This, however, was not the case with the incarnated Word. As Leontius of Byzantium pointed out, Christ as the composite of a divine and a human nature was neither like the Father and the Spirit nor like other human beings. This problem was seen clearly by a Nestorian theologian who demanded from the defenders of Chalcedon that they demonstrate through comparable cases in created being whether such a scenario was possible. Put on the defensive, Chalcedonian theologians took drastic steps. Patriarch Eutychius claimed that even in creation there were at the beginning only monadic hypostases, which then multiplied and in this way constituted species. Leontius of Jerusalem maintained that one should disregard the distinction between beings of the same nature and beings of different natures and only consider numerical difference between hypostases. Christ’s species-less hypostasis thus became the blueprint for a radical deconstruction of the traditional framework of genera and species.

Natural properties without substance?

Whereas Severus of Antioch declared that the incarnated Word was one nature but had two different sets of natural qualities, John of Caesarea insisted that there were as many natures as sets of natural qualities. He did not, however, content himself with restating the traditional Chalcedonian position. He introduced into the Christological discourse the concept of ‘substance’ that the Cappadocians had employed in their writings about the Trinity. This was a tactical masterstroke. The Cappadocians had equated substance with the account of being or definition common to all members of a species, such as ‘rational mortal animal’ in the case of the human being, and they had used substance in this sense interchangeably with nature. The Monophysites who acknowledged the existence of two different sets of natural qualities in the incarnated Word would thus also have to acknowledge two substances and as a consequence

also two natures.³⁹ This argument caused great discomfort to Severus. He rejected the notion that there was only one substance in the incarnated Word because he believed that this would result in confusion, but he was not prepared to admit that there were two substances because he was afraid that his enemies would then conclude that he also accepted the two natures of the formula of Chalcedon.⁴⁰ The subsequent inner-Monophysite debate reveals that this was not a satisfactory solution. Sergius the Grammarian spelt out the problem. The existence of separate sets of natural properties presupposes the existence of separate substances. If there are two distinct sets of properties in the incarnated Word, then there must be two substances and therefore also two natures. In his response to Sergius' letters, Patriarch Severus reiterated the traditional Monophysite position. Yet he could not stifle the debate. A few decades later, it was continued by John Philoponus. Unlike Severus, but like Sergius, he characterised the incarnated Word not only as 'one nature' but also as 'one substance'.⁴¹ Moreover, he tacitly dropped the traditional teaching of two distinct sets of natural properties. He declared that the existence of a single substance is indicated by a single account of being or definition and added that this was not only true for the human being as 'a rational and mortal living being' but also for Christ as 'God incarnate'.⁴² Yet this does not mean that he was an advocate of confusion. Using an example from created being, he declared that the single substance of the apple had various qualities, such as sweetness and heaviness, which were not confounded since only properties belonging to the same genus such as sweetness and bitterness could change into each other. From this he concluded that the properties of divinity and humanity, which are radically different from one another, could also not suffer confusion.⁴³ In addition, he found a way to rebut the Chalcedonian criticism that in the one nature the substance of the humanity seemed to disappear. He simply denied that substance was an entity that differed from substantial qualities. This he could do because he proposed a new interpretation of the term 'substance'. He argued that each property taken by itself was not a substance but that the 'compound (*synkrima*) of all properties was a substance'.⁴⁴ It is possible that he took his inspiration from Plotinus, who had defined sensible substance in a very similar manner as a 'conglomeration' (*symphoresis*) of properties.⁴⁵ Philoponus was condemned as a heretic by the Monophysite episcopate. Yet the debate continued. In the late sixth century, the sophist Stephen of Niobe also claimed that there was one set of properties just as there was one substance. Stephen found a follower in the pious layman Probus. Yet their association did not last long since Probus then made a volte-face and accepted the existence of two natures and two sets of natural properties. For him, it was then only logical to join the Chalcedonian church.⁴⁶

Substance without hypostatic properties?

The Chalcedonians wrestled with conceptual problems of their own. Unlike the Monophysites, they believed that the flesh remained a separate nature even after the union with the Word. Yet they denied that it was a second hypostasis beside the Word, which would have given it concrete and separate existence. This distinction was rejected both by Nestorians and by Monophysites who insisted that a nature, which was not at the same time a hypostasis, was simply inexistent.⁴⁷ Matters were complicated even further when John of Caesarea adapted for the Christological discourse the framework that the Cappadocians had devised for the Trinity. According to Cappadocian teaching, a hypostasis came into existence so-to-speak automatically when a bundle of accidents was added to the set of substantial properties that was common to all members of a species. John had to avoid such a scenario at all costs if he did not wish to be branded a Nestorian. His solution was to deny that the nature of the flesh was endowed with individual characteristics. This allowed him to argue that the flesh only gained concrete

existence through assumption into the Word, which already had a hypostasis of its own through the idiom of 'begottenness'.⁴⁸ A similar argument appears in Leontius of Byzantium's treatise *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*. Leontius declared that through his characteristic idiom the Word differed from the consubstantial Father but did not make the analogous statement that through its characteristic idioms the flesh differed from consubstantial human beings. Instead he juxtaposed other human beings with Christ as the compound of Word and flesh.⁴⁹ Here we are clearly to understand that the flesh has no characteristic idioms, which could serve as distinguishing marks.

Such a view was, however, difficult to defend. It flew in the face of Biblical accounts of Jesus' life where he appears as a full-fledged individual. Moreover, it seemed to throw into question the reality of the incarnation. This point was made very clearly by an anonymous Nestorian author who claimed that a secondary substance when abstracted from its substrate, the concrete individual, was nothing more than an empty concept.⁵⁰ The Chalcedonians could not simply argue that the flesh gained hypostasis in and through the Word because such a position was roundly rejected by their adversaries. Therefore, they had to find a way in which they could show that the human nature itself had a reality of its own even though it was not individualised. At the same time, they had to make sure that this reality fell short of the concrete and separate existence of the hypostasis. In order to make their case, they turned to philosophical texts. Yet they had great difficulties in finding a suitable concept. This is not surprising because Aristotle's ontology differed greatly from that of the Cappadocians.

The problems surface in Theodore of Raithou's treatise *Praeparatio*, which explains to a Christian audience the meaning of philosophical concepts.⁵¹ There 'substance' is not the secondary substance, as it would have been demanded by the Cappadocian framework, but the primary substance, which is defined as that which 'exists by itself' and 'does not need something outside of itself for its existence', features that are also mentioned in Aristotelian commentaries.⁵² Theodore does not spell out the Christological implications of such a concept. Yet it is clear that it becomes a rival for the Cappadocian term 'hypostasis', which is also said to 'exist by itself'. Indeed, in his subsequent discussion of the term 'hypostasis', Theodore gives the impression as if the bundles of accidents that are found in primary substances were little more than an extrinsic décor, which did not change the ontological status of the substrate. The obvious conclusion is that the human 'substance' in Christ is already a hypostasis in all but name.

Other authors were more careful in their adaptation of Aristotelian concepts.⁵³ Some sought to solve the problem by adapting the traditional distinction between two meanings of 'substance' – primary substance as opposed to accidents, and simple existence, which also includes accidents – through replacement of the Aristotelian term 'primary substance' with 'hypostasis'. Their argument, however, was ineffectual. Even after the modification, 'substance' in the sense of simple existence did not become the desired intermediary category of being but remained an overarching concept that encompassed both hypostasis and accident.

A much more complex explanation is found in Leontius of Byzantium's treatise *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*.⁵⁴ Leontius's starting point was an already existing argument, which targeted the axiom that a nature, which is not a hypostasis, was *anhypostatos*, that is, inexistent. It was claimed that the correct antonym of hypostasis was not *anhypostatos* but *enhypostatos*, that is, existent. This was, of course, little more than a play with words. Leontius clearly considered it insufficient because he proceeded to offer a definition of *enhypostaton*, which he equated with 'substance'. According to him, it is something that 'is not an accident, which has its being in something else and is not perceived in itself'.⁵⁵ From this statement, one might conclude that he identifies the *enhypostaton* with the Aristotelian primary substance.⁵⁶ If this were the case, he would have fallen into the same trap as Theodore of Raithou. Yet this is by no means

certain. Leontius states that the *enhypostaton* is a thing that ‘exists’ and not a thing that ‘exists by itself’, which would clearly identify it as a primary substance. Moreover, he counts as accidents not only non-substantial but also substantial qualities. Primary substances, however, cannot be juxtaposed with substantial qualities because they are part of their makeup. One might therefore conclude that Leontius’ reasoning is muddled. Yet this seems unlikely since he has an exceptionally good knowledge of philosophical terms and concepts. Elsewhere he states clearly that substantial qualities are constitutive of substances.⁵⁷ A much better philosophical counterpart for the *enhypostaton* is the unqualified ‘second substrate’, to which the substantial qualities are added and together with which they form the ‘first substrate’, the primary substance. If we accept that this was Leontius’ starting point, we also understand how he could refer to substantial qualities as accidents. In his commentary on the *Categories*, Philoponus explains that ‘the qualities which accrue to the body, that is, the second substrate, are accidents insofar as they accrue to it in its unqualified state’.⁵⁸ There is only one discrepancy. The philosophers identified the second substrate with matter, whereas Leontius spoke of ‘existence’. He may have taken this step because he wished to apply his model to the immaterial Word as well. It is evident that the *enhypostaton* is an addition to the Cappadocian framework, which only recognised common and individual properties. The immediately following passage is more traditional. Here nature is equated with the account of being that establishes ‘being’, and hypostasis is equated with the individual characteristics that establish ‘being by itself’. Yet it seems likely that here, too, we need to add the *enhypostaton* as a third element. The advantage of such a conceptual framework is immediately evident. It can now be argued that the flesh, which is not endowed with hypostatic idioms and therefore does not exist ‘by itself’, nevertheless had a degree of reality, because the account of being, which when seen by itself is a mere abstraction, inheres in ‘existence’ as a substrate.⁵⁹

Leontius of Byzantium was not the only author who modified the Cappadocian framework. In the doctrinal florilegium *Doctrina Patrum*, we find an excerpt from the Christological treatise of Leontius’ contemporary Heraclianus of Chalcedon.⁶⁰ Heraclianus starts by distinguishing four meanings of the term ‘substance’. He explains that it can refer to ‘matter’, to ‘form’, to the ‘compound (*synamphoteron*) of matter and form’, and also to incorporeal being. This distinction is borrowed from the philosophical discourse. In Asclepius’ commentary on *Metaphysics A–Z*, for example, we read that ‘substance’ is used in four different senses: ‘matter’, ‘form’, the ‘composite’ and ‘the universal, which is seen in many’.⁶¹ In a second step, Heraclianus then correlates the first three of these concepts with Cappadocian terminology. He declares that ‘form’ corresponds to ‘nature’, the ‘compound with idioms’ corresponds to ‘hypostasis’, and ‘matter’ corresponds to ‘substance’. Heraclianus’ argument is quite convoluted. Nevertheless, it is obvious that with matter he has added a new element to the original Cappadocian framework. Accordingly, ‘substance’ is no longer synonymous with ‘nature’. Unfortunately, the excerpt does not include the Christological application. Yet one notices that Heraclianus avoids speaking of the compound *tout court*. By claiming that it is always endowed with characteristic idioms, he makes sure that it does not become a rival for hypostasis. It is less clear why he introduced matter. It is possible that he, too, wished to ground the account of being in a substrate that gave it a higher degree of reality.

This dimension is much more obvious in the handbook of Pamphilus.⁶² Pamphilus begins by claiming that the Cappadocians had used ‘substance’ and ‘nature’ interchangeably. Yet then he declares that when one looks more closely, one can discern a difference between the two terms: ‘substance’ is pure existence, whereas ‘nature’ is qualified existence. Pure existence is then identified with the highest genus of the *arbor Porphyriana*, whereas qualified existence is likened to Porphyry’s ‘most proper difference’, that is, specific difference, such as ‘rational’ in the case of

the human being. In addition, he uses the curious formula ‘the qualified existence for everyone’ (*he poia to panti hyparxis*), which may be adapted from a passage in Aristotle’s *Posterior analytics*, where we find the formula ‘whatever exists for every living being’ (*poia panti zoo hyparchei*).⁶³ Pamphilus excerpted this argument from an older text but omitted the Christological application because he was only interested in definitions of terms. It seems likely, however, that the author of Pamphilus’ source sought to elide the intermediate genera and species so that the specific difference of the lowest species, the account of a human being, was directly juxtaposed with the highest genus, which bestowed reality on it.

Leontius of Byzantium, Heraclianus and Pamphilus made use of a wide range of philosophical concepts. Nevertheless, it is obvious that they engaged in the same discourse. They accepted that the common humanity when considered in abstraction had no reality outside the human mind. Yet they argued that the flesh was nevertheless existent because in each individual the account of being was grounded in a substrate, either ‘existence’ or ‘matter’ or the highest genus, which gave it reality even though it did not possess hypostatic idioms. This does not mean that all Chalcedonian theologians modified the Cappadocian framework. Patriarch Anastasius of Antioch, for example, declared that the Word had assumed the common humanity, seemingly without being aware of the conceptual problems. Yet even his writings show the influence of the new discourse. Once, he defines ‘substance’ not as the lowest species but as the highest genus.⁶⁴

Redefining hypostasis

Such complex arguments were not to everybody’s taste. Some theologians sought to solve the problem by redefining the relationship between nature and hypostasis. They declared that the addition of individual characteristics to a common account of being did yet not result in a hypostasis. For them concrete and separate existence was only established in a further step, ‘hypostatisation’, which added no further ‘content’ to the already individualised being. This argument, which is preserved in the writings of Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus, is of dubious value.⁶⁵ A much sounder conceptual framework was set out by Leontius of Byzantium. In his late treatise *Solutiones*, he conceded to his Monophysite interlocutor that the flesh had indeed characteristic idioms. Yet he then added that these idioms distinguished the flesh not from the Word but from other human beings.⁶⁶ This point of view is the result of a deeper engagement with the Cappadocian understanding of hypostasis. Accidents can only distinguish beings that belong to the same species because they can only be identified as such through distinction from a common set of natural properties. Significantly, the same argument is found in the writings of the Monophysite Philoponus, who stressed that there were two bounded sets of hypostatic idioms in the incarnated Word.⁶⁷ There is only one difference between the two authors. Leontius argued that the flesh could even have existed before the union with the flesh without endangering the oneness of Christ, a position that other authors regarded as typically Nestorian.⁶⁸ Philoponus, on the other hand, explicitly denied such a possibility. Even so, he was attacked by an anonymous Chalcedonian author who declared that the existence of a bounded set of individual human characteristics turned the flesh into a hypostasis within the hypostasis of the Word.⁶⁹ This was a problem that bedevilled several Chalcedonian theologians. Leontius of Jerusalem declared that the characteristic idioms of Word and flesh did not constitute bounded sets but were mingled so that the individual traits of his humanity distinguished Christ from the Father and the characteristic idiom ‘begottenness’ distinguished him from other human beings. Thus he effectively brought about a confusion of hypostatic idioms while at the same time insisting that the two natures remain

separate. John of Damascus' solution is even more ingenious. He observed that it was impossible to distinguish between natural and hypostatic idioms when one compared two beings that belong to different species, and he concluded that in this case the hypostatic idioms must be treated as if they were natural idioms. Thus the unity of Christ was safeguarded because in Chalcedonian Christology there are two sets of natural idioms, those of the humanity and those of the divinity.

Universal nature vs. particular nature

For Monophysites and Chalcedonians, Christology was closely related to soteriology. It had to be shown that the benefits of the incarnation were passed on to other human beings. John of Caesarea's solution was to claim that the Word assumed the entire human nature. Severus ridiculed this argument. He declared that Christ would then have incarnated in all human beings, including Judas and Caiaphas. This was evidently not what John had in mind. Yet his counterargument is rather surprising. He explained that the Word assumed the entire account of being, that is, all qualities that constitute a human being, and not just part of it.⁷⁰ One would instead have expected him to state that there was an ontological link between the flesh and other human beings, which made the human nature one. That John dodged this issue suggests that he could not explain how such a link might function. Later Chalcedonian authors, such as Anastasius of Antioch, made equally unsatisfactory statements.⁷¹ By then, the Nestorians had joined the attack. One of their number claimed that the universal human being, which the Word supposedly assumed, could either be the sum-total of all human beings, or the account of humanity, which only existed in the human mind.⁷² In the face of this criticism, Chalcedonians could not uphold their traditional position. As has already been pointed out, they introduced a particular substrate – matter or existence – in which the universal was grounded. By taking this step, however, they had already accepted that natures could be particular. Thus it is not surprising that later authors, such as Leontius of Jerusalem, acknowledged the existence of particular natures, even though they then found it difficult to explain the soteriological effects of the incarnation.⁷³ Among the Monophysites, it was John Philoponus who constructed a philosophically sound framework. Taking his cue from Aristotle's *De anima*, he contended that human beings were particular natures, even before they received characteristic idioms, while the common humanity was an empty concept, which could not bind together the individuals.⁷⁴ Interestingly, this view became quite popular among Chalcedonian theologians. Theodore of Raithou, the author of the *Doctrina Patrum*, and John of Damascus claimed that in the created order, species were one in name only.⁷⁵ Others were not prepared to go so far. In his *Solutiones*, Leontius of Byzantium conceded that the Word assumed a particular nature but then added that this nature was the same as that of other human beings. Leontius used the example of whiteness and that which is whitened to illustrate the difference between the account of being in abstraction and the account of being in a particular individual. It has therefore been argued that for him not only substances but also qualities were universals and that his understanding of 'individual nature' differed from that of Philoponus' 'particular nature'.⁷⁶ Yet it is by no means certain that the example was part of the argument. It may have been nothing but a general illustration without relevance for the argument. Later Chalcedonian authors denied that the nature in an individual was either common but an abstraction or real but particular. They claimed that that it was a universal that had been individuated through characteristic idioms.⁷⁷ It is, however, questionable whether one can speak of individuation as a process since it was agreed that the non-individuated universal had no reality of its own.

The limits of the discourse

At this point we can conclude that theologians of the sixth and seventh centuries regularly made use of philosophical texts. They scoured Aristotelian commentaries for terms and concepts that would help them to support their Christological positions. Yet these terms and concepts were ripped out of context. No author was interested in philosophy for its own sake. No attempt was made to construct a coherent ontological framework on the basis of philosophical speculation. One casualty of this approach was divine transcendence. Leontius of Byzantium declared that God and the human being must have the same highest genus because otherwise one could not use the same terminology in both cases.⁷⁸ Pamphilus disagreed, stressing the incomparability of God in the language of Pseudo-Dionysius. Yet even he treated the Word and the flesh as analogous cases when he made positive statements about the incarnation.⁷⁹

Notes

- 1 See Van Loon 2009: 205–220.
- 2 See Van Loon 2009: 544–545, with earlier literature.
- 3 See Grillmeier 1975: 358–359.
- 4 See Van Loon 2009: 518–530, with discussion of earlier secondary literature.
- 5 See Van Loon 2009: 507–509, 512–517.
- 6 See Van Loon 2009: 61–122.
- 7 See Siddals 1987: 355–356.R
- 8 See Van Loon 2009: 185–189, 517–518.
- 9 See Grillmeier and Hainthaler 1995: 54–61.
- 10 Sergius, *Letter III*, tr. Torrance 1988: 207.
- 11 John Philoponus, *Arbiter*, 1, tr. Lang 2001: 173.
- 12 Severus, *Letter III*, tr. Torrance 1988: 214–226.
- 13 See Gray 1989.
- 14 Sergius, *Letter I*, tr. Torrance 1988: 143.
- 15 Theodore of Raithou, *Praeparatio*, ed. Diekamp 1938: 185–222, esp. 198–200.
- 16 See Daley 2017: 1–25.
- 17 Grillmeier and Hainthaler 1995: 248–251.
- 18 See Krausmüller 2001.
- 19 Cyril can say that the humanity ‘accedes’ (*symbebēke*) to the divine Word; see Siddals 1987: 356.
- 20 Sergius, *Letter III*, tr. Torrance 1988: 208.
- 21 For the following, see Krausmüller 2017a, esp. 641–642.
- 22 Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, tr. Daley 2017: 135.
- 23 For the following, see Krausmüller 2017b.
- 24 See e.g. John Philoponus, *In Aristotelis analytica posteriora commentaria* (CAG 13.3, Berlin, 1898), 63.
- 25 Grillmeier and Hainthaler, *Christ in Christian Tradition*, 2/2, 447.
- 26 Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, tr. Daley 2017: 148.
- 27 Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula 13*, PG 91, 529; Leontius of Jerusalem, *Contra Nestorianos* I.52, PG 86, 1524.
- 28 See Edwards 2015, esp. 296.
- 29 John Philoponus, *Arbiter*, 4, tr. Lang 2001: 176.
- 30 See e.g. Martikainen 1986.
- 31 See Krausmüller 2005.
- 32 Maximus the Confessor, *Epistula 13* = *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 529. See L. Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Lund, 1965), 100–112.
- 33 See Zachhuber 2013, esp. 459–461.
- 34 F. Diekamp 1907: 42–44.
- 35 See Adamson 2013.
- 36 Leontius of Byzantium, *Solutiones*, tr. Daley 2017: 285.
- 37 Maximus the Confessor, *Letter 13* = *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 520.
- 38 For the following see Krausmüller 2014.

- 39 Grillmeier and Hainthaler 1995: 52–56.
- 40 Grillmeier and Hainthaler 1995: 59–61.
- 41 John Philoponus, *Arbiter*, 15, tr. Lang 2001: 186.
- 42 John Philoponus, *Arbiter*, 20, tr. Lang 2001: 189–190.
- 43 John Philoponus, *Arbiter*, 38, tr. Lang 2001: 204–205.
- 44 John Philoponus, *Arbiter*, 41, tr. Lang 2001: 209. Cf. the Greek fragment 12, 228–229.
- 45 Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.3 [44] 8 (19–37), translated by Sorabji 2005: 272.
- 46 Hainthaler 2004.
- 47 See Erismann 2010.
- 48 See Grillmeier and Hainthaler 1995: 60–61.
- 49 Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, tr. Daley 2017: 147. See also Gleede 2012: 136.
- 50 Leontius of Jerusalem, *Contra Nestorianos*, II.6 = *Patrologia Graeca* 86, 1544.
- 51 On the following, see Krausmüller 2011a, esp. 153–157.
- 52 *Asclepii in Aristotelis metaphysicorum libros A–Z commentaria*, ed. G. Kroll and M. Hayduck (CAG, 6.2; Berlin, 1888), 264.
- 53 See Krausmüller 2011a: 160–164.
- 54 For the following, see Krausmüller 2011b. See also the differing interpretations of Gleede 2012: 65–66; Shchukin 2016: 308–321.
- 55 Leontius of Byzantium, *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, tr. Daley, 133.
- 56 See Uthemann 1997, esp. 98–99.
- 57 Leontius of Byzantium, Daley, text.
- 58 *Philoponi (olim Ammonii) in Aristotelis categorias commentarium*, ed. A. Busse (CAG 13.1, Berlin, 1898), 65.
- 59 Leontius also speaks of a ‘universal thing’, which gives the impression as if he accepted the reality of universals. This may be an inconsistency. See however Krausmüller 2011b: 22.
- 60 For the following, see D. Krausmüller 2011a: 157–160.
- 61 Asclepius, *In Aristotelis metaphysicorum libros A–Z commentaria*, ed. G. Kroll and M. Hayduck (CAG VI.2, Berlin, 1888), p. 447.
- 62 For the following, see Krausmüller forthcoming.
- 63 See Aristotle, *Analytica posteriora*, 14, tr. Barnes 1984: 162.
- 64 See Krausmüller forthcoming.
- 65 Zachhuber 2013: 468–469.
- 66 Leontius of Byzantium, *Solutiones*, tr. Daley, 273.
- 67 John Philoponus, *Arbiter*, ed. Dickamp, *Doctrina Patrum*, 280–281. Compare *Arbiter*, 26, tr. Lang, 193–194.
- 68 Leontius of Byzantium, *Solutiones*, tr. Daley, 307.
- 69 For the following, see Krausmüller forthcoming in *Scrinium*.
- 70 See Zachhuber 2013: 461.
- 71 See Zachhuber 2013: 458.
- 72 Leontius of Jerusalem, *Contra Nestorianos*, II.6 = *Patrologia Graeca* 86, 1544.
- 73 See Krausmüller 2017a: 638.
- 74 See Zachhuber 2013: 462–466; Erismann 2008, esp. 285–291.
- 75 See Krausmüller 2015.
- 76 See Leontius of Byzantium, *Solutiones*, tr. Daley 2017: 279, with Cross 2002, esp. 255–256.
- 77 Rashed 2007: 367.
- 78 Leontius of Byzantium, *Solutiones*, tr. Daley 2017: 279.
- 79 See Krausmüller 2017a: 633–634.

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The philosophy of the resurrection in Early Christianity

Sophie Cartwright

Introduction: framing the resurrection issue

'We believe in . . . the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.'

The resurrection of the body was a key tenet of Early Christian belief, inherited from Judaism. At the end of history, dead bodies would be resurrected. For Greek and Latin Christianity, the soul had a conscious, post-mortem existence apart from the body between death and resurrection, so the resurrection was to be a reunion.¹ As it progressively formulated its worldview, nascent 'orthodox' Christianity found something seminally important in the doctrine of resurrection, which became a central feature of 'orthodoxy' in opposition to Gnosticism.² Even within the narrower, albeit slippery, parameters of orthodox Christianity, the resurrection continued to be a battleground issue, recurring in the 'Arian' controversy in the fourth century and the 'Origenist' controversy in the fourth and fifth centuries.³

The resurrection is, quite obviously, an eschatological doctrine – our bodies will be raised, our souls reunited with them, on the last day. As a doctrine about eschatology, it has a crucial soteriological dimension. If salvation history reaches its *telos* in eschatology, salvation wrought in the human being culminates in bodily resurrection. Bodily resurrection is key to the picture of human salvation. Resurrection is thus part of a process that both restores and renews, or promotes, the human being: it reverses the corrupting effects of the fall in the body, and it also confers something further on the body. At the same time, it is the historical person whose body is both restored and renewed – and this body has probably been bashed about a bit in the process of living, and then of decomposing after death. The resurrection therefore raises questions about continuity and change, how they coexist in bodies in general, and how they might do so specifically in the context first of death, and then of transformation.

Underlying these questions are other, perhaps more basic ones. What is a body? What is it made of? What particularises one body, distinguishing it from another, and makes it, say, Mary Magdalene's body and not Martha's? Discussions on these topics sit on the boundary between physics and metaphysics: in explaining what a body is made of, one begins to consider what makes a body a body.

To ask what makes a body Mary's body is to ask, at least in part, what makes *Mary* Mary. That is, the philosophy of the body has profound implications for a wider picture of human nature. The philosophy of the resurrection is fundamentally anthropological: how does the human body feature within the human being? How does it relate to the soul? What does the resurrection say about what a human being is? Different ways of explaining the resurrection result in different answers to this question.

These themes are explored in a philosophically relevant way in a rich variety of early Christian texts. I refer to pagan philosophical context where it is helpful for situating a discussion, but my primary concern is to analyse early Christian philosophical arguments about resurrection, and to demonstrate what is at stake in them.

1 *The metaphysics of the resurrection*

Much early Christian thinking on the resurrection takes it as a starting point that the body that is resurrected is the same as the one that lived and died. That is, at least on some level, a person's resurrection body must be the same as her historical body. Correspondingly, Christ's resurrection body is typically seen as an archetype for resurrection bodies in general, and Christ's risen body is manifestly the same one as his historical body: it bore the gorily physical marks of his crucifixion.⁴

Continuity between historical and resurrection bodies was important across different Christian traditions, and was a sticking point in internal Christian arguments. For example, at the beginning of the fourth century, Methodius of Olympus, who had previously admired Origen, critiques his doctrine of the resurrection for only maintaining continuity of bodily *shape*, not fleshly substance: 'the *same flesh* [*sarx*] will not be restored with the soul, but that each particular shape [*morphē*] according to the *eidōs* which now characterises the flesh will arise, imprinted on another spiritual body' (Methodius, *On the Resurrection* III.3.4–5 Bonwetsch). We shall see that this is an inaccurate characterisation of Origen's view of the resurrection. For the moment, it serves to illustrate Methodius's concern with continuity. A passage from Pamphilus's *Apology for Origen*, claiming to relay Origen's ideas, demonstrates that this concern was understood, and in some way shared, by those who would defend Origen on the resurrection:

if the soul alone, which did not struggle alone, is crowned, and the vessel of its body, which served it with very great exertion, should attain no rewards for the struggle and the victory, how does it not seem contrary to all reason . . . that at the time of recompense, one should be brushed aside as unworthy while the other is crowned?⁵

Probably alluding to Pamphilus's *Apology*, Eustathius of Antioch (writing c. 326) similarly writes:⁶

if the bodies of the martyrs were confined in fetters and in prisons, the ribs were scraped, they were tortured in every way, they were cut limb from limb, they were surrendered into the gluttony of fire, and with all the flesh and similarly all the bones they have been set on fire, is it not by far the most just that the same bodies will be raised again, which went within the things of pain and affliction, about to receive the wages of the pains?

(Eustathius of Antioch, *Contra Ariomanitas et de anima*, translation is my own from fragment 44)

So, bodies now dead will be resurrected. This raises several interrelated questions: how is resurrection of dead bodies possible? And what makes something the 'same body'? That is, what is it

that particularises a body and thus guarantees the continuity of its identity? The second question hints that the meaning of reference to bodily resurrection might not always be straightforward.

The same collection of matter is reconstituted

'Our bodies, being . . . deposited in the earth, and decomposing there, will rise.'
(Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.2.3)

A large number of early Christian authors conceive of the resurrection as the raising of *the same physical matter*. That is, the same lump of stuff that comprises my body now will comprise it in the resurrection. This raises some rather awkward questions, understandably pressed by those who oppose the doctrine of the resurrection. These are the subject of several early Christian apologetic tracts that overtly engage pagan philosophy. Let us examine two examples: Pseudo-Justin Martyr, writing around 178 CE; and Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection*,⁷ who states that he is engaging people sympathetic to Christianity but dubious about the resurrection (Rankin 2009: 33–34).

Pseudo-Justin reports the problem of the reconstitution of bodies as follows: ‘it is impossible that what is corrupted and dissolved should be restored to the same state as it had been.’⁸ Pseudo-Justin’s opponents apparently objected that bodies decompose. They may be burnt to a crisp. They can’t be put back together. He responds by appealing to a widespread principle, going back to Presocratic philosophy, that matter is indestructible, and only changes its shape:

The thing, then, which is formed of matter, whether it is an image or a statue, is destructible; but the matter itself is indestructible, such as clay or wax, or any other matter of the kind. So the artist designs in the clay or wax, and makes the form of a living animal; and again, if his handiwork is destroyed, it is not impossible for him to make the same form, by working up the same material, and fashioning it anew.

(Pseudo-Justin, *On the Resurrection* 6)

The questions addressed here are quite simple: 1) is the stuff each body is made of going to be available eschatologically?, and 2) won’t the bodies be damaged beyond repair? Extending his metaphor, we might imagine a wax statue being destroyed.

First, Pseudo-Justin appeals to a commonplace philosophical idea to establish that yes, the matter for each body will be available. He notes explicitly that this is a belief shared by Platonists, Stoics, and Epicureans:

there are some doctrines acknowledged by them all in common, one of which is that nothing be produced from what is not in being, nor can anything be destroyed or dissolved into what has not any being, and that *the elements exist indestructible* out of which all things are generated.

(Pseudo-Justin, *Resurrection*, 6. For further reference to this idea, see Nemesius, *De Natura Hominis*, section 5 = PG, 49–5–15)

Second, he asserts that, in that case, given the existence of a creator God, there is no reason why the bodies cannot be re-formed from the same matter. Elsewhere in the treatise, he appeals more explicitly to the *power* of God. Pseudo-Justin’s discussion about resurrection is thus framed by the concept of an omnipotent creator.⁹ It is significant that this creator will make, with the

same matter, the same *form*. ‘Form’ in this case either means something like physical structure, or at least entails this, among other things, as it is the loss of a particular physical structure that is at issue. The implication is that bodily continuity involves *the same matter* being organised in *the same way* – and presumably looking the same and feeling the same to the touch, that is, *resembling* the same thing.

In Athenagoras, we see that the post-mortem fate of the various bits that compose bodies raises a further and more complex problem, which is actually made more acute if one holds that there is no new matter: Dead human bodies ultimately become part of other human bodies. Bodies become part of the grass, which is eaten by cattle, which is eaten by people. One lump of atoms can apparently go from composing one piece of human flesh to another. How then, can every human body be reconstituted (Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection*, 5)?

Athenagoras offers two arguments. First, he responds that God

has adapted to the nature and kind of each animal the nourishment that corresponds and is suitable to it. God has neither ordained that everything in nature should be unified or combined with every kind of body, nor is at any loss to separate what has been so united.¹⁰

He goes on to explain that a human body does not ultimately assimilate another human body as nutrition, but will eject it.¹¹ Roughly speaking, nature is not structured so as to make cannibalism nutritionally profitable, even via the digestive tract of a non-human creature. Therefore, humans do not digest other humans *even if* they ingest them. A relatively narrow, biological argument about digestion is embedded in a wider philosophy of nature. Those who reject the resurrection on the grounds that some human bodies comprise parts of others are ignorant not only of God’s power but also ‘the power and nature of each of the creatures that nourish or are nourished’. It is noteworthy that in this picture, God is not necessarily jumping in to intervene every time someone eats a wolf that has eaten a human. Rather, God has created humans in such a way that we can deal with this.

Athenagoras hints at a second argument to address the same problem, though he does not draw it out: God ‘has neither ordained that everything in nature shall enter into union and combination with every kind of body, *nor is at any loss to separate what has been so united*’. By ‘separate’, he might simply mean immediate separation of inappropriate food from the body, that is, via vomiting or excretion; these processes he goes on to explain. He could, however, also mean that *if a human body were to assimilate another*, this would be unnatural and somehow bad for it, and therefore it would be a good thing for these two bodies to be separated again at the resurrection. Seen in this light, Athenagoras’s argument has a partly soteriological implication: the separation would constitute an act of eschatological healing. This begins to locate the doctrine of the resurrection within a wider theory of how the fall is manifest in nature. If nature does not work as it should – for example, if it allows one human to digest another – the consequences will be set right eschatologically, in the resurrection body.

Pseudo-Justin’s and Athenagoras’s arguments both take it as a given that the resurrection they are defending is a resurrection of the same *matter* as comprises a given body within history. Such arguments implicitly assume that a particular collection of matter is key in particularising a body, in making my body mine, and Lazarus’s body Lazarus’s. This assumption clearly has intuitive appeal, but on closer inspection, turns out to be far from obvious. The stuff that comprises a body changes perpetually over a lifetime. Suppose I die in thirty years’ time. The lump of stuff that composes my body now will be different from the lump of stuff that composes my body then. So, if we are concerned with lumps of stuff, which me is resurrected?¹² Some

early Christian thinkers found other ways to explain what particularises a body and that do not *necessarily* tie human identity to a particular lump of matter, and in any case de-emphasise this question.

‘Form’ particularises a body

Pagan philosophy had long been asking questions about what particularises matter. An explanation that has its roots principally in Aristotle is that matter is particularised by form – *eidos*; more specifically, form is the structuring principle of matter. (This metaphysic is commonly termed *hylomorphic*, though that is admittedly not a term found in classical or late antiquity). Aristotle (*Physics* 195a6–b8) famously gave the example of a bronze statue – the bronze is the matter, the statue shape is the form. Within this framework, the soul is the form of the body. This idea is taken up in diverse ways in late ancient philosophy, often together with a belief that body and soul are separate entities (for brief summary, see Cartwright 2015: 93–97). For example, the Neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry describes the union between body and the embodied soul as a ‘composite form and matter’ whilst maintaining a very clear ontological distinction between soul and body (Porphyry, *Sentences*, 21, discussed at Cartwright 2015: 96).

I have argued elsewhere that this idea of soul giving form to the body was influential in diverse strands of early Christian anthropology, and across lines of argument about the nature of resurrection bodies (Cartwright 2015: chapter 3 *passim*). Relatedly, Ilaria Ramelli has argued persuasively for a ‘hylomorphic’ anthropology in Origen of Alexandria and, following him, Gregory of Nyssa.¹³ Origen, she notes, writes that ‘every body is endowed with an individual form’ (Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.10.2, trans. Ramelli). It would be superfluous to reproduce Ramelli’s full range of textual analysis here. A passage she cites brings out the question of identity, and shows how ‘form’ provides an answer. Gregory has recently described objections to the resurrection like those cited by Athenagoras and Pseudo-Justin – some bodies are eaten, decomposed bodies will be dispersed, and so on. This passage appears within his defence of resurrection:

on one hand, the body is altered by way of growth and diminution, changing, like garments, the vesture of its successive statures. On the other hand, the form [*eidos*] remains unaltered in itself through every change, not varying from the marks [*sêmêion*] once imposed upon it by nature, but appearing with its own marks of identity [*gnôrismatôn*] in all the changes which the body undergoes. We must except, however, from this statement the change which happens to the form as the result of disease: for the deformity of sickness takes possession of the form like some strange mask, and when this is removed by the word, as in the case of Naaman the Syrian, or of those whose story is recorded in the gospel, the form that had been hidden by disease is once more by means of health restored to sight again with its own marks of identity.¹⁴

Gregory here notes that bodies change across time, but insists that personal identity *located in the body* does not, because the form (*eidos*) ‘imposed on it by nature’ does not. In this case, form is evidently not simply outward appearance, because form is constant over the course of a life, whilst outward appearance changes; form is what makes someone who they are in a fundamental sense. It seems that there is, nonetheless, something *visible* about this form, or the remarks about it being hidden by disease would be nonsense – the concept of bodily form *qua* structuring principle is tied to perceptible reality.

Gregory goes on to explain that these marks of identity allow the soul to recognise the body, so that its scattered constituent parts may be recalled to the soul and reconstituted eschatologically (Gregory of Nyssa, *De Opificio Hominis*, 27, 5).

It is important to be clear that a belief that form is the locus of personal identity, and preserves it between death and resurrection, is quite compatible with a belief that the same matter as decomposed is reconstituted, as Gregory seems to hold here. Nonetheless, it might sometimes have been an alternative: recall Methodius's critique of Origen as believing that the resurrection is one of form, not of flesh. He seems to be thinking of Origen's 'form' as outward shape, and it is by now evident that this is an inaccurate characterisation. Origen regards form as something like an underlying metaphysical principle.¹⁵ There may, nonetheless, be a remaining, substantive disagreement. Methodius knew Origen's work well, and his objection is likely to have its origins in a reasonable interpretation of Origen.¹⁶ Perhaps in Origen's understanding, resurrection bodies imprinted with the same *form*, i.e., metaphysically structured the same, are still not resurrection of the 'same flesh', if this is taken to entail a particular lump of matter currently decomposing in the ground.

Early Christian philosophies of the resurrection, then, were keen to establish continuity between the historical and resurrection bodies. To do so, they variously drew on the principle of the indestructibility of matter, and employ the notion of 'form' as a structuring and particularising principle of the human body. In the latter, they take up a tradition of thought that goes back at least to Aristotle, but that had been reworked in eclectic late ancient Platonisms.

Metaphysical transformation

So much for the consideration of how continuity is maintained in the human body across history and eschatology. Early Christian thinkers agree that resurrection involves change as well as continuity. What is mortal will become immortal. That, after all, is at least half the point of resurrection.¹⁷ Ideas about the transformation of the body, and its limits, tend to start from soteriology rather than metaphysics. The fall damages, among other things, the physical creation. The transformation of the body is the healing of physical creation, manifested in the human person.

In the next section, the transformation involved in the resurrection will be briefly located in an anthropological and ethical context. Here, it is important to consider some metaphysical contours.

The philosophical milieu in which early Christianity was a complex space for the issue of transformation to be negotiated. On one level, the concept of immortal human bodies did not sit comfortably with dominant late ancient philosophical ideas, including Christian ones, about what embodiment entails. Bodies are changeable. The human bodies we inhabit in history are mortal, corruptible, time-bound.¹⁸ How can they enter eternity? However, the contrast between body and eternity was not therefore straightforward, because corporeality had degrees; it existed in a multilayered, not purely dualistic, framework. Hence in Iamblichus we find the concept of an 'ethereal body' connected to the concept of a 'soul-vehicle' that the soul retains after death.¹⁹ Origen similarly has a variegated picture of corporeality, writing on the one hand that only God is bodiless, but on the other that the human mind is bodiless.²⁰

Augustine of Hippo, writing from the late fourth to early fifth centuries, particularly wrestled with how embodiment would, and would not, change in the resurrection. In *On the Faith and the Creed Against Gaudentius*, Augustine references Paul's statement that 'flesh and blood will not inherit the kingdom of God [1 Corinthians 15.50].' He interprets this passage as implying a distinction between flesh [*carnis*] and body [*corpus*] and argues that 'at that moment of angelic transformation it will no longer be flesh and blood but only a body' (*On the Faith and the Creed against Gaudentius* 10.24). Augustine is radically reworking the category of physicality to distance resurrection bodies from the historical phenomenon of embodiment. He does not,

however, remain comfortable with this idea; much later, in the *Retractions*, he feels the need to clarify that Paul's statement 'is not to be interpreted as if the substance of the flesh will no longer exist; but by the term flesh and blood, we are to understand that the Apostle meant the corruption itself of flesh and blood.'²¹ Here, Augustine might be seen as making his peace with the body by honing in on and isolating the aspect of it that is at issue all along: corruptibility.²² Flesh and blood, he concedes, are not intrinsically corruptible. Here, the Christian doctrine of resurrection has employed a Neoplatonic category of variegated corporeality, but shifted the terms, so that an eternal body bears closer resemblance to an earthly one.

2 The philosophical anthropology of the resurrection

We can already see from the arguments about continuity between historical and resurrection bodies that the doctrine of the resurrection is affirmed on anthropological principles: crudely, human beings are inherently physical. If a human body continues to rot in the ground or float dispersed on the wind or high seas, the human being is not saved. It is clear, then, that a concern for *personal identity* at least partly motivates preoccupation with continuity between historical and resurrection bodies: in order to be the *same person*, one must have the *same body*, whatever that turns out to mean. Thinking about the resurrection is embedded in a wide range of philosophical-theological anthropology.

The resurrection and the protology of sin

The argument about what constitutes a human being is bound up, from very early on, with a nexus of arguments over value and ethics, and which is very concerned with the protology of sin.²³ This happens against a Middle and later Neoplatonic background in which matter was a morally suspect category. For instance, the pagan Middle Platonist Numenius asserts that nothing in the perceptible realm is completely without vice.²⁴

In the second century, this is closely connected to Christianity's argument with, and self-definition against, Gnosticism. For example, in *Against Heresies*, Irenaeus of Lugdunum excoriates his Gnostic opponents on the grounds that, by denying the resurrection, they deny the salvation and thus the value of the body (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 4, pref. 4). The body is also specifically an integral part of the human creature: '*anthropos*, and not a part of *anthropos*, was made in God's likeness' (*Against Heresies* 5.6.1). Pseudo-Justin has a very similar idea: 'Then isn't it absurd to say that the flesh made by God in God's own image is contemptible, and worth nothing' (Ps.-Justin, *Resurrection* 7)? The point is crude but important. The human body matters; it is a part of God's good creation, and an integral part of what God created human beings to be. In these second-century writers, there is a strong emphasis on the image of God in the human body, though this is a more specific point; other Christian writers who place God's image exclusively, or at least by origin, in the soul, still defend the goodness of the body as part of God's creation.²⁵

Both Irenaeus and Pseudo-Justin also encountered the more specific objection that the body was the cause of sin. Pseudo-Justin lays out this objection, and his response, as follows:

yet the flesh is a sinner, so much so, that it forces the soul to sin along with it. And so they vainly accuse it, and blame it alone for the sin of both. But in what instance can the flesh possibly sin by itself, if it doesn't have the soul going before it and inciting it? For as in the case of a yoke of oxen, if one or other is loosed from the yoke, neither of them can plough alone; so neither can soul or body alone effect anything, if they are unyoked from their communion.

(Ps.-Justin 8)

For Pseudo-Justin, body and soul can only sin together – ‘neither can plough alone’ – but the soul actually leads in sinning. The resurrection, then, was connected to a rejection of body-soul dualism in a moral framework.

Resurrection bodies and the *telos* of the body

The fact that the sameness of the resurrection body is necessary to the sameness of the person has a further implication: whatever is shed from the historical body in resurrection is not intrinsic to the person. Early Christian writers typically distance the resurrection body from a range of typically bodily activities, eating and sex being prominent. They are often responding to a broadly Platonist philosophical milieu in which the body, by definition, was associated with these things. To be bodily is to be driven by physical appetites, and the process of controlling these is partly the process of freeing the soul from the body, as far as is possible during this life. Death, in this picture, is liberation from the body (Plato, *Phaedo* 61c–69e; Porphyry, *Sentences* 9). Against this background, resurrection might look like a re-entombment of a soul that was briefly allowed to escape. Christians need to explain how this is not so, but they face the problem that they tend to share with pagan Platonisms a broad sense that carnal desires enslave. As we shall see, they also believe that neither digestion nor sex will exist in the new creation.

Some patristic authors argue that certain bodily parts, and specifically sexual organs, will not exist in resurrection bodies. Gregory of Nyssa argues that sexual difference will be done away with in the resurrection, on the basis that we were not initially made male and female anyway: sexual distinction, and the need to procreate, are for him a consequence of the fall (Gregory of Nyssa, *Making of Humankind* 22). This places a great distance between our historical bodies and their *telos*. It suggests that perhaps many of the properties common to us humans as we inhabit history are contingent. To put it in Aristotelian terms, they are accidental, rather than essential. Notably, there is an implied corresponding distance between historical and resurrection society, or life. The more different we are to be, the more different resurrection life is to be.

By contrast, another strand of Christian thought posits that resurrection bodies will have all the same parts as historical bodies, but these will not be put to carnal uses. The third-century Latin Christian Tertullian offers a good example in his treatise *On the Resurrection*:

Now you have received your mouth, O man, for the purpose of devouring your food and imbibing your drink: why not, however, for the higher purpose of uttering speech, so as to distinguish yourself from all other animals? Why not rather for preaching the gospel of that God, so you may become his priest and advocate before people? Adam gave the animals their names *before* he plucked the fruit of the tree; before he ate, he prophesied. Then, again, you received your teeth for the consumption of your meal: why not rather for wreathing your mouth with suitable defence on every opening thereof, small or wide? Why not, too, for moderating the impulses²⁶ of your tongue, and guarding your articulate speech from failure and violence? . . . There are toothless persons in the world. Look at them and ask whether even a cage of teeth be not an honour to the mouth. There are apertures in the lower regions of man and woman, by means of which they gratify no doubt their animal passions; but why are they not rather regarded as outlets for the cleanly discharge of natural fluids?

(Tertullian, *On the Resurrection* 61.1–3 amended from ANF)

As for Athenagoras, for Tertullian the philosophy of the resurrection has become bound up with a philosophy of nature. Even more explicitly than Athenagoras, Tertullian asks

teleological questions: all the parts of the body were designed by God for a purpose, but what is that purpose? Tertullian strongly implies that the human body is not intended primarily for carnal functions: tellingly, he cites the fact that people fast and are celibate even in this life in support of his argument about the resurrection. He does not simply think that all the unsavoury, or indeed sinful, bits of corporeality will be done away with in the resurrection, but instead that

if even here on earth both the functions and the pleasures of our members can be suspended . . . how much more, when his salvation is secure, and especially in an eternal dispensation, will we cease to desire those things, for which, even here below, we are not unaccustomed to check our longings!

(*On the Resurrection* 6)

The implication is that carnal sins disregard the body's true *telos* in general. For Tertullian, the philosophy of the resurrection is grounded in a wider philosophical-anthropological ethics, not just for resurrection life, but for now. The resurrection concretises post-mortem survival and so obliges one to think concretely about what constitutes human perfectibility, in a way that belief in the post-mortem survival of a disembodied is less likely to.

Conclusion

Early Christian doctrine tended to insist on the *material continuity* of the body between history and resurrection, and some of its philosophy of the resurrection is therefore devoted to demonstrating that this is possible within the framework of physics – not only that matter persists, but that the matter of one human body doesn't become the matter of another. Wrestling with the notion of the body in time, many early Christian thinkers wrestled articulated bodily continuity – and therefore bodily particularity – in terms of form, meaning something like underlying or structuring principle. Here they drew on a tradition with Aristotelian roots that found echoes in contemporary Neoplatonism.

In all of these things, the philosophy of the resurrection in early Christianity was all but inextricable from a philosophy of the body *tout court*: what particularises a body; what constitutes the continuity of a body in time? Furthermore, historical bodies are seen in light of resurrection. If the resurrection asks us to think about apparently time-bound, historical categories in eternal terms, it also asks us to think about those categories in the light of eternity. Sometimes, this involved acknowledging the radical contingency of our current bodily state, as in Gregory of Nyssa. At other times, as for Tertullian, it involved thinking afresh about the purpose of the body as it is. This also meant asking questions about how we, *as bodily creatures*, are and should act in light of eternity. There is, as we saw in Tertullian, a philosophical ethics of the resurrection. The doctrine of the resurrection was at the heart of early Christianity, and it sat at the centre of Christian thinking on a range of questions about what it is to be human, how history related to eschatology, and what that meant for ethical norms.

Notes

- 1 A different picture is found within Syriac Christianity; the fourth-century writer Aphrahat, *Demonstration on Resurrection*, 8.22, suggests that the soul, or 'spirit', is trapped in the body at death.
- 2 We have a window onto this in Irenaeus's emphasis on resurrection in his anti-Gnostic writing *Against Heresies*, or, more accurately translated *On the Refutation of Knowledge Falsely So-Called*, which is

- discussed later in the chapter. For this translation of the title of Irenaeus's work, see Steenberg 2012; Setzer 2004: 4 argues that belief in the resurrection was a boundary issue in early Christian self-definition, demarcating orthodoxy.
- 3 Relatedly, Young 2011: 71 has argued that the 'Arian' and 'Origenist' controversies can be seen as different stages in one argument in which issues about 'the physical creation and human embodiment' are central. I have discussed the issue of body-soul relations in the early 'Arian' controversy in more detail in Cartwright 2015: ch. 3.
 - 4 According to Luke 24.39–40, the resurrected Christ shows the apostles his hands and feet. In John 20.19–25 (NRSV), the resurrected Christ showed his disciples 'his hands and his side' (verse 19) and later instructs Thomas: 'Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side' (verse 25). For a discussion of this idea in Eustathius of Antioch, see Cartwright 2015: 126–127.
 - 5 Pamphilus, *Apology for Origen*, amended translation of Scheck (2000), 128. Origen is sometimes accused of not really believing in the resurrection, hence the inclusion of this passage in the *Apology*.
 - 6 For a discussion of how Eustathius may use the *Apology* here, see Cartwright 2015: 118–120.
 - 7 The Athenagorean authorship of the work is contested; Grant (1954) argued that it was responding to some Origenian ideas (which we will encounter later in the chapter) which would place it too late for the second-century Athenagoras, Origen writing in the third century. The authorship of the work is not the main concern of this chapter, and beyond its subject's scope. This is, in any case, certainly an instance of early Christian apologetic on resurrection. A detailed discussion is contained in Rankin 2009: ch. 2.
 - 8 Pseudo-Justin Martyr, *On the Resurrection* chapter 2. Translation of this work amended from ANF. For the Greek text, see Heimgartner 2001.
 - 9 Athenagoras thinks more deeply about what this power will enable God to do: God will know where the various different bits of different bodies have ended up. Athenagoras, *On the Resurrection*, 2.
 - 10 Athenagoras, *Resurrection*, 5. Translation amended from ANF. The Greek text is edited by Pouderon 1992.
 - 11 He seems to envisage this happening primarily through vomiting, but also argues that, even where something is initially digested, it is not necessarily absorbed by the body, suggesting that this might occur through defecation.
 - 12 This is a point made by the character Aglaophon in Methodius of Olympus's dialogue, *On the Resurrection*, I.10–12, written at the beginning of the fourth century. See further Cartwright 2018. I draw on a discussion in an early piece of work.
 - 13 Ilaria Ramelli, 'Hylomorphism in Origen: A Background for Gregory of Nyssa's Anthropology?' forthcoming.
 - 14 Gregory of Nyssa, *De Opificio Hominis*, 27, 3–4, translation amended from NPNF = PG 44, 124–256.
 - 15 See Crouzel 1972; Mark Edwards 2002: 109 further argues that for Origen *eidōs*/form retains a material substrate.
 - 16 For Methodius's familiarity with Origen, see Patterson 1997: 123–145.
 - 17 Though apparently this point was not always appreciated by external observers: Nemesius reports that some people likened the doctrine of resurrection to the Stoic doctrine that the world will conflagrate and then be replaced by an identical one (*De Natura Hominis*, section 38 [PG 112]).
 - 18 A foundational text for this idea is Plato's *Phaedo* 74b–84b, where the soul is likened to the eternal, unchangeable, and immortal; the body to the changeable and mortal.
 - 19 E.g. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries*, 202. For discussion of this passage and the connection between ethereal body and soul-vehicle, see Shaw 2013: 547.
 - 20 Origen, *On First Principles*, 1.6.4 and 1.1.5–7 respectively. I discuss this in Cartwright, *Eustathius*: 92–93.
 - 21 Augustine, *Retractions*, 2.3. For discussions of Augustine's change of mind, see Fletcher 2014: 44–45; Nightingale 2011: 44–46.
 - 22 Cf. Methodius, *Symposium*, 9.5, on the incorruptibility of resurrection bodies.
 - 23 For a more detailed treatment of how this nexus of ideas relates to questions about the body in patristic Christianity, see Cartwright 2018.
 - 24 Numenius, Fragment 52.113–115, ed. Des Places, from Chalcidius, *On the Timaeus* 299. I am indebted to Edwards 2018.
 - 25 For example, Methodius of Olympus, who defends the goodness of the body forcefully in his *De Resurrectione*, either locates the image in the soul (*Convivium* 1.1) or, even in *De Resurrectione*, suggests that

the body might derive the image of God via the soul (*De Resurrectione*, ed. Bonwetsch I.34.2–3). I have discussed this in more detail in Cartwright 2015: 160–161.

26 *pulsus linguae*.

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Biblical hermeneutics

Scot Douglass

Framing the problem

Reading is and always has been difficult, even when, or perhaps especially when, restricted to reading how others have read – how Platonists read Plato, for example, or how early Christians read the Scriptures. Centuries of scholarship, ranging from sharply focused articles to monumental volumes,¹ have yet to exhaust our understanding of the complexities of biblical hermeneutics as practiced in the early Church. The purpose of this contribution, though, is not to rehearse the scholarly consensus and ongoing disputes regarding how patristic exegetes read the Bible, but rather to make that conversation richer and more complicated by situating their hermeneutics within the reading habits, assumptions, challenges and expectations of their pagan philosophical peers. What emerges is a similar set of interpretive struggles and strategies linked at a more fundamental level by (1) the relationship between language and truth, (2) the nature of written language, (3) a shared commitment to the practice of truth, (4) a common classical education, (5) the inheritance of recognized authoritative texts, (6) the increased distance – historically, culturally, linguistically – between reader and source text, (7) disputes with other reading thinkers, and (8) belonging to particular reading traditions.

Before exploring these similarities, though, we must first sketch out why reading the Bible was so important to the early Church and why doing it well was so difficult. Although hermeneutics played a role in doctrinal debates, interpreting the Bible was first and foremost essential to being spiritual. As Henri de Lubac (1959) observed: “ancient Christian exegesis is . . . the ancient Christian way of thinking . . . giv[ing] expression to ‘the prodigious newness of the Christian fact.’” The Christian reading project revolved around a very practical commitment to the spiritual welfare of ordinary believers and the production, therefore, of textually informed homilies, commentaries, lives of saints, funeral orations, catechisms, catechetical aids and liturgies. Even the great Trinitarian and Christological debates were driven by the ubiquitous spiritual practice of worshipping Jesus. The so-called rival hermeneutical schools of Antioch and Alexandria were centuries-old catechetical schools whose evolving disagreements emerged directly from concerns over how best to promote spiritual understanding and maturity. In the highly stylized account of his own conversion, Augustine, a professional rhetorician by trade, underlined the prominence of spiritual reading in the early Church. After rehearsing multiple

examples of people reading their way to the Christian faith, Augustine recounts how his own journey to Christ culminated in obedience to the singsong refrain from the nearby children's game: "Tolle, lege! Tolle, lege!" ("Take [it] [and] read [it]! Take [it] [and] read [it]!") (*Conf.* 8.12). The basic hermeneutical challenges faced by the early Church begin with the unambiguous identification of the implied "it" as the Bible (the Jewish Scriptures and eventually the New Testament), with all its strange blends of genres, styles, languages, authors, cultures, historical contexts and traditions. Moreover, before Augustine can *read* it with any spiritual value – he has been reading it for decades without allowing it to insinuate² itself in his heart – he must first negotiate the implications of the prior command to "take it": the active decision to submit to its authority and believe in its divinely inspired voice. Biblical hermeneutics for patristic exegetes required more than one's mind; it required one's will, one's heart and one's life.

The complexities of reading the Scriptures in the early Church included at least the following:

- 1 The Bible was regarded as an authoritative text of divine origin. No passage, therefore, could be ignored, rejected or otherwise managed without acknowledging its claim on the Christian reader.
- 2 Despite dozens of distinct human authors (the majority of which wrote before the incarnation of Christ), the Bible was believed to have a single divine author and, therefore, a consistent theological and, in particular, Christological message.
- 3 The Jewish Scriptures were written over centuries not only in a different language but from a different intellectual, rhetorical and cultural tradition.
- 4 The Jewish Scriptures were almost exclusively accessed through the translated Septuagint whose Greek vocabulary, syntax and style seemed "foreign" to Hellenistic Greek readers who were not also Hellenistic Jews.
- 5 Many aspects of the Jewish Scriptures if read at face value struck the Church Fathers as being unworthy of God: the sexuality of *The Song of Songs*, for example, or the commandments to kill every man, woman and child in Jericho.
- 6 The Bible, itself, provided multiple examples of New Testament authors reading the Jewish Scriptures through prophetic, allegorical, symbolic and typological hermeneutical lenses – interpretations that even using these methods would otherwise have been elusive.
- 7 The patristic practice of reading did not separate *theory* and *practice*. As a result, they believed that reading a spiritual text well required being spiritual *and* reading it spiritually.
- 8 The vast majority of influential Christian readers in the early Church were specifically trained in the Greek rhetorical tradition. The Scriptures, on the other hand, including most of the NT, were not produced by authors steeped in the same tradition of reading and who did not, therefore, write within its conventions.
- 9 Different approaches to reading the Bible, motivated by different challenges and shaped by different historical contexts, resulted not only in competing Christian schools of hermeneutic thought that evolved over time but also in a growing library of Christian readings.
- 10 Biblical hermeneutics needed to be fluid and malleable according to context when in the service of the varieties of textual production common in the early church: commentaries, homilies, funeral orations, theological treatises, creeds, letters and liturgies, as well as polemics and apologies directed against perceived theological enemies both within and outside the Christian community.

As the gospel spread beyond the direct oversight of the original disciples, concrete disputes surfaced concerning spiritual practices that could no longer be solved by apostolic authority but by contested readings of recognized authoritative texts. The letters of Paul, the earliest

extant Christian writings, reveal how quickly disagreements arose about how to read the Jewish Scriptures in Gentile churches in respect to a whole host of practical spiritual matters. Early catechetical aids such as the *Didache* provided a “second-generation” bridge, textualized and portable, to Jewish–Gentile Christian rituals and practices. As early as the second century, Church Fathers embedded explicit hermeneutical principles alongside specific readings. The increased intensity of the disputes, combined with the growth of the church and the distance, both geographically and chronologically, from its founding events all served to further textualize the faith and increase the authority of the Scriptures. This in turn demanded a more robust and systematic treatment of what would become known as biblical hermeneutics. By the third century, the catechetical schools in Alexandria and Antioch developed distinctive hermeneutical approaches, and Origen, beyond hermeneutical discussions in his commentaries, dedicated a portion of Book 4 of *On First Principles*, regarded as the first systematic treatise of Christian theology, on how to interpret the Scriptures. Constantine’s imperial validation of Christianity added a new public dimension to questions of orthodoxy, heterodoxy and heresy that resulted in disputes rooted in more fundamental debates about hermeneutics and adjudicated in both ecumenical and competing church councils where rhetorical skills mattered (Philostorgius, *Church History* 4.12). Looking back at the future impact of all this Christian attention to reading, Brian Stock credits Augustine with laying “the theoretical foundation of a reading culture” and “[giving] birth to the West’s first developed theory of reading” (Stock 1996: 1). But well before the articulation of such systematic underpinnings, the spiritual practices of the early church established a culture of reading whose various approaches defy simple categorizations and definitive distinctions. Thomas Böhm notes:

The terms history, literal sense, typology, allegory, *theoria* and *anagoge* are the most commonly used with respect to the methods of interpretation by the Fathers. . . . Above all, it must be stressed that these notions cannot be separated from each other in a clear and satisfactory way.

(Kannengiesser 2004: 213)

Given that the NT authors, themselves, used all of these methods in reading the Jewish Scriptures, distinctions claimed between them by patristic exegetes were largely of degree and attitude.

Even so, the basic hermeneutical challenges facing patristic exegetes were not altogether unique when compared to those of the pagan philosopher. As a result, Biblical hermeneutics were deeply informed by, shared a great deal in common with and, on occasion, departed from the reading habits and methods practiced in the philosophical tradition. This influence, though was as pervasive and passive as it was particular, as implicit and inherited as it was explicit, as natural and reflexive as it was self-conscious. That is, the spiritual concerns, exegetical battles and theological debates that permeated the reception and production of Christian texts in late antiquity turned on hermeneutical principles debated, for the most part, from within an unchallenged Hellenistic episteme. Although Christians might readily reject the content of pagan literature and philosophy, they were far less capable, let alone ready, to reject the way they had been educated to understand it. As a result, the pagan teacher Ammonius Saccas can have trained both Plotinus and Origen. The remainder of this chapter will be organized into two main sections: (1) a look at the structural and historical relationship between classical rhetoric and biblical hermeneutics, and (2) an examination of a series of common hermeneutical challenges faced by Church leaders and pagan philosophers.

Classical rhetoric and biblical hermeneutics

Rhetoric, the sister *techné* to hermeneutics, was a vital thread in the cultural fabric of classical antiquity. Grounded in a love of the Greek language and the need to navigate sociopolitical contexts that were being discursively determined, rhetoric maximized the persuasive potential of language by being attentive to its emotional, cognitive and aural impacts. It harnessed the influence of meter, the effect of sound combinations, the conventions of grammar, the arrangement of ideas, the power of poetic devices and the dynamism of delivery to produce a compelling synergy between pleasure and persuasion. It became the cornerstone of education and the currency of civic life. The poetry of Homer stood organically at the head of the rhetorical tradition as the leading source of both pleasure and wisdom (Plato, *Republic* 337b) – a status challenged by Plato and other philosophers in ways that would prove relevant to patristic hermeneutics. Broadly defined as the systematic methods used to persuade through words, rhetoric first emerged as a coherent concept/skill in the fifth-century democracies of Athens and Syracuse. Itinerant teachers known as Sophists offered rhetorical training, and the first handbooks on rhetoric appeared (Kennedy 1959). Pericles's *Funeral Oration* (*Pel. War* 2:34–36) endeavored to define Athenian democracy and persuade its citizens to act on this vision. By the fourth century, oratory as exemplified by Demosthenes played a central role in forging Greek political and cultural identity in the aftermath of the defeat of tyranny. Beginning with Isocrates, regular schools of rhetoric became common, producing a detailed lexicon of technical vocabulary to describe various elements of public speaking. Later in the same century, Alexander conquered the Mediterranean world and Hellenized it. As a result, rhetoric became a regular part of the education of young men throughout the Hellenistic world, later extending its pervasive influence throughout the Roman empire. The successful translation of the rhetorical tradition from Greek to Latin had notable champions including Virgil, Horace, Livy, Ovid and above all Cicero (106–43 BCE), who not only translated Greek philosophy into Latin but who made Latin oratory true to itself as a language of poetic and rhetorical power. Quintilian (35–c. 96 CE), the first state-supported teacher of rhetoric in the Roman empire, wrote the highly influential *Institutio oratoria*, which successfully advocated that rhetorical training be interwoven into all of education. Although Christianity began as a Judeo/Palestinian movement, its quick growth took it to a Greek- and Latin-speaking world in which a thorough understanding of rhetorical principles, devices and techniques could be assumed of every educated person – including the Church Fathers (Cameron 1991; Lim 1994). Their relationship to language was saturated by a system of standards and expectations that governed the right way to digest and produce discourses.

Although rhetorical training was the common cultural denominator throughout the Greco-Roman world of the patristic era, it had lost something of its past grandeur. Already in the early years of the second century, the pagan orator Tacitus summarized the consensus for the decline of classical rhetoric: loss of political weight, removal from the populace to the academy, morbid focus on a barren past, and the clever, mannered ornamentation of too much poetry.³ Rhetoric had been drained of its practical vigor, its vital attachment to life; and although the classical *paideia*, as Peter Brown has argued, was still an essential ingredient in the smooth fourth-century running of a widely spread empire, eloquence found itself subservient to the goals of civic peace, pacifying distinctions (instead of clarifying them) between Christian and pagan by providing a common discursive surface.⁴ Libanius lamented that pagan religion would not be given the opportunity under Constantine and his Christian heirs to revive Hellenistic rhetoric because they had severed the last link between the living rhetoric of the past and the dead rhetoric of the schools: the link between “sacrifice and words” (ἱερά καὶ λόγοι) (*Oration* 62, 7–8).

Gregory of Nazianzus, educated in this weak form of oratory, spoke dismissively upon his return from Athens of the expectations of his friends, family and fellow citizens to dazzle them with his recently acquired rhetorical skills.⁵

When I arrived home, I gave a display of eloquence to satisfy the inordinate desire of those demanding this of me as if it were a debt. But to me, I place no value upon vapid applause or upon those stupid and intricate conceits which are the delight of sophists.

(*De vita sua*, 265–269)

Instead, Gregory had studied rhetoric for the sake of Christian eloquence, to “turn bastard letters to the service of those that are genuine” (*De vita sua*, 113–114). The urgency of having something to say not only gave great vigor to Christian communication but forged a dynamic link between rhetoric and hermeneutics, between speaking and reading. Plato’s critique of rhetoric animated the patristic relationship to language as an inseparable interaction of reading, speaking and truth.

In Book 10 of the *Republic*, Plato famously claimed “there is an old quarrel between philosophy and poetry” (*Resp.* 607b) and spent considerable effort linking this to a quarrel between philosophy and rhetoric (see McCoy 2008). In short, Socrates’s main critique of the Sophist and Rhapsode was that their persuasive words did not emerge from knowledge of the subject. When had Homer governed a city or led soldiers to victory (*Resp.* 598e–600d)? Gorgias could speak persuasively about virtue, and Ion could powerfully perform the *Iliad*, but their impact was limited to their listeners’ beliefs, not their knowledge, because Gorgias did not understand the nature of justice and Ion did not understand the nature of valor. Rhetoric as employed by the Sophists was not a *techne* (τέχνη) but an *empeiria* (ἐμπειρία), an experience-based ability to use the tools of rhetoric to touch upon subjects with highly persuasive – perhaps even inspired – ignorance.

But Plato’s comprehensive and highly influential critique becomes complicated when reading his own textualized and at times highly “poetic” philosophy (see Partenie 2009). In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates allowed for the possibility, under certain conditions, of good rhetoric and good texts. Socrates listed the necessary characteristics of philosophical rhetoric: knowing the subject matter, knowing the soul of the listeners, and then knowing how to skillfully pitch one’s presentation of knowledge according to the listeners’ capacity to understand (*Phaedrus* 277). Plato understood that truth always possessed a persuasive component, and it was in this rhetorical register that the patristic exegetes read and taught the Scriptures.⁶ After laughing at Meletus’s warning that the jurors be wary of his sophistic eloquence, Socrates acknowledged that perhaps he was eloquent and indeed even an orator if the main virtue of eloquence was speaking the truth (*Apology.* 17b). In a similar vein, the Church Fathers’ rhetorical education required them to acknowledge the unpolished and literary crudeness of the Scriptures but, following Plato, defended them as worthy texts because they spoke the truth (Clement, *Protrepticus* 8; Origen, *First Principles* IV.1.7, IV.2.13).

But when these same readers of Biblical truth turned to proclaim Biblical truth, regardless of the genre, they did so according to the standards and methods of their rhetorical education (see Gibbons 2015). The process of reading a text in order to speak your interpretation and of interpreting a text with the conscious awareness that you are about to preach it blurs the line between the reception of textual truth and the production of truthful texts. Patristic exegetes were always readers who spoke persuasively and persuasive speakers of what they had read: “There are two things on which all interpretation of Scripture depends: the mode of ascertaining the proper meaning, and the mode of making known the meaning when it is ascertained”

(Augustine, *Christian Doctrine* 1.1) The reciprocal entanglements of rhetoric, truth, textuality, hermeneutics and moral responsibility could not be separated in practice. This allowed Biblical hermeneuts to conflate the truth-telling of Plato and Moses. Beginning with Philo, who desired to make the Jewish Scriptures relevant to a Hellenistic audience, Plato was thought to have learned his philosophy from Moses, which in turn justified reading Moses through the lens of Platonism. Jerome captured this bidirectionality in a proverb still in circulation in the fourth century: “Either Philo Platonizes or Plato Philonizes” (*Illustrious Men* 11). To better understand the particular hermeneutic challenges examined in the next section, it is important to keep in mind to what extent patristic exegetes, to borrow a rhetorical phrase from Paul’s sermon on Mars Hill, “lived and moved and had their being” (*Acts* 17:28) in the classical rhetoric tradition.

Common hermeneutical challenges faced by pagan philosophers and patristic exegetes

The following examination of common problems faced by both pagan and Christian readers, like the earlier-enumerated list of challenges facing Biblical hermeneuts, is more tidy in presentation than in practice. Because these containers cannot contain their contents, the rhetorical decision to organize this section around a core set of shared challenges means that different aspects of common hermeneutical solutions will be developed across multiple “challenges.” It should also be pointed out that the direction of influence between pagan philosopher and Christian thinkers was not symmetrical – flowing for the most part, except in the case of personal conversions, from pagan to Christian.

The challenge of unacceptable passages in authoritative texts

All sophisticated cultures at some point become embarrassed by certain aspects of their own traditions. This becomes a hermeneutical problem when these traditions have been enshrined in venerated texts with authoritative moral status. Such was the case with Homer. Famously by Plato, but earlier by Xenophanes and Heraclitus, the Homeric texts were judged to be immoral and indecent. Not only did heroic characters act in petty, lustful, deceitful, violent and capricious ways, so did the very gods still worshipped throughout Athens. The hermeneutical solution, embraced according to Porphyry as early as the sixth century BCE by Theagenes of Rhegium regarding the battle of the gods in *Iliad* 20 (HQ 1.241.10–11), was not to reject the text, when possible, but to read “beneath the text” to discover its underlying meaning and deeper sense. Although this approach would be known 500 years later as allegorical, its initial spatially laden nomenclature, *hyponoia* (ὑπόνοια), was more conceptually influential in the practice of Biblical hermeneutics. Texts have levels. There are surface meanings and then deeper meanings “under” (ὑπο-) the surface. Suspect authoritative literary works, if you knew how to read them, bore hidden (non-embarrassing) truths not readily apparent when read “according to the letter.”

In Xenophon’s *Symposium*, Socrates endorsed a *hyponoetic* approach to reading Homer in light of the many moral problems conveyed at the surface level and the pedagogical emptiness, therefore, of ignorantly parroting Homeric verses:

“My father was anxious to see me develop into a good man,” said Niceratus, “and as a means to this end he compelled me to memorize all of Homer; and so even now I can repeat the whole *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* by heart.”

“But have you failed to observe,” questioned Antisthenes, “that the rhapsodes, too, all know these poems?”

“How could I,” he replied, “when I listen to their recitations nearly every day?”

“Well, do you know any tribe of men,” went on the other, “more stupid than the rhapsodes?”

“No, indeed,” answered Niceratus; “not I, I am sure.”

“No,” said Socrates; “and the reason is clear: they do not know *the inner meaning* (τὰς ὑπονοίας οὐκ ἐπίστανται) of the poems.

(*Symp.* 3.5–6)

Although Socrates acknowledged a hidden meaning in Homer that aligned with Heraclitus (*Theaetetus* 152e), Plato found certain Homeric passages to be irredeemable even when read below the surface. As a result, he simply prohibited them in his ideal city – a luxury patristic exegetes could not exercise in respect to problematic passages in the Jewish Scriptures.

“No, by heaven,” said he, “I do not myself think that they are fit to be told. . . . Hera’s fetterings by her son and the hurling out of heaven of Hephaestus by his father when he was trying to save his mother from a beating, and the battles of the gods in Homer’s verse are things that we must not admit into our city either wrought *in allegory or without allegory* (οὐτ’ ἐν ὑπονοίαις πεποιημένας οὔτε ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν).”

(*Resp.* 378b–d)

The Alexandrian School, fundamentally identified with this hermeneutical approach, is associated with Philo, Clement, Origen, Didymus the Blind and the Cappadocians. Joseph Kelly described the high stakes in adopting this pagan hermeneutical strategy in respect to the Biblical commandment to kill everyone in Jericho (Deut. 7:1–2, Josh. 6:21):

The Alexandrians simply could not believe that God would demand something like that, so they said the people of Jericho represent our sins and God wants us to eliminate them, right down to the tiniest one. Today this would sound like a forced interpretation, but in the third century, when exegetes faced either a barbarous literal interpretation or an allegorical one that preserved the beneficent view of God, the latter method saved the Bible for the Christians.

(Kelly 1997: 119)

Gregory of Nyssa (fourth century) bears witness to the continuity of this trajectory – and its opponents – in his introductory comments about his reading approach to the unacceptable sexuality in the *Song of Songs*:

It seems right to some church leaders, however, to stand by the letter of the Holy Scriptures in all circumstances, and they do not agree that Scripture says anything for profit by way of enigmas and below-the-surface (ὑπονοίαις) meanings. For this reason I judge it necessary first of all to defend my practice against those who thus charge us. In our earnest search for what is profitable in the inspired Scripture there is nothing to be found unsuitable. Therefore, if there is profit even in the text taken for just what it says, we have what is sought right before us. On the other hand, if something is stated in a concealed manner by way of enigmas and below-the-surface meanings, and so is void of profit in its plain sense, such passages we turn over in our minds. . . . One may wish

to refer to the anagogical interpretation of such sayings as “tropology” or “allegory” or some other name. We shall not quarrel about the name as long as a firm grasp is kept on thoughts that edify.

(*Cant. GNO VI, 5*)

Gregory’s defense of his practice of reading the *Song of Songs* states the problem very clearly: what does the believer do when the surface meaning of Scripture is “void of profit in its plain sense” and yet “in the inspired Scripture there is nothing to be found unsuitable?” Confronted with a text full of “enigmas,” “below-the-surface meanings” and a variety of hermeneutical approaches – anagogical, tropological, allegorical – he placed a higher priority on producing a profitable spiritual interpretation. That is, he didn’t care how one labeled his approach; all he cared about was the spiritual edification of those whom his commentary would make better readers of the *Song of Songs*. In a similar vein, Augustine’s hermeneutical principle of the “rule of love” (*Doctr. chr.*, 3.10.16, 1.25–40) puts a higher priority on the spiritual impact of reading than getting the interpretation “right”:

When so many meanings, all of them acceptable as true, can be extracted from the words Moses wrote, do you not see how foolish it is to make a bold assertion that one in particular is the one he had in mind. . . . In this diversity of true opinions, let Truth itself bring harmony; and may our God have pity upon us that we may use the law lawfully, for the end of the commandment which is pure charity.

(*Conf. 12.25*)

Although the allegorical approach recuperated Biblical passages “void of profit in [their] plain sense,” this was only its initial step. The next more important step, to be explored in the next section, was to discover positive spiritual meaning beneath otherwise unacceptable, obscure or insipid passages because “there is no letter in scripture which is empty of the wisdom of God” (Origen, *Philoc.* 1:28:19–20).

The challenge of reading texts believed to have a single, consistent voice

Third-century-BCE Stoic readers of the early poets blurred *hyponoetic* reading with symbolic and etymological readings as an extension of their theological understanding of the cosmos. The ancient myths contained remnants of an original integration of language and the material manifestation of the Spirit of the world which could be discovered, if you knew how, beneath multiple layers of poetic alterations and accretions. The Stoic concept of textual layers, more archaeological than literary, allowed philosophers such as Zeno, Cletho and Chrysippus to not only explain away problematic passages as poetic additions but find positive, coherent theological meaning relevant to their present context. Hidden in Homer were the “seven roots of Greek theology” whose different characteristics could be combined to reveal the unitary divine force presiding over the world. The grammatical declination of *Zeus* (Ζεύς, Διός, Διί, Δία) justified the deeper theological reading of Zeus’s power to be that which “traverses everything” (διήκει) and “through” whom (διὰ) things exist and live (*SVF* 2.1021). Like the Antiochene criticism of Alexandrian exegetical excess, Cicero critiqued the Stoic allegorical hermeneutic as being arbitrary, fanciful and unrestricted (*Nat. d.* 1:36–43; 3:39–63). Heraclitus, writing in the second century CE, presented Homer as a theologian who deliberately wrote allegorically to conceal hidden truths for the initiated reader.

A theological dimension to allegorical hermeneutics also became prevalent amongst later Platonists (Neoplatonists in current parlance), who searched for representations of universal truths in both particular passages and the larger structures of the Homeric poems. Based in an understanding that human language was limited in its ability to speak about transcendent truths, these later Platonists viewed the epic poems as symbolically touching upon enigmatic wisdom that could only be understood if read philosophically. Numenius of Apamea (a second-century Platonist who deeply influenced Plotinus and was quoted frequently by Eusebius) might have understood Homer's *Odyssey* as the symbolic journey of the soul toward philosophical enlightenment (fr. 33). Porphyry's "Cave of the Nymphs" read the descriptive particulars of the Ithacan cave in *Odyssey* 13 as symbols of divine perfection's rational manifestation of the material cosmos. In the fifth century, Proclus found the emanation and return of Plotinus's universal triad of Mind, Soul and the One in the *Odyssey* and defended Homer against Plato in his *Commentary on Plato's Republic*. Like Christians reading the Jewish Scriptures, these pagan philosophers approached Homer with already-established theological imperatives and developed interpretive strategies to support them in their reading of the Homeric texts. Going beyond the Scriptures, Augustine defended reading the Platonists by arguing "every good and true Christian should understand that wherever he may find truth, it is his Lord's" (*Doctr. chr.* 2.18.28).⁷ Plotinus, therefore, could be read with Christian spiritual profit because the Plotinian triad, the same one Proclus had found in Homer, represented the extent to which natural reason could grapple with the truth of the Trinity. Plotinus's *eros* for absolute truth naturally vectored toward divine truth except in such cases as the incarnation and the cross, whose knowledge required revelation (*Civ.* 10.28–29). Porphyry, for his part, did not advocate in *On the Philosophy from Oracles* that all religions are ultimately the same but rather they all point to the supreme Platonist One. Clement, the second-century Alexandrian bishop and student of the Stoically trained, Christian convert Pantaenus, constructed in the *Stromateis* a genealogical reconciliation of pagan philosophy with Christian truth, demonstrating the inseparable connections between Hellenistic hermeneutics, rhetoric, philosophy and theology. Eusebius, the third-century church historian, in his *Praeparatio Evangelica* scoured pagan literature and philosophy for just such intimations of Christian truth. These examples of philosophical interaction are intimately connected with a way of reading truth.

The particular challenge of reading the Bible as the product of a single and consistent theological voice, a single theological datum, has two main complicating factors: (1) a belief that all the inherited Jewish Scriptures spoke about Christ and (2) that every passage had spiritual relevance to contemporary Christians. Beginning with Jesus's post-resurrection reading of the Scriptures (Luke 24:13–31) on "the road to Emmaus" ("And beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He explained to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures"), the entire corpus of the Jewish Scriptures must be taken as somehow speaking about the Christ of the New Testament. As Irenaeus states in the second century: "If anyone, therefore, reads the Scriptures with attention, he will find in them an account of Christ, and a foreshadowing of the new calling" (*Haer.* 4.26.1). Such a consistent Christological message is guaranteed by its single divine author whose intentions supersede the intentions (and at times the understanding) of the multiple human authors. John Chrysostom in his exegetical homilies on the Gospel of Matthew – the very idea of which admits to the difficulties of reading – lays out this principle in defense of Matthew's otherwise hermeneutically obscure reference to Mary and the virgin birth of Jesus in Isaiah 7:14: "Hence he did not say simply that 'All this took place to fulfill what was spoken by Isaiah' but 'All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet'" (*Hom. Matt.* 5.2). Chrysostom, who as a student of Diodore of Tarsus belongs to the Antiochene tradition, is careful to distinguish divine authorial intent from the human author

Isaiah. The same divine author inspiring Matthew had access to the prophetic value of the words of Isaiah in a way other human interpreters, like the Alexandrians, would not.⁸

Unlike Plato, who could alter/create myths and reshape “historical” discussions, patristic exegesis began and ended with the fixed words of the Scriptures. They were forced to address texts, specific diction, multiple genres and concepts that the philosopher might otherwise avoid. Or as Gregory of Nyssa put it: Christians must “turn over such passages in our minds.” Sarah Coakley (2003: 8–11) speaks in *Re-reading Gregory of Nyssa* of the four stunning Trinitarian images that emerge in his homilies on the *Canticum Canticorum* as a direct result of having to contend with its strange specific diction. The patristic exegete’s creativity imitated Plato’s but in a more hermeneutically grounded manner that transformed an existing text’s meaning. That being said, Plotinus spent his philosophical career laboring over the very words and sentences in the texts of Plato, “turning over such passages in his mind,” and his immensely complicated and rich philosophical interpretation of Plato emerged from this same hermeneutical imperative.

The second half of Irenaeus’s Christological reading principle is that the entire corpus of the Jewish Scriptures also speak to the “new calling” of Christ-centered spiritual life. Ambrosiaster (fourth century) identified the hermeneutical consequences of this: “The meaning deserves to be explored because divine scripture says nothing that would be useless or out of consideration” (*Quaest.* 10,1). To this end, Origen repeatedly cited Paul’s hermeneutical approach to the Jewish Scriptures (“These things were written for us” 1 Cor 10:11) to justify his own layered reading of the Jewish Scriptures in respect to the practical aspects of this “new calling” in Christ:

The Apostle Paul, “Teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth,” taught the Church which he gathered from the Gentiles how it ought to interpret the books of the Law. These books were received from others and were formerly unknown to the Gentiles and were very strange. He feared that the Church, receiving foreign instructions and not knowing the principle of the instructions, would be in a state of confusion about the foreign document. For that reason he gives some examples of interpretation that we also might note similar things in other passages. . . . Let us see . . . what sort of rule of interpretation the apostle Paul taught us about these matters. Writing to the Corinthians he says in a certain passage, “For we know that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all were baptized in Moses in the cloud and in the sea, and all ate the same spiritual food, and all drank the same spiritual drink. And they drank of the spiritual rock which followed them, and the rock was Christ.” Do you see how much Paul’s teaching differs from the literal meaning? What the Jews supposed to be a crossing of the sea, Paul calls a baptism; what they supposed to be a cloud, Paul asserts is the Holy Spirit. . . . And not only Paul, but the Lord also says on the same subject in the Gospel: “Your fathers ate manna in the desert and died. He, however, who eats the bread which I give him will not die forever.” And after this he says, “I am the bread which came down from heaven.” . . . What then are we to do who received such instructions about interpretation from Paul, a teacher of the Church? Does it not seem right that we apply this kind of rule which was delivered to us in a similar way in other passages?

(*Hom. Exod.* 5:1)

The tension between the “historical” meaning of a text and its superseding spiritual relevance resulted in a commentary tradition that addressed each. As many have pointed out (including Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.16), the Alexandrians, Origen in particular, were deeply committed to a historical, literal exegesis of the Bible; they simply did not stop there when the text presented “impossibilities” at the surface level (see Origen, *First Principles* IV.3.5). Gregory of Nyssa, for

example, followed the structure of previous “Lives of Moses” by Philo and Clement by breaking his commentary into two sections: a “historical” reading of Moses’s life followed by a Christian “*theoria*” reading of Moses’s life driven by the imperative of spiritual relevance:

It may be for this very reason . . . that the daily life of those sublime individuals is recorded in detail, that by imitating those earlier examples of right action those who follow them may conduct their lives to the good. What then? Someone will say, “How shall I imitate them, since I am not a Chaldaean as I remember Abraham was, nor was I nourished by the daughter of the Egyptian as Scripture teaches about Moses, and in general I do not have in these matters anything in my life corresponding to anyone of the ancients? How shall I place myself in the same rank with one of them, when I do not know how to imitate anyone so far removed from me by the circumstances of life?”

(*De vita Moysis*, GNO VII/I, 6)

Gregory’s *theoretical* reading of the life of Moses does not prioritize finding timeless theological truths but time-bound spiritual lessons for particular fourth-century believers who “do not have . . . anything in [their] life corresponding to anyone of the ancients.” Reading “then” historically and “now” spiritually always demands going beyond (or “beneath”) the text.

Throughout Porphyry’s *Quaestiones homericae*,⁹ he argues for the hermeneutical principle that Homer explains himself: “Since I believe that it is right to clarify Homer with Homer, I used to point out that he explains himself, sometimes immediately, sometime in another passage” (*HQ I*, 56:4–6). The hermeneutical foundation that the Bible interprets itself is demonstrated throughout almost every patristic textual output by the overwhelming number of other passages used to illuminate a particular passage (*Doctr. chr.* 2.9.14). Whether reading Homer, the Bible or even Plato, the hermeneutic of prioritizing self-referential explanations rested on a presumption of consistent and coherent texts.

The challenge of textual distance and reading traditions

Although one can readily grasp Origen’s observation that the Jewish Scriptures seemed culturally “foreign” to Gentile converts, it is easy to minimize the impact of the vast amounts of time separating various texts from those interpreting them. There is, for example, close to 600 years separating Plotinus from Plato. Porphyry’s reference to Theaganes’s allegorical approach to reading Homer stretches back over 700 years. When we say that Augustine read Plato, what we really mean is that he had primarily read Plato through Platonists like Plotinus, whose works had been written by Porphyry and then translated into Latin.¹⁰

The story of pagan philosophers and Church Fathers is a narrative of influence, not only of who taught whom, but who was reading whom. Pagan philosophers relied upon and wrote extensively on the interpretations of specific passages by others. Porphyry’s *Quaestiones homericae* is full of references to other readers, including Aristotle’s lost books on Homeric problems. Plotinus’s seminars would have begun with readings from previous Platonists, Aristotelians and Neopythagoreans – with an assumption of acquaintance with the source texts – followed by rigorous teaching and discussion of how all of this informed a living, contemporary Platonism. The place of Aristotle in the later Platonist tradition had interesting parallels with issues confronting Biblical hermeneutics. What status should Aristotle have as the most profound and direct disciple of Plato? Do his writings reflect the “unwritten teachings” of Plato to which only he would have access? Can Plato and Aristotle be fundamentally harmonized as advocated, according to Photius, by Ammonius Saccas? Pagan philosophers and patristic exegetes belonged

to living traditions whose philosophy and theology were refracted through and took their place within centuries of interpretation.

The problem of biblical hermeneutics

Although later Platonists strongly took into consideration how previous Platonists had read Plato, they felt free to critically reappraise Plato's hermeneutical stances. Patristic exegetes, on the other hand, had to wrestle with divinely inspired exemplary readings of the Jewish Scriptures in the New Testament. Both Antiochenes and Alexandrians acknowledged, for example, Paul's allegorical reading methods as presented in the earlier-given passage from Origen – this was indeed the “literal” reading of these passages. They differed, though, whether this gave them license “that we also might note similar things in other passages.” A recognizable Antioch way of reading – beginning in the second century with Theophilus, formalized in the late third century by Lucian's founding of the *didaskaleion*, defended against Alexandrian excess by Diodore of Tarsus in the fourth century, widely disseminated by his student Chrysostom and then extended in the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia – answered Origen's rhetorical question by saying “no,” limiting such readings to those specifically sanctioned by the New Testament. They thought that Paul's and the gospels' inspired but otherwise unregulated reading of these passages would, if understood as a normative model of reading the Jewish Scriptures, result in any and all readings. As seen previously with Chrysostom's handling of Matthew's reference to Isaiah 7:14, they dealt with the many gospel fulfillment passages with the same hermeneutical restraint: the Holy Spirit, like Jesus on the road to Emmaus, had the right to make these prophetic connections, patristic exegetes did not.

Conclusion

The fourth- and fifth-century debates between Christians and philosophers as to who were the true heirs of Platonism not only point to the deep influence of pagan philosophy and the larger Hellenistic episteme on patristic exegetes; they underscore the role texts played in their thinking. Both Platonism and Christianity, while looking beyond the material culture of language, navigated their search for the transcendent through living traditions of primary source texts, commentaries, transformative writings and textualized discourses in which speaking, writing and reading proved to be inseparable from thinking, acting, living and believing.

Notes

- 1 Simonetti 1994; Kannengiesser 2004; Cassiodorus's *Institutiones divinarum et saecularium litterarum* (sixth century). Van Oort 2006 provides a wealth of additional insights regarding Biblical hermeneutics beyond the scope of this chapter.
- 2 Augustine asks God: *quibus modis te insinuasti illi pectori?*, “by what means did you steal into that breast?”, at *Confessions* 8.2.
- 3 See Spira (182) and Kennedy (1972), especially 330–337, 446–465.
- 4 See Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity* (1992).
- 5 Basil frames his own conversion as a “turn” from the false promises of a sophistic reputation to the true promises of the gospel (*Letters* III, CCXXIII).
- 6 Tertullian: “Truth persuades by teaching, but does not teach by persuading” (*Against the Valentines* 1.4).
- 7 See Brown 2000: especially chs. 9–10.
- 8 Without divine inspiration, Justin Martyr indicates, the Christological dimensions of Is. 7:14 would have remained unknown: Trypho 68.
- 9 See MacPhail 2010: notes 27, 28.
- 10 See Edwards 2006 for an analysis of the Platonist tradition.

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Section 3

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The Presocratics

M. David Litwa

All who desire to do philosophy are present with us [Christians].

– *Tatian, Oration 32.7*

Introduction

The pioneers of Greek wisdom flourished in the early sixth century BCE, and their work made possible the breakthroughs of all later philosophy, science, and theology. These initial thinkers did not rest in armchairs. They served as holy men, moralists, poets, and healers. The radical assumption behind their work was that the world as a whole is an intelligible structure with underlying principles accessible to human understanding. This assumption did not mean that the world was bare of mystery. Nature, as Heraclitus observed, loves to hide herself.

Traditions

Beginning in the Hellenistic period (roughly 330 to 30 BCE), the philosophers prior to Socrates (or “Presocratics”) were variously grouped. First came the tradition of Ionia (on the west coast of Turkey) founded by Thales and including Anaximander, Anaximenes, and Anaxagoras. Second, a south Italian circle started with Pythagoras and included Philolaus, Archytas, and sometimes Empedocles (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 1.3). The Eleatics, also of south Italy, comprised Parmenides, Zeno, and the Atomists (most famously Democritus). Finally, there were the Sophists or traveling rhetoricians who helped to form the Greek educational system. Ancient writers often presented these groups as distinct schools linked by succession. In most cases, however, no real succession was involved, and the notion of a “school” is far too formal.

Sources

In this chapter, we can only sample a few of these thinkers who became important for Christian thought, namely Empedocles, Parmenides, Heraclitus, Anaxagoras, and Pythagoras. Today the works of these figures exist only in fragments – the reports, paraphrases, and quotations of later

authors, including Christians. During the time of the Christian fathers, the writings of the earliest philosophers were probably still available, though increasingly difficult to find.

Like most readers of the time, Christians seemed to have learned their philosophy from “reader’s digest” versions (doctrinal summaries with occasional quotations). These digests, now dubbed “doxographies,” often pitted the views of individual philosophers against each other with no argument supplied. The doxographical format served early Christians’ interests, since they could portray the Greek philosophers as dogmatizers wrangling in cacophonous disagreement.¹

Methodology

If one elects to speak of the “influence” of the earliest philosophers upon early Christians, it is important to realize that Christians already interpreted much of the material that counts as influential. In other words, they largely determine the “data set” of interaction with the Presocratics, even if the interaction is unacknowledged.

It is thus vital to understand the context of a philosophical quote in the Christian source. At the same time, however, one must distinguish several previous layers of interpretation. The understanding of the first philosophers had already been shaped by the intervening traditions of Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics. Thus the Presocratics, when engaged by Christians, were already refracted through several overlapping lenses. To understand the earliest philosophers, one also needs to recover (or rather reconstruct) earlier frames of reference.

In this chapter, we briefly sketch both the earlier interpretive frames and some Christian interpretations from the second to the fourth centuries CE. By this time, Christianity began to pervade the educated classes. As a result, elite Christians were incited to present the most plausible theology. For this project, the earliest philosophers played a decisive role.

Rhetorical strategies

When dealing with the earliest philosophers, Christian writers generally employed two strategies. First, they cited them, somewhat like the Hebrew prophets, to confirm a point of Christian teaching.² Second, they portrayed them as well-meaning but ultimately failed thinkers grasping after a truth only fully realized by Christians.

The anonymous author of the *Refutation of All Heresies*, who styles himself “high priest” of a Christian community in early third-century Rome, chose the second strategy (*Refutation* 1, preface 6). His narrative, somewhat simplified, can be summarized as follows. Long ago, the truth about God and the cosmos was known to a race of God-fearing folk. Yet the truth was soon lost and knowledge degraded over time (*Refutation* 10.30–31). Amidst the increasing ignorance, Greek philosophers searched for an ultimate principle (ἀρχή) of reality and found it in various material elements of this world (mainly water, earth, air, and fire). Then Christians rightly identified (or rediscovered) the ground of reality as an immaterial and transcendent creator. To quote the author:

All these men [the Greek philosophers] declared these doctrines . . . according to their opinion about the nature and origin of the universe. They all, advancing to a point below the divine, busied themselves about the substance of generated [or created] reality. Each one, struck by the magnitudes of creation, supposing them to be divine, and preferring different parts of creation, did not acknowledge the God and Artificer of these things.

(*Refutation* 1.26.3; cf. 4.43.2; 10.32.5)

To the sophisticated ancient reader, this narrative would have failed. After all, it was Plato who spoke of an immaterial divinity (the Good) and an Artificer of the world (or Demiurge). Before him, Xenophanes spoke of “one God” who could move all reality with his mind. The philosopher Anaxagoras referred to a divine Mind, separate from matter, who organized it into the world we see today. In fact, much of what we find in ancient Christian theology has some precedent in earlier philosophy.

Empedocles

To affirm, however, that there were precedents for Christian doctrines is not to say that any single philosophical system wholly conformed to Christian thought. According to Empedocles of Acragas (born about 492 BCE), for instance, human beings are fallen divinities (“daimones”) stuck fast in the vortex of a cosmic cycle that collapses into a singularity (called “Sphere”) and then, over time, splits into strictly separate elements. Within these cosmic cycles, divinities are exiled, incarnated, and reincarnated in lesser lifeforms until they attain human consciousness and the highest of human occupations. The way of escape is for a person to perform acts of purification (mainly, abstaining from killing) that prepare a person to enter a relatively stable form of existence as a daimonic being, also called a “god.” These gods

Share the hearth with other immortals and sit at the same table,
Without any share in men’s sufferings, unworn by time.
(DK 31 B147 from Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.122.3)

Clement of Alexandria (born about 150 CE) quoted both scripture and Empedocles to confirm that

the gnostic [*or knower*] can even now become a god: “I have said you are gods and sons of the Highest” (Ps 82:6); and Empedocles too says that the souls of the sages become gods, writing as follows: “In the end, they become seers, purveyors of hymns, doctors/and chiefs of humans upon the earth./Thereafter they bloom into gods finest in honor.”
(DK 31 B 146 from Clement, *Stromateis* 4.23.150.1).

Empedocles’s philosophy is also a story of redemption that selectively resembles later Christian thought. Origen of Alexandria (flourished 200–245 CE) speculated about the fall of human souls before their embodiment (*First Principles* 3.8.3–4). Other Christians like Basilides (flourished about 115–140 CE) affirmed a doctrine of reincarnation (Clement, *Stromateis* 4.12.83.2). A doctrine of deification (humans becoming gods) became standard in eastern Christian thought.

Empedocles’s doctrines, however, do not wholly match up with any later Christian teaching. There is no single creator in Empedocles’s system, only two divine (possibly personal) forces called “Love” and “Strife.” Love is the force that brings the elements of reality together, whereas Strife drives them apart. In the cosmic cycles, Love and Strife alternately attain dominance. There is no single creation; generation and destruction cycle eternally. There is no savior, although healers and holy men like Empedocles can show the way out of the wheel of reincarnation. Empedocles had a notion resembling sin, but it was governed by the greater force of Necessity.³ Philosophically minded Christians (e.g. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.29.16.23) adopted Empedocles’s notion of four elements (earth, air, fire, and water). Yet this is a perfect example of

selective reinterpretation. Empedocles names the elements as divinities (Zeus, Hera, Aidoneus, and Nestis), a notion anathema to early Christians.⁴

Parmenides

The philosophy of Parmenides cannot so easily be narrativized because it denies what stories require: change. Parmenides does, however, recount how he received his philosophy. He depicts himself as a young man riding in a chariot with glowing, whistling axles, guided by the daughters of the Sun. After passing through the awesome gates of Day and Night, he encounters an unnamed goddess who reveals to him two routes: the Way of Truth and the Way of Opinion. The Way of Truth sums up a revolutionary notion of reality (discussed later). The Way of Opinion gives the best account of reality assuming the presence of change.

According to the Way of Opinion, the world emerges out of dense, heavy night and light, subtle fire. In the doxographic tradition, these two forms become the “principles” of earth and fire (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 9.21). The goddess admits that the Way of Opinion is illusory. Yet it is helpful to know the most plausible illusion just as, to use an analogy, it is useful to recognize counterfeit money.

What then is the Way of Truth? Whatever reality is, the goddess reveals, it is. And whatever *is* is unchanging, stable, and complete. The world of changing phenomena, the world that humans see, is not the real world. Reality as such does not change, since if something changes, it is like saying that reality (which is stable) is mixed with non-reality. Yet it is impossible to speak – or even to think – of non-reality, because it does not exist. If reality came from what is not, one cannot explain how or why it arose. Reality must then have always been, and in stable form, though humans do not have the eyes to see it. It takes a special revelation to see reality as it is.

Early Christians like Clement were aware of Parmenides’s two Ways, but interpreted them differently. For Clement, the Two Ways designated secret (true) and public (deceptive) teaching (Clement, *Stromateis* 5.9.59.6). Yet this same Clement elsewhere selectively forgot the Way of Truth, a strategy that allowed him to censure Parmenides as a materialist who deified fire and earth.⁵

Ex nihilo nihil fit

Parmenides posited a fundamental principle followed by almost all later thinkers: nothing comes from nothing (DK 28 B8 7–10). For Parmenides, it did not make logical sense to say that something could come from nothing. Nothing does not exist, and reality cannot come from what does not exist. The upshot of this notion is that nothing in the cosmos is actually generated or destroyed. If anything exists, it has always existed in some form (compare the law of the conservation of energy in modern physics).

Thus philosophers who wished to speak of the world’s creation had to posit some ungenerated stuff out of which known phenomena came from. In the second century CE, this stuff was usually called “matter” (ὑλη). For Christians, this primal matter corresponded to the chaotic waters over which the divine spirit hovered in Genesis 1:2.⁶

Some Christian theologians, beginning with Basilides, spoke of “creation from nothing.” What Basilides seems to have meant, however, is that creation came from God, who is so transcendent that he can be called “Nothing.”⁷ In this case, Christian theology never fully bucked the strictures of Parmenides. Even if God does not use preexistent matter to create, creation is still caused by a transcendent force – the God beyond being.

Reality

This tendency toward negative theology (denying predicates for God) is presaged by Parmenides. Parmenides described Being (or Reality) in mostly negative terms as ungenerated, imperishable, unchanging, whole, unshakeable, unending, one, continuous, not past, not future, but present.⁸ The Platonic tradition fused this description of Being with its understanding of divinity. Hence Christians easily referred the characteristics of Parmenidean Being to their personal deity.⁹ They often cited a verse from the Septuagint in which the Jewish god Yahweh proclaims: “I am he who is [or exists]” (Exod 3:14). Parmenides’s understanding of being as “whole” and “all-together” may also have prepared the ground for the gnostic Christian concept of deity as the Pleroma or “Fullness” of being.

Philosophy and revelation

The form of Parmenides’s thought displays the fluid boundaries between philosophy and religion. Parmenides portrays himself as pursuing reality with religious fervor. His dogmatic attitude about his own righteousness and the rightness of his revealed philosophy can also be described as religious. Empedocles also appealed to a divine being – the Muse Calliope (mother of Orpheus) – to inspire his philosophy.¹⁰ He evidently considered his own poems to be the word of god.¹¹

The revelatory form in which these philosophers put their theories is similar to the form in which many early Christians put their own theology (often right back into the mouth of Jesus).¹² Both philosophers and early Christians were competing in a culture in which revealed truth often trumped human logic and empirical observation.

Xenophanes

Xenophanes of Colophon (born about 570 BCE) can be credited with devising the first philosophical theology. He conceptualized a God that was not identical to any civic deity worshiped by the Greeks of his time. He harshly criticized the immorality of gods as depicted in poetry – setting a trend for both Plato and later Christians (e.g. Athenagoras, *Embassy* 20–30). For Xenophanes, God was one, stable, unborn, and dissimilar to human beings in both form and thought (DK 21 B23, 25–26).

The denial that God is like humans in form and thought would seem to contradict Genesis 1:26, where God creates human beings in his image. Yet Christians like Clement interpreted Xenophanes’s word “form” (δέμας) solely in terms of bodily shape (Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.109.1). The resemblance posited in Genesis 1:26 was thought to refer to *rational* similitude, even if God’s thoughts are far more sublime.

Monotheism?

Despite his talk of “one God,” it would be wrong to call Xenophanes a monotheist. After all, he wrote that “God is one, greatest *among gods* and human beings.”¹³ Lesser gods exist under the one God. The oneness of God is thus not (or not solely) numerical, but describes the singularity of his power.

When Christians called their God “one,” they likewise aimed to affirm a point about God’s supremacy (1 Corinthians 8.6). God is the greatest among other divine beings (such as spirits,

angels, demons, and deified humans). Thales expressed a pervasive and long-lasting sentiment when he remarked: “everything is full of gods!”¹⁴

Heraclitus

Although we possess over a hundred quotations from Heraclitus of Ephesus (born about 540 BCE), his philosophy resists any attempt to extract doctrine. Indeed, “doctrine” implies something too stable for Heraclitean thought. He is the philosopher of flux. Heraclitus’s words are deliberately riddling, hence his ancient nickname, “the Obscure.” Offered here are only some basic themes important for early Christian reception.

According to Heraclitus, all things are held together in dynamic tension, what he called a “counterbalancing congruity.”¹⁵ All is change, and everything can be exchanged for the most vibrant element – “ever-living fire.”¹⁶ The unceasing process of change can be called “war,”¹⁷ “god,”¹⁸ “one,”¹⁹ and (reluctantly) “Zeus.”²⁰ To illustrate the constant process, Heraclitus indicated that one cannot step into the same river twice.²¹ In modern terms, the river’s water molecules, bits of soil, and microscopic organisms are never in exactly the same place at any given time, and yet people recognize that the river is a single process that can be called by a single name.

Christian reception

The author of the *Refutation* provides nineteen quotations from Heraclitus when locking horns with his opponents the Noetians. He understood the Noetians to confess that the Father and Son are “opposites” (an unborn deity and a born deity) who are in fact identical (*Refutation* 9.10.9–12). The author traced back this view to Heraclitus (*Refutation* 9.10.2). Heraclitus’s point, however, was not that opposites are identical, but that they exist in a “counterbalancing congruity.” Ironically, Heraclitus’s notion of tensile unity may have been closer to what Noetians meant by the union of Father and Son.

In the heat of his argument, the writer of the *Refutation* transmits a fascinating Heraclitean quote: “Immortal mortals, mortal immortals: living their death, dying their life.”²² Whatever its interpretation, the quote breaks down normally firm barriers between gods and human beings. For a religion built upon the unity of God and humanity in Christ, the quote proved appealing. According to Clement, for example:

That god [the Logos/Christ] becomes human. . . . Thus Heraclitus has rightly remarked, “Humans gods; god–humans,” for the meaning is the same [*or*: the Logos is the same]. It is a disclosed mystery: God is in a human being, and the human being is a god.

(Clement, *Pedagogue* 3.2.1)

Clement understood Heraclitus to say that an immortal being (the Logos/Christ) became mortal so that mortal beings could become immortal. Such an interpretation is close to the later formulation of Athanasius (born about 298 CE): “He [Christ] became human so that we could become God [or gods]” (*On the Incarnation* 54.2).

Logos

During late antiquity, it was popular to attribute to Heraclitus the notion of a divine governing principle called “Logos.” This Stoic interpretation of Heraclitus was taken up by early Christians

who referred to their mediating deity (Christ) as the “Logos” (John 1:1; Rev 19:13). Yet the meaning of *logos* is famously ambiguous. Heraclitus wrote: “Though the message/principle/teaching (*logos*) exists, humans ever prove uncomprehending.” The author of the *Refutation* understood the quote to mean, “Humans prove uncomprehending of the eternal Logos.”²³ A similar interpretation can be traced back to the Christian Justin Martyr (born around 100 CE), who viewed Heraclitus as a Christian insofar as he “lived with the Logos” (Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 46.3).

The similarity of the Heraclitean and Christian *logos* is debatable. The Christian Logos is a world creator. Heraclitus denied that the world was created by any god.²⁴ The idea of divinity as separate and distinct from cosmic processes would have seemed bizarre to Heraclitus. The cosmos itself is ever living. Perhaps Heraclitus would have agreed that the cosmos is ordered according to a rational pattern (*logos*), but this *logos* does not seem particularly congruent with human rationality (since humans prove ever uncomprehending!).²⁵

Conflagration and resurrection

In another Stoic reading of Heraclitus, the philosopher asserted that god is an intelligent fire that successively ordered and destroyed the world. Christians seized upon this interpretation since they preached a destruction of the elements by fire (2 Pet 3:10). Yet even Christians acknowledged the major difference. For the Stoicized Heraclitus, things are constantly being destroyed and regenerated. For Christians, there is a single end-time destruction and renewal.²⁶

Perhaps the strangest Christian teaching attributed to Heraclitus is the resurrection of the flesh.²⁷ Once again, this interpretation stems from a Stoic reading (*Refutation* 1.21.4–5). Some Stoics indicated that after the conflagration, the world – including human bodies – would be reconstituted in the same form. This teaching cannot be found in the preserved fragments of Heraclitus. The philosopher himself, moreover, set no store in human flesh. He famously called human corpses, “more worthy to be thrown out than feces.”²⁸ In the biographical tradition (Tatian, *Oratio* 3.2), Heraclitus fittingly perishes after smearing his whole body with dung!

Anaxagoras

Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (born about 500 BCE) was the first philosopher who declared that the motive force of the cosmos was Mind (Νοῦς). Anaxagorean Mind was not only intelligent and purposeful, it was also considered divine (eternal, ageless, and supreme in power). Though it did not preexist all other elements, Mind was separate from them and the means of their organization.²⁹

The church historian Eusebius quoted (or rather paraphrased) a line from Anaxagoras:

In the beginning all things were mixed together. Yet Mind arrived to lead these things from disorder into order.³⁰

To Eusebius, Anaxagoras’s Mind looked very much like the Christian Logos-creator, an invisible super-intellect who ordered the cosmos.³¹ Thus ironically – though Anaxagoras was condemned for blasphemy and atheism (reportedly for saying that the sun was a burning stone!) – Eusebius lauded him as the first philosopher to think correctly about God.³² To be sure, the Mind posited by Anaxagoras was not a personal deity, but philosophically minded Christians blended philosophical and scriptural portraits of deity with astonishing confidence.

Pythagoras

Although a shadowy figure, Pythagoras (born about 570 BCE) seems to have invented the concept of a stable soul. He conceived, that is, of a soul not as a gibbering shade (as in Homer), but an entity coherent enough to survive death and maintain a personality.³³ By the time that the (Platonized) concept of soul (ψυχή) was transmitted to Christians, however, it functioned as a second, immortal self. Christians were happy to adapt this idea, even as they generally denied Pythagoras's famous corollary: reincarnation.³⁴

The Holy Man

Pythagorean ideas were important for early Christians, but so was the image of Pythagoras itself. During late antiquity, this philosopher was reinvented to serve as the archetypal Hellenic holy man. He was the one who assimilated all sorts of barbarian wisdom (Egyptian, Hebrew, and Persian) and made it distinctly Greek. Pythagoras could perform miracles, speak to animals, walk on water, and teleport from one place to another – among other wonders.

Pythagoras established not only a philosophical circle, but what one today would call a religious movement. Pythagoreans were required to follow certain rules, including a period of silence and the famous taboo against eating fava beans (Clement, *Stromateis* 3.3.24.2–3). There were at least two grades of membership, the “exoterics” and the “esoterics.” Only the esoterics, who had gone through an initiation, could learn the meaning of the master's wisdom enshrined in riddles. At the end of his life, Pythagoras was reportedly burned or slaughtered at the hands of political opponents.³⁵

The image of Pythagoras in early biographies may have influenced the evangelical portraits of Jesus. Gospel writers depicted Jesus as teaching a secret wisdom in parables, as having an inner circle of disciples, performing miracles, giving regulations for life, and being brutally murdered by his political enemies.³⁶ Despite his tragic death and the scattering of his disciples, Jesus, like Pythagoras, established a viable community that long survived him.

Nevertheless, it is probably more correct to say that the biographies of Jesus and Pythagoras were influenced by a common conception of the Hellenic holy man. The holy man was typically a sage with a philosopher's beard and a special relationship with deity. Occasionally, the holy man could be depicted as a god in disguise. Some followers of Pythagoras, for instance, identified their master with Apollo of the Far North. This Apollo came “for the benefit and amendment of mortal life, to grant mortal nature the saving spark of happiness and philosophy.”³⁷ A priest of this Apollo, a man called Abaris, reportedly recognized the divinity of Pythagoras. As a token of his recognition, Abaris was said to have given Pythagoras a golden arrow. Pythagoras did not refuse the token. He confirmed Abaris's judgment by lifting up his tunic to unveil his golden thigh.³⁸

Conclusion

It is challenging to pinpoint trends in Presocratic thought later reflected in Christian theology. At present, nonetheless, we can isolate three items for further thought and exploration.

a) The Intellectualization of God

Whereas Greek civic and poetic theologies imagined the gods as super bodies (like modern superheroes), philosophical theologies began to imagine supreme divinity as a kind of supermind. For Empedocles, the god Sphere is “a holy and unspeakable Intelligence . . . darting

through the world order with swift thoughts.”³⁹ In other words, the cosmos in its unitive phase is a God whose thought pulsates throughout its divine body (the entire world system in the state of perfect mixture).⁴⁰ Xenophanes’s God “effortlessly shakes all things by the thought of his mind.”⁴¹ The same writer said that God “entirely sees, entirely thinks, entirely hears.”⁴² Similar formulations appear in Christian authors (without crediting Xenophanes). According to Clement, for instance, the Logos is “entirely mind . . . entirely eye,” (Clement, *Stromateis* 7.2.5.5) and “entirely hearing.”⁴³

b) Anti-anthropomorphism

The intellectualization of God goes hand in hand with the denial that deity has bodily traits. Empedocles described his Sphere:

Two branches do not spring from its back,
Nor feet, nor nimble knees, nor productive genitals.⁴⁴

Xenophanes was perhaps the most incisive critic of Greek anthropomorphic theology.

Mortals suppose that the gods are born,
that they have their own clothes, voice, and form.⁴⁵

Admittedly, Christians preached that their god was born and had human form (Tatian, *Oration* 21.2). Yet they distinguished this “son of God” figure from a non-anthropomorphic high God (the Father). By viewing this deity as bodiless, Christians were riding a wave of philosophical sophistication. By the second century CE, educated Greeks widely denied that their gods resembled their human-shaped statues. Celsus, second-century critic of Christianity, quoted Heraclitus: “These are similar acts: to approach lifeless gods and to hold a conversation with a house.”⁴⁶

c) Skepticism

Skepticism regarding the senses characterized several of the earlier philosophers. Heraclitus wrote that, “In their knowledge of visible things, people are easily fooled.”⁴⁷ Invisible beings like gods could also be doubted. Xenophanes wrote that,

No man has seen nor will anyone know
the clear truth about the gods. . . .
Even if, with optimal luck, one speak what perfectly befalls,
One would still not know. Opinion is allotted to all.⁴⁸

Similarly Empedocles: “It is impossible to approach it [the divine] to attain it with our eyes/ or grasp it with hands.”⁴⁹

By the second century CE, such skepticism led to a felt need for divine inspiration in order to obtain secure knowledge. Parmenides and Empedocles openly portrayed their philosophy as rational revelations. Christians followed suit and so were able to market philosophically plausible notions of God with the assurance of dogmatic certainty.

* * *

We can conclude that Christians were creative, if selective interpreters of the earliest Greek philosophical heritage. Though this heritage was felt to fall short of (their) revealed truth, Christians often praised it as reflecting accurate notions about both God and the world. In the end, by attempting to distinguish their views from the clashing opinions of the philosophers, educated Christians showed that they were steeped in Mediterranean intellectual culture, conditioned by its perceptions of plausibility, and very much children of their time.

Notes

- 1 Tatian, *Oration* 25.4: “you fractious [philosophers], since you possess different dogmatic traditions, you war amongst yourselves, disagreeing with those in agreement with you!” Cf. *ibid.*, 3.7.
- 2 Sometimes the earliest philosophers were said to depend on the Hebrew prophets by virtue of coming later than them. This is the main thesis of Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, book 10, who cites earlier sources.
- 3 DK 31 B115, partially from *Refutation* 7.29.16, 23. See also Origen, *Against Celsus* 8.53.
- 4 Galatians 4:9; Athenagoras, *Embassy* 22.1–3, 12; cf. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.29.23.
- 5 Clement, *Protreptic* 5.64.2. The same (mis)reading appears in *Refutation* 1.11.1.
- 6 Justin Martyr *1 Apol.* 10.2; cf. 59.1; 67.8.
- 7 *Refutation* 7.20.2–7.22.2; cf. 10.33.8.
- 8 DK 28 B8.3–6 partially quoted in Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.112.2 as referring to “the divine.”
- 9 *Refutation* 10.33.1, “the Father himself is Being” (reading τὸ ὄν).
- 10 DK 31 B131 from *Ref.* 7.31.4.
- 11 DK 31 B23.11. Empedocles judged himself to be a god (B112.4–6).
- 12 See, e.g., the *Secret Book of John* (NHC II,1) and the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* (NHC III,4).
- 13 DK 21 B23 from Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.109.1, emphasis added.
- 14 DK 11 A22, from Aristotle, *On the Soul* 1.5, 411a8. “Gods” here could presumably refer to any natural forces.
- 15 DK 22 B51 from *Refutation* 9.9.2.
- 16 DK 22 B30 from Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.104.2.
- 17 DK 22 B53 from *Refutation* 9.9.4.
- 18 DK 22 B67 from *Refutation* 9.10.8.
- 19 DK 22 B50 from *Refutation* 9.9.1.
- 20 DK 22 B32 from Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.115.1.
- 21 DK 22 A6 from Plato, *Cratylus* 402a.
- 22 DK 22 B62 from *Refutation* 9.10.6.
- 23 DK 22 B1 from *Refutation* 9.10.3.
- 24 DK 22 B30 from Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.104.2.
- 25 Cf. DK 22 B34 from Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.115.3: “[Humans are] uncomprehending; even when they have heard, they are like deaf people.”
- 26 Tatian, *Oration* 25.4. To make sense of Heraclitus’s non-creationism, Clement attributed to him two worlds: one eternal, another perishable. These worlds are somehow one (*Stromata* 5.14.104.1–5; cf. 5.1.9.4).
- 27 Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.1.9.4; *Refutation* 9.10.6–7.
- 28 DK 22 B96 from Origen, *Against Celsus* 5.14, 24.
- 29 Anaxagoras’s account of Mind paved the way for Plato’s depiction of the Demiurge (or Creator) in the *Timaeus* 28–29.
- 30 Quoted in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 10.14.12.
- 31 For Christians, it was important that God was separate from matter (Athenagoras, *Embassy* 4.1). In the first century CE, the doxographer Aetius already interpreted Anaxagoras’s Mind to be God (1.7.5, 15).
- 32 Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 14.14.8–9; 14.16.12.
- 33 DK 14 B8a from Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 19, quoting Dicaearchus (fourth century BCE) frag. 33 Wehrli².
- 34 Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 18.5. The notion of reincarnation could also be adapted to resurrection: “nothing according to Pythagoras . . . prevents bodies being reconstituted from the same elements” (Athenagoras, *Embassy* 36.3).
- 35 Athenagoras, *Embassy* 31.2. In other accounts, an elderly Pythagoras starved himself as the result of opposition.

- 36 Mark 1:23–2:12; 4:9–13; 8:1–9; 9:2; 15:1–39.
- 37 Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras*, 30, cf. 140. Pythagoras as Apollo incarnate goes back to Aristotle (frag 191, Rose). See also Aelian, *Variet History* 2.26, Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Philosophers* 8.11.
- 38 Iamblichus *Life of Pythagoras* 91–92, 140–141. The pattern of confession plus revelation of deity is similar to what we find in the gospels. Peter confesses the true identity of Jesus (“son of the living God”); then, in a blaze of glory, Jesus reveals his deity on a mountain (Mark 8:27–9:8).
- 39 DK 31 B134 from Ammonius, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Interpretation* 249.1.
- 40 In the doxographical tradition, Thales says that God is the mind of the cosmos (Aetius 1.7.11 [Sto-baeus], followed by Athenagoras, *Embassy* 23.4). Cicero (*Nature of the Gods* 1.10.25) depicts the god of Thales as a mind that forms all reality out of water. He is closely followed by the Christian author Minucius Felix (*Octavius* 19.4).
- 41 DK 21 B25 from Simplicius, *Commentary on Aristotle’s Physics* 23.19.
- 42 DK 21 B24 from Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* 9.144.
- 43 Clement, *Strom.* 7.7.37.6. Compare Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.12.2 (God is “entirely mind . . . entirely vision, entirely hearing”); 2.13.3 (“entirely spirit, entirely hearing, entirely vision”); *Eugnostos the Blessed* (NHC III, 3) 73.9–10: God is “all mind, thought, reflection.”
- 44 DK 31 B29 from *Refutation* 7.29.13.
- 45 Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.109.1; cf. 7.4.22.1.
- 46 DK 33 B5 from Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.5, cf. 7.62. The thought may be that the god inhabits the statue as a person inhabits a house. The text is also quoted by Clement, *Protreptic* 4.50.4 to prove that statues lack sensation. Cf. Athenagoras, *Embassy* 23.1–2.
- 47 DK 22 B56 from *Refutation* 9.9.6.
- 48 DK 21 B34. The latter two lines are quoted in *Refutation* 1.14.1.
- 49 DK 31 B133 from Clement, *Stromateis*. 5.12.81.2.

Suggestions for Further Reading

In the previous text, DK is the abbreviation for the standard edition of the Presocratics, H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, Hildesheim: Wiedmann, most recently 2004–2005.

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Socrates and Plato in the fathers

Joseph S. O'Leary

Unassimilable Socrates

The Christian encounter with Socrates and Plato begins with the sublime figure of Justin Martyr who imitated both Socrates and Jesus in his own life and death. His conversion narrative is modeled on Plato, *Apology* 21a–22e, and follows a pattern also found in Dio Chrysostom, Galen, Lucian, Josephus, Clement (*Stromateis* 1.11.2): an urge to find the truth; travel to reputed teachers, disappointment with them, and a concluding statement of an individual position.¹ Justin calls Christianity “the only reliable philosophy” (*Trypho* 8), but he saw Socrates as a martyr to a truer concept of God. Harnack notes that it is Socrates’ death that seals his teaching and gives it the significance of opening up the Greeks to a transcendent vision. But the gulf between Socrates and Christians remains: “He summoned to wisdom; they to faith. He accepted the gods as valid; they saw them as demons. He showed the way to self-redemption; they knew a Redeemer and hoped in him.”² So much is Justin under Socrates’ spell that he attributes the teachings of the *Timaeus* to Socrates (*Second Apology* 10) rather than to Plato or the speaker of the dialogue, a short circuit that enhances his image of Socrates as the one among the Greeks who most reflects the Logos: “Those who have lived in accordance with the Logos are Christians, even though they were called godless, such as, among the Greeks, Socrates and Heraclitus” (*First Apology* 66). Curiously, in second-century Platonism “Socrates himself has receded from view to an extraordinary degree,”³ so that Justin’s retrieval of him might betoken a seriousness about reason and truth lacking in the school Platonists.

“Justin is deeply convinced that the condemnation of Christians is really a continuation of that of Socrates.”⁴ His Hellenophobic disciple Tatian made an exception for Socrates: “There is only one Socrates” (*Or.* 3). Theophilus of Antioch deplors Socrates’ swearing by the dog, the goose and the plane tree and concludes that he had no knowledge of truth and that his death was in vain (*To Autolytus* 3.2). (Yet a later bishop, Basil, found Christlike virtue in Socrates: *Advice to Young Men* 7.9). Lucian asserts that Christians called their Teacher “the new Socrates” (*Death of Peregrinus* 12), and Galen admires their Socratic contempt for death, which, however, Marcus Aurelius (*Meditations* 11.3) finds to be too noisy, and inferior to the more reflective earnestness of Socrates.⁵

Harnack deplors the vandalism of Tertullian for whom Socrates, an idolator and a corrupter of youth, misled by a demon, could not think clearly about the soul on the eve of his execution. "All the wisdom of Socrates, at that moment, proceeded from the affectation of an assumed composure, rather than the firm conviction of ascertained truth" (*On the Soul* 1). Yet, as Harnack notes, Tertullian retained a sneaking regard for Socrates, and defends his swearing by dogs and trees as a satire on heathen belief. Minucius Felix and Novatian saw Socrates as a seduced and seducing thinker, an "Attic jester" (*Octav.* 38.5). Cyprian, in *On the Futility of Idols*, denounces Socrates, who "declared that he was instructed and ruled at the will of a demon" (whereas Plato, "maintaining one God, calls the rest angels or demons," a remark quoted approvingly by Augustine, *On Baptism* 6.87). Lactantius praises Socrates for abstaining from uncertain scientific speculation but not for his embrace of the proverb, "That which is above us is nothing to us" (*Divine Institutes* 3.20). He adds that

under the teaching of Socrates, it did not escape the notice of Plato, that the force of justice consists in equality. . . . Marriages also, he says, ought to be in common; so that many men may flock together like dogs to the same woman.

(*Inst.* 21)

Yet Lactantius speaks with respect of Socrates' daemon (*Epitome* 23.2) and his alleged suppression of knowledge (26.5), though ironically remarking on how little one can expect to learn from someone who so often declares his own *insipientia* (35.2); Socrates is a testimony to the impotence of reason without revelation. For Plato, who attested one God (*Epitome* 4.1), Lactantius uses Cicero's epithet "*deum philosophorum*" (33.1) and say that he comes closer to the truth than any other philosopher, though falling into monstrous errors. Arnobius likewise speaks of Plato, "*ille sublimis apex philosophorum et columen*" (*Adv. Nat.* 1.8); "*homo prudentiae non pravae et examinis iudicii perpensit*" (2.14); "*Plato ille divinus multa de deo digna nec communia sentiens multitudini*" (2.36); "*Platonem illum magnum pie sancteque sapientem*" (2.52).

For Ambrose, Plato is the "prince of philosophers" (*On Abraham* 1.1.2) and the "father of philosophy" (2.7.37), who went to Egypt to learn Mosaic and prophetic lore (*On the Psalms* 118.18.4), perhaps reading Hebrew (*De Noe* 24). Ambrose's *De bono mortis* is steeped in the *Phaedo*. Jerome writes of Plato:

The influential Athenian master with whose lessons the schools of the Academy resounded became at once a pilgrim and a pupil choosing modestly to learn what others had to teach rather than over confidently to propound views of his own. Indeed his pursuit of learning – which seemed to fly before him all the world over – finally led to his capture by pirates who sold him into slavery to a cruel tyrant. Thus he became a prisoner, a bond-man, and a slave; yet, as he was always a philosopher, he was greater still than the man who purchased him.

(*Ep.* 53.1)

"Augustine took the last step through his frightful theory that all the virtues of the heathens are but glittering vices. This first plunged into dark night the great and sublime achievements of antiquity."⁶ In fact, the phrase "*splendida vitia*" is never used by Augustine, and it is of Roman virtues (which he admires) rather than Platonic *areté* or noesis that he expresses occasional criticism (for instance in discussing Lucretia's suicide). Harnack sees in Augustine the beginning of the insight that "Greek philosophy and Christianity are two specifically distinct quantities and that each must be viewed by itself and assessed according to different criteria," in contrast to the amalgam of philosophy and Christian belief in the apologists.⁷

However, Augustine lauds Socrates and Plato in *City of God* 8.3–4, going on to urge that Platonism is the primary dialogue-partner in matters of theology. That Augustine had some acquaintance with the Greek text of Plato is suggested by his comment on Socrates' style of speech (“*lepore mirabili disserendi et acutissima urbanitate*”). But more likely he is echoing Cicero's eulogies of Socrates, as he does in asking if Socrates turned to ethics *taedio rerum obscurarum et incertarum* or because *nolebat immundos terrenis cupiditatibus animos se extendi in divina conari*. Cicero has Varro say:

Socrates was the first (this is a point accepted by all) to summon philosophy away from the obscure subjects nature itself has veiled . . . and to direct it towards ordinary life. He set it onto investigating virtue and vice and good and bad in general, considering celestial subjects to be far beyond our knowledge.

(*Tusculan Disputations* 4.16; cf. 5.10; *Academics* 1.15)⁸

As a wise and authoritative churchman, Augustine is aware not only of his personal debt to Plato (via Cicero, Plotinus, Porphyry, Ambrose, and the circle of Milanese Platonists) but of how deeply Platonism had shaped the Christian understanding of God. He sees Plato as uniting Pythagoras' contemplative with Socrates' active wisdom. Harnack forgets how central Neoplatonism is to Augustine's thinking on God, so much so that he is sometimes cited today as one who abolishes the distinction between philosophy and theology rather than heightening it: though in reality, even more lucidly than his predecessors, he insists on the necessity of the *initium fidei*.

Socrates animates the satirical pen of Jerome: “Socrates had two wives. . . . He was accustomed to banter them for disagreeing about him, he being the ugliest of men” (*Against Jovinian* 1.48). Cassian tells how Socrates, when accused of having “the eyes of a *paiderastos*” (which Cassian translates as “corrupter of boys”), replied, “Such I am, but I restrain myself” (*Conferences* 12.5).⁹ But such tittle-tattle is not confined to the Latins. Gregory Nazianzen tells how Socrates picked out handsome *Charmidai* (plural of Charmides) for preferential sharing of divine wisdom: “May such speculations perish!” (*Poems* 1.2.10, vv. 288–292 [PG 37: 700–701]). For John Chrysostom, Socrates, in his insincere discourses, had an eye to fame (*On Acts of the Apostles* 36.2). His suicide was illicit, and was forced on him, and cost him little since he was so old (*On 1 Corinthians* 4.4).

Doxic Plato

Socrates tends to vanish from the Christians' radar screen, but Plato remains a common reference, and still more a powerful invisible presence, in that fundamentals of his thought become part of the backbone of Christian theology. As Étienne Gilson noted, the Christians had no precise doctrine on being and the one, but only on the world's origin and the soul's destiny. On this ground they met Plato:

Not, indeed, the Plato of the *Parmenides* or the *Sophist*, but the Plato of the *Timaeus* and the great myths about the future life; thus not what for Plato counted as science but what he had relegated to the domain of probable opinion.¹⁰

Doxography trumps analysis and dialectic rusts unused.

Second-century Christian writers did not have a vast ecclesiastical literature to draw on, and risked being drowned out by the prolific Gnostics. The figure of Plato loomed larger for them

than for later Christians, for in his conceptions of the divine and of moral and spiritual life, Plato offered more points in common with the Christian vision than any other figure from the classical world.¹¹ Even Irenaeus, whose “literature was the Bible”¹² and who held philosophy in low esteem (*Against Heresies* 2.14.3–4), nonetheless cites Plato against Marcion: “he acknowledged that the one and the same God is both just and good” (3.25.5), and draws on Plato’s distinction of being and becoming (4.38–39). Tertullian, too, knows Plato well, jousting with him in defence of the soul’s corporeality (*On the Soul*, 6–8), denying its preexistence and transmigration (4), yet agreeing on its simplicity (10); he takes issue with Plato’s mistrust of the senses and his theory of Ideas, which he sees as anticipating the Gnosticism of Valentinus (17–18).

The fullest Christian appropriation of Plato occurs in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromateis*. Encouraging his Christian readers to move from simple faith to mature gnosis, Clement draws on Paul and Plato together like a virtuoso playing on two keyboards. Plato can support the lower motivation of martyrdom, hope of future reward, but also the higher spirit of the truly gnostic martyr (*Stromateis* 4). His philosophy can serve as a propaedeutic to faith (along the lines mapped by Plato’s own account of the role of such disciplines as dialectic, astronomy, geometry, in *Republic* 527–533), but it also embraces mystical insights which close the gap between the Greeks and the “barbarian philosophy” or “Christian philosophy”

Middle Platonism shaped the patristic reception of Plato, and the texts that Alcinous, Numenius, Celsus, Apuleius favoured, such as *Timaeus* 28c (“To discover the father and author of this universe is a feat, and when he is discovered he cannot be communicated to all”) and *Ep.* 2, 312e (“All things are around the King of the Universe. . . . The second things are around the second and the third around the third”), recur in many Christian writers, e.g. Justin *1 Apol.* 60: “He gives the second place to the Word who is with God, who, as he stated, is placed in the universe in the form of the letter X, and the third place he attributes to the Spirit”; Athenagoras (*Leg.* 6; 23), Tertullian (*Apol.* 46), Minucius Felix (*Octav.* 19), Clement (*Stromateis* 5.103.1), Origen (*Against Celsus* 6.18–19), Cyril (*Against Julian* 1.47) and Theodoret (*Cure* 2.42; 72; 4.38). The obscure formula in *Ep.* 2 served to generate the Platonist triad of the Good, the Mind, and the Soul (Eusebius, *Preparation* 11.20; Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.7.42), and lies behind Origen’s discussion of the hierarchically disposed roles of Father, Son, and Spirit. The *Timaeus* quote is applied to the highest God and not the Demiurge in all these writers, and the non-biblical designation of God as father or author of the universe is absorbed into Christian diction: “We are indeed faced here with the constitution of Christian theological language starting from Plato.”^{13,14}

But there is a subtler presence of Plato in the patristic familiarity with the most basic Platonic categories: “participation” (*metousia*, *metokhê*) is used by Origen not only to envision virtues as participation in justice as a Platonic form (*Commentary on John* 2.52), but even to conceive the ontological status of the divine Logos (*Commentary on John* 2.17); *homoiôsis* occurs often with reference to the soul as created in the image and likeness of God; and the general distinction between the ideal noetic world and the instable sensible world underlies the allegorical method in scriptural exegesis.¹⁵

Philo is the great precursor of this Christian Platonism, particularly for Clement of Alexandria.¹⁶ Philo refashioned the *Timaeus* along the lines of Genesis, and used key terms of Plato to show that Moses was the greater philosopher. Philosophy, “than which no more perfect good has come into the life of mankind” (*Making of the World* 54), was born out of “the love and desire (*erôta kai pothon*) of knowledge” (77) and the scrutiny of the stars. This language consummates an entente between Plato and the Bible, which, despite the condescending or disparaging tone often adopted toward Plato, shaped in depth the Christian theological discourse initiated by the apologists. The Fathers might put Plato at a distance, but they could not shake off the Platonic thought-forms that had lodged in their minds.

The complexity of the interaction between Christian theology and Platonism is already on display in the hermeneutical battle over Justin renewed by Niels Hyldahl,¹⁷ who sees Justin as making a merely extrinsic apologetical use of Plato, and by J. C. M. van Winden¹⁸ and Robert Joly,¹⁹ who stress Justin's commitment to philosophical rationality. Similar battles continue to rage around Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. Even if one concedes that Justin's work does not represent a mixture, compromise, fusion, or synthesis between Platonism and Christianity, nonetheless his apologetic engagement with Platonism inevitably shapes his effort to give a theoretical articulation of his faith. Though like Origen later he writes "against Plato," at the same time he enacts the "Christian appropriation of Plato" that will be more richly continued by Clement of Alexandria.

Plato's dependency on Moses

As the *Logos spermatikos*, Christ had sown some knowledge of these truths in pagan minds:

Each spoke well, according to the part present in him of the divine logos, the Sower. . . .
Whatever things were rightly said among all people are the property of us Christians. For next to God, we worship and love the logos who is from the unbegotten and ineffable God.
(2 *Apol.* 13)

In addition, the philosophers borrowed insights from Moses (1 *Apol.* 44; 59–60); this is secondary to, and in tension with, the *Logos spermatikos* idea and is not yet presented polemically (as in Tatian, *Or.* 40) or called a "theft" in light of John 10:8 (as in Clement, *Stromateis* 1.20.100; 5.14). Both sources yielded only a confused version of the truth. Despite his view of the *anima naturaliter christiana* (*Apol.* 17), Tertullian emphasizes Plato's theft from Moses (*Apol.* 46–47).

Tatian thinks Plato must have derived his correct teachings not from Pythagoras (as Hippolytus holds, *Ref.* 6.21–28) but from Moses. Celsus reverses the charge that Plato borrowed from Moses and misunderstood him; rather the Jews and Christians plagiarize and misunderstand Greek wisdom,²⁰ a charge repeated by Julian. Like all Greek thinkers, Plato wandered in the East, where he picked up Mosaic lore (Clement, *Stromateis* 1.101; 150). Origen shares this view (*Against Celsus* 4.39).

The topos has roots in Jewish apologetic, and was taken up also by the Gnostics. It was entrenched in Christian apologetics down to Theodoret, John Philoponus (*On the Eternity of the World* 6.28), George Hamartolos, and the *Suda*. Following a lost work of Ambrose, Augustine (*On Christian Doctrine* 2.43; *Letter* 34) thought that Plato had met Jeremiah in Egypt and might have studied Hebrew.²¹ Later, Augustine noticed the chronological impossibility of such an encounter (*Retractions* 2.4; *City of God* 8.11), yet still says that what most inclines him "almost to assent to the opinion that Plato was not ignorant of those writings" is the shared conviction of Exodus 3:14 and Plato that "compared with Him that truly is, because He is unchangeable, those things which have been created mutable are not," for which Augustine knows no other precedent (*City of God* 8.11).

According to a recent editor, the anonymous, probably late third-century, *Cohortatio ad Graecos* presents defective "human wisdom" in chapters 2–7 and the "wisdom of God" in chapters 14–34 (see 1 Corinthians 2:12–13).²² The philosophers were constrained by divine providence to utter things favourable to Christianity, especially those who corrected their wrong ideas about God after picking up Mosaic lore in their sojourns in Egypt (14.2). But this is over-optimistic, for the critique of the philosophers' misunderstandings of what they borrowed from Moses prevails to the end.²³ Plato veiled the truth he learned in Egypt (such as the ontology of

Exodus 3:14–15) for fear of the hemlock, and cultivated an ambiguous discourse that could be taken as affirming or denying the gods (20.1; referring to *Timaeus* 41a). The Middle Platonic tenets that matter is uncreated and is the source of evil are attributed to him (20.2). The distinction of being and becoming in *Timaeus* 27d is said to reproduce the teaching of Moses (22.2). Plato lies by having the Demiurge describe the gods as generated but also incorruptible (*Timaeus* 41b) – a sop to the polytheists he feared (23.1). His theory of Ideas is a misunderstanding of Moses’ account of the *eidōs*, *paradeigma*, *typos* of the Tabernacle (29). In this account, what Plato learned from Moses is a muddled miscellany, too crisscrossed with concealments and misunderstandings to clearly attest “divine wisdom.”

Following Philo in a Platonic discussion of virtues, Clement places the primary emphasis on the mystical theme of “becoming like unto God as much as possible” (*Theaetetus* 176b), correlated with the “likeness” of Gen 1:26 (*Stromateis* 2.100.3; 131.5). The distinction between philosophy and theology was making itself felt in the second century but was not steadily focused, coming near to fusion in Clement and to an abrupt dissociation in Tertullian. Origen has the most comprehensive vision, accepting that certain universal ideas, Stoic *koinai ennoiai*, explain the commonalities between philosophers and Christians (*Against Celsus* 1.4).

Origen: Plato Sublated

Gregory Thaumaturgus praises his teacher Origen somewhat as Alcibiades did Socrates, and describes him as

sometimes assailing us in the genuine Socratic fashion, and again upsetting us by his argumentation whenever he saw us getting restive under him, like so many unbroken steeds, and springing out of the course and galloping madly about at random, until with a strange kind of persuasiveness and constraint he reduced us to a state of quietude under him by his discourse.

(*Panegyric Oration* 7)

Gregory does not mention Plato by name, and one gathers that Origen focused not on the intricacies of dialectic but on broad clashes of opinion between philosophers, to be resolved in light of Christian wisdom (14). This philosophical pedagogy nonetheless undercuts the currently fashionable claim that a distinction of philosophy from theology would make no sense to the Fathers. While Origen used Plato for apologetic and propaedeutic purposes, he did not welcome him, at least by name, into the inner spheres of theology or preaching. Yet “his hermeneutics allows him to find the Platonic doctrine of God in biblical texts, raising the question of his fidelity to the Bible or to philosophy, . . . whether he Christianizes Plato or Platonizes the Bible.”²⁴

A school of German scholars have recently promoted a vision of Origen as a, or even *the*, philosopher of freedom.²⁵ Already in Plato the lot of souls is determined by their behaviour. When Origen exclaims, “if you take away the element of free will from virtue, you also destroy its essence” (*Against Celsus* 4.3; trans. Chadwick), he recalls Plato, *Republic* 617e: “Virtue has no master.” Origen plants freedom everywhere. Even the stars can choose between contraries (*First Principles* 1.7.2) – an idea inspired by Plato (see *Timaeus* 40b; *Laws* 10, 898e–899a).

At least when prompted by Celsus, Origen takes up the Platonic theme of divine ineffability, much favoured by Clement. Celsus, quoting Plato, *Letter* 7, 341c, affirms that the Good “cannot at all be expressed in words, but comes to us by long familiarity and suddenly like a light in the soul kindled by a leaping spark.” Origen greets this warmly: “we also agree that this is well said,

for God revealed to them these things and all other truths which they stated rightly” (*Against Celsus* 6.3). He concedes to Celsus that “none of the descriptions by words or expressions can show the attributes of God” (6.65). But he deflates this by a comparison with the difficulty of naming the difference between the taste of a date and the taste of a fig. He scores a point: the ineffability of the first principle is not absolute in *Timaeus* 28c; it is speakable by a small number; thus Celsus contradicts Plato in making God ineffable even for these (*Against Celsus* 7.43).

But Origen is impatient to leave the terrain of ineffability in order to return to his home ground, the revelation of God in his Logos. When Celsus draws on *Republic* 518a: “If anyone leads people out of darkness into a bright light, they cannot endure the radiancy and think that their sight is injured and damaged and incapacitated,” Origen does not pursue this glimmer of divine transcendence but affirms a robust knowability of God, mediated by the Logos, who is identified as universal reason and cosmic wisdom. “Human nature is not sufficient in any way to seek for God and to find Him in His pure nature, unless it is helped by the God who is the object of the search” (7.42). Origen does not reject the *sungeneia* between the human soul and the divine, but he places it in a more concrete soteriological context. It is not an automatic passport to knowledge of God, but a capacity that needs to be activated by grace.

But Origen’s absorption or sublation of Platonist thought forms does not necessarily imply a critical engagement with the complexity of Plato’s thought. He offers a Christian version of Plato’s *onoma*, *logos*, *eidōlon*, *epistēmē* (*Letter* 7, 342a): 1. the Baptist’s voice, 2. the incarnate Logos, 3. the imprint of his wounds in the soul, and 4. the Christ-Wisdom that the perfect know (*Against Celsus* 6.8–9). Crouzel calls this ad hoc utterance “a genial transposition of Platonic dialectic into Christian revelation,”²⁶ though it has nothing at all to do with dialectic. De Lubac finds here the very “soul” of Origen’s transposition of Platonism, which he compares with Plato’s own transposition or elevation of the myths he drew on: “errors, incoherences, awkwardnesses” in Origen’s “new synthesis” cannot diminish “the dominant thought of this extraordinary genius,” namely to proclaim Christ.²⁷ Neither of the Jesuit Origenists show much understanding of philosophy here, and in general they react phobically to Harnackian diagnoses of Origen’s (popular) Platonism, including those of their confrères Jean Daniélou and Aloisius Lieske.²⁸ As Harl observes, Origen’s concern “is above all to find *words* analogous to those of Plato; he does not seek so much to discover across the appropriate terms the proper procedure of revelation.”²⁹ The identification of this “procedure” would have required first an overcoming of Platonic conceptions.

Again, when Celsus quotes *Timaeus* 28c and states that the methods of synthesis, separation (*analysis*), and analogy are furnished “that we might get some conception (*epinoia*) of the nameless” (*Against Celsus* 7.42), Origen’s response betrays a poor understanding of this triad, which he associates with geometrical procedures (7.44). Correctly understood, as Alcinous explains, analysis or separation is the negative way, and synthesis is a more positive regression to the One, for example in going back from the beauty of bodies until one conceives “the good itself and what is in the first degree loveable and desirable” (*Didaskalicus* 10; cf. Plato, *Symp.* 204c). Since for Origen, as for Philo, Paul, and Augustine, natural theology is not a human enterprise but a divine revelation, he would not be impressed by this recommendation. Romans 1 equips him with a critical distance from Platonism. The preached Word now has more effect than intellectual acrobatics. There is more divine solicitude for weak humanity in the incarnate Word than in “the Logos, of whom Plato says that after finding him it is impossible to declare him to all men” (*Against Celsus* 7.42).

Similarly Origen distinguishes four ways of relating to God: some adore the God of the universe, some the Son, his anointed, some the sun, moon, and stars, some the works of men’s hands (*Commentary on John* 2.27). He parallels this with an epistemological division

of degrees of participation in the Logos (2.28–31) that recalls the segmented line of *Republic* 509d–e, which concerns relations of image and archetype in the intelligible and sensible worlds. The parallelism between these two series of stages, one “ontological,” the other “epistemological,” also recalls the correlation of four levels of being and four powers of the mind – intelligence (*noêsis*), reflection (*dianoia*), belief (*pistis*), and imagination (*eikasia*) – in *Republic* 511d–e.

Numenius in Origen’s judgement “expounded Plato with very great skill” (*Against Celsus* 4.51). Numenius is the foremost precursor of Plotinus’ thinking of the One beyond being. Clement associates the supreme God with the first hypostasis of the *Parmenides* and the second God, the Mind – in Clement the Son, the Logos – with the second hypostasis, the one-many. Divine ineffability and simplicity characterize the Father, but not the Son. Some of this carries over to Origen, as when in *Commentary on John* 2.18 he says that the Logos “would not be God if he were not with God (*pros ton theon*) and he would not remain God if he did not persevere in the uninterrupted contemplation of the paternal depths.” However, the question whether God is to be identified with being itself or “whether God ‘transcends being in rank and power’ (*epekeina ousias esti presbeia kai dunamei*)” (cf. Plato, *Republic* 509b), so that “we ought to say that the only-begotten and firstborn of all creation is being of beings, and idea of ideas, and beginning, and that his Father and God transcends all these” (6.64), remains undecided in Origen as in Middle Platonism. Origen plays quite freely with the elements of Platonic rhetoric, to underline the Father’s transcendence:

Although the Saviour transcends in his essence, rank, power, divinity (*ousia kai presbeia kai dunamei kai theotêti*), . . . and wisdom, beings that are so great and of such antiquity, nevertheless, he is not comparable with the Father in any way.

(*Commentary on John* 13.152)

Faced with a string of Platonic platitudes from Celsus – “Being and becoming are, respectively, intelligible and visible. Truth is associated with being, error with becoming. Knowledge concerns truth, opinion the other” (*Against Celsus* 7.45), Origen contrasts his own attitude – “We are careful not to raise objections to any good teaching” – with Celsus’ contempt for Christian virtue and piety, which he describes entirely in Platonic terms:

It is not merely a matter of theory when they distinguish between being and becoming and between what is intelligible and what is visible, and when they associate truth with being and by all possible means avoid the error which is bound up with becoming.

(7.46)

He gives a Platonic hue to Romans 1:20 by adding a reference to “steps (*epibathra*) to the contemplation of the nature of invisible things” (7.46). Such exchanges confirm that Celsus and Origen share a global Platonist wisdom, forming the broad horizon within which Origen’s more piquant Platonist tenets fall into place.

In response to Celsus’ claim that all the wisdom of the Christians was better expressed by Plato, without recourse to threats and promises, Origen says that Plato is read only by literati whereas the Gospels, like Epictetus, touch ordinary folk. He adds a deeper point: the Christian teachings have a power given by God to the teacher, a grace that shines in his words (*Against Celsus* 6.2). The inefficacy of “Plato’s fine utterance” (6.5) is clear, for it did not succeed in purifying his own religious practice. This stance is taken up by Eusebius of Caesarea, who often builds on Origen in his own apologetical work against Porphyry, and echoes his judgements on

Plato.³⁰ Plato's message reached only an elite, whereas Christ's has captured the whole world, and this weakness was compounded by his continuing idolatrous practice.

Eusebius's Plato is that of Middle Platonism, the Plato of the *Republic*, the *Laws*, and the *Timaeus*, not the *Parmenides*; metaphysics, dialectic, and the problematic of the Ideas play little role; a popular Platonism, primarily ethical, with religious tenets easily linked to Christianity, predominates, with a focus on Socrates.³¹ Eusebius notes that Plato counseled faith in the gods as a matter of custom rather than of rational insight or mystic ineffability (*Preparation for the Gospel* 2.7.3). He says that Plato "brought back to unity all the parts of philosophy until then scattered and torn like the limbs of Pentheus, as someone has said" (11.2.2); this "someone" is probably Numenius.³² Clement (*Stromateis* 1.59.1–6) used the image for the way Greek philosophers have torn the eternal Logos into shreds, which the theologian puts back together.

Gregory of Nyssa: The Awkward Body

For Athenagoras, "the divine *logos* is at the same time the mediator of creation and contains in himself the totality of 'the ideas,' the paradigms of creation" (as in Origen later); he "understands the creation of the world as a mere shaping of eternal matter. . . . The Platonic scheme of world formation is in no way criticised. For Athenagoras it possesses absolute validity."³³ Theophilus of Antioch (*To Autolykus* 2.10–31), foe of the Platonizing Hermogenes, was the strongest teacher of the *ex nihilo*, scotching the notion that God needed preexistent matter to work on. The force of *creatio ex nihilo* as a crucial mark of difference between Platonism and Christianity should not be exaggerated. Justin approves of Plato's teaching, derived from Moses, that God created from shapeless matter (*1 Apol.* 59); later Theodoret (whose degree of philosophical education is disputed³⁴ and who relies heavily on Clement, Eusebius, and florilegia³⁵) will make Plato, again a teacher of *creatio ex nihilo*, again in dependence on Moses.³⁶ Theodoret is the last great representative of the apologists' tradition, replaying the old contests between Platonic and Christian cosmology, anthropology, and theology. Perhaps the unoriginality of his copious discussion matches the depleted state of the pagan opposition since the crushing of Porphyry and Julian.

The lofty spiritualism of the *Phaedrus* and the *Phaedo* drew the disapproval of Athenagoras, who denies that the goal of life is "the happiness of the soul after its separation from the body" (*On the Resurrection* 25.1), and Methodius, who says that "Origen claimed, like Plato, that the human being was the soul alone" (*On the Resurrection* 1.34.1). Athanasius writes in Alexandrine style of the soul's immortality in *Against the Nations* 30–34, but adopts a more biblical conception of incorruptibility (a salvific gift rather than a metaphysical necessity) in *On the Incarnation*.³⁷

The resurrection of the body was a major point of Christian opposition to Platonism, even to the point of a provocative insistence on the literal materiality of the resurrection body. How entrenched that attitude was is seen not only in Tertullian, but even in the philosophical-minded Gregory of Nyssa, foremost Christian reader of Plato and guardian of the Origenian heritage in the fourth century. His *On the Soul and the Resurrection*,³⁸ a Christian *Phaedo*, shows a fuller engagement with Plato than the similar exercise of Methodius of Olympus, his *Symposium*, in which Plato is adapted to the praise of virginity, as also in Gregory's *On Virginity* 10 and *Life of Macrina* 22.³⁹

Nyssen never really engages with Plato's philosophy, preferring to use it for polemic purposes in his jousts with Eunomius, and ready to renounce the freedom of philosophy for the authority of Scripture at Macrina's behest. Revelling in scriptural wisdom, he laments the sterility of philosophical debate, which hardly suggests an eager involvement with Platonic dialectic. Yet he is steeped in Plato's texts, and their imprint on his way of thinking goes deep, notably in his conceptions of the soul: he seeks to reconcile its simplicity with its tripartition in a manner

reminiscent of Alcinous, though ascribing a providential role to its "impulses of desire," resisting the *Phaedo's* tendency to see the *epithumetikon* and *thumoeides* as evil.⁴⁰ For Gregory as for Plato, "the real world is immaterial, intelligible, and ideal. Of this world the soul is a part; there is its true home . . . God becomes the idea of Good and man rises to God by participation."⁴¹ There is a development from the quite Platonic ascent to God in such earlier works as *On Virginity* to the stress on divine infinity and incomprehensibility and on the endless reaching out in *epektasis* in the *Life of Moses*. The apophatic elements in the long polemic against Eunomius no doubt contributed to this, perhaps also a deeper study of Plotinus, not to mention the development of his spiritual life.

The funereal, grief-laden mood of *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, caused by Basil's death and Macrina's imminent death, matches the grief of Socrates' disciples, but the earnest admonitions of Macrina are far from the spirit of play affected by Socrates. Macrina's peremptory command cuts across Gregory's perennial doubting and his philosophical mindset, but the two agree that he can put his questions in dialectical style, not with the intention of destroying faith in the soul's durable existence, but rather with a view of making more solid his conviction about it.

Macrina argues that the soul "exists, with a rare and peculiar nature of its own, independently of the body with its gross texture." "The soul is an essence created, and living, and intellectual, transmitting from itself to an organized and sentient body the power of living and of grasping objects of sense." One knows what the soul is when one is told "that it is not that which our senses perceive, neither a colour, nor a form, nor a hardness, nor a weight, nor a quantity, nor a cubic dimension, nor a point, nor anything else perceptible in matter." Gregory asks if we should then say "that the Deity and the Mind of man are identical, if it be true that neither can be thought of, except by the withdrawal of all the data of sense." This Macrina denounces as blasphemous.

That which is made in the image of the Deity necessarily possesses a likeness to its prototype in every respect; it resembles it in being intellectual, immaterial, unconnected with any notion of weight, and in eluding any measurement of its dimensions; yet as regards its own peculiar nature it is something different from that other.

But the dialogue veers into a more materialistic register with the claim that the soul remains attached to the atoms of a dead body in view of their reconstitution in the resurrection of the body: it is not "absolutely impossible that the atoms should again coalesce and form the same man as before."

You will behold this bodily envelopment, which is now dissolved in death, woven again out of the same atoms, not indeed into this organization with its gross and heavy texture, but with its threads worked up into something more subtle and ethereal, so that you will not only have near you that which you love, but it will be restored to you with a brighter and more entrancing beauty.

The tawdriness of the argumentation is a lapse from high rationality due to a literalist ratiocination on biblical data. Philosophical reason works best in the contexts for which it was developed and wilts when transferred to biblical contexts. It is not quite correct to say that "though the resurrection of the human being in a new, transfigured bodiliness is not denied, it is 'existentially' quite secondary to the 'Dionysian' longing for the heavenly home of the *soul*,"⁴² so that the bodily resurrection would be only an ontic narration, secondary to the ontological metaphysics.⁴³ Gregory does insist strongly on the physical resurrection, even if in the end he relativizes

it by recalling Paul on the “spiritual body” (1 Cor. 15). A real integration between the Platonic, the materialistic, and the Pauline is not achieved, though ideally it should have been possible to resolve the clash between Platonic pathos and credal conviction by making Paul a platform for their conciliation rather than for a flight into apophasis.

Cherniss says that the mismatch between Platonic idealism and the physicality of the resurrection makes Gregory’s writings “a sorry spectacle.”⁴⁴ But the strains within the biblical-Platonic synthesis run through all patristic theology, and need not be melodramatized as an agonizing clash between Gregory as thinker and Gregory as believer. The suggestion that Gregory is a Platonist to the fingertips and could not really be interested in the crudities of the Creed dissolves the creative tension that animates his thought. Apostopoulos wrongly criticizes Daniélou for his portrait of a mystical Gregory, and his suggestion that Gregory was only reluctantly a churchman is confuted by the very titles of Gregory’s works, mostly scriptural commentaries, catechesis, and defences of the Creed against heresy. Discussion of the tensions between Platonism and dogma in the *On the Soul and the Resurrection* has been too focused on alleged personal problems of Gregory rather than on the perennial tension between the Greek and biblical roots of theology.

Impatience with Plato

The Emperor Julian was an ardent champion of Plato, drawing on the *Republic* and the *Laws* in his earlier forced praise of Constantius (*Oration 1*), and also on the *Menexenus*, in which he translates Plato’s reliance on self theistically, since the self is the mind and the mind is divine. Porphyry and Julian prompted increasingly negative views of Plato and his thought on the Christian side. While Origen largely shared Celsus’ veneration of Plato, Gregory Nazianzen lumps Plato in with the evil influences on the ungrateful Julian:

That’s what the Platos, the Chrysippuses, the illustrious Lyceum, the venerable Stoa, and the brayers of ingenuities taught him. . . . That’s what he learned from the noble masters and supporters and legislators of the monarchy that he recruited from the back streets.

(*Oration 4.43*)

He goes on to list atheists and astrologers among them, in despite of Julian’s deep theistic piety. Socrates he accuses of pederasty veiled by fine-sounding speculation, Plato of gluttony (4.72; the latter accusation is already in Tatian, *Oration 2*).

Plato is demonized by Chrysostom (*On Acts of the Apostles 4.4*):

Why then, it is asked, did not Christ exercise His influence upon Plato, and upon Pythagoras? Because the mind of Peter was much more philosophical than their minds . . . The one wasted his time about a set of idle and useless dogmas [such as the idea that the soul could be reborn as a fly]. . . . The man was full of irony and of jealous feelings. . . . He enacted those laws of gross turpitude [sharing of women].

(trans. Pusey)

Women and slaves are persuaded by Christian preaching, whereas Plato’s luxurious life shows how little he himself was persuaded that money is to be despised (*On Acts of the Apostles 36.2*). How much time Plato wasted on mathematics, and how useless are his ruminations on the immortality of the soul (*On 1 Corinthians 4.3*)!⁴⁵

Moderation prevails in Cyril’s twelve-book response to Julian. Cyril agrees with Socrates and Plato that scientific studies are futile (*Against Julian 5.38–40*), citing, from Eusebius who makes

the same point (*Preparation for the Gospel* 14.11), Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.13–14 along with *Republic* 475d8–e5 and *Phaedo*, 96a5–c7. He praises Plato’s insights (*Against Julian* 1.40 and 42; 2.17; 8.27 and 31), but denounces him for propositions close to Arianism (1.48; 2.48; 8.26), and for his contradictions and his refutation by Aristotle (2.16; 45). The theological yield of the *Timaeus* and *Letter 2* is presented slightly:

Plato, Julian’s father and master, defined the “demiurge” as the one cause of all . . . but says that another god pre-exists him, namely the idea of the Good, and even imagines a third cause, less privileged in rank and nature than the first two, which he calls the “soul” of all beings.

(*Against Julian* 3.34)

Those who judge Plato entirely negatively, such as Tatian, Theophilus, and Epiphanius “most probably have the majority of community members on their side.”⁴⁶ No doubt, but the greatest Christian intellectuals such as Origen, Eusebius, Gregory of Nyssa, Cyril, and Augustine were free of such narrow bias; though Origen sees Plato as sometimes demonically inspired (*Against Celsus* 8.4). All had trouble integrating the alien figures of Socrates and Plato into their Christian vision and tended to waver in the attitudes they took up to them. What was valid in Plato’s thought could have prompted a wide ecumenical vision, drawing on conceptions of natural theology or of the universal presence of the Logos, but the all-too-convenient dependency theory sidelined this possibility. Yet Plato’s core ontological, noetic, and ethical convictions invested Christian thinking very deeply, in both crude and subtle guises, with the silent force of a rising tsunami. Despite centuries of discussion on “the Platonism of the Fathers,” the theological implications of this are far from being fully clarified, and need to be revisited in light of modern philosophical critiques of Platonism and in light of current theological appreciation of religious and cultural pluralism.

Notes

- 1 Thomson 2017: 127.
- 2 Harnack 1901. See also Edwards 2007: 8. Justin avoids drawing the parallel that lay close to hand between the death of Socrates and that of Jesus (11), stressing rather that no one was prepared to die for Socrates’ teaching.
- 3 Young 1989: 163; Harnack 1901: 9, however, says that Justin knew how his imperial addressees admired Socrates.
- 4 Harnack 1901: 10. Athenagoras writes in similar terms (*Leg.* 31).
- 5 Harnack 1901: 13.
- 6 Harnack 1901: 23.
- 7 Harnack 1901: 23.
- 8 “Augustine probably knew only a part of the *Timaeus* (27d–47b) in Cicero’s translation.” Erler 2016 col. 915.
- 9 This draws on *Charmides* 155d to spice up the anecdote deriving from *Phaedo* of Elis that the physiognomist Zopyrus discerned in Socrates’ face *multa vitia* (Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.80), including that he was “addicted to women – at which Alcibiades is said to have given a loud guffaw!” (Cicero, *On Fate* 10). Socrates admitted that he had bad tendencies by nature but had overcome them by reason; see also Alexander of Aphrodisias, *On Fate* 8; quoted in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 6.9.
- 10 Gilson 1941–42: 252.
- 11 Jesus’ “apprehension of God as a loving Father could to a large extent be confirmed by selected texts drawn from the philosophers: God’s truth (Plato, *Republic* 382e), his goodness (*ibid.* 379c), his generosity (*Timaeus* 29e), and his creative wisdom (*Sophist* 265cd)” (Stead 1995: 143).
- 12 Minns 2006: 266.
- 13 Daniélou 1961: 106. This Harnackian remark is less pointed in John Austin Baker’s translation, 1973: 110: “the shaping of Christian theological language under Platonic influence.”

- 14 Another often-Christianized text, again filtered through the Middle Platonist reception, is *Phaedrus* 246–249 on the wings of the soul: “It is the whole Christian theology of the original fall and the restoration of grace that we see expressed in Platonic terms” (Daniélou 1961: 16–17). Philo draws on it (*Planting* 14; *Dreams*. 1.138; *Heir of Divine Things* 240). The supracaelestial place (*huperouranios topos*) of *Phaedrus* 247c is taken up by Justin, *Trypho* 56.1 and 60.2, to refer to God’s awful dwelling, accessible only to the mind (see Méhat 1975). Clement of Alexandria is intimately familiar with the *Phaedrus* (see Butterworth 1916); Origen refers to it in *Against Celsus* 4.40; 6.43; 7.44 “Plato learned the words of the *Phaedrus* from some Hebrew” (6.9). The *Phaedrus* hovers behind the account of souls in *First Principles* 1.3.8.
- 15 Origen’s charter for his spiritual exegesis is 2 Cor. 3:7–17, but Platonism lurks in the background of Paul, John, and Hebrews, mediated by the Hellenistic Jewish traditions culminating in Philo. Origen may be less Platonistic than Philo as an exegete, but he shares his premises.
- 16 Van den Hoek 1988; Runia 1995.
- 17 Hyldahl 1966.
- 18 Van Winden 1971.
- 19 Joly 1973.
- 20 See Thraede 1962.
- 21 Cardinal Bessarion recalls this in his 1469 defence of Plato, as a point in Plato’s favour; Plato is dubbed an “Attic Moses” by Ficino and Pico. See Ridings 1995: 244–236.
- 22 Marcovich 1990.
- 23 Pouderon 2009: 51 finds that unlike Justin, the author of *Cohortatio* “shows no sympathy toward philosophy. . . . Even Plato, so often spared by Christian polemicists, finds no favour in his eyes.”
- 24 Erler 2016: 911.
- 25 See Hengstermann 2015.
- 26 Crouzel 1961: 215.
- 27 De Lubac, in Crouzel 1961: 8.
- 28 Lieske 1938: 186: “Origen’s cosmological interpretation of the Logos is the gravest threat for the trinitarian mystery of sonship and the strongest thrust of his speculative thinking toward the Neoplatonic system.”
- 29 Harl 1958: 313.
- 30 See Des Places 1956.
- 31 See Des Places 1982: 36–37, who cites Festugière 1932: 222–223.
- 32 See Des Places 1973: 65 Another possibility is Atticus, fr. 1; see Des Places 1977: 19, 27, 39.
- 33 May 2006: 444–445, referring to Plato, *Laws* 10.2–3.
- 34 Pierre Canivet later modified his negative judgement of 1957: 274, 308, and it is contested by Siniosoglou 1908: 8–10, who at 11 ascribes to Theodoret a method used by Eusebius too: “his selection, rearrangement and *découpage* of Platonic passages often attribute to them a signification very different from and occasionally opposed to that intended by their author.” See also Theodoret 1904: 111–114.
- 35 He names Aetius, Plutarch, and Porphyry as his sources for the diversity of the philosophers’ views (*Curat.* 4.31).
- 36 *Curat.* 4.37, citing *Tim.* 28b–c and *Republic* 6.509b. Eusebius also makes Plato a witness to *creatio ex nihilo* by selective quotation from *Timaeus*.
- 37 See Louth 1975. Similarly, Athanasius limits Justin’s *logos spermatikos* to the Christian community (Meijering 1974: 117). Meijering shows Platonic elements in the arguments of *Contra Arianos*.
- 38 Quoted from St. Gregory of Nyssa, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers translation, revised by Kevin Knight, at www.newadvent.org/fathers/2915.htm. For the Greek text and extensive discussion of its Platonic elements, see Ramelli 2007.
- 39 See Meredith 1990: 129.
- 40 See Cherniss 1971: 7–25; Pochoshajew 2004: 114–123.
- 41 Cherniss 1971: 62. On participation see Balas 1966.
- 42 Apostolopoulos 1986: 282.
- 43 Apostolopoulos 1986: 283.
- 44 Cherniss 1971: 7–25. Pochoshajew blurs Cherniss’ position when he omits the first word in the following quotation: “but [= except] for some few orthodox dogmas which he could not circumvent, Gregory has merely applied Christian names to Plato’s doctrine and called it Christian theology” (21). Cherniss does not call in question Gregory’s faith, and indeed sees him as ready to sacrifice all philosophy for it.

- 45 Erler 2016: 906, following Fabricius 1988: 180, has Chrysostom say that to mention Plato in a sermon on Christ is an insult to Christ; but the text is not entirely negative: “let it not be thought an insult to Christ that we recall Pythagoras, Plato, Zeno and Apollonius of Tyana in speaking of him; we do it not of our own accord but as a condescension to the weakness of the Jews who think Christ a mere man,” just as Paul adopted a gradualist approach in Athens in Acts 17 (*Against the Jews* 5.3 = *Patrologia Graeca* 48, 886).
- 46 Fabricius 1988: 180. Even though approving nods to Plato are rare exceptions in patristic writing and are so managed that “the central Christian region is secured against the Platonic” (183), we may investigate “in what degree Platonic elements could be received and further developed without being apprehended as such” (185). But Fabricius underplays the encomia of Plato that often crop up in Patristic writings.

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Aristotle and his school

Mark Edwards

Aristotle and the Peripatetics

Born in Stagira in 384 B.C., Aristotle spent most of his adult life as a resident alien in Athens, first studying under Plato and then lecturing in his own school, the Lyceum. Between these two periods of residence, he was tutor to Alexander of Macedon under the patronage of Alexander's father Philip (for sources, see Düring 1957). At his death in 322, he left behind him a body of lectures spare in style but covering almost every field of inquiry with remarkable tenacity of thought and uniformity of method. For some centuries after his death, these were not so well known outside his own school as his exoteric writings, which were more elegant in style but more superficial in argumentation. His esoteric works were arranged and published as a corpus by Andronicus of Rhodes in the mid-first century B.C. (see Hatzimichali 2013). By this time, his disciples were known as Peripatetics, perhaps because it was the custom in the Lyceum for the teacher to perambulate the cloister as he spoke. From the late second century, commentaries on his writings grow increasingly abundant; by the end of the third, his philosophy had been fused with that of Plato to form a tradition of thought that would dominate first the Greek, then the Christian, then the Muslim world for more than a millennium. He became not only an oracle in biology and physics but a regular interlocutor in the theological disputations of late antiquity.

This is all the more remarkable when we consider that his cardinal principles seemed to Christians of the three centuries far less assimilable than those of Plato. His *Categories* announced that the only real entities are concrete objects in the phenomenal realm; his treatises on physics, while they posit an incorruptible fifth element as the stuff of the heavens, promise to sublunar beings only an eternal vicissitude of generation and corruption. Every such being, so long as it exists, is a realisation of the potentiality of its material substrate to receive a form; this substrate, however, is equally hospitable to all qualities, and the processes of growth, locomotion and alteration which bring us into existence will replace us in time with new determinations of the same matter. The soul as the *eidos* or form of the body can never escape it, even in perception, which is the realisation of its potentiality to abstract the form from an object and unite with it through the mysterious agency of the *nous poiêtikos*: Aristotle does not say whether this “maker mind” or “active reason” survives the dissolution of the body (see further Brentano

1992; Kosman 1992). The one agent of whom eternity can be predicated with confidence is God, at least in *Metaphysics Lambda*; he maintains his character as pure act, however, only by the perpetual contemplation of that which is perfect and immutable – that is to say, of his own perfection and immutability (see further Kosman 2000). He neither creates nor acts upon the world, but moves it only as the beloved moves the lover; since both his pure actuality and the naked potentiality of matter are eternal, the world must exist forever, and must be governed forever by the same natural laws.

The purpose of the present chapter, therefore, is to explain how it was possible for Christians to embrace a philosophy which was at first sight manifestly inimical to their own in its denial of creation, special providence and any notion of personhood or voluntary condescension that might compromise the simplicity of God.

Aristotle in the second century

Justin speaks of the Peripatetics only to mock their greed (*Trypho* 3), yet it has been argued by Robert Grant (1956) that he owed his version to a sally of Aristotelian dialectic. According to his own narrative, he had left doubt behind him as a Platonist until he was accosted by an old man, who convinced him that his school was confusing a substance with its qualities in teaching that the soul is life and at the same time that soul is a thing that lives; once disabused of this error, Justin found the Bible a surer ground than Plato for the hope of immortality (*Trypho* 5). Justin's younger contemporary Tertullian is consistently censorious in his references to Aristotle's denial of immortality to the soul, his sighting of providence and his fanciful postulation of a fifth element; yet he too has been credited with a surreptitious use of a trope from *Rhetoric* 2.22.23 when he urges that an act ascribed to God is all the more credible if it challenges our powers of comprehension (*Flesh of Christ* 5.4; Moffat 1916). In this case, however, the evidence for indebtedness is not so strong, for Aristotle propounds a forensic argument that implausible claims are less likely to be invented, whereas Tertullian bases his reasoning on the peculiar capacity of God to perform the impossible – a capacity unfathomable to all pagans who can imagine no God higher than the most sublime creation of their own minds.

Clement of Alexandria evinces a wider knowledge of the Stagirite's philosophy than any Christian writer before him, quoting by name from the exoteric writings and accurately paraphrasing the teaching of the *Nicomachean Ethics* on the threefold sources of vice (depravity, ignorance and incontinence) and his definition of virtue as a mean (*Stromateis* 2.15.62.2; Clark 1977: 59). Clement himself inclines more to the Stoic ideal of passionlessness (*apatheia*) than to moderation in virtue, and is as hostile as Jesus himself to any notion that external goods in this world are essential to happiness (*Stromateis* 3.7.57.1). His disquisition on logic in the eighth book of the *Stromateis* owes much to the Stoics, and it may be through perusing their criticisms that he came to know the Aristotelian *Categories* in some detail (*Stromateis* 8.23–24; Havrda 2012). A satire on this treatise is polemically deployed by Clement's contemporary Hippolytus of Rome against the Gnosticising heretic Basilides, who proclaimed the ineffability of God in terms that might be thought to preclude his very existence (*Refutation* 7.21.1; see further Bos 2000). This, says Hippolytus, is the fruit of Aristotle's teaching in the *Categories* that every concrete substance (first *ousia*) is a composite of the merely notional species (second *ousia*) with a constellation of properties, which, since they are not substances, have once again only a notional existence (*Refutation* 7.18.6). This hostile critique is probably derived from a Stoic or Platonic skirmisher of the second century, who did not foresee that the notion of the individual as an ensemble of properties would one day be advanced by both philosophers and Christians with more serious intent (see further Hippolytus 1990; Mueller 1994).

Aristotle's power to influence Christian thought was greatly enhanced at the end of the second century by the appearance of the first substantial commentaries on the esoteric corpus. Their author, Alexander of Aphrodisias, had imbibed the religious temper of the age, and his intimation that the God of *Metaphysics Lambda* may be the active reason of *On the Soul* 3.5 foreshadows the double character of *nous* in Plotinus as demiurge and fountainhead of human intellection (see further Bazán 1973). In his treatise *On Fate*, he defends the doctrine of sublunar providence, which he also entertains in his *Questions and Answers*, and raises a question that Aristotle had not raised, in his discussion of future contingents, with regard to divine foreknowledge. He concurs with Aristotle's view that if the future is known, it is predetermined (see *On Interpretation* 17a–18b, with Anscombe 1956), and concludes that, while gods excel us in their capacity to predict the future actions of free agents, even they cannot have absolute certitude, since to know today that X will do p tomorrow necessitates the occurrence of p, and thus curtails the freedom of X. Origen, the first Christian heir to this discussion, accepts Alexander's definition of freedom as power to do otherwise (Ramelli 2014), but is bound by his faith in prophecy to maintain that this indeterminacy is consistent with the infallible prescience of God.

Mind (Latin *mens*, Greek *nous*) is the closest analogue to the nature of God in Origen's *First Principles* (1.1.1), though he also he opines in his work *Against Celsus* (7.38) that God may be superior to mind. His precepts for the cultivation of virtue in *First Principles* 3.1 are reminiscent of the advice in the *Nicomachean Ethics* to foster a virtuous disposition by the deliberate performance of commensurate actions. His acceptance of the Aristotelian principle that there cannot be an actual infinity gave rise to the erroneous charge that he held the power of God to be finite (*First Principles* 2.9.1); his argument is rather that God's omnipotence manifests itself as a power to create a world of any magnitude, with the logical proviso that this magnitude must be finite, just as a shape created by God will necessarily have a finite number of sides. His failure to forestall misunderstanding on this point is a corollary of the tendency, which he shares with scripture and hence with all ante-Nicene theologians, to use the word *dunamis* only to express the power of God in act, and not in the Aristotelian sense of unexercised potentiality.

Plato, Aristotle and the Trinity

The church remained wary of Aristotle, and more hospitable to his master Plato, so long as the two were eponyms of irreconcilable schools. In the course of the third century, however, the metaphysics and logic of Aristotle were annexed by the leading school of Platonism as necessary supplements to the teaching of the founder, whom they venerated almost as Christians venerated the scriptures. The reality of the transcendent forms was not open to doubt, but Aristotle's insistence that an incorporeal essence must have a substrate could be accommodated by making the forms coterminous with, and constitutive of, the archetypal *nous*. While this is not the first principle – the One being that which unifies all that exists, and is therefore prior to all existence – it is the God of *Metaphysics Lambda*, who in Aristotelian parlance is perfect *energeiai* or actuality (see further Rist 1973). Aristotle also teaches that every actuality has an associated activity, a second *energeia*; Plotinus deduces that if the first *energeia* is eternal, so is the second, no conversion of the potential to the actual being required as the precondition of this activity. An incorporeal and eternal being (having no matter and therefore no potentiality) may thus be said to act by virtue of its mere existence (see Viltanioti 2017).

Plotinus devoted three polemical lectures to the *Categories*, but his editor Porphyry took a more benign view of this treatise in his own commentaries and his *Isagoge*, or introduction to Aristotelian logic (see Hass 2001; Karamanolis 2006: 212–220). The *Categories* was not designed, as Plotinus supposed, to compete with the ontology of Plato, but to teach us how to

parse the terms which we use of phenomena in the material realm. Moreover, while it is more than a tract about grammar, it does not purport to investigate the nature of objects even in this realm, but rather the relation of the sign to the object, the word insofar as it signifies. His *Isagoge*, or introduction, reduced the Aristotelian taxonomy of being to five cardinal terms: the genus, the differentia, the *eidos* or species resulting from the combination of genus and differentia, the *idion* which is common to the whole species, and the *sumbebekos* or accident which characterises the individual member of the species (Barnes 2003). Translated into Latin by Victorinus and Boethius (Adamo 1967), this was to prove the most seminal of Porphyry's works in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Both his interpretation of the *Categories* and the Plotinian notion of a being that acts by virtue of its existence were given a Christian dress by Gregory of Nyssa in his vindication of the Nicene faith.

In his answer to the arguments of Eunomius against the coeternity of the Son with the Father, Gregory invokes the Plotinian principle that eternal and incorporeal objects act by virtue of their mere existence. Eunomius, by reputation a subtle Aristotelian, had argued that the Son's immateriality is no proof of his being unbegotten or uncreated, as God is capable of creation out of nothing (16.1–6). On the other hand, a corollary of the immateriality of God is that his nature is wholly free from composition (11.1–3). Hence the Unbegotten cannot be two beings, for then it would be a composite of elements which are prior even to the Unbegotten; yet surely that which is unbegotten can be second to none (46.13). The one who is begotten comes into being from the *me on*, the state of not-being; if therefore he were eternal, his existence and his nonexistence would be coexistent – an absurdity on which we need not linger (14.15–21). Nor would it have been possible for him to alienate any portion of his essence to the Son, for that would introduce *pathos* (suffering) into a nature which is agreed by all to be impassible (16.9). It follows that there is a state, if not a time, in which the Father was without a son, though we cannot suppose that he ever lacked the capacity to beget. Although he does not commonly distinguish the *energeia* of God from his *dunamis*, Eunomius appears to have implied on one occasion that the *energeia* which gave rise to the Son was the realisation of a latent potentiality (1.244; GNO I 98: *energeia dunameos*). Eunomius now departs from Aristotle by denying that the realisation of this potentiality follows inevitably from the simplicity and eternity of God. If that were so, the product would be eternal (23.1–6), a conclusion repugnant to reason and scripture alike.

Gregory, while agreeing that scripture must be the chief authority, does not accept that the term “begotten” implies an antecedent state in which the Son was not begotten and hence nonexistent. In his letter to Ablabius, he argues that the doctrine of the Trinity does not entail three gods because the nouns *theos* (“god”) and *theotês* (“divinity”) are derived from the verb *theasthai*, “to contemplate”, which characterizes not the essence of deity but its *energeia*, the providential exercise of oversight of the cosmos (GNO III.1.44.22. Cf. GNO II.397.16 and the play on *theos* and *theastês* at Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.9–12). While it is true that all divine acts originate with the Father, proceed through the Son and are perfected by the Spirit, the three remain so inseparably united that no act can be attributed uniquely to one of the Persons. Since, therefore, they are one in operation, there is no legitimate plural of the term *theos* which is derived from the operation. Gregory concedes that the exercise of this divine power need not be eternal, for the world itself was created out of nothing, as were even the denizens of the invisible world. The very fact, however, that the highest of these are acclaimed in the plural as *dunameis* or powers of God is evidence that they do not share the monadic nature of the three divine persons (1.310–313; GNO I 118–119). The Son we know, by contrast, to be the *dunamis* and wisdom of the Father (1.335; GNO I 126); if instead we postulate an intermediate *dunamis*, distinct from the Father's essence, as the instrument of his creation, then that *dunamis*, not the

Father, is his author (1.247; *GNO* I 99). Absurdity is compounded if we introduce *energeia* as a third term, distinct from any of the hypostases; for, having no hypostasis of its own, it could produce only a work commensurate with its own nature, that is, a work without substance (1.253–260; *GNO* I, 100–102). The *dunamis* that is Christ cannot itself be in a state of *dunamis*, but is itself an *energeia*; neither, if we grant to Eunomius that the simplicity of divine beings precludes the separation of properties from the essence, is it possible to distinguish the Father's *dunamis* from that which he is in himself. In short it is he, by the mere fact of being the Father, who generates the Son as his *dunamis* and *energeia*, and hence as a being one in essence as himself (see further Barnes 2001).

The Porphyrian understanding of the *Categories* as the “study of terms insofar as they signify” underlies and elucidates Gregory's efforts to explain the coexistence in the Godhead of the one essence with three hypostases or persons (see Edwards 2016). Although in Letter 38 of the Basilian corpus he likens the persons to three men who share one essence because they belong to a single species, his qualifications of this thesis in his reply to Ablabius show that he recognised the shortcomings of this comparison. Of course God is not a species, for he is by definition the only one of his kind. Neither is he an Aristotelian *deutera ousia* which is predicated of the concrete particular but is never instantiated in reality: on the contrary, whereas humanity is never fully instantiated in any human being, God is fully instantiated in each of his three persons. Careful readers of Letter 38 have agreed that Gregory is not drawing an ontological distinction between the Godhead and its persons, but differentiating the terms of “common” or “catholic” application from those which set each person apart from the others – those by which, to use Gregory's own locution, each of the persons “is known”. In arguing that the persons are individuated not so much by their intrinsic attributes as by their relations to one another, Gregory seems to avail himself of another innovation in Porphyrian logic, the concept of an inseparable relation, which is not an intrinsic attribute of a subject yet pertains to the subject so long as it exists. At all times he prescinds from questions regarding the essence of divinity, which in his writings against Eunomius are repeatedly said to exceed any human power of comprehension.

The *Categories* and the Trinity

Augustine, however, seems to be conversant with a version of Gregory's reasoning which crosses the line between logic and ontology, and thus makes the Godhead a species of which the persons are individual members or else a genus of which they are three species (see further Lienhard 2008). Augustine was perhaps more conscious than any theologian before him that, in affirming the persons to be consubstantial, we not only attribute to them the common property of *deitas* or divinity but declare them to be identical with that being (*deus* or God) whom reason and scripture prove to be the only one of his kind (*On the Trinity* 5.11.12). The Greek term for that which is common to the three is *ousia*, which, though commonly rendered in Latin as *substantia* or substance, is the etymological counterpart of “*essentia*” or “essence” (5.2.3; 7.6.11). None of these terms, however, can be understood to signify a class to which three persons belong, as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all belonged to the class named “man”. It would be uncharitable to impute to Gregory the view that “God” is a class and each of the persons a discrete member of that class, but his argument may have reached Augustine through intermediaries. The Cappadocians do not afford a precedent for a second rejected hypothesis, that the persons are three species of one genus. This fails, Augustine argues, because, although the genus animal is divisible into species, a single animal is not; hence the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit cannot be three species of the one entity who is God (7.6.11; see further Erismann 2012: 152; Cross 2007).

Gregory's letter to Ablabius also draws a comparison between the three divine persons and three statues sculpted from the same gold. Augustine objects (again without naming an adversary) that this would imply a conversion from the potential to the actual, which is impossible in God, and it would not maintain the identity of all three with the one God, because "one statue is less of the gold than two" (7.6.11). If there is one respect in which Augustine can be said to have followed Gregory, it is in his insistence that the attributes which distinguish the persons are relations rather than essential properties (see further Cross 2003). In characterising the Spirit as the love which binds the Father to the Son, he all but identifies the person with the relation, and he may be acquainted, as A.C. Lloyd suggests (1972: 201–202), with Plotinus' argument that relations are more substantial than Aristotle would allow. At the same time, he distinguishes love as substance and love as activity (9.2.2), and we ought not to seek any final pronouncement on the meaning of "person" from a text in which he disclaims any understanding of the term and in which his thoughts avowedly never come to rest (cf. 5.9.10 and 15.22.42).

A further corrective to the misuse of Aristotelian logic is administered by Cyril of Alexandria in the second of his seven books *On the Trinity*. His enemies, once again, are the Eunomians, whom he taxes with incompetence in "the Aristotelian art" when they define the Fathers' *ousia* by a reified adjective, the ingenerate or *agenmêton*. The category of *ousia*, he reminds them, contains the genus and the species, both of which are predicable of many (see further Boulnois 1994: 195–197). The answer to the question "what is a human being?" is not that a human being is an animal, for the names of all species falling under this genus are (in the Aristotelian sense) synonymous (*On the Trinity* 726d–728d). Even to add that human beings are mortal differentiates them only from God and the angels; only when we say further that we are rational, or receptive of mind and knowledge, have we defined our peculiar status in the world. When the Eunomians, therefore, propose to characterise the Father by one adjective, "unbegotten", we must ask them whether this signifies the genus or the differentia. If it signifies the genus, Cyril argues, it tells us nothing; a genus of things unbegotten would be a heterogeneous class of which the Father was only one member. He does not expressly consider the possibility that "unbegotten" might be not so much the differentia of a genus as the *idion*, or property of a species – that is, the typical and peculiar characteristic which enables us to pick out all and only the beings which belong to that species. Yet he tacitly entertains and rejects this thesis when he contends that if unbegottenness were the salient and peculiar characteristic of the Father, it would be as much a necessary truth that "the unbegotten is the Father" as that "the Father is unbegotten". By way of analogy, he adduces the adjective *chremetôdes* – *hinnibile* in Latin – which is the property of being able to neigh (cf. *Thesaurus* 445b, 449d). This being the salient and peculiar property of the horse, it is as true to say that the hinnible is the horse as that the horse is hinnible (731c–d). For reasons that have been set out earlier, however, the unbegotten is a class that includes more than the Father, and hence the statement "the Father is unbegotten" is not subject to the same logical inversion (717c–d etc.). The true *idion* of the Father is not to be unbegotten but to generate the Son (716d). Sonship and Fatherhood are therefore mutually implicative (734a–b), as they are in the world and as all relations are in the *Categories* of Aristotle (6b28).

Two Christian philosophers on the Trinity

All the authors reviewed so far accepted it as an axiom that there cannot be three gods. The foremost of all Greek commentators on Aristotle, however, was John Philoponus, a pupil of the philosopher Ammonius, and perhaps for this reason less willing than most Christians to put logic entirely at the service of dogma (Van Roey 1980). His argument (so far as it can be

retrieved from its Syriac remains) is built on two unexceptionable premises – that divine *ousia* or substance is nothing over and above the three hypostases, and that that which the three hypostases have in common is not strictly denumerable (Fr. 1.1 van Roey). The first of these is universally orthodox, while the second is anticipated in the eighth letter of Basil of Caesarea. Philoponus, however, is the one who underwrites it with the Peripatetic doctrine that the second, or universal, *ousia* is nothing in the world and has a referent only when it is predicated of some concrete particular, or first *ousia* (Erismann 2008: 291 compares Aristotle, *On the Soul* 402b7). We may say that it exists as a mental idea, yet this idea has no number, or rather is one and many at once insofar as it cannot be divided in thought yet is parcelled out to an indefinite multitude of particulars (Fr. 1.3). If we extend this reasoning to the *theotés* or divinity which is ascribed to all three persons, we have said that this is not something in addition to the hypostases, yet no one will contend that it is nothing. What is real is the concrete entity, in this case the hypostasis of Father, Son or Spirit, and God is each of them, not a fourth thing extracted from them; and thus the real divinity of each is his own divinity, not the universal which we abstract from them (1.5a). Divinity is ascribed severally, not generically, and hence there are three *ousiai* and three natures, though they are of a single species; the error of the Sabellians is to conflate the three persons, while that of the Arians is to allot each of the three concrete natures to its own species. We may wonder how much of the argument is merely terminological, but it sufficed to make a heretic of Philoponus, even if the opprobrious term “tritheist” is undeserved (see further Erismann 2010, 2008: 283–287).

In his treatise *On the Trinity*, Boethius achieved a more orthodox baptism of Peripatetic logic. Echoing the preface to *Metaphysics* 6, he divides philosophy into three branches: mathematics, physics and divinity (*On the Trinity* 2.5–16). The last is the highest because it takes for its subject form without matter. A form is by definition what it is, which is to say that all its properties are essential (2.20–21). Although this is indeed the character of the form in Plato, it is also the Greek etymology of the name of the Biblical God, who is the only named denizen of this incorporeal realm in the treatise (2.30–31). Boethius goes on to urge that, since a form becomes subject to accidents only when united with matter, no accidents can be predicated of forms which are exempt from matter and hence from all potentiality for transformation (2.42–46). When a man is just, the man is one thing and his justice is another; when we say of God that he is just, however, he and his justice are one (4.36–41). By the same reasoning, God cannot occupy place, for place is related only contingently to its occupant; to say that he is everywhere is to say that all place is equally present to him (4.54–59). To be, as we have remarked, is of his essence; so then, on the Aristotelian principle that to be is to be one is unity (2.55–57). So far the exposition rests, as it will continue to rest, on premises that are wholly Platonic or Aristotelian; and yet it is already evident that the faith defended here is one that neither of these philosophers entertained.

Can three be one? Boethius follows not only Aristotle but Plotinus in distinguishing between number as an arithmetic quantity and number as a property of the objects to which arithmetic is applied (3.8–9). This contrast between the numerable and the numerator plays its role in other writings by the great Alexandrian, and it also informs Augustine’s reflections on the nature of time; neither of these authors, however, foresees the corollaries which were to be drawn from it by Boethius. The arithmetic unit, he contends, can be added to others to make a plurality, so that as a mathematical proposition it is true that $1+1+1 = 3$ (3.9–10). In the realm of substance, on the other hand, no multiplication of unity is possible: to affirm that each of the persons who is God is also a unity is as though one were to say “sword”, then “blade”, then “brand” (3.19–22). This is a Porphyrian example of homonymity, which permits us to apply three distinct terms to an identical object. And yet, this is not the logic of the Trinity, as Boethius

concedes, for while we hold that the Father, the Son and the Spirit are a single God, we do not hold that they differ only in name (3.49–53). Since they are of one essence, which is nothing less than the unity of the Godhead, they cannot differ in their essential qualities. Quantity cannot be predicated of incorporeal subjects, and hence it is only the category of relation that can set one apart from another (5.1–5). The relations of eternal and unchanging objects cannot be contingent, as they are in the world of material particulars; at the same time, it remains as true of the higher world as of the lower that the essence is independent of relation (5.17–34). God, who is identical with his own essence, cannot differ from God with respect to his divinity, and it is consequently the one God who is identical with Father, Son and Spirit (5.42–57). Nor can these persons occupy different spaces, as otherwise identical particulars do in our world (5.49). It is the very predication of relations, and this alone, that constitutes the numerability (*numerositas*) of the Trinity, while the unity consists in the *indifferentia*, or indiscernibility, of the essence (6.1–7). Such is the peculiar logic of incorporeality, which we apprehend by intellect, not by the senses or the imagination, and thus (as Boethius intimates) by the science of divinity but not by those of physics or mathematics.

The *Categories* and Christology

Aristotelian terminology enters the Christological debate with a tentative borrowing from Porphyry by Cyril of Alexandria. Resolved as he is to present an account of one Christ who is both God and man, he affirms that all Christ's attributes, both divine and human, are *idia* – that is, proper – to the Logos: because, however, his human individuality came into being only when he assumed the flesh, his human attributes have the status of accidents, whereas those that he has by virtue of his divinity are inseparable and eternal (Siddals 1987: 350–358). Cyril is here subsuming under the one term *idion* both the essential properties of a species and the contingent properties of an individual, which Porphyry preferred to call *idiômata*. Following Alexander of Aphrodisias, Cyril and his disciples recognise three kinds of mixture: juxtaposition (*parathesis*), mingling (*mixis*) and mixture (*krasis*). Severus of Antioch writes that in his character as God the Word is simple, while as Christ he is the composite of his *ousiai*, by which we must understand not merely an aggregate of qualities, but that in which the qualities inhere. The God-man cannot simply be a composite of divine and human properties, any more than a man can be constituted simply by rationality and blackness (*First Letter*, at Torrance 1988: 155). In contrast to Cyril, Severus declares that the nature or *ousia* of the God whom Christians worship is not one to an *idion* can be assigned (Torrance 1988: 193). In his third letter, the noun *ousia* no longer denotes a nature but, as in the *Categories*, a concrete entity, for example a man or a horse (Torrance 1988: 207). If nature and *ousia* are synonymous, to be in two natures is to be two *ousiai*: Christ the Word, however, is one *ousia* whose nature is immutable even when he takes the flesh which is our nature to be his own flesh (Torrance 1988: 208–211).

Leontius of Byzantium, in his treatise *Against the Nestorians and Eutychians*, attempts to refute Severus by distinguishing the hypostasis from the *enhupostatos*, or hypostatic. The monophysites (that is, advocates of a single nature in Christ), are right to assert that a nature must be hypostatic, but wrong to identify either the divine or the human nature of Christ with his one hypostasis. To say that the *phusis* – that is, the *ousia* – is hypostatic rather than anhypostatic (*anhupostatos*) is to say that it subsists in an individual, and it is true that no nature can subsist otherwise. But, whereas the *ousia* confers the *eidos* or form on the subject, the *hypostasis* is the subject itself, subsisting as this individual; the *ousia* gives the *katholikon pragma* – the thing taken universally – its *kharaktêr* or distinctive mark (134.8), but we speak of the *hypostasis* in distinguishing the individual from the universal (134.5–9). A *hypostasis* may be one of many

individuals, sharing one nature but differing in number, or a composite of two natures, which (as with soul and body) cannot subsist alone, although neither belongs to the definition of the other (134.18–19). The *hypostasis* is common to both natures, yet each nature has its own *logos* (134.20) – a conscious echo, no doubt, of *logos tēs ousias* in the first sentence of the *Categories*, just as the *enhypostatos* approximates to the first *ousia* when it is defined as that which does not exist as an accident or in another subject (132.22–23). As every *hypostasis* therefore is *enousios* (that is to say, a representative of a universal substance), so every *ousia*, if it has a place in our world, is *enhypostatos*, or hypostatic (see further Daley 1976 against Loofs 1887: 65–68). The adjectives, like the nouns, are complementary, one universalising the individual and one individuating the universal (see further Krausmüller 2011; Zachhuber 2014). In a supplementary treatise handling certain arguments in a more technical manner, Leontius reminds Severus that Cyril regarded “Christ” as a titular designation, and hence did not accord to it the same onomastic function that we accord to such nouns as “ox”, “horse” and “human being”, each of which can indeed be said to denote a single *phusis*, when we mean by this a particular member of an *eidos* or species (328.10–15). Although he eschews the nomenclature of the *Categories*, he clearly implies that Severus has confused the second with the first *ousia*, thus mistaking the person who is Jesus Christ for that which we predicate of him.

Philoponus wrote his *Arbiter* to prove that Cyril’s description of Christ as “one divine nature enfleshed” was a more perspicuous formulation of the truth that Chalcedon had also tried to convey in its illogical attribution of two natures to the one person of Jesus Christ. By nature, as he explains in a tacit rebuttal of Leontius, we may mean either the “common intelligible content” of a species or the instantiation of that common content in an individual being (Lang 2001: 191). No being can be an instantiation of two common natures; when therefore we wish to affirm that Christ is the perfect representative both of divinity and of humanity, we do not say with Chalcedon that he has two natures, but rather that he is of one composite nature. He goes on to repeat an analogy drawn by Cyril between the conjunction of the divine and the human in Christ and the conjunction of soul and body in human beings: just as a soul and a body constitute not one man but two, so too in Christ there is only one person, fully God and fully man. The assumption that soul and body are distinct yet inseparable is more reminiscent of Aristotle’s doctrine that the soul is the form of the body than of Plato’s view that the body is a temporary instrument of the soul.

Boethius, a distinguished commentator on the logical works of Aristotle (Shiel 1990), was also a zealous champion of Chalcedonian orthodoxy. He commences his refutation of both the monophysites and the Nestorians by setting out three definitions of nature. The first, derived from the *Categories*, comprehends whatever exists in any sense, excluding only that which is *nihil* or nothing (*Against Eutyches and Nestorius* 1.7–17). The second, derived from the *Physics*, makes nature is the principle of all motion that is proper rather than extrinsic to the moving subject (1.39–40). According to the third definition, nature is the differentia which stamps a thing as a member of a species (1.54–55). Here the corresponding term would seem to be *idion* (property), as this was employed in Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, and Boethius admits as much when he later defines a nature as “the specific property of a given substance” (4.7). Pursuing the method of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, Boethius now divides corporeal substances into the living and the non-living, the living into the sentient and non-sentient, and the sentient into the rational and the irrational (2.18–23). The term *persona*, predicable only of rational beings (2.28–36), has the converse definition to that of *natura*: “the individual substance of a rational nature (*naturae rationabilis individua substantia*)” at 3.4–5. *Substantia* is here understood to signify the concrete subject of properties, in contrast to *subsistentia*, which signifies that which requires no properties for its existence. Genera and species are examples of *subsistentiae*, and so is God, that is the

undifferentiated Godhead, in contrast to the Father, the Son and the Spirit, who are called *substantiae* not because they are differentiated by their accidents but because they provide the world with its ontological foundation (3.87–98). Each of us is a *substantia* which instantiates a *subsistentia*; in God before incarnation, the *subsistentia* and the *substantia* coincide (3.87–90). The incarnate Christ is one *substantia*, in the sense of a concrete subject of properties; he has taken on a *natura* in the third sense by becoming a member of the human species. The two natures and the one person coexist because person and nature belong to different orders of being and can stand in two different relations to one another. That person or rational substance who is Christ is now a particular instance of that *subsistentia* which is exhibited in all humans, but has not (as the monophysites fancy) ceased to be identical with the eternal *subsistentia* which is God.

Time and eternity

The two most accomplished philosophers of the ancient church were Boethius and Philoponus, the one perhaps a reader and the other a disciple of the Peripatetic Ammonius of Alexandria. It will therefore be instructive to end this chapter with a summary of their two most celebrated arguments, one a refinement of Origen's defence of divine foreknowledge, the other a counterpoint to the most important thesis of Gregory of Nyssa in his vindication of the Nicene Creed.

In his *Consolation of Philosophy*, the imprisoned Boethius takes up the case for providence against those who opine that human affairs are ruled by fate. His interlocutor, Dame Philosophy, tells him that fate is the temporal bailiff of providence, which issues its decrees in accordance with the simplicity of the divine intelligence before entrusting the execution of them to the temporal nexus (4.6.25–42). Thus everything has its reason, whether or not it is visible to us. The wicked are punished as an example to others and spared in order that they may repent (4.6.162–167); the good who appear to be cut off prematurely will not be called to account for the sins that they might otherwise have committed (4.6.133–140). In Book 5, the discussion turns to chance, which in the common view is no less inimical to human liberty than is fate. Philosophy notes that Aristotle defines chance as the unintended confluence of two intentional actions (5.1.35–38): such an outcome, unforeseen though it is, is the intelligible corollary of acts which are free and purposeful, and thus no proof that our destiny lies outside our control. The true enemy of freedom is choice itself when we surrender ourselves to vice and allow our reason to be swallowed by animal passions (5.1.20–27). But now a new difficulty arises: how can we be free if our actions have been foreseen by God since before the beginning of the world? Even if we say that the event is the cause of knowledge, and not the knowledge of the event, the very fact that God knows now what I shall do in the future entails that I am not able to influence my own future and hence am not free (5.16.16–40).

Philosophy rejoins that to God all times are one, the future no less than the past: his knowledge of the future is at once no less definitive, and no more determinative, than our knowledge of the past (5.4.46–56). To explain how such timeless cognition is possible for God yet unattainable for us, she draws a distinction between the intelligible and the rational, which Boethius himself had already broached in his logical writings. Our senses perceive the material phenomenon; imagination grasps the material object in its totality, while reason abstracts the universal form which gives us a knowledge of its essence (5.5.26–38). The higher faculty comprehends the lower but is not comprehended by it; our ways as rational creatures are perfectly known to God, but his intellectual vision remains unfathomable to us (5.5.46–56). God is eternal, the world perpetual: the events that unfold in the future of the world will be contingent in themselves, as they are products of free agency, but insofar as God knows them – or, as we wrongly say, foreknows them – it is necessarily true that they will occur (5.5.59–72).

Boethius rather ignores than refutes the Aristotelian arguments for the eternity of the cosmos. Christians before him had been content to set revelation against philosophy, or at most to protest that the world cannot be created in time because time and the world are coeval. Philoponus was the first to undertake a rebuttal of Aristotle on Aristotelian premises, maintaining in his *Commentary on the Physics* that if the world had no beginning we should be forced to admit that the number of humans who have lived before us constitutes an infinite set. His most extensive arguments are directed not against Aristotle himself but against the Neoplatonist Proclus, whose theses demonstrating the eternity of the world were all the more difficult to answer when they mimicked the catholic arguments for the eternity of the Son. If it is true that the Father begets the Son by virtue of his mere existence, why is it not equally true that by virtue of his existence he is always creating a world?

If God is changeless, Proclus contends, his *dunamis* is eternal, and his *energeia* will also be eternal. If we posit instead a temporary *energeia* supervening upon an eternal *dunamis*, we are bound to posit a god above the demiurge, since Aristotle teaches that whatever exists in *dunamis* cannot actualise itself but must be actualised by that which already exists in *energeia* (43.8–24). Philoponus answers Aristotle from Aristotle: the *Metaphysics* distinguishes two kinds of *dunamis*, receptivity and habit. It is true that a boy who is merely receptive to knowledge cannot learn without a teacher, but the teacher who already possesses the knowledge may elect either to exercise or not to exercise it, requiring in both cases no other agency than his own will (41.3–42.17). This second *dunamis*, or *hexis*, is also the first *energeia*, or actuality, of its possessor, which makes possible the exercise of the second *energeia* or activity (48.25–49.6). Thus, while his eternal capacity for creation does entail that God is eternally the Creator, it does not entail the eternity of the cosmos, because it is one thing to be the creator in actuality and another to exercise the creative activity (49.20–24).

But does this not entail some change in a God who is supposed to be immutable? Equating Plato's demiurge with the unmoved mover of Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Proclus objects that, since he cannot undergo change, he cannot begin to cause that of which he was hitherto not the cause (55.25–56.14). If, on the other hand, we suppose that the mover too is subject to *kinesis*, we must conclude that its *energeia* was hitherto *atelés* or imperfect, since (as Aristotle points out) the perfect cannot become more perfect and would not allow its perfection to be impaired (56.15–22). Again the response of Philoponus is to distinguish the *energeia* which consists in actuality from that which consists in activity: when the one who possesses the actuality exercises the activity, a change takes place indeed, but only (as Aristotle tells us) in the object of the action (87.13–18, citing *On the Soul* 417b5). The builder is not always building; when he does so, he does not become either more or less a builder, but the change occurs in the matter on which he works (66.12–16). From Aristotle, we also learn that the supervenience of the form on the matter is not a process but a consummation which occurs instantaneously (*akhrônôs* at 63.4–5 and 65.19–21). Since God creates the matter with the form by a sovereign act of will, his activity and the instantaneous completion of his activity coincide. It follows that he is subject to none of the four kinds of *kinêsis* which are distinguished by Aristotle, for the common feature of generation, locomotion, growth and alteration is that all take place in time (68.23–74.23).

The timelessness of divine knowledge and the timelessness of divine willing are the tantalising propositions advanced by these Christian sons of the Lyceum to counteract pagan criticisms of two fundamental articles of faith. The mediaeval elaboration of their arguments cannot be pursued in the present volume, but enough has been said to illustrate the piquancy of Aristotelian thought in late antiquity, both as a stimulus and as an astringent to Christian reasoning on things human and divine.

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Christians and Stoics

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If there was a dominant philosophy in the Roman world, it was that of the Stoics – or rather their ethical teaching, which was easily digested by a culture that prized tenacity of purpose and fidelity in discipline above more cerebral or emollient virtues (Arnold 1911). Those for whom philosophy was above all a practical exercise turned to the Stoics for moral casuistry and for advice on the education of the will. Stoic precepts found their way into rival systems, yet it was this school that produced the most enduring works of counsel of exhortation in the early Roman Empire, both in Latin and in Greek. The consequences of this pragmatic triumph, however, were not propitious to the survival of Stoicism as a philosophic sect, for in its insistence that nothing matters apart from conduct, it lost sight of its founders and developed no tradition of commentary to compete with that which perpetuated the writings of Plato and Aristotle under the aegis of Neoplatonism. Doctrines of the Stoa were adopted surreptitiously by Plotinus and his disciples (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 14; Graese 1972), while its own professors have left barely a trace on history after Constantine. Thus, while the marks of Stoicism are everywhere, it is hard to say what was borrowed, what was absorbed through intermediaries and what had come to pass for received opinion. This chapter will confine itself to the age before Constantine, in which Stoicism still enjoyed sufficient prominence as a school to be identified as a source distinct from other traditions, including those were growing up within the church itself.

The early Stoa

By the general agreement of ancient authors, the founder of Stoicism was Zeno of Citium, who came to Athens from Phoenicia in 313 B.C. He first took as his master the Cynic Crates, who, like the rest of his school, was largely indifferent to metaphysics and doggedly subversive rather than systematic in his ethical conduct. When Zeno set up as a teacher in the *Stoa Poikilê* (painted colonnade) from which the Stoics derived their name, he remained true to the chief principle of the Cynics, that nothing licensed by human societies can be foreign to human nature, and it is said that in his *Republic* he condoned the practice of incest on the argument that it was not forbidden in Persia (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 17.121; Waerdt 1994). In fact he maintained that the end of all moral striving and intellectual speculation was to live in accordance with nature;

in contrast to the Cynics, however, he held that it is only through the study of philosophy in all its three branches – logic, ethics and physics – that we can ascertain what is truly in accordance with nature, that is with the goal not merely of loving but of living in rational equanimity. Humans being distinguished from the brute world by their capacity for reason, it is not enough that our impulses should be humoured, although these impulses are conducive to life, and in that sense good, in both animals and humans. The wise man’s quest for equanimity may require him to forgo the satisfaction of certain appetites and to place no value on the material goods that Aristotle had deemed essential to happiness. Such goods being all too often the gifts of fortune, another desideratum of equanimity is to leave to fate those things which we cannot control and to cultivate instead the one good that lies wholly within our power, the extinction of the passions. Fear and desire with respect to the future, exhilaration and grief with respect to the present, are the four tormentors of the untutored soul (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.116), and to have vanquished them completely is to be one’s master, even when in the world’s eyes one is labouring under poverty, pain, captivity or disgrace.

It seems that Zeno’s position can be expounded with little reference to supernatural agency. While he is never characterized as an atheist, he has no concept of a transcendent god because he has no concept of the incorporeal. The soul which inhabits our bodies is a body of subtler texture; similarly the Logos or reason which pervades the cosmos, and to which the Greeks give the name of Zeus, is one of the elements, sometimes conceived as a tenuous species of fire, sometimes receiving the special appellation of pneuma or spirit. In its “spermatic character”, this Logos sows rational principles of existence, growth and action in all the beings that populate the universe (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.135–136). God alone survives the *ekpurōsis*, or final combustion, of each world, and as each successive world is a replica of the one that went before it, his memory is the source of his foreknowledge (SVF 2.625; Plutarch, *Stoic Contradictions* 1953b). Warm religious sentiment enters the Stoa only with Cleanthes, frequently described as its second founder, and remembered chiefly for his eloquent hymn to Zeus (SVF 1.537; Zuntz 1958). Here the principles of Zeno’s physics are fused with the Heraclitean doctrines that all things are changes of fire: and that these revolutions are governed by a logos to which the Logos within us bears witness (see Long 1975). Whereas Heraclitus, however, declares that God is indifferent to good and evil, Cleanthes ascribes to Zeus a paternal solicitude for the cosmos, crediting him with a love of that which seems to us unlovable, but denying him any part in the works of those who do evil through ignorance of law. The prayer of the sage will not be for any good of his own imagining, but only to be led at all times by “Zeus and destiny”, these two being one inasmuch as nothing ordained by fate can be contrary to nature.

The refinement of Stoic philosophy in response to objections from other schools was not a work for a poet, and the third founder of the school, Chrysippus, was infamous not only for the abundance of his writings but for the ruggedness and obscurity of his style. He believed not only in God, but in gods, so long as it was understood that the myths of the poets are allegories in which the supernatural actors personify physical forces. Against those who denied that a corporeal deity can be omnipresent, he urged that nature furnishes examples of the mutual interpenetration of bodies whenever wine is mixed with water or iron suffused by fire; the same model will account for the presence of soul in body and that of god in the world (Todd 1976: 114–117). Gods and humans together constitute the cosmos or world which is the polis or commonwealth of the wise man (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 7.129–130; cf. Obbink 1999: 184). Against the Cynics and Sceptics who sneered at oracles, Chrysippus argued that if the gods love mortals they will wish to apprise them of impending dangers and tribulations (Cicero, *On Divination* 1.38.82–39.84). Against the Peripatetics, he maintained that definite knowledge of the future is conveyed by prophecy, drawing the corollary that whatever is predicted

is predetermined. Against the idle argument – “once the birth of my child is foretold, it will come about even if I abstain from sexual congress” – he urged that the oracle implicitly predicts the required conditions for its fulfilment (Bobzien 1998: 198–217). It appears, however, that he was unwilling to draw the inference that I am not free if my actions are foreknown. On the contrary, human beings have a special place in the natural order because of their unique capacity for deliberation (*SVF* 2.1152). We are free to determine, not the course of events, but our own response to it; by aligning my reason with the omnipresent logos, I can achieve the goal of loving in accordance with nature – or at least of willing to do so, which is the true criterion of virtue (Cicero, *On Ends* 3.31). Every transgression is a falling away from my character as a rational agent, and Chrysippus endorsed the principle already laid down by Zeno, that all sins are of equal weight, and hence all equally unworthy of indulgence (*SVF* 3.529; Cicero, *On Ends* 4.56). The wise man may be only an ideal, but one who propagates that ideal in act and word will have no pity for the infirmities of others, any more than for his own.

As they acknowledged no one founder, later Stoics could boast that they were not bound by an *ipse dixit*, like the adepts of Epicurus and Pythagoras; nor did they ever imitate the Platonists and Peripatetics in the writing of commentaries on their intellectual precursors. Our specimens of Stoic commentary are the *Homeric Allegories* of a certain Heraclitus, which apply figurative readings to texts that would otherwise expose the poet to charges of impiety, and the *Epidrome* of Cornutus, which expounds the attributes of the Greek gods according to a variety of forced and ingenious etymologies (see further Most 1989). It was even possible for a professing Stoic like Posidonius, the head of a school in Rhodes, to maintain against Chrysippus that the affections (which he distinguishes from passion) cannot be uprooted from the soul (Cooper 1999). This argument assumes, with the Platonists, that the soul is a composite, whereas Zeno and Chrysippus had both maintained that the *pneuma* which constitutes the soul is as homogeneous as God. Posidonius also appears to have ramified the Stoic understanding of providence by setting it above both fate and nature (Laffranque 1964: 33–34). For all that, Posidonius agrees with his Stoic precursors that nothing is good but the will to live in accordance with nature, and that divination is possible only because whatever the gods foresee is fated to occur (Laffranque 1964: 347).

The Roman era

In the absence of a prose classic, the most popular introduction to Stoic cosmology was the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, a versified itinerary of stars which coupled weather lore with moral exhortation in its eloquent stratigraphy of the cosmos. In the Roman era, ethics began to dominate Stoic teaching, and it is almost equally true that Stoic teaching began to dominate ethics. Antiochus of Ascalon, for example, drew heavily on this tradition in his efforts to escape the scepticism of Carneades (itself an antidote to Stoic dogmatism) and furnish the Academy with a system of probable, if not irrefragable, beliefs. Cicero appears in his treatise *On Ends* to prefer the casuistry of Antiochus to the doctrinaire invocation of either nature or pleasure as the sole criterion of the Good. Nevertheless, he shows a clear partiality for the Stoics not only in this work but in his dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods*, where the Stoic interlocutor, though apparently worsted in argument by the Sceptic, is none the less judged to hold the most likely position. In the *Tusculan Disputations*, an exercise in self-consolation after the death of Cicero's daughter Tullia, he no longer thinks it excessive to seek the passionlessness which, according to Chrysippus, would teach a man to be happy even when he is being roasted alive. Not only the leading philosopher of his day but the leading poet, Cicero is the author of the first of three Latin renderings of Aratus. Yet, then as now, he owed his fame above all to his versatility as an

advocate, and when his brief demanded it, he could ridicule Cato the Younger for his moral intractability and his refusal to acknowledge degrees of sin (*For Murena* 60–66).

Cato is the most lauded character, though not the hero, of Lucan's unheroic poem *The Civil War*, in which we are given to understand that the better cause was not the one that pleased the gods. Lucan, executed for conspiracy against Nero, nonetheless belongs to a roll of Stoics who achieved political martyrdom. Exile rather than death was the lot of Musonius Rufus, a preacher whose extant homilies, or fragments of homilies, show no interest either in theology or in natural philosophy, but argue for vegetarianism in diet, for faithful marriage as the cement of society and for the teaching of philosophy to both sexes on the premiss that they are equal in mental capacity (Inwood 2017). Lucan's uncle Seneca, a more seminal thinker than either, was required on the same occasion to take his own life. His Stoicism had not forbidden either to write bloody works for the stage or to flatter Nero with a lampoon on his predecessor Claudius. His philosophical writings are predominately ethical, except for his seven books on natural questions. At his most conversational, in his *Letters to Lucilius*, he is a latitudinarian, freely quoting from Epicurus and confessing his inability to sustain his youthful experiment in vegetarianism (Letter 108.23). His treatise *On Clemency* celebrates a virtue seldom commended by the Greek Stoics, although in Rome it had been more often praised than practised. His treatise *On Anger*, by contrast, is as rigorous as any of his precursors could have wished in its prohibition of consent to the incipient stirrings of passion. Together with Aulus Gellius (*Attic Nights* 19.1.15–21), Seneca is our witness to the Stoic doctrine that every passion is preceded by a first motion or *propathēia*, originating only in our somatic nature and hence not culpable unless it is ratified by the will (*On Anger* 2.3.1 etc.). He is no less austere in theodicy than in psychology, admonishing readers of his essay *On Providence* that the righteous suffer unjustly so that others may learn to accept their due of suffering (6.3): if we would not be dragged hither and thither by fortune (5.4), we must yield ourselves voluntarily to fate (5.8).

Rome was also the home of Epictetus, a pupil of Musonius, and the only slave in the ancient world to have left us a substantial body of writing. He expounded the works of Chrysippus and adopted an equally hirsute style in his own discourses, which were transcribed by his freeborn pupil Arrian. He will not, for all that, allow the “slaves” who frequent his school to imagine that mere quotation will buy their freedom: to have mastered the whole of Chrysippus is no more a test of virtue than to own a pair of dumbbells is a proof of muscular strength. His originality seems to lie above all in his conviction that it lies in our own power of choice (*prohairesis*) to cultivate virtue, doggedly though not infallibly, by the right use of our mental impressions (Long 2002: 34, 207–222). Notwithstanding his firm belief in providence, Epictetus can admire the self-sufficiency of the Cynic, limning his ideal portrait in a long sermon on the labours of Heracles (*Discourses* 3.22). More eloquent, more urbane and not so rigid a Stoic is the Emperor Marcus Aurelius, whose notes to himself are popularly known as his *Meditations* (Rist 1982). Marcus seems, as Porphyry was to say of Plotinus, ashamed to be in the body, and preserves his inward probity by frequent meditation on its decay (*Meditations* 9.3 etc.; Rutherford 1989: 244–250). His moral fortitude is enhanced by a Roman desire to do the work of a man (8.26; 10.8), and his faith in providence by a Platonic sense of an indwelling god.

Stoicism and Early Christianity

It is no surprise that the first Stoic to be cited in Christian literature is Aratus, for he is that “poet of your own” who, according to Paul on the Areopagus, had declared all humans to be the offspring of God (Acts 17.28). The Stoics and Epicureans to whom he preached will have observed that he substituted god for Zeus and modified the verb *eimen* (we are) to *esmen*, two

changes anticipated by the Jewish apologist Aristobulus (Edwards 1992). Whether or not he knew Aratus at first hand, the apostle's desire to gather all nations into the *politeuma* or citizenship of heaven (Philippians 3.21) has been compared to the exhortations of the Stoics that the wise should be citizens of the world – or, as Marcus Aurelius said, should address their hymns no more to the city of Cecrops but to the city of Zeus (*Meditations* 4.23; Stanton 1968). Philo had already commended Abraham as a *kosmopolitês* (*On the Migration of Abraham* 11.58), hinting that he had left behind the errors of the Stoics when he bade farewell to the astrologers of Chaldea. In *Every Good Man is Free*, he superimposes the attributes of the Stoic sage on the righteous Jew, and Paul is equally zealous in his teaching that the precondition of freedom is to renounce all that the world loves. In Paul as in the Stoics, the *pneuma* or spirit is not only the ruling element in the soul but the medium of both power and knowledge in God himself. Analogies have been multiplied to fill whole volumes and volumes have been written to say in reply that the God of the Stoics is not a creator or an active figure in history, that no meaning could have been attached by a Stoic to his incarnation, that even Stoics who entertained some notion of immortality never envisaged a resurrection of the body, and that Paul's account of our present state of bondage is incomprehensible without some notion of a historic fall and the corporate propagation of sin (see further Engberg-Pedersen 2000).

Stoic and Cynic are both protean categories, as is evident from the fact that Epictetus serves as a quarry for parallels between the teaching of both schools and that of the gospels. The Jesus of Mark, who is certainly no stranger to first motions, masters grief and fear with exemplary resolution (Thorsteinsson 2018: 33–71): it is not, however, the mere subjugation of passion that distinguishes the Stoic. Seneca, like Jesus, tells us not to return a blow (*On Curbing Anger* 2.32), but then neither his arguments for the restraint of anger nor his precepts for maintaining this restraint are those of the Sermon on the Mount. This is not to deny that there is much in common between the outward forms of Christian and Stoic morality; we can only be astonished indeed that so little of this appears in the forged correspondence of Paul and Seneca, whose author fails to credit either man with a sentiment worthy of repetition. Nor, although he wrote Latin of the kind that the apostle might have acquired in a Roman prison, does he come within sight of the unlaboured elegance for which Seneca strove in his letters and discourses (see further, however, Ramelli 2013). There is more philosophy in the Greek commentary on Aratus which Hippolytus published as a document of the Peratic heresy (*Refutation* 4.46–50; 5.12–13): he names its author as the magician Euphrates, who is otherwise unknown unless we identify him with the Stoic philosopher who is praised by Pliny but vilified by Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonius* as an unprincipled rival and gadfly to the Pythagorean sage (Edwards 1994).

Justin Martyr mentions the Stoics in his *First Apology* only to charge them (erroneously) with teaching that God will perish in the final conflagration (*First Apology* 20). In his *Second Apology* (7), he complains that they err again by supposing that all is subject to fate, thus denying freedom of choice not only to humans and angels but to God himself, and robbing the fire of its proper use as an instrument of moral retribution. The ethical philosophy of the Stoics, on the other hand, he finds admirable, citing Musonius in particular (*Second Apology* 8). They owe this, he says, to the seed of the *logos* in every nation, and he credits them in chapter 13 with a share in the spermatoc *logos* which gives them knowledge of that which is akin (*to sungenes*). This passage is confessedly obscure (see Holte 1958), but Justin tells us clearly enough in his *First Apology* (44) that, while some Greeks possess enough *logos* or reason to see the folly and turpitude of polytheism, the “seeds” which propagate knowledge of the true God are sown by prophecy and not by direct communication to the philosophers. It is likely, as Thorsteinsson argues (2012), that most of his information came at second hand, already accompanied by the “stock criticisms”. Athenagoras ascribes to the Stoics the Heraclitean doctrine that God is a fire

which pervades all things and assumes the character of each substance, deducing that while they are polytheists in name they acknowledge the unity of God (*Embassy* 6; cf. 22). Echoing Justin, he urges that if all things are doomed to be swallowed up in the last conflagration, the gods themselves will perish, and the operation of providence (distinguished as the active cause from matter, the passive cause) will come to nothing (*Embassy* 19). Tatian, in his one reference to them, notes that the Stoics in fact acknowledge no final day, and contrasts their doctrine of recurrent cycles with the Christian scenario of a once-for-all resurrection (*Oration to the Greeks* 6).

Irenaeus holds that the soul is able to receive a figure coterminous with the body that it inhabits (*Against Heresies* 2.19.4; 2.34.4); he seems to agree with Chrysippus in regarding the human person as a mixture by penetration of two corporeal substances, each retaining its properties and the capacity to act upon the other (Briggman 2019: 140–162). On the other hand, while he describes the incarnation as a mixture in which the divine and the human retain their specific properties, the incorporeality of the Logos forbids us to treat this as a union analogous to that of soul and body. The Logos may act through the flesh or may choose to be dormant, but it is never the subject of reciprocal action. The model for later accounts of the incarnation was the “unconfused commingling” of corporeals and incorporeals postulated by Ammonius Saccas, the teacher of Plotinus (Nemesius, *Nature of Man* 2.108); since, however, Irenaeus could not have read Ammonius, we must be willing to grant that this may be a case in which a Christian, holding by faith what no Greek school could prove by reason, found himself stumbling into originality. It has been argued that a younger contemporary of Irenaeus, Callistus of Rome, conceived the two natures as partners in Christ’s suffering (Heine 1998: 75–78), but the evidence comes at second hand from an unfriendly source (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 9.12.18).

Even the learned Clement of Alexandria, who cites Plato over 600 times and frequently in his own words, would be judged to know almost nothing of the Stoics if explicit naming and quotation were the sole proofs of acquaintance. Although he thinks Chrysippus the prince of logicians, he offers no anatomy of Stoic logic in his eighth book to match his enumeration of Aristotle’s ten categories or his paraphrase of the method of collection and division in the Sophist. Stoic views on the origin of the sun are mentioned only to illustrate the dissonance of philosophical opinions (*Stromateis* 8.2.4.3), while their refusal to grant a soul to plants exemplifies the difficulties of agreeing on definitions even of terms that all schools have in common (8.4.10.4). Of course, he abhors the notion that the Creator of all bodies should be a body (*Stromateis* 1.10.51.1), imputing to the Stoics the Epicurean tenet that God needs sensory organs (7.7.37.1), and complaining at *Protrepticus* 66.3 that they make him a prisoner to the basest of his creatures. The theory that God pervades the world as an architectonic fire (*Stromateis* 5.14.100.4) is said (at least obliquely) to be derived from Heraclitus at *Stromateis* 5.1.9.4 and 5.14.105.1. He notes with approval that, while they make matter the substrate of the cosmos (*Stromateis* 5.14.89.5), the Stoics do not hold the cosmos to be eternal (5.14.97.4). Without naming them, he reveals an accurate knowledge of Stoic discussions of causality, distinguishing the four species of cause as prokatarctic, synectic, cooperative and prerequisite. The Father, he explains, is the prokatarctic or primordial cause of education, the teacher the prerequisite of conditional cause, the pupil the cooperative cause, and time the prerequisite cause which in itself does nothing (*Stromateis* 8.9.33.1–9). This seems to be his own version of the taxonomy of Chrysippus (see Bobzien 1999: 218–228), which Clement pursues through its further refinements – distinguishing joint from cooperative causes and noting that causes often act reciprocally – to a point that was more likely to be reached in the second century by critics or parodists of the school than by practising Stoics for whom ethics constituted the whole of philosophy (see Plutarch, *Stoic Contradictions* 1055f–1056d).

Clement himself commends their moral teaching and has sometimes been regarded as their disciple (Parker 1901). At *Stromateis* 2.4.19.4, he reproduces a list of the virtues that accompany wisdom, and at 4.4.19.1 he applauds their view that the soul of the wise man cannot be inclined to good or evil by the affections of the body. While he notes affinities between the ethical teachings of the Stoics and those of the Platonists (5.14.97.2–6 and 6.2.27.3), and even accuses Zeno of plagiarism from his Athenian predecessor (5.14.95.1–2; cf. 2.19.101.1), he credits the Stoics alone with the Pauline doctrine that the true city of the righteous is heaven (4.26.172.2), he admires the severe pronouncement that not even a finger ought to be stirred without reason (2.10.83.1), and he is familiar with the use of the adjective *kathêkôn* to denote right action on the basis of reason (1.12.102.2). He knows enough of the history of the school to say that the younger Stoics urge us to live in accordance with the human constitution rather than nature (2.21.129.5). He justifies his own practice of reading the scriptures allegorically by asserting that some of Zeno's book were reserved for his close disciples (5.9.58.2), and he argues that the Stoics agree with Plato and the scriptures when they describe the soul's conversion to wisdom as a turning to God (4.6.28.1). For all that, he suspects that their materialism, entailing as it does that our reasoning faculty participates in the one Logos, has the atheistic corollary that divine and human virtues are the same (7.7.31.1).

Clement is the first Christian writer to inculcate *apatheia*, or passionlessness, as the virtue of the ideal Christian (Osborn 2005: 236–240). He is also unique among catholic theologians in maintaining that Christ, the paragon of humanity, was so exempt from bodily infirmity that even his hunger in the wilderness was affected for our sake (*Stromateis* 3.7.59.1; see Grillmeier 1975: 357–35). Here we see what separates the churchman from the Stoic, for whereas the latter sets the wise man before himself as a pattern without supposing that such a man has ever existed, the Christian regards Christ not only as the living paradigm of wisdom but as the one who has created every human in his image with the intention of shaping every human into his perfect likeness (Osborn 2005: 233–236). Again Christ is the exemplar of *autarkeia* or self-sufficiency, a condition cultivated by the Stoics in emulation of the Cynics, who professed to have attained it (see further Gibbons 2017: 131–166). In Clement *autarkeia* is above all freedom from avarice, in accordance with the Old Testament's praise of the righteous man as one who feeds the poor. Because the relief of the poor is their true obligation, rather than the mere exoneration of their souls from material burdens, Clement advises his wealthy coreligionists that they need not give up their possessions so long as they hold them at the disposal of the church and perceive that they themselves are the true recipients of mercy when their alms are repaid with blessing (*Who is the Wise man that shall be Saved?*). Stoic philanthropy does not commonly take this form and is not commonly underwritten by the hope of enjoying the favour of God and growing into his likeness. Stoic virtue and Christian righteousness could both be characterized as life in accordance with the Logos: for the Stoics, however, logos is that elemental stuff which humans share with God, not the Creator of all from nothing, who willingly forfeited his impassibility to wear a crown of thorns (*Paedagogus* 2.8.75.2).

Tertullian

We often hear that Tertullian was a Stoic, and a perusal of his tract *On the Soul* seems to lend some colour to this assertion. The Stoics, he says, maintain *paene nobiscum*, almost with us, the identity of *anima* (soul) with *pneuma* or spirit, thereby verifying Tertullian's own belief that Adam received his soul from the *flatus* (breath) which God infused into his nostrils at Genesis 2.7 (*On the Soul* 5.2). Testimony is elicited from both Plato and the Stoics that the body inhales the soul at birth and exhales it at death, although the Stoics are later said to be distinguished

from the Platonists by their doctrine that the soul has its source in *rigor aeris*, a hardening of air (*On the Soul* 25.2). Tertullian assumes it to be the common teaching of Stoics that on its egress from the body, the soul ascends to the upper regions (54.1; 55.4), perhaps to dwell there immortally, as Cicero had intimated in his *Dream of Scipio*. Zeno, Cleanthes and Chrysippus are separately adduced to prove the most infamous of Tertullian's heterodoxies, that the origin of the soul from air, its entry into the body and its return to the elements all afford logical proof of its being a body that occupies space. Chrysippus is said to have made it a law (in the teeth of Plato, if not of Aristotle) that no meaning can be attached to the soul's departure from the body if it is not corporeal (*On the Soul* 5.5–6). He concurs with the Stoics in ascribing prophetic dreams to the mercy of God (46.11), and seems to endorse their definition of sleep as a relaxation of bodily vigour that does not reduce the vivacity of the soul (*On the Soul* 43.5).

It is possible nonetheless that the term "corporeal" does not signify to Tertullian exactly what it signifies to his philosophical allies, for it seems not to be his own doctrine that the body which we call soul is derived from matter (*On the Soul* 11.2). He also credits all the principal teachers of the school with a division of the soul into parts, admitting no distinction between Posidonius and the others except that he posits only two divisions where Zeno posits three, Chrysippus eight, and others 12 (14.2). Modern scholars would quickly remind him that Zeno and Chrysippus spoke of faculties rather than parts, and even then only insofar as each is a determination of the single hegemonic faculty which plays the role of Logos to the soul's matter. Again, when he asserts that the Stoics "tax not every sense with lying and not always" (17.4), he forgets that they regarded judgment, not perception, as the seat of error (Watson 1966: 34–37; *SVF* 2.74). Even in this lucubration on a subject which admits of free inquiry, Tertullian is a pupil of the scriptures, not the Stoa; when he writes *Sicut et Seneca saepe noster* (*On the Soul* 20.1), he means not "as our Seneca often says" (Baker 1977: 380), but "as Seneca says, who is often on our side". And when Jerome later commends this philosopher as *Seneca noster*, the reason is not that Jerome is a Stoic but that he accepts the correspondence of Paul and Seneca as evidence of the latter's Christianity, allowing his zeal for the winning of pagan friends to get the better of his critical acumen (*Against Jovinian* 1.49; Faider 1921: 89–96).

At *Against Hermogenes* 1.3, he imputes to the Stoics the false teaching of his adversary, that matter is coeval with and hence independent of God; and yet, he scoffs at 44.1, Hermogenes cannot keep faith with his own instructors, since he imagines a creator who is superior to matter, whereas the god of the Stoics is ubiquitously present in the world like honey in the cells of a hive. He seems to come late upon the Stoic theory of divine immanence, for in his *Apolo-gy* (47.7) he contrasts their belief in a god who moves the world from without as the potter shapes his clay with the Platonic god who acts from within as a helmsman steers his ship. In the preceding sentence, he notes that Stoics also differ from Platonists in holding the deity to be incorporeal, but since his intention is merely to illustrate the diversity of Greek opinions as proof of the fallibility of philosophers, he expresses no approbation or disapprobation of either tenet. In his *Indictment of Heresies*, where every divagation in Christian thought is traced to some error in philosophy, the idle god of Marcion, who permits the creation of a sick world and redeems it at his leisure, is said to be a Stoic invention (7.3), and Marcion is subsequently alleged to have followed this sect as Valentinus followed Plato (30.1). Tertullian is consistently opposed to the theology of the Stoics, whatever he takes to be the content of that theology – a fact that should give us pause before we quote his challenge to Praxeas – who does not know that God is a body? – as a token of his allegiance to that school. No one who was so conscious of the plurality of philosophies could have phrased this as a rhetorical question unless he was giving to *corpus* the colloquial sense, attested by Augustine (Letter 166), which denotes a real as opposed to a virtual entity, or to quote his own synonym in his assault on Praxeas, a *res*.

Readers of this treatise have discerned a Stoic theory of mixture in Tertullian's account of the incarnation as an interpenetration of flesh and spirit, in which neither substance lost its peculiar qualities (*Against Praxeas* 27; Yarnold 1989; *SVF* 2.473). There is indeed no doubt that he would have characterised the Word and the flesh which the word assumed as two distinct corpora, and that among the Greeks a union of two corporeals without alteration of either would have been conceivable only to the Stoics. It is equally true that when he states that the body of God is spirit, the introduction of the word "body" gives a Stoic tone to his iteration of John 4.24. On the other hand, there is his hint that the corporeal and the material are co-extensive for him as they were for the Stoics. Nor need we seek a Stoic pedigree for his argument that the existence of a father implies the existence of a son (*Against Praxeas* 10.1–4; Osborn 2003: 125–127): examples in logic are chosen for their self-evidence, and Aristotle had already illustrated the reciprocity of relations by observing that the slave is as necessarily "of" the master as the master is "of" the slave. Tertullian found serviceable arguments in the Stoics for his reasoning on disputed questions of psychology, and a serviceable nomenclature for the Trinitarian dogma which he held to be at once biblical and catholic; even in the former case, however, his determination not to be less than biblical and catholic sets limits to his speculative freedom, and even to his desire to ascertain precisely what the Stoics believed.

Origen

While Origen is a fertile source for the *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, he resembles the majority of our ancient informants in quoting them only to quibble. Perhaps no criticism is intended when, in a catalogue of dissonant opinions on psychology, he observes that the Stoics reject the tripartite division of the soul (*Against Celsus* 5.47). On the other hand, their teaching that the substance of the deity is *pneuma*, or rarefied spirit, is declared to be as impious as the Epicurean reduction of the gods to bundles of matter (4.14). In words that prefigure the condemnation of Arius at the Council of Nicaea, he protests that a material god must be mutable and changeable (1.21); worse still, since the Stoics posit an infinite succession of worlds, we must assume that the divine *pneuma* comes into being and passes away with each new cycle of generation, and that as each world succumbs to a final holocaust its god will also perish (6.71; 5.23). At *Against Celsus* 5.7, we read that the Stoic God is the world, at 6.48 that he is no happier than we, and at 7.37 that the Stoics banish all noetic entities from the universe. Origen also accuses them of teaching that each new world will be a facsimile of the last: the absurd corollary, drawn out with great labour on two occasions, is that each of us, even Socrates, will come into being an infinite number of times (4.45, 4.68, 5.20). Thus he differentiates the Stoic cosmogony from his own conjecture, loosely grounded on one biblical text, that God has created worlds before the present one (*First Principles* 3.5.3, citing Ecclesiastes 1.10), but without ordaining that each will have an identical history. He is on surer, or at least more common, ground when he contends that the world-consuming fire predicted in the Christian scriptures is not the Stoic *ekpurōsis* because the Creator will survive it and is able to confer everlasting perfection upon the denizens of a new world (8.72).

Half a dozen references to Chrysippus, the great logician of the school, appear in the index to Koetschau's edition of *Against Celsus*. In one, he is simply a representative Stoic (8.49), and in another a truant pupil of Cleanthes (2.12). Elsewhere, however, Origen transcribes or paraphrases texts from named works by Chrysippus on the unfathomability of the higher mysteries (1.40), the cure of the passions according to the philosophy of the patient (1.64), the admission of courtesans into Greek cities (4.63) and the palliative reading of an icon which depicted an "unspeakable" act of sexual intercourse between Zeus and Hera (4.48). In the

light of these citations – which evidently were not schoolroom commonplaces, as most do not appear elsewhere – his tacit appropriations of Stoic arguments may also be taken as evidence of his acquaintance with that tradition. Zeno, the founder of Stoicism, had used the phrase *katalêptikê phantasia* of perceptions which are not open to doubt; Christians possess this, according to Origen, in the apostolic testimony to the acts and words of Christ (8.53). It may not be fanciful, therefore, to surmise that when he appeals elsewhere from the mere text of the gospels to the *pragmata*, or realities, that it subtends he is availing himself of the technical sense that this term had acquired among the Stoics (Rist 1981: 66–67, commenting on Roberts 1970).

While Rist doubts this conjecture, he is willing to grant that Origen is parading his dexterity in the deployment of Stoic logic when he explains to Celsus that, even if it is necessarily true that what is foreknown will occur, it does not follow that the foreknowledge itself necessitates the occurrence (*Against Celsus* 2.20; Rist 1981: 70–73). Origen openly accuses Celsus of mishandling another Stoic argument in the hope of luring pious readers of scripture into an impasse (7.15). Suppose, says the pagan casuist, that one of the prophets were to foretell that God will become a slave: the prophecy will be true because all such utterances are infallible, yet false because the scenario is impossible. Celsus offers this as an ineluctable example of false prophecy: Origen retorts that it is no prophecy at all, as there is no conceivable state of affairs to which it could refer. He contrasts the Stoic syllogism that Celsus is mimicking: “If you know that you are dead, you know it; however, if you know that you are dead, you cannot know it because you are dead. Therefore you cannot know that you are dead.” The purpose of this useful exercise is to show that the proposition “X knows that x is dead” can never be true. If Celsus were a more adroit logician, he would perceive that the conclusion to which his sophistry points is not that the biblical prophets can err but that God cannot be a slave. Whatever we make of his reasoning, Origen has rendered at least one service to the history of philosophy, since, as Rist notes (1981: 75), this is the only Stoic syllogism of its kind that has been preserved.

Direct quotations from the Greek philosophers are rare in Origen outside the work *Against Celsus*. From his pupil and encomiast Gregory Thaumaturgus, we learn that he taught philosophy as a preparation for scriptural exegesis, restricting his syllabus to those who acknowledged an active deity. If he therefore commended the Stoics as an object of study, it is all the more probable that they are his unnamed adversaries when he argues for the incorporeality of God, and indeed of all true *ousia* or being. When he lays this down as the first substantive thesis of his *First Principles*, he imagines that the verses quoted against him will be John 4.24, “God is spirit” and Deuteronomy 4.24, “the Lord your God is a consuming fire” (*First Principles* 1.1.1). While these objections could have been raised without the assistance of any Greek sect, the inference from “God is spirit” to “God is a body” might have come more readily to one who was acquainted with Stoic physics. The interlocutor cannot be Tertullian, who refrains from equating either the corporeal with the material or fire with spirit, whether “fire” and “spirit” be names of elements or metaphors of divine power. In his treatise, when Origen has to explain the locution *artos epiousios*, he takes it to mean bread that has true *ousia* or substance (*On Prayer* 27). In this case, the scriptures afford us not a definition of substance but the evidence for a choice between the philosophers who assign the highest degree of reality to the incorporeal and those who maintain that nothing exists without matter. It is widely assumed that the former class (to whom Origen awards the palm) are the Platonists, while the latter are the Stoics. While this is likely enough, we must remember that a similar conflict between the gods and the giants is already a parable in Plato’s *Sophist*. The thesis of Cadiou (1932) that he consulted the definitions of *ousia* in the lexicon of the Stoic Herophilus rests on premises and testimonies which, as Barnes observes (2015: 296–297), are open to contestation (see further Marksches 2007: 176–183).

Porphyry says of Origen, with a show of regret, that he turned away from the Platonists to the writings of barbarians which he allegorised in the manner of the Stoics (Eusebius, *Church History* 6.19.8). Few scholars have endorsed his judgment, and Origen himself appeals more often to the precedent of Numenius, whom Porphyry also cites as the chief precursor to his own experiment in the interpretation of Homer. Origen's search for the mysteries of the New Testament in the Old prefigures Porphyry's use of the mystery cults as glosses to poetry far more closely than it resembles the Stoic exegesis of Homeric motifs as symbols of natural forces or human passions; if he sometimes avails himself an etymology, he has not only Cornutus for his model but Philo (Bostock 1987), and behind Philo the *Cratylus* of Plato. Like Philo, he applies allegory to a text which he believes to be free of the blemishes that disfigured its pagan rivals: allegory is not for either of them a remedial measure, but a sustained decipherment of the moral and spiritual lessons that the Spirit imparts to us under the veil of history or provisional legislation. Because they believe (as the Stoics did not) in an incorporeal soul, they can draw an antithesis between the inner and the outer man which in Origen's hands becomes to the extraction of a higher, though homonymous, sense from an otherwise trivial or recalcitrant passage (Edwards 2019: 185). His usual rule of interpreting scripture from scripture (not mirrored by any Porphyrian or Stoic principle of interpreting Homer from Homer) allows him to cite the parables of Christ as accreditations of the allegorical method. Clement had done this also, but Origen goes beyond Clement, and into regions where neither Philo nor the Platonists could have followed him, when he takes the incarnation of the Word in all three elements of humanity as his warrant for seeking a bodily, a psychic and a pneumatic sense in scripture, where this sojourn in the flesh has been reconverted into words (*First Principles* 4.2.4–9; *Homilies on Leviticus* 1.1 and 5.2; Edwards 2002: 133–135). Where Porphyry opined that the cave of Homer might be historical, the Stoics displayed no interest in such questions: for Origen, by contrast, it is only because the New Testament is history that the Old Testament can be read as allegory.

Origen is a fierce opponent of determinism, the doctrine that every other school associates with the Stoics. At the same time, as I point out in my chapter on Aristotle, his occasional use of the Peripatetic vocabulary does not weaken his conviction that the future is definitely foreknown to God, and it might thus be said that he marries Aristotelian presuppositions to a conclusion that is logically tenable only on Stoic principles. The key to his thought on the freedom of the will, as on the necessity of embodiment, is his unwillingness to surrender revelation to philosophy even when he recruits philosophy in defence of revelation. It was hard for any Christian to add to the positions that the Greeks had already reached in moral philosophy or in their speculations on the bounds of liberty and knowledge, for all such theories must be brought to the test of experience, and will founder if they set goals which are universally agreed to be unattainable or impose demands to which no one has the capacity to respond. Ethical philosophies are particularly convergent, since all of them take as an end some state – be it happiness, pleasure, agreement with nature or likeness to God – which is already agreed to be good in popular discourse. It is in the field of metaphysics that everyone is his own master, feeling no obligation to flatter the opinions of the multitude; in this field, Origen joins the majority of his fellow Christians in rejecting determinism and the materialistic levelling of the Creator with his creatures. It is hardly necessary to say that in these respects Tertullian too is emphatically a Christian and no Stoic.

Postscript: A Stoic Augustine?

Christian ascetics after Constantine embraced the pursuit of *apatheia* with zeal, establishing communities of which some were devoted to study, some to manual labour and some to

contemplation, but all at a distance from the political world that a Roman Stoic would have deemed unmanly. As I have said in the chapter on Evagrius, the goal of monastic passionlessness was not only to harden the soul against temptation, but to make it a vessel of selfless love for others. The Stoics of this era existed chiefly as literary foils to the Platonic cultivation of *metriopatheia*, or moderate passion, the goal of which was to redirect the chastened affections from the sensory to the noetic realm (Dillon 1983). Augustine, a wary observer of monasticism, learned all that he knew of the Stoics from Latin authors: reading in Aulus Gellius of a Stoic who explained his pallor during a shipwreck as an uncontrollable response to danger, he concludes from this exhibition of *propatheia* that even the wise man will experience passion, whatever he chooses to call it (*City of God* 9.4; Byers 2003). Cicero (*Tusculan Disputations* 4.6.11–14) is his informant in the *City of God*, where he notes that the Stoics exhort their disciples to substitute volition, joy and prudence for desire, exhilaration and fear, but acknowledge no virtuous counterpart to grief because they do not feel contrition for their sins (*City of God* 14.8.1; cf. Buch-Hansen 2010: 106–111).

Self-maceration, absolute sexual continence, renunciation of property and the surrender of the will are not Stoic virtues; even when the vocabulary of the sect is woven into Christian precepts and exhortations, we must remember that monks differed as much from the Stoics in asserting the fallenness of the body as they differed from the Platonists in according to it a share in eternal life. The absence of any doctrine of the fall in the Stoics must also qualify any parallel that can be drawn between the Stoic and the Augustinian understanding of volition (Frede 2011). It is true that the Stoics and Augustine are at one in defining freedom as the habit of acting only in accordance with one's nature, unconstrained by passion or any external force. It is also true that his *liberum arbitrium* is the lexical equivalent of *prohaeresis* in Epictetus; yet the “choice as to what we will”, which Frede ascribes both to Epictetus and to Augustine at *On Free Will* 1.86 (2011: 166–168), is precisely what Augustine denies at *On Free Will* 3.17.48–49 on the grounds that willing to will would entail an infinite regress. Stoics know nothing of any primordial error which has vitiated the power of reason to discern the good and the power of will to choose good even when it is discerned. They could not have entertained – indeed they would not have understood – Augustine's doctrine that without the grace of God we must choose between one sin and another, because no action which is not informed by love can be other than sinful. Believing that the ideal of the wise man has never been realised, they would think it chimerical to imagine a heaven in which the will is so fused with the Spirit of God that sin becomes inconceivable. When love takes the place of will in Augustine's treatise *On the Trinity*, we no longer think of Stoic *prohaeresis* but of the Aristotelian *eros* which, unless it is matched by a countervailing force, will irresistibly restore an element to its natural place.

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Epicureans

Mark Edwards

Epicurus and his school

Born in Samos in 341 BC, Epicurus settled in Athens in 307 and founded there the community of philosophers known as the Garden. Its principal tenet, foreshadowed in the teachings of Democritus of Abdera, was that nothing exists but atoms and the void. Hence there are no Platonic ideas or Aristotelian essences; the soul, no less than the world that it beholds, is a transient congeries of atoms, into which tenuous emanations flow from material bodies through pores in our own to stimulate sensory impressions. Since there is no authority to correct them, these impressions are to be trusted when they report that the earth is flat or that the sun is no more than a few feet in diameter (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 10.91). The purpose of such inquiries is not to gratify scientific curiosity but to rid the soul of the fears and superstitions that accrue from false beliefs. The most pernicious of these are the teachings of religion, which ascribes every freak of nature to invisible agents, pretending that those who offend them in the present world will suffer enduring torment in the next. In fact, the true prerequisite of virtue is to admit that, since nothing exists except the objects of our senses, the end of life should be to enjoy the greatest possible excess of bodily pleasure over bodily pain (Cicero, *On Ends*, book 1). Vicious hedonism will not secure this, as the pleasures which it yields are outweighed by the pains that it entails: the wise will aim for a state of *ataraxia*, or imperturbability, in which the satisfaction of avoiding pain is seasoned by the companionship of others who are intent upon the same goal.

Thus Epicurus, like the Stoics, exhorts us to follow nature; with Plato, he holds that nature's guide to virtue is the calculus of pleasures; for him, as for Aristotle, the ideal is the life which most resembles that of the gods. These too are composed of atoms, with the peculiar (and unexplained) attribute of immortality. Far from acting as efficient, final or material causes to the physical world they take no part or interest in it, and the wise will honour them, not with useless prayers but by imitating their steadfast practice of *ataraxia* (Festugière 1955). The cosmos, while it exhibits a lawlike harmony so long as it exists, is the result of a fortuitous concourse of atoms. Since the habitual motion of these particles is a vertical fall through the void, Epicurus finds it necessary to posit a "swerve", or aleatory deflection, the origin and operation of which remain obscure (Englert 1987). The charge that Epicurus substitutes automatism for divine

providence is true only if this word has the sense of chance rather than mechanical necessity. Both are equally antipathetic to reason, the free exercise of which in human agents seems to be guaranteed by the same swerve that has introduced vicissitude into the cosmos. Few would agree that the liberty which we think fundamental to reasoning can be reduced to a kinetic aberration; some at least are grateful to Epicurus for turning the tables on the fatalist with the quip that if he is right he cannot know it, as his argument puts his own mental processes at the mercy of fate (*Gnomologicum Vaticanum* 40; Arrighetti 1960: 147).

According to Epicurus, the reading of poetry is a pleasure to be shunned, since it can only breed. Railing against mythology, its cultic manifestations and its philosophic defenders was the stock-in-trade of Epicurean polemicists; Colotes, a disciple of the master himself, charged Plato with hypocrisy because he used myth as a vehicle while denouncing the lies of poets (Kechagia 2011: 69). On the other hand, Philodemus (c. 110–30 BC) was a noted epigrammatist and the author of a treatise on the utility of poetry, fragments of which were reserved in Herculaneum by the eruption of Vesuvius. His literary exertions are eclipsed by his contemporary Lucretius in 7000 lines of Latin hexameter verse *On the Nature of Things*. He celebrates Epicurus as the Greek who climbed beyond the flaming ramparts of the world, having slain the monster of religion, to contemplate the true abode of the gods (*On the Nature of Things* 1.62–79). He follows both Colotes and Epicurus in assuming that the imagined torments of hell afflict his countrymen more than economic or physical privations (1.102–135); nevertheless, he not only adopts a medium which was abhorrent to Epicurus but commences with an apostrophe to the goddess Venus, soliciting a cure for Rome's current maladies in a style that belies his own and his master's teaching on the remoteness of the gods (1.1–49).

The Epicureans continued to recommend their creed primarily as an antidote to fear of death. This is the premiss from which Diogenes of Oenoanda begins and to which he returns at the end of the inscription which he commissioned in the second century of the Christian era (Clay 2007). The enemies of virtue and repose, in his view, are the Sceptics, who eschew natural philosophy, the Peripatetics who hold a false theory of nature and the Platonists who threaten us with punishment in a fictitious afterlife. After Diogenes of Oenoanda, the one known champion of Epicurus in antiquity is Diogenes Laertius, the tenth book of whose *Lives of the Philosophers* reproduces three of his letters and refutes his adversaries with a zeal that is not displayed on behalf of any other thinker in this compilation. As he undertakes no biography of any of his successors, we are left to suppose (as many of his detractors said) that the school was simply a monument to the man.

Epicurus in the apologists

Epicureans were stigmatised in the Roman world as idle self-seekers who took no part in politics, although Cassius, the assassin of Julius Caesar, belonged to the sect. They were sometimes described as atheists (Sedley 2013: 145–147), a term which in their case signifies neither complete disbelief in gods nor refusal to worship them but denial of their concern with our affairs. Where there is no divine providence, there are no miracles, and Epicureans, according to their admirer Lucian (*Alexander* 25), made common cause against the pseudo-prophet Alexander with the Christians, who were atheists in the sense that they abstained from civic cults. Alexander denounced both sects, whereas Lucian, when he gives his own view of the Christians, derides their infamous willingness to die as a parody of Cynic courage (*Peregrinus* 13–14; *Rumaways* 1). Equally contemptuous of martyrdom, Galen says of Christians what everyone said of the Epicureans, that they had no reason for any of their beliefs but the *ipse dixit* of their founder. The polemicist Celsus presses against them the Epicurean argument that anyone who is

weary of the world knows how to leave it;¹ Plotinus hurls the same quip at the Gnostics whom his disciple Porphyry characterises as Christian heretics.² He can also liken them expressly to the Epicureans, since, unlike their catholic adversaries, they did not ascribe the ordering of the cosmos to a benign intelligence.

To the accusation of atheism, Christian apologists rejoined that it is all one thing to worship false gods and to worship none. At *Second Apology* 7.6, Justin couples Epicurus with Sardanapalus as a notorious libertine, spared by the same society which put Socrates to death. At 12 in the same text, he asserts that pagans adduce the teaching of Epicurus and the fables of poets to palliate their own crimes, as though Epicurus had not been the fiercest critic of the poets and as odious as Plato himself to their defenders. At 15.3 he libels the entire sect by association with the scurrilous poets Sotades, Philaenius and (according to some editors) Arcestratus, ignoring both their avowed opposition to poetry and their admonitions that surfeit is the enemy of pleasure. We should not deduce that Justin is either ignorant or unusually malicious: he is seeking a place for Christianity in the republic of letters, which awarded its choicest laurels not to sophist but to orators who, like Cicero and Lucian, made full use of the licence which was permitted to forensic combatants. For once we find his pupil Tatian less fantastical, first when he names Epicurus as one of the many Greeks who rail at us if we agree with Plato, and then when he contrasts his own fearless proclamation of truth with the supine custom of “carrying the torch” for gods in whom one has ceased to believe. Theophilus of Antioch is fair to Epicurus but not to the Stoic Chrysippus when he makes them his two examples of philosophers who either believe in no gods or deny them any providential interest in the world.

Tertullian mocks the “otiose and inactive” God of Epicurus in his *Apology* (47.6) and in the related treatise *Against the Nations* (2.2.8). It is more humane to think, with Plato, that the world has an author, than to take the dour position (*duritia*) of Epicurus that it has none (2.3.4). Nevertheless, his school can be cited (with others) as a reputable precedent for taking one’s philosophy from a named founder, as Christians take their name from Christ (*Apology* 3.6); the doctrine that the soul is composed of atoms is only one of many opinions to be rejected in the treatise *On the Soul*. Of course, Tertullian cannot applaud the teaching that the end of life is pleasure (*Apology* 38.5); what Epicurus praises as equanimity is merely a *stupor* or insensibility (*On the Soul* 3.2). When Tertullian says the same of his god, it is to discredit the “good god” of Marcion, who after an unaccountable delay intervenes to save us from the creator. Marcion is the worse of the two, for if it was culpable to be idle, it is equally so to break out of his idleness to meddle in the handiwork of another (*Against Marcion* 1.25.3–5). This is the first example of the use of Epicurus as a stick for the chastisement of a heretic.

Hippolytus of Rome exploits the original meaning of the noun *hairesis* (“choice” of doctrine, in philosophy or in medicine) to corroborate his own thesis that every heresy, in the ecclesiastical sense, is the offspring of some pagan school. Epicurus, he says correctly, admits no principles but atoms and the void (*Refutation* 1.22.1), and therefore opines that even the deity is a product of atoms (1.22.3). This god resides in a place set apart from the world, in the eternal fruition of happiness and serenity, taking no thought for the “automatic” dispersion and combination of particles in another realm. Thus he is the model for the wise man, who will direct his thoughts and actions at all times to pleasure, whether we take this to mean, with some, no more than sensuous delight or, with others, the cultivation of imperturbability through virtue (1.22.4). As nothing can survive the dissolution of its atoms, there is no afterlife for the soul, which is composed of nothing but blood (1.22.6); hence there remains no subject for reward and punishment in the next life, even if there were a judge to administer them. This is by no means an ill-informed report: it refrains from caricaturing the moral teaching of Epicurus and acknowledges that (notwithstanding critics who urged that whatever consists of atoms must

be dissoluble³) he regarded immortality as an attribute of the divine. The tenet that the soul consists of blood is attested not only in Lucretius but in a saying ascribed to Epicurus himself. The substitution of God for the many gods of the Greek philosopher, on the other hand, is tendentious, but Hippolytus does not in fact go on to accuse him of being the progenitor of a Christian heresy.

For Epiphanius of Salamis, the noun *hairesis* has but one sense, whether it denotes a Greek philosophy or a Christian aberration. When he speaks of Epicureans in the plural, he summarily brings against them the usual charges of atheism, automatism and (in his words) making pleasure the “end of happiness” (*Panarion*, proem 6). In a catalogue of founders and successors, he appears to be unaware of any successor to Epicurus himself (2.1.44). We might compare the absence of any epigonal biography in Diogenes Laertius, but Diogenes would not have made the error of imputing to him the doctrine which he abhorred above all others – that there is no such thing as free will and that consequently none of us is entitled to praise or reward (2.1.44). Perhaps he deduced this from his own observation that the two varieties of automatism – the doctrine of fate in the Stoics and the Epicurean tenet that worlds arise by chance – had led both schools to posit an infinite series of worlds (1.1.8). For this belief, some warrant might have been found in the preaching of Solomon, but we are wholly at a loss to explain the continuation, in which the Athenian is credited with the thesis that the cosmos commenced as an egg, around which nature was wrapped as a band, until it tightened and broke the shell to permit the light elements to rise and the heavy to sink. This might have been a vestige of some lost account of the Orphics, were it not that such a chapter would have raised the number of heresies in the *Panarion* from the 80 prescribed by scripture to 81.

The Alexandrian tradition

Justin’s maxim that everything which was well said by philosophers about God was derived from God’s own prophets of God was also the habitual, if not unvarying, position of Clement of Alexandria. Epicurus is cited as an example of this truth when it is stated universally; the verse that gave rise to his fatalism, poorly understood, was Solomon’s exclamation, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (*Stromateis* 5.13.90.2). Hence it was that Paul, having encountered his disciples on the hill of Ares, characterised all thought that defies the scriptures as “vain philosophy” (*Stromateis* 1.10.50.6). Yet no perversion of scripture can account for his glorification of pleasure as the sole end of life (2.20.119.3). In part it is an inheritance from the Cyrenaics who learned nothing else from Plato but the hedonistic calculus (2.21.127.2): the equation of pleasure with the mere absence of pain or misfortune, however, is his own vagary, as his blasphemous adage that when free from pain we are equal to the gods (2.21.127.1). This is his vaunted *autarkeia*, or self-sufficiency (6.2.24.8); no wonder then that his only argument against taking a bribe is that even the wise man cannot be sure that he will escape detection (4.22.143.6). As the founder of atheism (1.1.1.2), he is even more of an enemy to truth than Democritus, from whom he received his theory of atoms (6.2.27.4). At the same time, he can be co-opted, when occasion serves, as a witness to the necessity of *pistis* as a presupposition of knowledge, although he meant by this not faith in authority, but trust in sense perception (2.4.16.3). Clement also notes with pleasure that the sect cherished both a public and a private tradition of the master’s sayings, just as the gnostic, or enlightened, Christian will find truths in scripture that cannot be discerned by simple faith (5.9.58.1).

In his panegyric on Origen, Gregory Thaumaturgus records that, while he required his pupils to study the classical philosophies before they approached the scriptures, his syllabus did not include the impious teachings which denied the providence of God. This charge could be

laid against almost any tradition, for even Platonists did not admit special providence, and the Stoics are always denounced as fatalists in Christian literature. On the other hand, even Peripatetics maintained that above the moon all bodies are subject to uniform principles of motion, and the Epicureans stood alone in reducing all things to the play of chance. Origen therefore takes advantage of a general prejudice when he characterises Celsus, the pagan detractor of Christianity, as an Epicurean, in spite of the inclinations to Platonism which are so evident to modern commentators. He appeals to external sources (1.8, 1.10), no doubt taking his interlocutor for the addressee of Lucian's *Alexander*, where, as we have noted, Epicureans and Christians are reviled by the pagan antihero as partners in atheism.⁴ He concedes, in fact, that Celsus never admits his affiliation (5.3), but ascribes his reticence to fear of his fellow pagans. It is a common trope of his to construe his adversary's sallies against Christianity as expressions of universal scepticism. Thus, when Celsus observes that cults of resurrected men are found among the Getae, the Cilicians and many other nations, his object is only to show that Christianity has no claim to a special revelation; Origen, however, retorts that Celsus has ostracised himself from his fellow Greeks by this Epicurean show of incredulity (3.35). He gloats that the mask has fallen again when Celsus denies that God can work a miracle (1.42) and asseverates that no god or child of a god has ever come down to share the human lot (5.3).

Origen shows no acquaintance with the writings of Epicurus himself. The name occurs repeatedly in lists of pagan teachers who have espoused a private philosophy (1.24, 3.75), where it stands for anything it tends, like that of his sect, to connote mere hedonism and the denial of providence (1.21, 3.80, 5.61, 7.63). To consult the works or hold the tenets of Epicurus is simply to be an infidel of the same type, and we are given to understand that it is all one to be "of Celsus" and to be "of Epicurus" (1.10). Only an allusion to his disparagement of oracles suggests a more detailed knowledge of the teachings of Epicurus (7.3, 8.45). For the most part, however, his apologetic purposes do not require him to read a man whom no one of his own epoch names expressly as his master. There is equally little evidence that his pupil Dionysius of Alexandria had any firsthand acquaintance with the atomists whom he denounced in his celebrated treatise *On Nature* (Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 14.23–27; Marksches 2007: 143–148). For all that, it was as possible in the church as in the schools for his words to survive the atrophy of his reputation. Just as his maxim "Live unknown" was transferred to Pythagoras in the third century,⁵ so his enduring riposte to determinism – namely, that if all things are fated, so is the argument that everything is fated – was baptised in Origen's *Commentary on Genesis* with no acknowledgement of its parentage.⁶

The Latin world after Nicaea

Epicurus, being no stylist, was read by few, and his followers in the Greek world achieved no political eminence; Lucretius and Philodemus, on the other hand, were accomplished men of letters under the patronage of sympathetic nobles, and they survived as literature after the philosophy had become defunct in the later Roman world. Poet as he was, Lucretius scoffs at the mythologies espoused by his fellow poets, yet is frequently betrayed into tropes and idioms that challenge the adequacy of his prescriptions for happiness and rational conduct: in the words of Henri Patin (1860), there is an "anti-Lucrece chez Lucrece". For these reasons, he lends himself perfectly to the aims of Lactantius, whose threefold task, in an age of persecution, is to show that Christians have the intellectual culture that gives them a right to a hearing, to elicit a critique of Roman society from the writings of its own teachers, and to vindicate Christianity as the practical realisation of the ends that these same teachers have enjoined but could never attain.

His first quotation is a verse deploring human sacrifice as the worst of the evils occasioned by religion (1.21.14), his second an animadversion on the stupidity of mortals (1.21.48), and his third a protestation that true piety does not consist in the donning of veils or in lachrymose self-abasement (2.3.10–11). He derides the poet for falling prey to his own superstition when he extols Epicurus as a god (3.14.2; 3.17.28), but detects a “whisper” of truth in his mythological representation of thunder and lightning as weapons in the hands of Jupiter for the chastisement of injustice (2.17.10). He finds that Lucretius cannot but admit the celestial origin of the soul, and he agrees that no pagan thinker has given us reason to suppose that God created the world for the sake of the human race. The apologist’s own threnody on old age is laced with echoes of the diatribe against fear of death (7.12.12–18), and he finds a subtle play on words to corroborate Cicero’s etymology of religion from the verb which means “to bind” (4.28.13). In his treatise *On the Workmanship of God*, Lucretius is represented only by invidious paraphrase, demonstrating the folly of the school which denies that the eyes were made for seeing, advances the ludicrous argument that if light reached the mind through the eyes we would see more through open sockets, and invents fantastic tales of the spawning of monsters in a past epoch of which history and scripture alike know nothing. All these errors are confidently traced to Epicurus, whose philosophy has proved, like all the rest, to be of more use in the confutation of falsehood than in the discovery of truth.

Lucretius is in fact little quoted by Christian authors after Lactantius – not even by Jerome, who in his treatise *On Famous Men* records that Lucretius died of a love potion administered by his wife. For most Latin authors, Epicurus too is only a byword for hedonism and impiety; the exception is Ambrose, who, setting up Epicurus once again as Paul’s chief antagonist, ascribes to him the doctrine that pleasure is evil only for its consequences, and that even a life of luxury may be irreproachable if it entails no fear of death or pain (Letter 22). This sober account lends credit to his claim to have discovered an innovation to the teaching of the sect in an otherwise obscure Philomarus, who adopts what he understands to be a Stoic tenet, that the taste for pleasure is planted in us by God (Ambrose, Letter 10.82). By contrast, the Greek theologians of his age make little reference to the great atheist, except to rebut the sophistries of Eunomius, who had urged, against Basil and Gregory of Nyssa, that the essence of God has been defined for us by God himself: if then we contend that his essence is inscrutable, we have fallen into the Epicurean blasphemy of denying his revelation to the world.

This is one more instance of the purely eristic use by Christian writers of a man whom they loved to represent, in Hippolytus’ words, as the adversary of all. At the same time he was a representative Greek, whose atheism and hedonism were the extreme results of a universal indifference to the providential government of God in the present world and to his promise of an everlasting kingdom for the righteous in the next. We have seen that where it served an apologist’s strategy, he could be cited to prove the utility of faith or the legitimacy of following a master; since, however, the content of his thought was always assumed to be antipathetic to Christianity, he could be taxed with blasphemies that were chargeable only to his rivals, but was never an acknowledged ally, even when he furnished Origen with his subtlest argument for the freedom of the will.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 10.126.
- 2 Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.9; Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 16.
- 3 Cf. Cicero, *Nature of the Gods* 3.30.

- 4 Bergjan 2001 suggests that he had more substantive reasons for thinking Celsus an Epicurean, at least when writing the first half of his treatise.
- 5 See Plutarch, *On the maxim "Live Unknown"*; Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 8.28.
- 6 *Genesis Commentary*, p. 74 Metzler. Cf Epicurus, p. 167 Arrighetti (*Gnomologium Vaticanum* 40).

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Cynics and Christians

Mark Reasoner

Introduction: problems in definition

Cynicism is that school of philosophers who demonstrate a hardiness in their actions, disregarding comfort or pain (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Philosophers* 6.2). The intercourse of Cynicism with other philosophies, e.g. Antisthenes' debt to Socrates and the Cynics' contributions to Stoics, complicates its definition and recognition. Downing, whose stated intention is to identify the "popular impressions of Cynicism," or "how things appeared to the populace at large," defines Cynicism quite broadly (1992: 27, 30). This results in the wide net that he casts for characteristics that can be accounted as evidence for Cynicism: "Doing what comes naturally"; "The equipment" [wearing shabby cloak with no tunic, carrying a staff and a bag – though some Cynics did not use staff or bag]; "Wandering – or staying put"; "Action rather than reflection"; "Providence and Fortune" [are generally denied; one rather acts to effect one's own destiny]; "Religion and Mythology" [are generally belittled and scorned]; "The 'Diatribes'"; "Cynic 'slogans' [including the catchwords *anaidia* 'shamelessness'; *apatheia* 'disregard for feeling'; *askēsis* 'hard training, hard exercise, practice'; *autarkeia* 'sufficiency'; *doxa* 'opinion'; *eleutheria* 'freedom'; *hēdonē* 'pleasure'; *kuōn*, *kunikos* 'dog,' 'doglike'; *parrhēsia* 'frankness'; *phusis* 'nature'; *ponos* 'painfully hard work'; *suntomos* 'shortcut to excellence'; *spud[ai]ogeloios* 'jesting seriously'; *tuphos* 'illusion']" (Downing 1992: 30–53).

The problems in Downing's methodology are not uniquely his own. Previous descriptions of Cynicism have been similarly careless in distinguishing between essential and accidental characteristics of Cynicism, and between Cynicism and other philosophies. For example, Cynicism has been described as seeking to live virtuously (Origen, *Against Celsus* 3.50; Diogenes, *Lives* 6.104). But this description as Diogenes Laertius gives it to us is immediately identified as being similar to Stoicism. The descriptions of ascetic behavior that follows could just as easily be said of many outside the Cynic tradition, such as Pythagoras or Cato the Elder.

In contrast to Downing's wide net for Cynics, Desmond notes how the "renunciation of wealth" is the underlying value of all Cynics (2006: 16). But he goes on to distinguish between this renunciation and the ascetic behavior it engenders and various forms of asceticism, whether oriented toward religious experience, promoting the good of a community, securing victory in battle, or growing in intellect. The Cynic, in contrast, renounces physical and material pleasures

not for these reasons, but as a sure way to experience pure, simple pleasure (Desmond 2006: 19–21). Desmond traces the Cynic development of the “renunciation of wealth” into four paradoxes that became *topoi* in what the Cynics left for us: “poverty is wealth, idleness is work, powerlessness is power, and wisdom is foolishness” (Desmond 2006: 24).

The resonance of Cynic themes within early Christianity has prompted Downing to argue that early Christians, including the authors of the Synoptic Gospels, were aware that they sounded like Cynics and that they embraced the continuities with Cynic teaching that he finds in these gospels (Downing 1988: vii–ix). In the survey of early Christian literature that follows, we shall continue to consider just how Cynic the Christianities of the first two centuries CE really were.

Survey of first- and second-century texts

Pauline letter corpus

The earliest stratum of primary texts within Christian philosophy, the Pauline letter corpus, offers some resonance with Cynic discourse, thought and practice. Paul claims to be above dependence on any material support; he says that he is self-sufficient (*αὐτάρκης*) and can live with little or much in the way of physical resources, a statement that could echo Cynic ideals of renouncing materialism in one’s lifestyle (Philippians 4:11–12). In a later letter, Paul ironically describes his audience as reigning like kings, while he and other apostles are hungry and going through life as captives in a parade who are publically on display before execution (1 Corinthians 4:8–13). In a later letter, Paul or a disciple writing in his name describes the love of money as the root of all evils (1 Timothy 6:10). Still, we do not have a fully coherent argument about wealth in Paul’s letters. Paul makes some metaphysical claims about wealth while soliciting for a collection for the poor in Jerusalem or thanking a church for supporting him, but he does not offer as developed a philosophy of wealth as the Cynics’ literary remains provide.

While some would read Paul’s opinion that it is better not to marry as echoing Cynic attitudes (1 Corinthians 7:8, 32–35, 38, 40), Paul’s moral sense for sexual behavior seems far from Cynic indifference (1 Thessalonians 4:3–5; 1 Cor 6:9–11; cf. Lucian, *Passing of Peregrinus* 9). Paul’s idea that marriage generates a saving environment for spouse and children does not have Cynic parallels (1 Corinthians 7:14–16). And while some Cynics were respectful of the gods, Paul’s piety seems far removed from most of the Cynic discourse, which disparages living in ways that respect the gods (Romans 1:18–21; 9:5). Paul, like two Stoic contemporaries, taught that people should live according to human custom (Musonius Rufus, frag. 6 Hense; Seneca, *Letters to Lucilius* 5.2; Romans 12:17b). In that regard, he is different from Cynics, at least as Horace pictured them (*Epistles* 1.17.13–32; *Sat.* 2.2.65; Griffin 1996: 196).

In the history of Pauline interpretation, Paul has been read as though he were participating in Platonist (2 Corinthians 4:16–18; Justin) and Stoic philosophies, but only rarely has he been associated with the Cynics (Downing 1992). Early in his career, A. J. Malherbe followed through on the suggestion of Dibelius and developed the Cynic parallels in 1 Thessalonians 2. After summarizing Dio Chrysostom’s descriptions of false and ideal Cynic philosophers, Malherbe lists parallels between Dio’s description of the ideal philosopher and Paul’s description of his apostolic ministry. Malherbe finds Cynic parallels in Paul’s claims to speak: boldly as in a serious contest; not in order to lead his audience astray; not on an unclean basis or deceptively; not in order to receive glory from others; not by falsely complimenting others; on the basis of a divine commission (1970: 205–209, 216). Later, Malherbe noted that in the letter of 1 Thessalonians, Paul claims to use bold speech (*παρρησία*) as did the Cynic philosophers. But unlike

the Cynics, who justified their bold speech because of their sufferings and accomplishments, Paul justified his bold speech on the basis of his divine commission (1983b: 249). Malherbe notes that there are Stoic parallels as well in the letter, and that Paul seems to side with Plutarch's Platonic criticism of the Epicurean description of friendship, so it is not as though he is claiming that Paul is uniquely indebted to Cynic terminology in the letter (1983b: 249, 253). Similarly, the nurse and father metaphors that Paul uses for himself fit with contemporary moral encouragement of the first century CE, but are not limited to Cynic discourse (1983b: 242).

In sorting out the possible debts that early Christian thought holds to Platonic, Cynic and Stoic philosophies, it is helpful to consider the genetic explanation of Goulet-Cazé. She sees all three philosophies as attempting to follow and present themselves as authentic successors of Socrates. While the Platonists emphasized reason or the *logos*, the Cynics emphasized the imposition of the will as the way forward through the difficulties of life. The Stoics then tried the near-impossible by claiming that they were both looking to the *logos* as the key to human life, while not abandoning the Cynic emphasis on the will's subjugation of the body (Goulet-Cazé 1986: 190–191).

Because of terms that Paul uses in 2 Corinthians, Malherbe suggests that in Corinth Paul was accused of being like Odysseus, weak in battle and duplicitous. He thinks that Paul uses Cynic language in his defense, but that instead of asking others to humiliate themselves, Paul treats his own humiliation as a means of battling for virtue. And unlike the Cynics, who used military language in their claim to have ultimate confidence in themselves, Paul's use of such language in 2 Corinthians 10:3–6 arises out of his confidence in God (Malherbe 1983a: 169–171). It should be noted, however, that while Downing might take Malherbe's work as evidence that the general public viewed Paul as a Cynic because of his Cynic language, Malherbe is actually suggesting that while Paul described himself as in some ways like the Cynic philosopher Antisthenes, Paul also uses this language because it is the idiom in which others were criticizing Paul (1983a: 167–168, 172–173). Malherbe is not claiming that Paul understood his apostolic identity to be fundamentally Cynic in character.

In 2 Timothy 4:2, the author – perhaps someone writing in Paul's name after Paul's death – commands that Timothy “preach the word, be focused in season [and] out of season” (κήρυξον τὸν λόγον, ἐπίστηθι εὐκαίρως ἀκαίρως). Malherbe notes that the Cynic philosophers were scorned because they spoke out even at inopportune or awkward times, while the Stoics and others emphasized that the philosopher's street preaching and private persuasion should be done only at appropriate, opportune times (1984: 237–240). Malherbe finds it remarkable that Paul uses the “in season [and] out of season” phrase here, but explains it by noting that those to whom the letter's implied audience are to speak are heretics for whom the timing of the teaching will not matter anyway (2 Timothy 3:6; Titus 1:11), and that the implied author's eschatology considers God to have fixed the times, so that human judgment on the appropriate times will not matter (1 Timothy 2:6; 6:15; Titus 1:3; Malherbe 1984: 242–243).

Synoptic gospels

In a later stratum of NT texts, the Synoptic Gospels describe Jesus as telling a predominantly Jewish audience not to think about the next day, not to take any concern for one's food, drink or clothing, but simply to depend on God for all these material needs (Matthew 6:25–34). The theological underpinning of this disregard for life's necessities is different from that of most Cynics. In their descriptions of Jesus sending his followers out to announce the kingdom of God and heal, the Synoptics record Jesus as telling both the apostles and the seventy disciples not to take money, bread or bag – the Cynics' *πήρα*? – with them (Matthew 10:9–10; Mark

6:8; Luke 9:3). Acts 19:18–20 describes converts in Ephesus burning their magic books, and this has been suggested as a Cynic practice, since Metrocles burned his notes from the lectures of Theophrastus when he decided to become a Cynic (Diogenes, *Lives* 6.95). But others besides Cynics burned books (Aelian frag. 89 on an Epicurean), and the hypothesis that Acts is describing former Cynics in Ephesus must be rejected (Pervo 2009: 481, n. 57). Downing identifies similarities between gospel and Cynic texts along the following axes: “addressing ‘ordinary people’ (including women)””; the message goes out to the whole world; “similar agents: ‘ordinary people’ – including women””; “a similarly unpretentious message””; significance of who taught the teacher/philosopher; “the teacher who reprimands all and sundry””; “you are animals (or worse)””; “the wrath to come””; “repentance””; “inherited privilege””; “fruitful in deed””; “symbolic action, socially disturbing””; “one mightier than I””; “temptation and resistance (a) hunger (b) royal power (c) wonder-working””; “an evil, tempting spirit or *daimon*””; “God’s will preferred””; “true happiness””; “poverty and riches””; “hunger and repletion, sadness and laughter””; “hatred and rejection””; “the happy rewards – now and to come””; “love your enemies””; “give, generously””; “do as you would be done by, (b) give freely, (c) be godlike” (1–29). As we saw in the “Problems of definition” section earlier, however, these purported parallels do not identify essential characteristics of Cynicism, and thus can be found in those following other philosophies besides Cynicism.

Apostolic Fathers and after

The *Didache* (ca. 100) similarly offers some guidelines for Christians that seem on first reading to be analogous to Cynic teaching. Thus readers there are told to “abstain from fleshly and bodily cravings” (1:4a), to share all one’s material good with those in need, regarding no possession as one’s own (4:8). Greed is to be avoided (5:1). When traveling apostles or prophets visit a community, they are to be given food and lodging for one or two days, but those who ask to stay more than this are to be shunned as false. When sent on their way, the community must only give them enough food to make it to the next stop on their journey and must avoid giving them money (11:5–6). These directions sound as though the apostles and prophets in view are to be treated as traveling Cynic philosophers.

Justin Martyr (100–165 CE) most explicitly links his Christian philosophy with Plato, and his only mention of the Cynics is to assert a fundamental difference. The links with Platonism are found in *First Apology* 8 – divine punishment of the wicked; *First Apology* 18 – conscious existence of souls after death; *First Apology* 20, 59 – God is creator; *First Apology* 44 – human responsibility for moral choices; *First Apology* 60 – doctrine of the cross known by Plato through Moses. After Platonism, Justin is most likely to name the Stoics and then poets as those who echo the truth of the Christian philosophy (*First Apology* 20; *2 Apol.* 13). In his *Apologies*, Justin only mentions Cynics when explaining why Crescens cannot recognize truth, since Crescens as a Cynic makes indifference his life’s goal (*2 Apol.* 3). Downing understands Justin’s protest that Crescens acts as he does in order not to be identified as a Christian as evidence for the perceived overlap of second-century Cynicism and Christianity, as though Crescens is prosecuting Justin to set a divide between them (Downing 1992: 171). But the text from which Downing draws his argument can just as readily be read to say that Crescens generally acts as a Cynic so that he will not be understood to be a Christian (*Second Apology* 3). And though Justin is described as wearing the Cynic’s cloak after being baptized, this is not enough evidence that the general public perceived a large segment of Christians to be Cynics (Eusebius, *Church History* 4.11.8, letter 9). Justin’s statement to Trypho that he as a Christian has left the Stoic, Peripatetic, Platonist and Pythagorean schools, followed by Trypho’s retort that Justin should have stayed with the

Platonists rather than throwing in his lot with the unrecognized, is taken by Downing to indicate that Justin is very close to Cynicism, for this was the philosophy that paid no heed to logic (1992: 180; *Trypho* 2.8). Here there is no evidence that Trypho, not to mention the general public, considered Justin to be a Cynic; the “unrecognized” at first reading are the Christians.

Clement of Alexandria (150–215 CE) wrote that the philosophers known as Cynics (“dogs”) are given that name because they bite others (*Stromateis* 1). He would therefore oppose the spread of any opinion that the Christians were Cynic in their background.

Second-century pagan authors

Marcus Aurelius (121–180 CE) perhaps obliquely refers to Christians in his *Meditations*, but never likens them to Cynics (1.6; 3.16; 7.68; 8.48, 51; 11.3). His autobiographical description of how he came to have few wants, work on his own and not mind others of course parallels Cynic traits, but no one would consider him a Cynic (1.5).

In his satire, *The Passing of Peregrinus*, Lucian (ca. 125–181 CE) describes how Peregrinus spends time leading Christians, only to be rejected by them for what he eats (see further Edwards 1989; König 2006). The description of the Christians emphasizes how gullible and simple they are (*Peregrinus* 13). Peregrinus does dress like a Cynic philosopher during his second stint among the Christians (*Peregrinus* 16). But it is only after leaving the Christians that he begins to practice behaviors that the Cynics called indifferent (*ἀδιάφορον*, *Peregrinus* 17). The point of Lucian’s description of Peregrinus’ time with Christians is not to show how similar they are to Cynics, but how unsuspecting and easily taken they were by the intrepid Peregrinus (*Peregrinus* 11–13).

A similarity that can be seen between second-century church fathers and Lucian is that both groups ridiculed the Homeric pantheon and the idea that there was a deterministic cast to the universe. Downing traces the template for these critiques to standard Cynic discourse (Downing 1992: 182). But ridicule of foreign gods could just as easily spring from some of the fathers’ familiarity with the Old Testament, or in the case of Justin, from exchanges in Platonic dialogues that point toward monotheism (Psalm 82:1–8; Isaiah 44:6–20; Jeremiah 10.1–11; Plato, *Euthyphro* 7b–9a; *Republic* 508e; *Timaeus* 29e–48d, 92c).

The relationship between Cynic and Christian Philosophies

Malherbe observes in his introduction that New Testament scholars have carelessly used “Cynic-Stoic” as a designation for the context of moral philosophers active in the first and second centuries CE, during the spread of Christianity. He calls for greater attention to the differences between Cynicism and Stoic philosophies, though he does not offer criteria for distinguishing between the two. The texts presented in his volume of Cynic letters are not accompanied by explanations for how they could help us understand Christianity better. The earliest of letters in that volume is the collection attributed to Anacharsis; most of them come from 300–250 BCE; Cynic letters written in the first century CE could be those of Crates, Diogenes (Epistle 19), and the letters of Heraclitus (Malherbe 6, 10, 14, 22). Though some of them demonstrate a piety toward the gods that is consonant with Christianity (Heraclitus, Epistles 4, 9), in general they part ways with Christian thought in their metaphysics, one aspect of epistemology and in their ethics.

Human autonomy

The Cynics’ construction of the human self as the only entity worth acknowledging or serving is far from Christian thought. Goulet-Cazé distills the essence of Cynicism as the defense of

one's deepest self from all attacks upon it (1986: 229). By contrast, the Christian tradition follows in the wake of Jewish thought with an acknowledgement and dependence on the Holy Spirit as an essential guide on the path to full personhood (1 Corinthians 2:10–12). The metaphor that Christians are adopted brothers of Christ, who are being conformed into the image of this Christ, is also very different from the Cynic quest for autonomy (Romans 8:29).

The radical orientation on the individual self is the basis for the Cynics' shameless mode of speech and action. According to Krueger, Downing "has downplayed shamelessness" as an identifying trait of Diogenes and other Cynics (1996: 229, n. 51). Paul is unashamed of the gospel, but in his ethical guidelines, he asks his readers to think and live above shame (Romans 1:16; 12:17; Philippians 4:8).

Both Cynics and Christians could be viewed as rejecting the social norms of civilized society. Tacitus' description of the Christians as haters of humanity could also have been directed at a variety of Cynics, who avoided normal social intercourse and politics (Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44; Diogenes, *Lives* 6.29, 72; Cicero, *On Ends* 3.68). This independence from society was often framed in a moral context. Griffin claims that the Cynic elements within the Stoicism of the Principate functioned as a conscience for society, keeping Stoicism from being equated merely with whatever those of senatorial rank wanted (Griffin 1996: 204). Still, the early church's position that one must follow Christ is a wholly different sort of shameless rejection of society than the Cynics' radical defense of the human subject.

In general, the Cynic insistence on human autonomy and one's own self as an autonomous, impregnable subject is a key factor in the Cynics' agnostic or atheistic metaphysics. Cynics thus resisted any cult that could be paid to the transcendent. On the other hand, the Christian texts affirm, in continuity with Judaism, a deep regard for the transcendent God's existence in the universe and thankful response to this deity's immanent provision for humankind.

The Cynic emphasis on self-sufficiency is a development of Eleatic ontology, in which true existence involves being one, unperturbed by people or forces outside one's own self. For most Cynics, "the self is the only reality" (Desmond 2006: 170). This metaphysical position would necessarily make Cynic lifestyles much different from Christians' lifestyles. The surface similarities between Cynics and Christians, e.g., living simply and scorning some social norms, seem sufficient to account only for the very few places in the first through fourth centuries CE when some continuities have been suggested between Cynics and Christians. But even if the prescriptive discourse and narratives on how Christians related to others inside and outside their communities is only partially reflective of Christians' social intercourse in those centuries, most observers would not consider Christianity to be an outgrowth of Cynicism.

Relation to the material world

A related metaphysical difference concerns how one regards the material world. Cynic thought treats nature as an *adiaphoron*; it is not valued in itself. What nature can provide for a human is to be used for survival, but not considered valuable for its place in the created world. By contrast, Christian texts, in continuity with their Jewish roots, affirm the value of the created world, assigning a sacramental regard for some parts of it, whether as ingredients in cultic rites or simply as one's God-given gifts in this life (1 Corinthians 10:25–26, citing Psalms 24:1; 50:12; *Didache* 9:1–4; 10:3).

These opposed philosophical orientations can at times lead to what appears to be the same behavior: thus because of Cynics' refusal to acknowledge the transcendent, they view as indifferent the accumulation of material resources and scoff at the accumulation of wealth. But it is precisely because of early Christian teachings that God exists and cares for humankind that

some Christian texts similarly speak against accumulating material resources and criticize the wealthy (Luke 12:13–21; 16:19–31). Material wealth can be described as a barrier to the good life (Matthew 19:23–24; Mark 10:23–25; Luke 18:24–25). But this wealth is criticized because it leads people away from being “rich toward God” (Luke 12:13–21), not for the deconstructive work that the Cynics brought to wealth, based on its ultimate vacuity or the difficulties and additional work accompanying it.

Human knowledge, will and emotion

Like Paul in 1 Corinthians 1, the Cynics mocked worldly wisdom (Desmond 166–167). But the resemblance ends there. While the Cynics’ scorn for worldly wisdom is based on the affirmation of the self as the one good, early Christian texts instead center their focus on the cross and resurrection of Christ, which is the proof of God’s deliverance of humanity and the orientation for one’s metaphysical universe (1 Corinthians 1:22–25).

Christian authors of antiquity differ profoundly from most Cynics over the role that feelings play in human consciousness, knowledge and action. The Cynics famously seek to live above feelings (Diogenes, *Lives* 6.2). There has been disagreement regarding whether the love of YHWH enjoined on the Israelites in the book of Deuteronomy is devoid of feeling or not, but in the New Testament, commands or encouragement to rejoice and empathize with those in pain or joy are common (Moran 1963; Lapsley 2003; Romans 12:15; Philippians 3:1; 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16; 1 Peter 4:13). In general, Cynic discourse has little regard for the love of God (understood either as subjective or objective), and would not consider this or any human love to motivate a Cynic to sacrifice one’s life for another (cf. John 10:11, 15; 15:13; Revelation 12:11). Thus, in various areas of epistemology, there are significant differences in Christian and Cynic understandings of the human subject.

Ethics

There is also a difference in ethical orientation. The Cynics denied the value of marriage. Despite wide variety in Christian theoretical discourse regarding marriage, on the whole, most Christian authors of the early centuries affirm marriage as a sacrament for some to enter and embrace as a channel of grace for spouse, children and self (1 Peter 3:7; 1 Corinthians 7:12–16; Colossians 3:18–21; Ephesians 5:21–6:4).

The Cynics were indifferent regarding what they ate. Despite Paul’s apparent statement on the indifference of all foods in Christ and Mark’s adoption of this idea (Romans 14:14; Mark 7:14), the New Testament and later authors do not hold foods indifferently, but typically rule against eating food offered to idols (Acts 15:20, 29; Revelation 2:14, 20). This stereotype is perhaps reflected in Lucian’s explanation for why the Cynic pretender Peregrinus was rejected by the Christians (*Peregrinus* 16).

There is a significant difference regarding what one does with one’s speech. The Cynics’ indifference in speech apparently led them to be unrestrained in the verbal abuse they offered others (Lucian, *Peregrinus* 18). On the other hand, the Christian approach to speech generally follows the Jewish wisdom tradition, valuing one who uses few words, who takes care in his speech. But sometimes Cynics would criticize behavior that Christians would also find objectionable. The public criticism that Diogenes and Heras directed against Titus’ liaison with Berenice does not seem that far from what John the Baptist directed against Antipas (Cassius Dio, *Histories* 66.15.5; Mark 6:17–18).

Cynics adapted the Greek value of “martial poverty,” i.e., fighting with the few weapons one has for one’s city-state or land, in their discourse of fighting against luxury, greed or violence (Desmond 140). Origen had made a similar move in his exegesis of the holy war texts of the Old Testament, but no one would say he was influenced by the Cynics in doing this. In addition, the Christian call for being filled by the Holy Spirit invites the transcendent into the human quest for virtue in ways the Cynics do not approximate (Romans 8:2, 10–16; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 6:17–18).

Desmond identifies a paradox in that the Cynic philosophers would claim that their own idleness was work, while at the same time telling others that pain and work was a necessary part of life, even citing Heracles’ labors as exemplary for others (71). But anyone who reads the New Testament would not find such a paradox there; the moral exhortations dealing with work are uniformly in favor of avoiding idleness and working (Colossians 3:23–24; 1 Thessalonians 5:14; 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13).

Conclusion

Later Christian discourse occasionally acknowledges the Stoics, but there is no evidence that its authors regarded their faith or lifestyle as the outgrowth of Cynicism. Admiration for Cynic behaviors, such as the praise Gregory of Nazianzus gives for Antisthenes’ lack of retaliation when hit in the face, except to write the name of his attacker on papyrus and affix it to his (Antisthenes’ own) forehead, does not imply any kind of genetic relationship between Cynicism and Christianity (Gregory Nazianzen, Oration against Julian 1 = *Patrologia Graeca* 35, 596; commentary by Ps. Nonnus in *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 1001d; see also Diogenes, *Lives* 6.33).

Dorival’s summary (1993) of the Greek fathers’ positions on Cynic philosophers helps to make sense of the difficulties in defining Cynicism and in the complicated web of questions when considering Christianity’s relationship to Cynicism. During the period of the Roman Empire, Dorival conceives of two versions of Cynic philosophy. The one that has its own goal and specific purpose he considers completely incompatible with Christianity. The other form of Cynicism, which is a set of behaviors without an integrating, Cynic purpose, he regards as compatible with Christianity, or with other philosophies, such as Stoicism. But even here, he writes that such a Cynic must consider suicide to be wrong, must positively regard ascetic discipline, and must be positive toward the transcendent deities. Since these specific traits were rare among Cynics, Dorival concludes that even these Christian Cynics were not numerous (1993: 443).

This makes good sense of the evidence. There were certainly models within the New Testament and in the early centuries of Christianity of specific behaviors that are very similar to Stoic behaviors. But even when one allows for the varieties within Cynicism and Christianity, the Cynics’ foundations and goals for their behaviors were significantly different from the Christians’ foundations and goals for similar-appearing behaviors.

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Sceptics

Mark Edwards

Taxonomy of the sceptics

Had Marcus Aurelius endowed a chair in Scepticism when he provided subsidies for four other Athenian schools in 176, it might have been claimed by any of three sects, though it is unlikely that by this fate any of them could have furnished a scholar worthy of the office:

- 1 The Pyrrhonists take their name from a philosopher who served in the army of Alexander the Great (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* 9.58 and 9.61), and has consequently been suspected of bringing home from the east his nihilistic doctrine that all propositions can be doubted, including this very tenet that all propositions can be doubted (see further Beckwith 2015). Since he himself wrote nothing, it is far from certain that he himself would have made the last reservation (Bett 2000); even the ten “modes”, or arguments for suspension of judgment, which were set out by his disciple Aenesidemus in the first century, are known to us only from the *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* by Sextus Empiricus, a Greek of the Roman era. In 11 other treatises against various arts and branches of purported knowledge, Sextus freely avails himself of stratagems first employed by the Academics against the Stoics, his object being not to prove anything, even a negative, but to demonstrate the futility of all attempted proofs (Barnes 1990). As a system of thought, his Scepticism (deriving its name from *skepsis*, or inquiry) is therefore parasitic; whether it can be adopted as a rule of life is a question still in dispute (see further Burnyeat and Frede 1997).
- 2 The New Academy – sometimes divided into the Middle Academy, beginning with Arcesilaus (fl. 250 B.C.), and the New Academy proper, spanning the 70 years from Carneades (fl 155 B.C.) to Philo of Larissa – discovers the essence of Plato’s teaching not in his more constructive works, but in the “aporetic” dialogues which show Socrates exploding the claims to knowledge advanced by his rivals or interlocutors while making no contribution of his own beyond an admission of his continuing ignorance. Carneades became the recognised master of corrosive dialectic (Cicero, *Academics* 2.11–12), and his refutations of proofs for the existence of the gods (which should not be taken as apologues for atheism) are rehearsed at length by Sextus (*Against the Professors* 9.138–190; see Sedley 2013: 147–150). Cicero, speaking in his own person, borrows his arguments on the negative side

in his treatise *On Divination*; in his dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods*, the final speech is allotted to Cotta, a Roman magistrate, who doubts the sincerity of the Epicureans (since they scoff at providence, yet engage in worship) but is unconvinced by the tokens of divine benevolence which the Stoics profess to have culled from nature (3.89). His own asseveration that he will not depart from his custom of revering his native gods according to the way of his fathers (*mos maiorum* at 3.7 and 3.43) is a Roman version of the principle laid down by Carneades that the wise man will assent to impressions but will shape his conduct at any time according to that impression which appears to him most plausible (*pitanon*), or in Cicero's Latin, most *veri simile*, "like the truth" (e.g. *On Divination* 30, 89, 113).

- 3 Although the name "Old Academy" can be used of the first successors of Plato, it was also assumed by the followers of Antiochus of Ascalon, who studied in Rome under Philo of Larissa after 88 B.C. but was in Athens when he taught Cicero in 79 B.C. In opposition to Philo (on whom see Brittain 2001), Antiochus argued that Plato correctly ascribed to the intellect a capacity for discerning truth from falsehood, and could therefore give a qualified assent to both metaphysical and moral propositions. In Cicero's *Academics*, the position of Antiochus is represented by his friend Lucullus, while that of the New Academy which preceded him is represented by Varro the antiquarian, with a playful intimation that the new may be superior to the old (*Academics* 2.4). From Cicero's approving commentary on his ethical judgments in his works *On Ends* and *On Offices*, it is clear that Antiochus favoured the rigorous principles of the Stoics, eschewing only their notorious dogmatism (Glucker 1978: 27). It is not so clear that he held any metaphysical positions which would entitle him to be called the father of Middle Platonism (Barnes 1989).

Roman scepticism and Christian faith

In the *Octavius* of Minucius Felix, a dialogue modelled on Cicero, a satirical observation on pagan worship by the Christian speaker provokes an acerbic rejoinder from his friend Caecilius. At the outset, the pagan proceeds that we cannot hope to discover the truth about the gods, but only the truth-like (*veri simile*), which consists for him, as it did for Cicero's Cotta, in the precepts handed down by the fathers to whom Rome owes her greatness (*Octavius* 6, 14). Anticipating the Christian appeal to the fatherhood of the one God, as displayed in his acts of providence, he builds up a case against this from the obvious injustices of fortune (5). Yet almost at once, as though to avert the charge of Epicurean dogmatism, he recalls the many epiphanies of Rome's gods as recorded by her own panegyrists (6–7) – a mode of argument treated with disdain by Cicero's Cotta in his rebuttal of the Stoics (*Nature of Gods* 3.42–50). Although he regards the cult of ancestral deities as the duty of every people, he justifies the persecution of Christians by secondhand imputations on their morality, which he borrows from Fronto, the tutor of Marcus Aurelius (9). Reminiscent as they are of Roman allegations against the rites of Dionysius in 186 B.C., these slanders reveal that the *mos maiorum* is nothing but a superstition underpinned by ignorance and cruelty, and far from consistent in its use of scepticism as an intellectual veneer.

Christian doxographers in the age of Minucius barely notice the Sceptics. We look in vain for the names of Aenesidemus, Carneades, Philo of Larissa or Antiochus of Ascalon in Hippolytus' *Refutation of all Heresies*. Pyrrho he knows by reputation only, ranking him among the Presocratics between Hermetimus and Pythagoras (1.11) – an error repeated in the sixth century by John Philoponus (*On Aristotle's Categories*, p. 2.15 Busse). He is acquainted with a doxographic tradition which divides the Academics (as he styles them) into two classes, one of which tries

both sides of every question but affirms neither, while the other affirms that nothing is more what it seems to be than its contrary. His refutation of the astrological lore professed by certain heretics, on the other hand, is all but a transcript from Sextus, or from the sources plagiarised by Sextus himself (see *Against the Mathematicians* 5.1–36 with Litwa 2016: 91–93). Thus there is nothing original in Hippolytus' contention that we cannot know the exact time of conception, as we cannot follow the seed in its path from the vulva to the womb; again it is old news that even the moment of parturition is undefinable, and that some time must elapse between the recording of the birth by one observer and the transmission of his report to his colleague who is watching the stars. Carneades had already pointed out that there must be persons who shared the time of birth to an instant but have not enjoyed the same destiny, and the differences of opinion between Archimedes and Hipparchus with regard to sidereal distances and motions were known to every dilettante in this science. Of course it is no part of the heresiologist's project to be original: the more commonplace his arguments, the less likely it is that they will be gainsaid.

Pagan and Christian genealogies of Scepticism

Christian apologists, boasting of their allegiance to a single founder, never tire of mocking the constant schisms and rebellions which have given rise to the multiplicity of pagan schools. In their support, they could quote Greeks who had likened the fissiparation of doctrine to the dismemberment of Pentheus the legendary king of Thebes. A scurrilous account of the secession of the academy from Plato by Numenius of Apamea is excerpted at length in Eusebius of Caesarea's *Preparation for the Gospel*. Numenius begins by contrasting the famous unanimity of the Epicureans with the continual innovations of the Stoics and the divided legacy of Socrates.

Commending Plato's fusion of Socratic with Pythagorean doctrines, he acknowledges that even his first successors were not in all respects his disciples; the fall into scepticism, however, he traces not to principled disagreement but to the rivalry between Zeno and Arcesilaus, two students of Polemo. While Zeno amplified the teachings of Plato with those of the Stoics, Arcesilaus went from one tradition to another in search of novelty until at last he hit on the works of Pyrrho, and started to teach universal suspension of judgment as though it were Plato's own philosophy. Lacydes differed from him in denying that suspension of judgment is possible in every case, distinguishing those questions on which we cannot form an opinion from those on which we must merely confess a degree of uncertainty. His own scepticism, however, was prompted not by metaphysical reflection but by the secret depredations of his slaves, which for a time led him to imagine that he had deceived himself with regard to his own possessions. Once he discovered the subterfuge, he took his revenge, exclaiming, when his slaves asked what had become of his practice of suspending judgment, that the rules of the classroom are not the rules of life. Next came Carneades, weighing both sides of each question on the scales of plausibility, yet never professing certitude even when balancing a vivid apprehension against the falsehood that mimics truth. For all that, he permitted no logical doubts to temper his wrath when he found his pupil in bed with his wife. In the final excerpt, the apostasy of Antiochus of Ascalon from Philo of Larissa is presented not as a return to Plato but as a defection to the Stoics.

All this is of interest only to historians of burlesque. By contrast, all three books of Augustine's dialogue *Against the Academics* display the same philosophic gravity that he brings in other works to the unmasking of illusory claims to knowledge. His account of the rise of methodological doubt in the school of Plato is not polemical, though it lacks corroboration in ancient sources. Like Numenius, he traces it to a quarrel between two students of Polemo, but in this telling it is Zeno who is to blame when he maintains, in defiance of Plato, that the real is the corporeal, with the consequence that the soul too is a body and therefore mortal (*Against the*

Academics 3.17.38). Thus the Stoa was founded, but rather than set one dogmatic system against another, Arcesilaus subverted the new philosophy with the weapons of scepticism. After him, Carneades enlarged the arsenal, still concealing the authentic doctrines of the school from those without. Philo of Larissa, in this narrative, was preparing to make them public once again, but was forced back to the policy of Arcesilaus when Antiochus of Ascalon revived the errors of Zeno. The Second Book of the *Academics* is Cicero's refutation of Antiochus, in the wake of which it has at last become possible for the true successors of Plato to expound his teaching without dissimulation (3.18.41).

Scholars have found no warrant for the ascription of esoteric Platonism to the successors of Polemo, except for the juxtaposition of Metrodorus with the mysteries of Athens in an autobiographical passage of Cicero's *On the Orator* (3.60). Augustine says on behalf of Arcesilaus that he practised reticence only as a corrective to the propensity of the multitude to seize upon new thoughts without reflection (*Against the Academics* 3.17.38). Such a hypothesis naturally commended itself to a Platonist familiar with the descants of Numenius and Plotinus on the ineffability of the highest principle; it also commended itself to a future bishop in an epoch when the creed of the church was, notionally at least, kept secret until the instruction of the catechumen was finished. Most scholars today, however, would endorse Charles Brittain's verdict (2001: 245) that the motives here attributed to Philo have "only a tenuous relation to any thesis" that he "could have entertained".

Augustine against the Academics

Whatever one makes of its historiography, the ratiocinative element in the dialogue has been admired in modern times, even by critics who do not share the author's religion. Ostensibly an unabridged transcript of a real conversation, it is addressed to a friend of the magisterial class who is in need of the consolations of philosophy after providence (or as the world says, ill fortune) has robbed him of the gratifications that would normally accrue to his rank and office. The subject of discussion, says Augustine, was the question which he put to his friends Alypius, Trygetius and Licentius: would we choose happiness if it were not accompanied by truth (1.2.5)? Trygetius opines that if this state is possible, we may reasonably desire it; Licentius replies that we cannot be happy unless we employ the highest of our faculties, which, being divine, will not be satisfied by anything less than the search for truth (1.4.11). The happiness of the intellect consists in this perpetual seeking, but need not result in the finding of the object (1.2.6; 1.4.10): the wise man is the one who withholds his assent from all impressions which do not meet the strict criterion of proof, and thus avoids falling into error. He may be compared to a traveller who unerringly follows the road to Alexandria, but happens to die before he attains his goal (1.4.11; cf Plato, *Meno* 97a–b). After a digression on the occasional successes of diviners (1.6.17–1.8.22), Licentius reaffirms his view that those who resolutely abstain from error are wiser than those who are ready with answers but hit upon truth only intermittently and without any rational method. Wisdom in fact has two aspects, knowing and seeking, but the former pertains to God and the latter to us (1.8.23).

In the second book, these opinions are expressly attributed to the Academics, and it is argued that the wise man lives in accordance with his philosophy by following those impressions that seem to him probable without giving his assent (2.6.14). A quotation from a lost portion of the *Academics* confirms that the Latin *probabile* (Greek *pithanon*) is equivalent in Ciceronian usage to *veri simile*, "like the truth" (2.11.26), but here, Augustine urges, is the patent fallacy of the Sceptic's position, for how can we know what is like the truth unless we are acquainted with truth itself (2.8.20)? The absurdity will be obvious if we imagine that without having met a man's

father, I pronounce him to be the image of his father (2.7.16). Augustine, so far as we know, is the originator of this famous argument; we must add, however, that we have little knowledge of ancient writing against the Sceptics, and that no Greek antecedent is conceivable, since no term meaning “like the truth” was employed in this language as a synonym for *pithanon*. It is open to the Greek Sceptic to maintain that the *pithanon* is simply that which is apt to persuade us, and that under this description we may include both the data conveyed to us by the senses and the analytical propositions marshalled by Augustine in his third book as examples of knowledge which cannot be doubted. The Sceptic will agree that the mind is less easily deceived in arithmetical computation than in its inferences from sensory impressions, but he is not therefore obliged to deny that impressions may be less or more persuasive; he may admit that his moral judgments are merely probable, but he will not therefore admit that he is more likely to sin than the dogmatist who upholds the same norms with unreasoning conviction. Augustine may urge that, but for the divine monitor within us, we could not be sure of any of our beliefs; the Sceptic will retort that he can act without being sure.

In other works, Augustine becomes a virtuoso Sceptic, pressing doubt to the point where it becomes its own assassin. If the Sceptic doubts the truth of a proposition – that is to say, its correspondence to the reality that it purports to signify – he has failed to grasp Cicero’s principle that the word is a name of a thing (*On the Teacher* 5.16), and has therefore failed to draw the obvious inference that we should not invent a word if there were nothing to be named (9.26). As Wittgenstein later argued, we must know that the speaker intends us to fix our attention not on the word itself but on the object which is not present to us (cf. 8.23–24). Since this rule is logically anterior to the construal of any sign, it cannot be conveyed to us in signs; it follows, as there is no other instrument of education, that our ability to interpret signs as signs must be innate. Furthermore, in interpreting any particular word, we must be conscious, not only of a general principle of signification, but of an actual correspondence between this signifier and the thing signified; we must therefore possess the intellectual concept as a correlative to the sign (10.28, 10.34). This is another version of the argument that we cannot identify that which is like the truth without some knowledge of truth itself; in other hands, it might lead to a Platonic theory of forms or the Aristotelian postulation of the active intellect. For Augustine, it shows that Christ himself, as the way, the truth and the life, is the invisible touchstone by which every act of reason is verified, even in the unbeliever (11.38–14.46). The construction of an argument against the possibility of attaining truth is thus made to attest presence of truth within us, just as Augustine demonstrates elsewhere, foreshadowing Descartes, that I cannot coherently question my belief in my own existence, since even to entertain a false belief I must exist (*City of God* 11.26; see Bubacz 1978).

The Sceptic may grant this last conclusion as a tautology from which nothing follows. For reasons that we have already adumbrated, he will not accept the argument that the very possibility of reasoning necessitates an internal standard of truth. Least of all will he grant Augustine’s deduction in his dialogue *On Free Will* (2.2.5) that, if the object of wisdom is higher than wisdom itself, we must seek our happiness not in wisdom but in this object, which is evidently God. Augustine assumes that the object is the highest thing in reality, defining the real as that which exists independently of wisdom; Sextus, on the other hand, had countered a similar inference by denying this last assumption and defining the object of wisdom as nothing more than an accurate estimate of the likely truth of any proposition (*Against the Professors* 9.125). At the root of Augustine’s quarrel with the Academy is his conviction that, since there is truth, it must be knowable, and that since we can speak of the good it must be possible to discover and pursue it. But this is the very premiss that they will not concede without proof.

Faith and scepticism

When he first began to read the Sceptics, Augustine still entertained an interest in astrology. A chance remark on the simultaneous birth of two boys, one of whom was the son of a land-owner and the other of his slave, caused him to meditate on the different fates which await those who are born in the same locality under the same configuration (*City of God* 5.5). In his *City of God*, this argument becomes the centrepiece of his refutation of astrology, with due acknowledgement to Cicero (*City of God* 5.2, 5.8, 5.9). Fate is defined by the Stoics as the necessary connexion of causes (5.8); Christians who do not fall into their error of taking Homer for scripture know that it was not the blind course of nature that assigned one lot to Esau and one to Jacob but the omniscient will of God (*City of God* 5.4). The fatalists who had threatened to seduce him in his youth, however, were not the Stoics but the Manichaeans, against whom he wrote his treatise *On the Utility of Belief*. Whereas this text argues for the necessity of submitting to the Catholic Church, as the sole trustee of the gospel, before we set ourselves up as experts in divine matters, Clement of Alexandria had already maintained in his *Stromateis* that *pistis*, which the Platonists deride as a vulgar counterfeit of knowledge, is the foundation of all philosophy (Osborn 1994). Like Justin Martyr before him (*Trypho* 2–4), he is happy to embrace the Sceptic's view that none of the systems which have been at war for centuries is likely to be more true than other; both, however, urge that the superior antiquity of the Old Testament and the manifest fulfilment of its prophecies in the gospel furnish the church with that security in its first principles which is lacking in all the schools.

All Christians would be Sceptics if the affirmation that God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts and his nature superior to our understanding were sufficient to make one a member of that school. The difference between the two positions, of course, is that the Sceptic is willing to doubt the existence of God, which the Christian takes to be axiomatic. Thus for Irenaeus our inability to account for the waxing and waning of the moon or for the flooding of the Nile does not lead us to argue that the causes of these phenomena are unknowable but that our intellects are too limited to fathom a truth that God has not unsealed (*Against Heresies* 2.28.2). Gregory of Nyssa's declamations on the limits of knowledge are not designed to prove that one man's notion of God is as fallible as another's, but on the contrary, to rebuke Eunomius for setting the ebullitions of his own reason against the mysteries disclosed to faith in scripture and interpreted by the church. Arnobius of Sicca, in the first quarter of the fourth century, issues a similar retort to Greeks who mock the credulity of his coreligionists (*Against the Nations* 2.8.1). He draws his own proofs, however, not from prophecy or the antiquity of scripture – nothing is old or new in a universe that has no beginning – but from the unprecedented union of benignity and power in the acts of Christ. These reveal him to be at least an emissary of the eternal God to whom the universal conscience of the human race bears testimony; he did not come, however, to sate the curiosity of unbelievers regarding the origin of the soul or the cause of evil (1.7, 2.61; though cf. 1.38). If pagans scoff, the Christian may scoff in return at their traditions (1.57), some of which are admitted to be poetic fabling (4.32). Arnobius is not in fact determined to question the truth of all pagan theology, provided that they abjure beliefs which are manifestly unworthy of the gods, be they one or many (4.18; 6.1–3 etc.). The Christian knows his saviour and will therefore be content to entrust to his wisdom all the questions to which neither faith nor philosophy can return an answer. And thus, in the work of an author who was for many years a pagan, we see the return of an argument which had hitherto been deployed in the pagan interest: not “we believe in order to understand”, but rather “we cannot know, and therefore we must believe.”

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Philo of Alexandria

Mark Edwards

Philo and his first principles

The life of Philo (c. 20 B.C.–c. 50 A.D.) coincides with the birth of the Christian era. It also marked a brief epoch in Jewish intellectual culture and a longer one in the history of Greek thought, primarily though perhaps not only in writings which put Greek thought at the service of Christianity. His innovation was to take as the axiom of his philosophy, if philosophy it is, the infallibility of a body of texts which he had no hand in writing, thereby setting at defiance the common Greek view that the way to truth is by ratiocination from first principles, accompanied by the interrogation of common phenomena and received assumptions. Christians were to differ from him in subjecting this inspired corpus to a new hermeneutic grounded in the equally infallible, but more perspicuous, teaching of the New Testament: Platonists and Peripatetics, even in their most scholastic exercises, always presented arguments to justify the authority of their founder rather than citing his authority to silence argument. If even they are accused by modern scholars of an irresponsible sacrifice of reason to faith, we cannot be surprised that Philo is belittled as a mere exegete by historians of philosophy, even while modern exegetes allege that it was his vassalage to the schools that prevented him from grasping the spirit, any more than he grasped the letter, of his Hebrew *vade mecum*.

What more might be expected of a man whose chief distinction in his own time, to judge by his presence on the embassy which the Jews of Alexandria sent to the Emperor Gaius in 38 A.D., was his fluency in the use of Greek? The object of this mission, which would have failed but for the death of the royal lunatic, was to dissuade him from erecting his statue in the Jewish Temple, thus creating the new abomination of desolation which is perhaps foreseen at Mark 13. This is evidence, no doubt, that he was a more faithful Jew than his nephew Tiberius Alexander: it is not evidence of his biblical erudition, or of his readiness to improve in Rome the arts that he had acquired in Alexandria (cf. Niehoff 2001: 111–151). For all that, the highest estimate of Philo as a thinker makes him the equal, at least in influence, with Maimonides and Spinoza (Wolfson 1962); the highest estimate of his exegesis suggests that, far from being a slave to the ambient culture, he was striving to bring that culture under the sway of a revelation who had hitherto held authority for no one but the Jews (Dawson 1991: 74–126). Both judgments recognise an indebtedness to rabbinic teaching which has not been captured by the

current practice of labelling Philo a Middle Platonist (Dillon 1977: 139–183): this instrument of domestication is useful only to those who deny that the Western mind is the child of both Greece and Israel. This joint patrimony we owe in no small part to the fact that the opinions of Philo the Jew on the sources of religious knowledge, the nature of God and the purpose of creation appeared at just the right time and in the right tongue to be read by a brotherhood of deracinated Greeks who were independently persuaded that salvation is from the Jews.

Sources of religious knowledge

Philo is confessedly a philosopher, but not a philosopher of any existing pagan school. In one of the most famous of his treatises, he extols the proficiency of the Greeks in the secular arts and sciences, but subordinates all these disciplines to the study of God, in which even the best of the Greeks have faltered for want of a revelation. This revelation has been conveyed to one people alone through Moses, whom the world knows as the lawgiver of the Jews. Philo too in the opening sentence of the first tract in his corpus, *On the Creation of the World*, gives him the appellation *nomothetês* or lawgiver, since Judaism is to him above all a *politeia* or way of life. The precepts which have been handed down by Moses are to be honoured to the last scruple, however arbitrary they might seem to an outsider; foremost among them are the Ten Commandments, inscribed by Moses himself on tablets of stone, and for the most part requiring no gloss, since they ask no more of us than to acknowledge the majesty of God (*On the Decalogue* 58–64) and to prove ourselves not inferior to his other creatures in kindness to our neighbour or in reverence to those who gave us life (*Decalogue* 111–117). At the same time, the more learned adepts of the one God will allow the Greeks to explain to them the sacred properties of the number ten (*Decalogue* 22–23; *Creation* 95 and 103), and when they read that the people of Israel witnessed the presence of God without hearing his voice, they will divine that the Law is addressed to the intellect rather than the ear (*Decalogue* 32–35; *Migration of Abraham* 47–48). Hence they will understand that the more elusive rationale for the laws which govern diet, worship and priestly vesture must be sought by the Greek device of reading the text as allegory.

Philo makes no secret of his debt to the Pythagoreans, whom he praises in an excursus on Moses' reasons for assigning seven days to the creation (*Creation of the World* 97). Pythagoras, of course, discovered only what Moses knew, and what God had written into the fabric of the world by providing that our lives should fall into epochs of seven years (*Creation* 103–105), that the seventh day should typically mark the climax of an illness and that infants born in the seventh month should be more apt to survive than those born in the eighth (*Creation* 124–125). The disciples of Pythagoras, however, hit on a principle which, though latent in scripture, was not clearly formulated in Jewish practice, namely that in a sacred injunction there are two elements, that which is heard and that which is understood. Ancient authorities frequently contrasted the *akousmatikoi*, who merely refrained from eating the heart or taking the common road because this was commanded, from the *mathêmatikoi*, who grasped the figurative meaning of these precepts; to the latter alone was imparted an understanding of the world as a system of numerical harmonies, although this deepening of knowledge did not exempt them, at least in the works of commentators later than Philo, from carrying out the ordinances in the most literal manner (Burkert 1972). In the same way, Philo argues that the literal washing of stomach and feet betokens the subjugation of all the appetites (*Special Laws* 1.206), that the unquenched fire on the altar should be a symbol of our unbroken return of thanks to the Creator (1.285–288) and that the animals which are designated clean or unclean are types of perseverance in virtue or else of dissolute pleasure (4.100–115). It is useless to be clean of body without clean in soul, but also impossible to be clean in soul without being clean of body.

Like most ancient allegory, Pythagorean exegesis is largely stochastic: if the interpretation is more perspicuous than the original and patently edifying, it bears witness to its own truth. Philo too often follows no stated principle in his unriddling of dark passages, but he has at least three foundations to build upon: an infallible scripture, which even in its literal sense gives a true and comprehensive account of the cosmos; an omniscient and omniscient God who at his own will reveals himself directly to his servants; and a confidence in the capacity of every human being, as a divinely ordered composite of body, soul, speech and mind (*On Dreams* 1.25) to construe what has been written and to digest what has been directly revealed, so long as we do not permit our frailties to obscure the beams which God is continually raining upon us (*On Dreams* 1.114). These, of course, are not discrete sources of knowledge: the scriptures, in testifying to the steadfastness of God, receive in turn the suffrage of God himself to their infallibility (*On Dreams* 2.220–222); in their historical passages, they commemorate men and women who in their outward lives were paradigms of unstinting service to God, while in the sacred text their actions function as parables of the soul's quest for wisdom and the perfection of virtue. Abraham was a man of flesh and blood who at God's call forsook his native land and its idols; he is also the allegorical counterpart of every soul that detaches itself from the goods of the world and the toils of the body in order to unite itself with God. Moses, whose biography in the scriptures is eked out with many explanatory and apologetic inventions, is not only the legislator of Sinai but the type of every votary who has reached that plane of knowledge which is dark to our own intelligence, all but crossing the eternal boundary between creature and Creator (*Life of Moses* 1.156–158). Joseph is historically a master of worldly wisdom (*On Dreams* 1.16) and dramatically a witness to the power of the soul to apprehend truths that elude our carnal eyes.

Abraham's departure from Chaldea is an image of the separation of intellect from the realm of common speech (*Migration of Abraham* 7), and the approximation of intellect to God is symbolised by his assuming the role of leader to others as he had once been led (*Migration* 175). In promising him that his seed would be equal to the stars of heaven, God informs us that the beauty of the celestial cosmos is mirrored in the soul (*Heir of Divine Things* 87–88). The division of sacrificial victims in Genesis 15 shows that Moses preempted Heraclitus in perceiving that the world is founded on binary oppositions (*Heir* 214); the undivided birds, by contrast, signify the integrity of the soul and of the heavens which are related to the earth as soul to body. The loftiest knowledge of God is attained, however, not by ratiocination but by the "horror of great darkness" which encompassed the sleeping Abraham at Genesis 15.12 – not the obnubilation of the mind by a sudden or chronic infirmity, not the thunderclap of dismay or even the mere serenity of contentment, but a divinely inspired enthusiasm (*Heir* 249), a setting of one light to permit the rising of another (*Heir* 264), which is recognised as something other than stupefaction or perturbation by the concomitant gift of prophecy (*Heir* 259.265). It is this sublimation of his mental powers that teaches us to seek the figurative import of his taking both a wife and a concubine – the mistress signifying the soul and the contemplation of God, while her Egyptian bondmaid stands for the body and hence for the lore imparted to the senses by the worldly or "encyclopaedic" arts (*Mating with Preliminary Studies* 24–26).

Although the dreams which Joseph interpreted were sent by God, they are emblematic of his being a statesman rather than a prophet. Just as Philo emulates Plato's classification of madness into four species when he distinguishes the enthusiasm of Abraham from three other kinds of trance, so now he echoes the simile of the Cave in *Republic* VII when he argues that the dreams which the statesman expounds are those of the multitude, who in waking life take false goods for real ones as though they were sleepers imaging that they see when their eyes are closed and that they walk when their bodies are still (*On Joseph* 125–131). On the other hand, there is no Platonic congener to the burning bush, discerned by the outward senses but understood, once

Moses heard the voice of God, to be a figure of Israel's resilience under perpetual affliction until the time when she could blaze forth with new splendour (*Life of Moses* 1.67–69). Since Philo affirms repeatedly that God does not speak as we speak (*Migration* 52), it is no surprise that the auditor to whom he confides the task of proclaiming his will should be rude of speech (*Life of Moses* 1.83); and even if God's word is more truly seen than heard (*Decalogue* 47), the slumber of Abraham has already prepared us for the withdrawal of Moses from the camp to an impenetrable asylum in which he celebrates the mysteries (*On Giants* 54) alone.

This, it would seem, is not the darkness of Sinai, for the anecdote is a conflation of two retreats at Exodus 33.7 and Exodus 20.21 (Cover 2015); the imagery attending the gift of the law in Philo is always of light and flame, and he commends at length the subsequent framing of the tabernacle and attiring of the high priest in imitation of a supernal prototype (*Life of Moses* 2.74–127). Nevertheless, the proper state of the prophet is to have taken leave of the senses, not to sink into insensibility like Noah (*On Drunkenness* 166) but to rise above every common test of sanity and decorum (*Drunkenness* 146–147; see further Lewy 1929: 1–41). This emancipation is characterized as a Corybantic ecstasy (*Creation of World* 71) – not a Platonic term but a reminiscence of Plato's use of terminology from the mysteries – and he is not ashamed to recall ten thousand occasions when he himself, in a season of intellectual barrenness, has experienced a sudden inundation from above which has left him ignorant of his own identity, let alone of what he was saying, what he was writing or the names of his own companions, and conscious only of a surfeit of ideas, an intensity of light, a heightened vision and an energy not his own (*Migration* 34). The path to the only knowledge of God that is truly knowledge, therefore, is to accept the exclusive and plenary inspiration of the scriptures, to make oneself worthy of reading them by the cultivation of virtue – that is in Plato's metaphor, by restoring the reins of the chariot to reason (*On Husbandry* 72–73) – and then, as Plato himself had intimated in the *Phaedrus*, by handing the reins from reason to the sanctified fury of love.

The nature of God

What then is this God, so amply revealed, so seldom apprehended? The nearest approximation that philosophy can offer is the Pythagorean term “monad”, connoting not only primacy in the order of being but absolute simplicity of nature which admits no distinction of subject and attribute (*Heir* 187). Yet at *Rewards and Punishments* 39–40, God is higher than the monad, and at *Special Laws* 2.176 it is merely his image. He may also be conceived as absolute being in the light of Exodus 3.14, where he intimates that his proper name is YHWH, glossed in the Greek text as I AM and supplemented by the command to tell Pharaoh “He who is has sent me.” Philo also employs the neuter *to on*, “that which is”; but whatever the gender, that being whose nature is simply to be, uncircumscribed by any further epithet, can be pronounced superior even to the One and the Good (*Contemplative Life* 2). This is perhaps a calculated rebuttal of Plato, who states that the Good is superior to *ousia* (*Republic* 509b); no Platonist or Pythagorean, however, had yet declared the first principle to be superior to thought (Whittaker 1969), and Philo's repeated affirmations that the deity is unknowable, ineffable and intangible, so that the mind slips away in trying to conceive him, carried theology to an altitude from which the pagan intellect had recoiled (*Embassy* 6).

Indeed it was more usual to apply such privative epithets to matter, the elusive substrate of physical existence which, although we are bound to posit it, can only be, as Plato says, a spurious object of reason. While Philo is in no doubt that God is known to us primarily through his creation of the physical world, he speaks equivocally of the status of matter. At *Allegory* 2.160 he seems to regard it, in the Platonic manner, as an eternal potentiality, lying ready to hand

before any act of creation; on the other hand, at *On Providence* 1.8 he insists that but for God there would be no matter even in its inchoate condition. The argument as to whether he was the first to postulate creation *ex nihilo* is occasionally clouded by the difficulty of ascertaining whether his subject is the physical or the intelligible universe (O'Neill 2002). The latter, residing eternally in the mind of God, resembles the paradigm of the *Timaeus* in containing the archetypes of all things that populate the material creation. The proper place of the forms within the divine mind is the Logos (*Creation of the World* 2 and 20–22), a term that is clearly biblical (Psalm 33.6), as it was never applied by Platonists to a supernal mediator between the first principle and the world. Nor was it employed by the Aristotelianising Platonists who, a century after Philo, inverted the relation between the paradigm and the demiurge of Plato by declaring that the transcendent intellect generates the forms (Rich 1954). Philo too believes this, and, while he is more cordial in his advocacy of the forms than any Platonist of his era, he writes as a Jew to Jews when he says that those who deny them will not stop of short of doubting the unity and the invisibility of God (*Special Laws* 1.327–333). As Wolfson observes (1961: 6–10), the Logos of Philo is not only the content of the divine mind but the means of decanting its infinite power to a finite world. Philo is in any case the first thinker known to have held that the forms are thoughts in the mind of God, not self-subsistent yet uncreated insofar as they have no temporal origin (Radice 2009: 131–134).

The source of Philo's nomenclature is no mystery to those who recall that Genesis 1 ascribes creation to the speech of God, which at Psalm 33.6 is styled his Logos. The Hebrew equivalent *memra* was one of a number of words that were used in rabbinic parlance in this period to betoken a mode of presence in the lower sphere that did not imply the subjection of God's own nature to space and time (Moore 1922; Gieschen 1998: 112–114). While *logos* in common Greek is a masculine noun but not a personal designation, the Logos of Philo also bears the titles High Priest (Decharneux 1994: 117–126) and Son or Firstborn of God (*Confusion* 62–63; *On Husbandry* 51). These, like the occasional description of him as the image of God, attest his function as the plenipotentiary of the Creator who cannot mingle with his own creatures (*On Flight* 101; *Confusion* 41 and 146); another title, "sword", shifts the emphasis from mere presence to power and judgment (*Heir* 140; *On Flight* 194–194; O'Brien 2015: 48–56). The Logos is also styled the chief of the angels, ambassadors of God who are incapable of evil (*Confusion of Tongues* 146, 177). Two other symbols of divine activity in Philo are Wisdom and the Holy Spirit, the first (as in Proverbs 8, Sirach 18 and the Wisdom of Solomon) a personification of God's omniscience as creator and lawgiver, while the second is Philo's own hypostatisation of a scriptural noun denoting the irresistible power of God (see further Levison 1995). The relation of the Spirit and Wisdom to Logos remains uncertain, but all imply some devolution of energy on God's part without diminution of essence. While no incarnation of divinity can be imagined on Philo's principles, Moses becomes a god to Pharaoh when he becomes the sole instrument of revelation to a benighted soul (Exodus 7.1; *Migration* 74; Runia 1988).

The purpose of creation

A treatise *On the Eternity of the World* espouses the Peripatetic argument, which had not yet been accepted by all Platonists (*Eternity of World* 14), that a temporal creation of the world would be unworthy of its Creator (see further Runia 1981). If it were even coherent to posit time before the world (52), we cannot believe that he spent that time in idleness (83); if, as the Stoics imagine, he creates a succession of worlds, he is either reduplicating perfection or has fallen short of it (41–43); if he created the world to contain all things, there is nothing outside it that could

bring about its destruction (21); the argument that the world is visibly undergoing corruption (and would therefore, in infinite time, have become extinct or homogeneous) is fallacious, for what we in fact perceive is not decay but the unceasing vicissitude of coming to be and passing away (113–150). Some deny this work to Philo, while others surmise that he wrote it to invite a refutation: his uncontested treatise *On the Creation of the World* maintains that the physical cosmos has an origin, coinciding with that of time, and that even the intellectual cosmos which is ontologically prior to it was created (though perhaps not in or with time) on the model of the eternal paradigm in the mind of God (*Creation* 17–22). This argument permits him to distinguish the incorporeal light of the first day from the visible radiance of the sun and moon (*Creation* 33 and 45); the ordering of the sensible realm, however, follows a temporal sequence, even if the mornings and evenings are figurative.

Why was humanity the last creation? Because it was necessary that the kingdom should be made ready for its sovereign (*Creation* 77–78), because it was fitting that the end should be worthy of the beginning (*Creation* 79–81), and because the beasts would not have been so ready to fear him had he been their companion from the outset (*Creation* 83–84). The seventh day is the day of rest and consummation because this number, having no factors, resembles God in being simple and ingenerate (*Creation* 100). Two creations of humanity are recounted, the first (at Genesis 1.26–28) of the male and female in the image of God, the second (at Genesis 2.1–9) of Adam alone in paradise, to be followed at 2.22 by that of Eve. Since Philo cannot adopt the modern expedient of assigning one narrative to the Priestly Writer and the other to the Jahwist, he argues that, as the intellectual cosmos precedes the physical cosmos, so a heavenly archetype, at once male and female, preceded the embodiment of Adam (*Creation* 134–135). Even this carnal progenitor of ours, however, excelled his descendants immeasurably in wisdom, power and virtue (*Creation* 136–138): the fall from noetic communion with God into vicious and ignorant sensuality was the consequence of allowing his mind to be ravished by the beauty of his helpmeet Eve, or rather by her reflection of his beauty, thus forgetting and forsaking the proper object of desire (*Creation* 151–152).

In this text, both the creation of the world and the planting of paradise are real acts, though many details of the narrative must be figuratively construed. The next treatise, by contrast, is an allegorical interpretation, in which paradise is no longer a terrestrial place, but seems to be equated with the condition of the soul before its fall (*Allegory* 1.43). The first man is again the heavenly archetype; the man “formed by God” at Genesis 2.7 is said (notwithstanding the immateriality of paradise) to be the earthbound mind, which would be for ever in thrall to vice were it not that the infusion of God’s own spirit has rendered it capable of reason and hence of virtue (*Allegory* 1.33–40). Philo introduces a further distinction between the man whom God made to guard and cultivate paradise and the man who is “placed” there without the moral capacity to exercise the virtues which are represented by its plants and rivers (*Allegory* 1.53–55). This is the one who is expelled from paradise; the other, earthbound mind though he is, appears to remain unfallen. In his treatise *On Abraham* 120–124, Philo declares that, while the highest object of contemplation is God himself, some merit belongs to a second class of seekers who contemplate only the divine goodness, and even to a third who contemplate only the divine power. At *On the Cherubim* 27–30, these two aspects of God, corresponding to the Greek designations *theos* and *kurios* (“God” and “Lord”), are personified by the two angels who are set to guard Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve. Can we conclude that the second and third class are nearing the gates of paradise, while those of the first have already reclaimed our primitive abode?

In *On the Giants*, Philo allegorises the passage in which angels (not “sons of God” as in the Septuagint) descend from heaven to father giants upon the daughters of men. From the

etymology of the Greek word for giants (*gēgeneis*, “earth-born”), he deduces that they represent human beings who remain irredeemably attached to the world. He contrasts them with those of a better order, who set their desires on heavenly goods, but these too are an embodied race and hence not to identified with a third, which has never fallen (*Giants* 14–16; 31). In this text, he asserts that angels, humans and demons are beings of one kind, distinguished only by their adhesion to vice or virtue (*Giants* 16): it would seem then that the angels are unfallen souls, the demons fallen souls who remain incorrigible and the humans souls who are capable of amendment. Philo also concludes from Genesis 6.3 (“My spirit shall not strive for ever”) that some embodied souls have been deprived of the spirit of God (*Giants* 19–21). Perhaps then, if we correlate the angels with the heavenly image of God in the *Allegorical Interpretation*, the possessors of the insufflated mind will be the humans of *On the Giants*, while the demons will be those who have no share in paradise (see further Winston and Dillon 1983).

For all his apparent vacillations, Philo maintains consistently that the soul exists in an incorporeal state before its descent into the body, and at *Heir of Divine Things* 240 he states that the cause of descent is *koros*, or satiety. If the fall in Eden is a historical event which impaired the powers of the body and its sensory faculties, it does not in itself entail any iniquation of the soul. Philo concurs with the rabbis who came after him in assigning two innate propensities to the embodied soul, one to vice and one to virtue, together with the untrammelled freedom of will to choose between them (*Rewards* 63). Like many Christians after him, he concedes that the natural man, for all his ignorance of God, is not always inferior to the elect in his moral discernment or his power of acting upon it: hence the unsurpassable feats of renunciation performed by such men as Diogenes the Cynic and the Indian sage Calanus (*Every Good Man is Free* 96–97 and 121). From Plato and the Stoics he adopts the tetrad of cardinal virtues – wisdom, temperance, fortitude and justice – and at *On the Immutability of God* 262–265 he argues that our pursuit of these should be tempered to the Aristotelian mean.

The legislation of Moses – which, as we have noted, inculcates only what is prescribed by nature – excels that of every Greek school in its universal benevolence, manifested habitually in solicitude for the poor and the weak, and extending even to the recognition of duties to one’s enemy (*On Virtues* 118–117). Moreover, it is Moses alone who teaches – though no biblical text is quoted – that the person who lives in perfect obedience to the commandments has become equal in rectitude to God himself (*Every Good Man is Free* 43). Where Plato had defined the goal of philosophy as likeness to God so far as is possible (*Theaetetus* 176c), Philo sets no limits to our capacity to perfect within ourselves the “image and likeness” that were bestowed upon the archetypal man. Where Aristotle assumes that the contemplative life is compatible with the retention of worldly goods and the restriction of friendship to men of one’s social class, Philo’s treatise *On the Contemplative Life* extols a community of ascetics, the Therapeutae, who have put away all possessions and domestic ties and levelled all differences of class and gender (*Contemplative Life* 68; Taylor 2003). Being observant Jews, they meet as a body every sabbath to hear religious discourses; the intervening six days are spent in frugal solitude, with no avocation but the unceasing perusal of the scriptures. They keep no slaves and taste no wine (*Contemplative Life* 70–74), and after their meatless feasts they spend the whole night singing hymns in antiphony (79–84). The Therapeutae share their name with a guild of physicians devoted to Asclepius, but it has also been suggested that the Greek hints at a possible etymology of the name Essene (Vermes 1962). The notion that they were Christians has all but died with its first proponent Eusebius of Caesarea (*Church History* 2.17), who appears to have been seeking ancient precedent for the communal regimen that was turning the desert into a city in the Egypt of his own day (see further Inowlocki 2006).

Philo and Christianity

It falls outside the scope of the present volume to decide whether the creative logos of John 1.2 or the two-edged sword of the word of God at Hebrews 4.12 are already prefigured in Philo (Dodd 1953: 54–73; Borgen 2003); we can say at least that no incarnation of the Logos has any place in his thought, and that even the earliest occurrences of this title outside the New Testament are no more likely to stem directly from him than from the Johannine tradition. The author to the Hebrews shares his interest in the imagery of the Temple and its celebrant, but to him the priest in this world is a mere shadow of the true hierophant, and it is left to Epiphanius in the fourth century to produce a rival to Philo's iconography of the stones on the High Priest's breastplate. It is argued that the Greek prototype of the Muratorian Canon, a second-century relic of uncertain provenance, ascribed the Wisdom of Solomon to Philo, whose name was then mistranslated in Latin as *ab amicis*, that is "by friends" of Solomon (Horbury 1994). The lofty asseverations of the hiddenness of God in his genuine works found an echo in Clement of Alexandria (Hägg 2006), who thus became the pioneer of the negative way in Christian mysticism. Clement, who names his fellow citizen four times at *Stromateis* 1.31.1, 1.72.4, 1.151.2 and 2.100.3, describes him as a Pythagorean, no doubt because this school of renunciants set the example of drawing out the cryptic truth from a text whose literal sense appears nugatory (see further Runia 1993: 135–136, 1995).

In other Christian writings, the rule is silent plagiarism from Philo rather than candid borrowing: some Gnostics strike a more extravagant vein of apophaticism, denying to the first principle even the privatives that take the place of attributes in Philo (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.9). At the same time, his contrast between the heavenly and the earthly man is phrased in terms that anticipate Gnostic myth more vividly than the gnomonic antithesis of 1 Corinthians 15.45. The division of humanity into three classes, of which the first belongs to heaven and the third to the lifeless clay while the second is saved or damned according to its own choice, is regarded by catholic authors as a Valentinian error (e.g. Tertullian, *Against the Valentinians* 17); Tertullian, however, who is certainly no Gnostic, distinguishes the pneumatic elect to which he belongs not only from the heathen but from flaccid coreligionists (*On Modesty* 6), while Irenaeus, at least in one passage, concurs with Philo in denying the Holy Spirit to those who have turned from God (*Against Heresies* 5.6.1). Marcion's subjection of the Demiurge, as blind dispenser of justice, to the benign God who redeems us through Jesus Christ may be a perversion of texts in which Philo reifies the goodness and justice of the Creator; but these passages might also be at the root of the primitive tendency to reserve the name "God" for the Father while venerating Jesus as Lord. They might also have suggested to the "Hebrew" teacher of Origen that the seraphim who stand to either side of God at Isaiah 6.3 are the other two persons of the Trinity (*First Principles* 1.3.4).

Origen, though he mentions Philo only at *Commentary on Matthew* 15.3 and *Against Celsus* 4.51 and 6.21, is the first known imitator of his practice of expounding the scriptures verse by verse, with frequent recourse to tropological readings where the literal sense appears to him insufficient. Believing as strongly as Philo in the temporal creation of heaven and earth, he concurs with him also in allegorising heaven and earth as the higher and lower faculties of the soul (*Homilies on Genesis* 1). His understanding of paradise too resembles that of his predecessor – in its obscurity, if in nothing else. He mocks any literal notion of God's planting a tree in Eden (*First Principles* 4.3.1), and asks naive readers whether they believe that the Creator of all wove coats of skin with his own hands for Adam and Eve (Epiphanius, *Panarion* 64.63.5). Nevertheless, it would seem that subsequent denizens of the garden must possess a body of some kind, for Origen writes that before they ascend through the spheres most souls are destined to

undergo chastisement in the earthly paradise (see now Edwards 2019; Martens 2019). We may argue that his position is equivocal, or that it changed, or that, while he privately assumed the state of the blessed to be incorporeal, he sometimes chose to dissemble this belief. To discount the Latin translations rids us of his most perspicuous allusions to a paradise on this earth (e.g. *First Principles* 2.11.6) or on any new one; it is also possible that he imagined both a terrestrial and an incorporeal paradise, one for the purification of the soul and one to receive it when it has shed the last vestige of mortality. If, on the other hand we are willing to posit gradations of corporeality, we might argue that he endowed both Adam and the future saints with bodies of a more rarefied character, in accordance with his reiterated maxim that no being can subsist without matter except the three persons of the Trinity (*First Principles* 2.6.4 etc.).

Greater perhaps than his influence on Origen himself (on which see Runia 1992) is Philo's influence on the interpretation of Origen which came to prevail in late antiquity (cf. Bostock 1987). It is evident from his extant writings in both Greek and Latin that Origen attributes to souls some form of preexistence before their present state of embodiment. In view of his denial of transmigrating and his insistence that no creature exists without a material substrate, many scholars would now contend that the seat of the unembodied soul is the mind of God (Tzamalikos 2006: 45), or else that the theory of its preexistence is advanced as myth, not as doctrine (Harl 1966). Origen's detractors in the sixth century, however, allege that he believed souls to have existed from all eternity as discrete and naked intellects. This, we might say, is redolent of Platonism in general rather than Philo in particular; when the same critics add, however, that Origen imputes the descent into bodies to satiety (*koros*), they appear to be superimposing the use of this term at *Heir* 240 on a passage in *First Principles* (1.4.1), which appears in fact to be explaining not the cause of the soul's captivity but the cause of its fall from innocence once embodied. Again they tell us that angels, humans and demons are all one species in Origen, set apart only by varying levels of moral degradation. Those who question the standard indictment sometimes propose that Origen has been burdened with the heresies of Evagrius – a hypothesis which substitutes one debatable list of charges for another. On the other hand, Philo's advocacy of the same tenets is incontestable, since he was fortunate enough to be no heretic but an infidel, so that his books were not condemned.

We owe to Eusebius both the first inventory of Philo's writings and an excerpt from a lost dissertation on providence, which teaches us to see God's handiwork even in the crocodile (*Church History* 2.18; *Preparation for the Gospel* 13.8.386–399). Runia (1991a) shows that Philo is the anonymous Jew whose teachings are rehearsed at length by Isidore of Seville; he is surely also the mouthpiece of those "Hebrews" who, according to Nemesius of Emesa, endorsed divination by dreams and held that humans are capable of immortality, though created neither mortal nor immortal (see *Nature of Man* 1.46, 1.56, 5.166, 12.201). Nemesius, however, has done scant justice to *Creation* 151, where we read that transgression is an inevitable consequence of the mortality that belongs to the outer man by virtue of his bodily nature. In contrast to Philo himself, his Christian admirers were bound to defend the resurrection of the body, even when, like Gregory of Nyssa, they maintained the ontological priority of the inner man and characterised the fall as a surrender of reason to animal desire. Origen is in any case the likely source for much that sounds Philonic both in Gregory and in Didymus the Blind – though not for Gregory's assertion in his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* that the archetypal man was winged (*GNO* VI.448.1–4), for which the closest antecedent is an allusion to the wings of the mind at *Rewards* 62. His argument that we cannot expect to know God as he is when we cannot even fathom his image in the human mind (*Making of Man* 11), is more reminiscent of Philo (*Change of Names* 10) than of Origen's comparison of human and divine mentation at *First Principles* 1.1.4–6.

The provenance of texts from Basil and Ambrose in which Runia (1991b) detects unacknowledged borrowings from Philo is also open to debate. Whether or not Augustine was directly acquainted with the *Allegorical Interpretation*, he too interprets paradise both as a physical locality and as an image of the soul, though with the caveat (at least in his mature years) that allegoresis can never be a substitute for, but only a supplement to, the historical sense (*On Genesis against the Manichaeans; On Genesis according to the Letter* 4.28.45). His division of humanity into two cities in the *City of God* is foreshadowed in Philo (*Confusion* 108), but also in Plato, in Cicero and in the dictum of Marcus Aurelius, “The poet says, dear city of Cecrops; will you not say dear city of Zeus?” (*Meditations* 4.23).

Philo is a Jew, who can relate with unabashed rancour the hideous death which God inflicted on the persecutor Flaccus (*Against Flaccus* 108–191). At the same time, as Daniel Schwartz observes (2009: 30), he espouses a Judaism whose headquarters is not Jerusalem but the heart and mind of the adept. He may have been the first to marry a version of the Stoic theory of natural law to the practice of the Mosaic commandments, but neither this innovation nor his doctrine of an intermediate Logos proved to be wholly irreconcilable with the philosophy of the rabbis (Winston 2009). He set the example of using allegory to vindicate both the completeness and the inerrancy of his ancestral scriptures, and also has a claim to be regarded as the progenitor of Christian mysticism (Louth 2007: 17–34). It must be admitted that evidence for Christian perusal of his works in the first few centuries is desultory, if by evidence we mean quotation or palpable indebtedness; the strongest proof of his fame, however, is not to be found in the witness of other texts but in the survival of his own, which (as he was all but forgotten by his coreligionists) is only to be explained by the assiduity of generation after generation of Christian scribes.

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Orpheus, Mithras, Hermes

Fabienne Jourdan, Mark Edwards

Introduction

The last thing that we expect from a philosopher of our own day is a myth in the style of Plato – unless it be a poem or a ritual of the kind to which Plato’s myths were a corrective. Philosophy, we believe, should be an austere cerebral exercise, which regulates life (if at all) by no other principle than reason, and stirs no emotions other than the logician’s delight in the clarity and economy of a well-formed argument. We hesitate to admit Nietzsche and Erasmus to our histories of philosophy; we are gracious to Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles because Aristotle has already marshalled them into a canon, but we barely consider the claims of Homer and Hesiod and are happy to remain ignorant of the Orphics, who do not even have a secure place in the annals of literature. The philosophers of the Roman world thought otherwise, and the more scholastic Platonism becomes the more apt it is to gild a piece of exquisite reasoning with a summary or quotation of the Thracian bard, whose authority seems to stem, like that of the prophets in Christian writings of the same epoch, from the very obscurity of his archaic diction.

We should know much less of Orphism but for Proclus; by contrast, we should possess abundant evidence of the cult that we know of Mithraism if not a word survived of ancient Greek or Latin literature. What we would never guess from the artefacts is that Mithraism had any pretensions to be a philosophy, for this we learn only from Porphyry, or rather from the predecessors whom Porphyry cites, together with the Christian invectives that were inspired both by the cult itself and by his advocacy. If Mithras was to Porphyry what Orpheus was to Proclus, Hermes holds an even more eminent place in the philosophy of Iamblichus, at least if we judge by his treatise *On the Mysteries*; the writings ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus survive independently and are clearly philosophical in form and intention, notwithstanding a popular and sometimes oracular manner which deterred the more strict practitioners from taking notice of them, then or now. Orpheus, Mithras and Hermes may not satisfy our definition of philosophy, but in the ancient world they enhanced the religious tone that was never wholly absent from the most fastidious expositions of Plato, Aristotle or Epicurus. Least of all, therefore, can they be excluded from a history of early Christian thought, in which philosophy was always subordinate to revelation, and the erudite few were no nearer to the kingdom of God than the pious multitude.

Orpheus and Orphism in the Christian literature of the first centuries¹

The Christian writers of the first five centuries do not perceive Orpheus and Orphism as some scholars of the nineteenth and of the beginning of the twentieth centuries think they do. They do not compare Orpheus' and Christ's descents into the underworld²; they do not draw any link between Orpheus and David, at least in their writings,³ as being both marvellous singers and musicians – Clement of Alexandria is the first and only one (before the Middle Ages) to suggest such a link, but in a negative manner (Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 1.5.2–4). They do not see in the religious movement ascribed to Orpheus a kind of religion unified firstly around a “holy Scripture”, as their own religion is around the Bible; or unified around a central myth, that of Dionysus or Zagreus, which would have contained in itself the principles of a theology characterised by an original sin, a suffering and then risen god and a message of redemption for humanity; neither do they see in this movement a religion unified around a prophet inaugurating a new religion set against the religion usually practised in the city of the time. In other words, for them, Orphism is not a kind of proto-Christianity. As to the link between Orpheus and Christ himself, it is finally made only by Clement in his *Protrepticus* in order to exhort the Greeks to convert through a depiction of Christ as a new Orpheus. However, this portrait, based on the picture of Orpheus as singer, is an exception in late antiquity.⁴

The Christian writers of the first five centuries make use of six main features of the figure:

- 1 Orpheus' status as founder of Greek religious institutions (he is the “first theologian”) and more precisely of the Mysteries;
- 2 Orpheus' chronological status: he preceded Homer in time;
- 3 Orpheus' possible presentation as a Barbarian because of his supposed Thracian origin (after the Jews, the Christians were also considered as Barbarians, they could therefore use this origin of Orpheus to their own advantage);
- 4 Orpheus' supposed journey to Egypt (the traditional journey to the land of Wisdom that the Greeks supposed every ancient philosopher and theologian had made);
- 5 Orpheus' supposed conversion to monotheism, according to a Jewish legend born in Alexandria in the second century B.C., which also attributes to him a poem revealing the Biblical message to his pupil Museus and therefore to the Greeks;⁵
- 6 Orpheus' image as singer and citharist.

Let us see how they use these features in polemical contexts. We will then examine the motives of the Orphic lore they appropriate to enhance Christianity.

I Christian strategies in the use of the figure of Orpheus

The Christian writers of the first centuries evoke Orpheus to criticise and condemn paganism (and heterodoxy, considered an imitation of paganism) through the figure of its supposed founder, or to show the presence in paganism (always through the intermediary of its founder) of an allusion to the Biblical message or a prefiguration of the Christian one, sometimes even of the very discourse which is considered orthodox. In their offensive or exhortative works, the mention of Orpheus serves three kinds of strategies.

A The denunciation

First, the Christian writers aim at defending their peers against a series of religious and moral accusations and they use these very accusations against their adversaries. In this context, Orpheus is accused of being the founder of the Greek mysteries and by extension of the Greek (impious and sacrilegious) religion itself.⁶ His journey to Egypt is not used only to discredit the primacy of Greek culture because it was supposedly borrowed from Egypt.⁷ Egypt is seen as the country of idolatry *par excellence* (Eusebius, *Preparation* 10.8.1–16): the fact that Orpheus came after Moses is therefore emphasised in order to prove that the Greek religious traditions followed the Christian ones and are consequently inferior.⁸ In this polemical context, even Orpheus' alleged conversion is a target. Clement notes that it is not complete (Clement, *Protrepticus* 7.74.4); the author of the *Ad Graecos* points out that it does not result from a personal choice, but from a decision of the Providence who made use of Orpheus as a tool for its own project (Ps.-Justin, *Cohortatio* 15.2). The accusations can be more aggressive: the legend serves the denunciation of Orpheus as the author of a vain and impious work – the introduction of polytheism – he is said to have abandoned himself later (Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 3.2.2), or as a semi-prophet unable to transmit clearly the truth he had a glimpse of (Augustine, *City of God* 18.4; *Against Faustus* 13.2 and 5). Theodoret goes so far as to reverse the legend and denounces Orpheus as an apostate who first knew the truth, but made a bad use of it in order to deceive the Greeks and lead them to idolatry (*Cure for Greek Distempers* 2.32f).

B The highlighting of Orpheus' merits in order to denigrate the Greek traditions

The second strategy consists in pointing out certain of Orpheus' merits with a view to discrediting Greek traditions. Two examples can be given here. First, his barbarian origin is underlined by Tatian to show to the Greeks that their supposed cultural superiority is spurious because the inventor of their culture was not Greek himself (and it cannot be forgotten in this context that Tatian was Assyrian and not Greek).⁹ The second example concerns Tatian as much as his alleged pupil Clement. Both emphasise the anteriority of Orpheus as poet, who, according to them, came even before Homer and Heraclitus, in order to assert that the whole of Greek culture, namely poetry, religion and philosophy, plagiarises Orpheus' production.¹⁰ This accusation is brandished to denounce the Greeks as villainous (Clement, *Stromateis* 6, as shown later), but also serves another purpose than mere criticism: Clement makes use of it to claim that the whole Greek culture was influenced by the Biblical message because it is copied from Orpheus who knew this message.¹¹

C Orpheus as a model

Finally, the Christian writers present Orpheus as a model. This presentation is inseparable from the Jewish legend of his conversion to monotheism, of his instruction by the Egyptian pupils of the Hebrews (Ps.-Justin, *Cohortatio* 14.2) or by Moses himself (Artapanus, in Eusebius, *Preparation* 9.27), as well as of the sacred poem which he is supposed to have written on the One God. The Christian writers continue this legend in order to prove to the pagans that their religious founder had already “sung” in agreement with the Biblical message and to exhort them to convert as he himself did.¹² They do not hesitate to write new verses which they attribute to Orpheus, and this time to prove that the poet sings not only in agreement with the Christian

message, but with the form of it that is presumed to be orthodox, as we read in Didymus' treatise on the Holy Spirit.¹³

In Clement moreover, the figure of the mystagogue on the one hand and of the citharist on the other hand are endowed with a specific role. Since the *Protrepticus* presents the mysteries as centred around the figure of Dionysus, it turns Orpheus into the servant and priest of a kind of unique god.¹⁴ Clement first criticises this presentation, but it prepares the portrait of Christ as a new and better Orpheus, the hierophant and great priest of the one and only God (Clement, *Protrepticus* 12.120.2–5). This portrait is based on Orpheus' image as singer and citharist, which is also attacked at first (see n. 16), but then used to enhance in contrast the efficiency of the Word.¹⁵

The three general attitudes can be found in the same writer and even in the same work, as is the case in Clement and Eusebius.

II Christian polemical use and appropriation of the Orphic lore

The Christian writers make a polemical use of Orpheus' work as theologian and founder of the Mysteries in the same way as they use Orpheus himself: They quote his verse to prove the impiety of the Greek theology,¹⁶ to denounce its use by the so-called heretics as a model,¹⁷ and to condemn the materialism and immanentism inherent in the religion of the Greeks¹⁸ and in their philosophy, which sophistically¹⁹ interprets these effusions.²⁰ On the other hand, Clement shows that they could contain conceptions of the Divine similar to the ones described in the Bible²¹ and uses previous Stoic and Pythagorean interpretations of Orphic verses, which he adapts to his own Christian eschatological views.²² However, the most interesting is the choice of a series of motives used for the Christian appropriation of the Orphic lore. Let us make it clear straightaway that our authors are not interested in the specific way of life and diet Orpheus is supposed to have prescribed;²³ neither do they draw a comparison between Orphism and Christianity as the religion of the Book.²⁴ The motives they appropriate come from Orphic literature, and they, themselves, add a few more. As to the Orphic "mysteries", the Christian attitude is less predictable than we could expect.

A Appropriation of the Orphic theology

The monism that impregnates this poetry is certainly the main reason for this appropriation,²⁵ and it had certainly already contributed to the choice of Orpheus by the Jews as author of the so-called *Testament*.²⁶ A series of less recurrent motives is also used and transformed by the Christians. The most noticeable are the following:²⁷

- The motive of the breath present in these verses: the Pseudo-Clementine novel points it out in order to show a parallel with the breath of the *Genesis* (*Clementine Recognitions*, supplement 10.32.1) and [Didymus], *On the Trinity* 2.27 resorts also to this motive present in a rewritten verse in order to read it as a prefigurative hint at the Holy Spirit and therefore at his doctrine of the Trinity.
- A second motive is that of the god Phanès or Protogonos, who, when appearing, makes all things appear with him: Lactantius sees in him an image of the Creator (*Institutes* 1.5.4; cf. *Epitome* 3), and in the *Theosophy of Tübingen*, this figure is associated with the Only Son, that is the *Monogenès*, seen as the agent of Creation (*Theosophia* 2.9 Beatrice = 61 Erbse).
- The figure of the bisexual god (Zeus or Phanès, according to the version of the myth mentioned) is also used as image of the Creator in Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.125.1–5.14.126.4.

(Lactantius, however, denounces this motive as unsuitable to describe the birth of the Son at *Institutes* 4.8.4 and 6)).

- The story of the swallowing of Phànès by Zeus and the regurgitation of all the gods by the same Zeus is mentioned by Clement who gives to it an eschatological meaning (*Stromateis* 5.14.122.2f).
- More generally, the fact that all the meaning of this poetry is supposed to be concealed and that Orpheus would have made a sharp distinction between the initiates and the non-initiates is evoked not only by Clement, but also by Theodoret who mentions it in order to justify the necessity of faith as a preliminary to gaining access to the knowledge about God (*Cure* 1.114; 2.86).

In addition, with their interpretation and rewriting of Orphic verses, the Christian writers themselves introduce new motifs into this poetry. The images of the Creator and of the Holy Spirit have already been mentioned, but Clement (*Stromateis* 5.14.116.2) even quotes a forged verse mentioning a relationship between Father and Son, showing that the core of the Christian faith is also present in a prefigurative way in this poetry.

Finally, there is a motif that must be evoked because it has often been pointed out by modern scholars, namely the story of Dionysus, his murder and resurrection – a story which actually does not specifically belong to the Orphic lore. Justin is the only one who sees a pagan plagiarism of biblical stories in it and he doesn't link it to Orpheus (Justin, *Trypho* 69; *First Apology* 1.54). Clement, Arnobius and Firmicus Maternus all mention this story without making any comparison between it and Christ's ordeal,²⁸ and it is not sure whether any of them tries to conceal the possibility of such a comparison. The parallel between the eating of Dionysus and the Eucharist or the comparison between the murder of the god and its consequences for humanity and original sin is primarily the result of modern projections.²⁹ The aim of such projections is to reconstruct Orphism as a coherent system prefigurating – or at least having affinities with – Christianity or even sometimes with Protestantism. Even when Firmicus considers Dionysus as a sacrificial victim, his words are to be taken as an *interpretatio christiana* of the Greek episode he comments on (Firmicus, *Error* 6.5).

B Christian attitude to the Orphic mysteries

If the Christians of the first centuries mention the mysteries, it is primarily to criticise the impiety of the Greek traditions.³⁰ However, they see favourably the notion of mystery itself. Clement makes a rich use of it in order to exhort the pagans to convert, and Theodoret takes up the same notion in order to justify his call to faith (Theodoret, *Cure* 1.114; 2.86). But the Christian writers totally ignore the eschatological aspect of the Greek mysteries and the idea that they were conceived as a means of getting into contact with the gods. This concealment is certainly due to their intention to underline these aspects in their own practices (Clement, *Protrepticus* 12.119f). At least, they don't make the parallels drawn by some scholars of the nineteenth and of the beginning of the twentieth centuries who wanted to compare the mysteries and the Christian practices by pointing out the supposedly similar topics of death and resurrection, divine lineage, revelation, salvation, communion. All these topics have different meanings according to the framework in which they appear.³¹

To conclude, the features of Orpheus and his work that the Christians of the first five centuries appropriate, more specially to depict Christ as a better and new Orpheus and Christianity as the greatest Mystery, are the following: the existence of the Jewish-Hellenistic discourse in which Orpheus praises monotheism; Orpheus seen as a barbarian, which likens him to the

Christians; his status as the very first theologian, which permits one to assert that the seeds of Christianity are present at the beginning of the Greek religion itself; his representation as the priest of an “Only God” (Dionysus) and as the founder of Mysteries that, once purified, could be used to enhance the Christian Mystery; and finally, the image of the singer endowed with marvellous powers, allowing a parallel with the efficiency of the Word through the biblical image of the new Song. As to the link with the figure of David, it is woven into Christian literature only by Clement in his emphasis on the power of the Song. Yet, by doing so, he refutes any comparison between the pagan citharist and the Psalmist. Such a comparison will not be positively developed in literature until the Middle Ages – a way, however, Clement surely paves.

Christianity and Mithraism

From ancient times the church has been accused of surreptitiously aping the rituals of the Persian cult which was dedicated to Mithras. Mithras is hailed as a source of light and guardian of the cosmic law in Zoroastrian scriptures, and whatever we make of the story that his cult in the Roman world was established by Cilician pirates in the first century before Christ,³² we cannot doubt that Antiochus of Commagene, a Greek-speaking king of Armenia in the same period, fused him with Apollo and the sun in a dedication which also couples Zeus with Oromasdes or Ahura Mazda, the chief god of the Achaemenid and Sassanid rulers of Persia.³³ Just as it was urged in the second century that Christ’s birth in a cave is a calque on the legend that Mithras sprang from a rock, so it is now maintained that the celebration of his nativity on the 25th of December supersedes a feast of the sun and that the meals at which some fifteen to thirty worshippers reclined in the subterranean Mithraea were anticipations of the eucharist. At the same time, since it is evident that his shrines were spread throughout the Roman world and that most of his adepts within the Roman army cannot have been of Persian origin, Mithras has been characterised as the one oriental god who vied with Christ in popularity. From this it is easily inferred – especially by those who see the influx of the Orontes into the Tiber as an adumbration of twentieth-century groping for the orient – that Christianity was simply the most successful of the foreign wares that flooded the “religious marketplace” when the civic cults no longer offered sufficient nourishment to the soul. The determining factors, on this view, may have been the favour of Constantine, or the church’s willingness to admit both sexes; on the other hand, the two religions are said to have been of a piece in their pursuit of moral purity, their devotion to an anthropomorphic saviour and their institution of the common table as a means to the continual renewal of his presence.

Fifty years ago, all these were fashionable positions;³⁴ all would now be dismissed by many scholars as hasty deductions from polemic and partisan testimony, reinforced by a desultory and tendentious reading of the archaeological remains. Early Christian writers had an interest in representing pagan mysteries as diabolic parodies of their own sacraments; they are also apt to maintain that every nation has its own false creed, in contrast to the universal way which has been opened by the gospel. Firmicus Maternus, who evinces both these tendencies in his address to the sons of Constantine, would now be judged doubly suspect rather than doubly credible (Edwards 2015: 308–312). The most familiar scenes on the walls of Mithraea shows Mithras straddling a bull and raising his knife to cut its throat: on the one hand, there are no proven antecedents for this Tauroctony in Persian myth,³⁵ and on the other hand no ancient witness states that the victim of this immolation was Mithras himself or that the flesh of a bull was one of the foods consumed in his honour. The sidereal diagrams which surround the image of Mithras as bull slayer suggest that the bull is best construed as a symbol of the constellation, as Porphyry appears to intimate in his *Cave of the Nymphs* (Edwards 2015: 117). Many now

favour the theory that the Mithraists were attempting to reverse the procession of the equinoxes and construct a more ancient pattern of the heavens than was visible to observers in their own era.³⁶ By contrast, many now regard the lurid description of the Mithraic Taurobolium in Prudentius as a literary invention:³⁷ if there was ever a ceremony in which the initiate lay in a pit and imbibed the black blood that was poured upon his face through a wooden grill, it was celebrated only by the votaries of Cybele and Attis, as numerous inscriptions testify. As for the modern claim that Christmas Day is the successor to a feast of the sun on December 25, we need only observe that the feast is first attested in a calendar of 354,³⁸ while there is evidence that Christians were commemorating the birth of Christ on December 25 in the earlier decades of the fourth century.³⁹ In any case, there is no warrant for associating Mithras with a Roman solar festival, and no cognate explanation for the widespread observance of January 6 as the anniversary of both the birth and the baptism of Christ (e.g. Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38.3 and 40).⁴⁰

No narrative purporting to be historical, then, will present the cult of Mithras as a postscript to Zoroastrianism or as an overture to Christianity. This being said, it is also a fact of some historical interest that the Persian origins of Mithraism were uncontested in antiquity, while informed observers thought that they detected common grounds between its tenets and those of some professing Christians. We may safely ignore the epilogue to the *Acts of Archelaus*, where the dualism of Mani is traced through Basilides to Zoroaster himself; on the other hand, we seldom meet inaccurate or inauthentic quotations from either Greek or Christian literature in the diatribe of Celsus against Christianity, and he therefore deserves our credence when he describes a Mithraic depiction of the soul's ascent through seven heavens, each ruled by a different planet and locked by a gate of the corresponding metal (Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.22–23). We may assume that the passage through these gates keeps pace with the seven grades of initiation enumerated by Jerome;⁴¹ the existence of such grades is attested also in Porphyry's *Cave of the Nymphs*, which adds that it was the custom of the Persians to perform their initiations in a cave to represent the descent of the soul and its return to heaven from the sublunary realm. The diagram known to Celsus showed a configuration not only of the planets but of the stars, while Porphyry reports that Zoroaster dedicated a cave to Mithras as an icon of the world that he had created. The presence of similar odysseys in the *Poimandres* and Numenius does not help to determine the date and provenance of the diagram, but illustrates the difficulty of identifying any peculiar trait of Mithraism.

Celsus professes to have caught certain Christians in the act of plagiarism. Origen, who does not question the provenance of the Mithraic diagram, protests nonetheless that Celsus is guilty first of giving undue salience to this little-known pagan sect, and then of treating one of the most obscure conventicles of heresy as though it were representative of the church (*Against Celsus* 6.24). It is he who gives the name "Ophite" to those whom Celsus cites as Christians, and he derives this name from the serpent whom he declares to be their object of worship in purposeful defiance of true believers. Before reproducing the prayers which they address to the keepers of the seven gates, he remarks that the Ophites place Leviathan, the great dragon, at the centre of a map in which this world is stigmatised as Gehenna or hell, while the Creator is a mere demiurge whom they style an accursed God (*Against Celsus* 6.25–28). Although all this is said to prove that they have no right to the appellation "Christian", he himself is prepared elsewhere to equate the devil both with the dragon and with the first material creation (*Commentary on John* 1.17.95–97); and while he has Paul's authority for denying that any malediction on Christ is permissible even under threat of death, he knew well enough that the power of sin had been broken only when he who knew no sin had been made sin for us, accepting of his own will the curse that the Law pronounced on "him who hangs on a tree".⁴² For all his reticence

on this point, he concedes that Celsus has accurately described the bestial physiognomies of the seven daemons of the Ophites, and analogues can easily be produced from the Gnostic texts which are now available to scholars. Chief of the planetary archons in such literature, as in the Ophite diagram, is the lion-headed demiurge Ialdabaoth;⁴³ his counterpart has been found in certain temples to Mithras above the inscription *Deo Arimano*,⁴⁴ a dedication by way of exorcism rather than worship to the evil twin of Ormuzd, who is credited in Zoroastrian scriptures not with the making but with the marring of the world.

Thus Mithraists and Ophites adopt a similar cartography of the heavens, and the ruler of the topmost heaven in the Ophite diagram has the features of a god who could not be excluded from the Mithraeum. Origen is happy to grant the chronological primacy to the pagan sect, as the Ophites do not fall under his definition of Christianity. Modern scholars note the syncretisation tendencies of both Gnosticism and Mithraism: who would not be glad, if the facts permitted it, to subsume one into the other, when one presents us with whole libraries of texts but no archaeology, and the other with a plethora of artefacts but barely a word of reliable commentary? Without going so far, we may give some credit to Firmicus Maternus when he informs us that the idol of the Mithraists is a goddess with three faces who is plainly Hecate, queen of the underworld and the magical arts,⁴⁵ perhaps functioning here as a female counterpart to Ahriman. The Mithras of Firmicus is a stealer of cattle who conceals his nefarious mysteries in a cave – no god, in fact, but a man whose disciples now salute him in metre as the “mystic of cattle-rustling, right-hand companion of the noble father” (*Error of Profane Religions* 4). The first acclamation is redolent of Hercules, the second of Christ, although Firmicus clings to his premise that Mithraism is a Persian cult – the only one (as he sneers) that has nested in Rome. Remembering that Mithras is also the name of the priest who inducted Apuleius into the mysteries of Egypt (*Golden Ass* 11.22 and 25), we can only repeat that Mithraism seems to have been in one way what Christianity was in another – the religion of all peoples, and of none.

Christianity and Hermetism

Where the Mithraists are a sect without a literature, the collection of tractates known as the *Corpus Hermeticum* is a literature in search of a community. In this respect it resembles Orphic literature, but its strongest affinities are with Platonism, if we take the principal tenets of this philosophy to be the supremacy of the intellectual, the unity of the good, the imperfection of the sensory realm and the natural divinity of the soul.⁴⁶ Some of the texts equate God with intellect, while others characterise him in a more apophatic manner as the source of mind and spirit; the creation of the material world is presented both as an imposition of form on matter by an immanent deity and as an act of divine amnesia comparable to the fall of Sophia in Gnostic thought. Neither creation nor embodiment is an absolute evil, but almost every text proclaims the superiority of the cause of motion to that which is moved. So long as it fails to master the body, therefore, the soul is its captive, and the object of the majority of texts is to reawaken it to a knowledge of itself. This knowledge (*gnōsis*) includes an awareness of our moral freedom in all conditions, notwithstanding our inability to alter the course of nature: both the determinate order which we call fate and the self-determination of our own lives which we call virtue are expressions of the divine will as it beckons to the divine element in the soul. In the fourth tractate, souls endowed with Logos are summoned to be reborn as intellects in a cup sent down by God; in the thirteenth, *gnōsis* or knowledge is not only the goal but the instrument of salvation, and Tat the pupil of Hermes rejoices to feel himself transfigured by the teachings of his master (*Corpus Hermeticum* 13.11).

The first name is derived from that of Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom; Hermes (who is often styled Trismegistus, or “Thrice-Great”, in Hermetic literature) was his recognised equivalent in the Greek pantheon. While it is hardly possible for the whole corpus to be of native Egyptian provenance, the name *Poimandres*, assumed by the “Mind of the Sovereignty” in Tractate 1, has been plausibly derived from an indigenous title of Ra.⁴⁷ At the same time, the account of creation unfolded in the *Poimandres* (to give this work its usual title) is plainly indebted to the opening chapter of Genesis and Jewish locutions recur in the hymns of Tract 13, most obviously the verb *ktizein*, “to create”.⁴⁸ The inference that the *Hermetica* emanate from Jewish circles, not wholly untouched by Egyptian lore, has been maintained by a number of scholars:⁴⁹ if that is true, however, its authors were not merely propagating but transforming the thought of Moses in the fashion of their gnostic contemporaries. Thus, where Genesis 1.2–3 ascribes the creation of light to a divine command, the *Poimandres* makes the logos, or Word, an emanation of eternal light (*Hermeticum* 1.5). The “pneumatic word” which moves upon the surface of the primeval mud is certainly a tributary of the Spirit in Genesis 1.2, but in the Hermetic narrative, *pneuma* is one of the physical elements, while the mud, as Dodd remarks,⁵⁰ is more reminiscent of the cosmogony which Porphyry attributes to the Phoenician Sanchuniathon. The echoes of this cosmogony, both here and in the third tractate, are perhaps designed to indicate that the author has access to sources which are more ancient than Moses and consequently more worthy of belief.

We may even suspect an allusion to the New Testament when *Poimandres* speaks of a mystery that was hidden until this day.⁵¹ While his cosmogony is Gnostic inasmuch as it recounts the seduction of a supercelestial power by matter (*Hermetica* 1.14–15), the substitution of the divine Anthropos for the Sethian and Valentinian figure of Wisdom suggests that the gospels have replaced Solomon as the substrate of the myth. Any such speculation, of course, implies that at least some writings of the New Testament are older than the *Hermetica*: an ingenious case to the contrary was put by Richard Reitzenstein,⁵² who argues that the preface to the second-century *Shepherd of Hermas*, in which the church appears first as a maiden then as an older woman, is modelled on the epiphany of Poimandres, who undergoes various changes of aspect in the course of his revelation.⁵³ Reitzenstein takes the name Hermas as a modification of Hermes and Poimandres as a telescoping of the Greek *poimên andrôn*, “shepherd of men” (the first assumption, however, is gratuitous, as the narrator of the *Poimandres* is anonymous, whereas Hermas is an attested name at Romans 16.14; as to the second, modern scholarship seems more likely to ratify the Egyptian etymology of *Poimandres* than to concur with Reitzenstein, even though he has the implicit support of the thirteenth tractate (*CH* 13.15 and 19)). The *Poimandres*, as we have said, is neither Egyptian nor Jewish: rather than antedating the New Testament, it may be the work of a writer who considered himself a Christian. Certainly his would be an eclectic gospel, and heterodox in any era; but why should not a Gnostic (to give him a label) choose to re-pristinate his own creed as a forgotten revelation, just as more orthodox writers present their version of Christianity as the primordial philosophy of which all other systems are bruised remains?

We should not lose sight of the fact that the only indubitable quotations from the *Hermetica* occur in Christian authors.⁵⁴ For Lactantius, our earliest and most copious witness, Hermes is indeed the first philosopher, therefore the wisest, and a harbinger of the Christian revelation. As a rhetorician whose aim is to persuade, he is willing to purchase the alliance of the pagan sage by endorsing locutions that would be unpalatable to an orthodox theologian. Citing both the extant corpus and texts which are now known only from his testimony, he shows that Hermes imagined the soul to be not only an image of God but a divine complement to our mortal nature. He quotes with approval not only the affirmations of God’s incorporeality and

transcendence, but the dictum that the highest God is both motherless and fatherless, with its corollary that the divine subsumes both sexes. A treatise entitled the *Perfect Discourse* (*teleios logos*) is for him a testimony to the existence of the Son as a “second god” – that is, a visible iteration of divinity – notwithstanding the fact that the Hermetist identifies this being with the starry cosmos rather than its Maker. His sources include the Greek original of the *Asclepius*, a vindication of providence which now survives only in a Latin rendering ascribed to Apuleius. Augustine appeals to the same book in the *City of God*, not only without ascribing it to Apuleius, but in explicit criticism of his demonology: he skilfully rests his case on two short passages which imply that every deity but the One God is a figment of the sculptor’s imagination, and goes on to adduce a prophecy that a day will come when the shrines of Egypt are unfrequented ruins. If this is an allusion to the spoiling of pagan temples in the time of Theodosius, Lactantius must have possessed an earlier version of the *Asclepius*; on the other hand, one could argue that the prophecy was already fulfilled when the Ptolemies set up new gods in Egypt. If the attribution of the Latin to Apuleius is defensible,⁵⁵ the Greek cannot be later than the early second century, and may antedate the *Poimandres*; whatever its date, however, its provenance and purpose remain as open to conjecture as those of any other writing in the corpus.

A Greek text attributed to the martyr Anthimus, but more probably by Marcellus of Ancyra, denounces the appellation “second god” as an Arian solecism inspired by Plato and Hermes.⁵⁶ This is doubly tendentious, as we have no proof that Arius spoke of Christ as a second god or was acquainted with the Hermetica. An author whom Marcellus would have disdained, the alchemist Zosimus, commends Hermes for his teaching that the soul is free from the laws which bind the elements; he was Christian enough to give the name Theossebeia to the dedicatee of his *Treatise on the Omega*, where he promises that she will see the Son of God becoming all things, and to knead baptismal and eucharistic images into another text which recounts his own dream of an immolation followed by rebirth.⁵⁷ An orthodox work on the Trinity, attributed to Didymus the Blind, reinforces exegetic arguments with Hermetic testimonies to the irradiation of primaevial chaos by an intellectual light and the omnipresent action of the creative Spirit. Cyril of Alexandria sets Hermes against his putative coreligionists as a witness to the immateriality of God, his inscrutability, the ubiquity of providence and the impossibility of pleasing God unless we strive to perfect his image in our souls. In all these authors, Hermes lends his suffrage to positions which have been formed on other grounds, and it cannot be maintained (since Arius and Zosimus were already lost to the church) that his pagan vocabulary has been allowed to inflect the formulation of Christian doctrine. John of Stobi (Stobaeus) should also be numbered among the admirers of Hermetic literature in late antiquity, for he preserves many excerpts in his florilegium which are not found in the extant tractates. It remains, however, impossible to determine whether Stobaeus was a pagan saving what he could from the shipwreck of the classical world or a Christian writing for fellow believers who needed rapid access to the more recondite productions of the Greek mind.

Notes

- 1 This chapter summarises a part of Dr. Jourdan’s previous research on Orpheus in the writings of the Church Fathers of the first five centuries (see Jourdan 2014a, 2014b; also Herrero de Jáuregui 2010).
- 2 It is only in the Middle Ages that the focus on the journey into Hades to bring back Eurydice is used as an allegorical picture of Christ’s journey into hell and his victory over death, see Friedman 1970. The descent into the underworld and the fact that Orpheus is murdered are only mentioned by Origen. But Origen (*Against Celsus* 2.55; 7.53) just replies to Celsus who pretended to make use of both these episodes to compare Orpheus and Christ at the disadvantage of the latter.
- 3 On the iconography, see Jourdan 2014c; Jourdan 2010–2011: I, 366–373; Roessli 2014.

- 4 Something similar can be found only in Eusebius, who follows Clement in his *Eulogy of Constantine* (14.4f) and in the Roman iconography, Jourdan 2010–2011: I, 381–399 with bibliography.
- 5 Concerning this legend and this poem, see Jourdan 2010, with updated bibliography.
- 6 Athenagoras, *Embassy* 18.3–6; XX; XXXII 1; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 1.3.1; 2.13.3–2.17.2; 2.21.1; 7.74.3; *Clementine Homilies* 6.17.1; 6.17.3; *Clementine Recognitions, supplement* 10.35.1–3; Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.17–18; 7.54; Ps.-Justin, *Cohortatio* 26.3ff; Ps.-Hippolytus, *Refutation* 5.20.4f; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 26.4.8–10; 33.8.7–11.
- 7 Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 3. 9, 12; Theodoret, *Cure for Greek Distempers* 1.21f; 1.96.4f; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 4.2.6f.
- 8 Athenagoras, *Embassy* 18.1; 18.3; Tatian, *Oration* 27.2; 41.1f; Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* 1.3.1; *Stromateis* 1.14.59.1; 1.14.60.1; 1.21.131.1; Eusebius, *Preparation* 3.9.14; 9.27; 10.4.4; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 33.8.9; Augustine, *City of God* 18.14 and 37.
- 9 Tatian, *Oration* 1.2; 27.2; 41.1f. Cf. Theophilus, *Autolytus* 2.30; Clement, *Stromateis* 1.15, 66, 1; Theodoret, *Cure* 1.21; 1.114; 2.30; 2.95; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 4.2.6f.
- 10 Tatian, *Oration* 41.1f; Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.116.1f; 6.2.5.3f; 6.2.17.1f; 6.2.26.1f; 6.2.27.1f; cf. Ps.-Justin, *Cohortatio* 17.1; 36. 4.
- 11 Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.116.1; 6.2.5.3 and 6.2.26.1f. Cf. Eusebius, *Preparation* 10.4.10; Ps.-Justin, *Cohortatio* 36.4; Cyril of Alexandria, *Against Julian*, 1.35. (cf. Ps.-Justin, *On Monarchy* 2.4); [Didymus], *On the Trinity* 2.27; Lactantius, *Institutes* 1.5.4.
- 12 Such an exhortation can be found in Clem. Alex. *protr.* and *strom.* and in Ps.-Justin, *Cohortatio* for instance. On this text, see Jourdan 2010 with complete bibliography and references.
- 13 [Didymus], *On the Trinity* 2.27 (PG 39, 753, 15–756, 4).
- 14 See Jourdan 2010–2011: I, 178–225.
- 15 This is the project achieved in Clement's *Protrepticus*: see Jourdan 2010–2011: I.
- 16 In e.g. Athenagoras, *Embassy* 18. 3 and 6; 20.4f; Tatian, *Oration* 8.4, Clement, *Protrepticus* 2.17.2; 2.21.1; Eusebius, *Preparation* 2.3.23 and 34 (= Clement, as earlier); Theodoret, *Cure* 3.54.
- 17 Ps.-Hippolytus, *Refutation* 5.20, 4f; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 31.4 8–10.
- 18 Athenagoras, *Embassy* 19.1; 20.4; Eusebius, *Preparation* 3. 9; *Clementine Homilies* 6.17; Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 4.115.
- 19 Athenagoras, *Embassy* 22; Origen, *Against Celsus* 1.18; Eusebius, *Preparation* 3.9; *Clementine Homilies* 6.17–19, *Clementine Recognitions, supplement* 10.29f and 35f.
- 20 Athenagoras, *Embassy* 22; *Clementine Homilies* 6.12 and 24; Eusebius, *Preparation* 3.9; Theodoret, *Cure* 3.44 and 54; Arnobius, *Against the Nations* 5.32–45; Firmicus Maternus, *Error of Profane Religions* 1.1–7.
- 21 Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.122.2; 5.14.128.3 on the *Hymns*. Cf. Origen, *Against Celsus* 4.17.
- 22 Clement, *Stromateis* 5.8 45.5f; 5.8.46.4; 5.8.49.3.
- 23 Jerome praises Orpheus for having introduced vegetarianism – this only allusion occurs in the context of the confutation of Jovinianus who denounces this practice (*Against Jovinian* 2.14 = Patrologia Latina 23, 304c).
- 24 The comparison is only suggested in by Origen (*Against Celsus* 1.18, cf. Theodoret, *Cure* 2. 111) in his reply to Celsus who uses Orphic lore to support his views. But Origen asserts that all Orphic writings have disappeared at his time in contrast with the Bible. He does not suppose that Orphic texts could have been a kind of Greek canon.
- 25 It is emphasised to show the agreement with the biblical message at Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.122.2; 5.14.128.3.
- 26 See Riedweg 1993; Jourdan 2010.
- 27 Two other motives are not specifically Orphic, but more Pythagorean and Stoic: the image of the body as prison and grave of the soul (Augustine uses it as a good prefiguration of the Christian notion of original sin, *Against Julian* 4.15.78; 4.16.83) and the conception of the transmigration of souls. Clement considers it as an image of the Last Judgement, *Stromateis* 5.8.45.5f.). As for the doctrine of the reincarnation, it is condemned by all Christian writers who mention it (Clement, *Stromateis* 3.3.13.3; Gregory Nazianzen, *Poems* 1.1.8. 22–52; Augustine, *Against Julian* 4.16. 83).
- 28 Clement, *Protrepticus* 2.17.2–2.18.2; Arnobius, *Against the Nations* 5.19; Firmicus, *Error* 6.
- 29 On this topic, see for instance Edmonds 1999; Jourdan 2005, 2010–2011: I, 195–198, 217–220, with updated bibliography.
- 30 Tatian, *Oration* 18.6; X 1; Clement, *Protrepticus* 2.12–22; Eusebius, *Preparation* 2.3.23–34; Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration* 4.115; 5.31; 39.5; Theodoret, *Cure* 1.114; Epiphanius, *Panarion* 4.2.26f; Augustine, *City of God* 18.14.

- 31 *Contra Loisy* [1914]1930, who tried to draw many such parallels; Boulanger 1925: 84–116; Festugière 1932: 133–163; Nilsson [1941] 1974: 685–693; Rahner 1945; Nock 1952. See the summary of the state of research on this topic in Herrero de Jáuregui 2010 and my positions in Jourdan 2010–2011: I, 160f.
- 32 Plutarch, *Pompey* 24; cf Turcan 1993: 25–26.
- 33 Beck 1998.
- 34 Particularly influential were the works of Cumont (1903 and 1911). Cumont (1898–1899) was the standard resource until superseded by Vermaseren 1960.
- 35 See Hinnells 1975.
- 36 See Ulansey 1991; Beck 2007.
- 37 On Prudentius, *Peristephanon* 10.1036–1040 see McLynn 1996.
- 38 See Salzman 1991: 150–152.
- 39 See now Nothhaft 2012.
- 40 See e.g. Gregory Nazianzen, *Orations* 38.3 and 40.
- 41 *Letters* 107.2; cf Metzger 1945.
- 42 1 Corinthians 12.3; Galatians 3.13, citing Deuteronomy 21.23.
- 43 See Bianchi 1975.
- 44 See Bertolin 2012; Mastrocinque 2017: 208–211, where Orphic associations are also proposed.
- 45 On statues of Hecate in Mithraea, see Mastrocinque 2017: 284.
- 46 For a general survey, see Fowden 1986.
- 47 Kingsley 1996.
- 48 See Zuntz 1955.
- 49 See e.g. Pearson 1981: 336–348.
- 50 Dodd 1935: 216, 234, 246n.
- 51 *Hermetica* 1.16; cf Colossians 1.26 and 1 Corinthians 2.7.
- 52 Reitzenstein 1904.
- 53 *Hermetica* 1.1–3; *Shepherd of Hermas*, Visions 1,1–3; 2.1; 2.4; 3.1.
- 54 For the dossier, see Scott 1936.
- 55 See Hunink 1996.
- 56 Scott 1936: 155–161; Logan 2000.
- 57 See now Dufault 2019: 110–118.

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Middle Platonists and Pythagoreans

Carl O'Brien

Introduction

The aspects of Middle Platonism and (Neo-Pythagoreanism) of greatest interest for our understanding of the development of early Christianity can be reduced to two principal topics: 1) the understanding of the telos (goal) of human life as likeness to God, rather than conceiving it in terms of living in accordance with nature and 2) speculations concerning the First Principle – which from a Christian perspective could be identified with God – and the manner in which this highest principle interacts with the world by means of a series of intermediaries. The other issues which play a role in philosophical speculations during this period can be seen as interconnected with, or offshoots of, these two topics. For example, questions regarding the necessity of virtue in order to obtain happiness or the nature of the soul can be seen as related to speculation regarding the telos of human life. Similarly, concern with the First Principle is illustrated by speculations regarding the relationship between fate, necessity, free will and divine providence or developments regarding the Theory of Forms, which in this period is illustrated by the reduction of three principles (God, matter and Forms) to two (God, matter) since Forms are understood by the Middle Platonists as simply the thoughts of God.

Additionally, figures such as Plutarch of Chaeronea and Numenius of Apamea display a remarkable openness to reading the texts of other religious traditions (such as those of the Egyptians or the Jews) allegorically in Platonic terms, accepting that other traditions also recounted aspects of (what they regarded as) the truth. Essentially, all of these various points can be seen as part of a broader framework, seeking to understand both the role and purpose of humanity within the cosmos, as well as the nature of the First Principle's interaction with this cosmos. In addition to Plutarch's *Moralia* and the fragments of Numenius previously mentioned, the other main sources for Middle Platonism are the *Didascalicus* of Alcinous and the fragments of Atticus. Philo of Alexandria is a further witness to developments in Middle Platonism, as is Maximus of Tyre (although as a sophist, his *Orations* are not particularly technical). While several Middle Platonic notions are found in subsequent Christian thinkers such as Origen, such concepts are adopted primarily via Philo of Alexandria, rather than directly from the Middle Platonists under discussion here. The most notable of these concepts is the Logos – originally drawn from Stoicism but subsequently Platonized¹ – which Philo represents as God's archangel and chief

power in the process of creation.² This is adopted by Origen and christianized as a means of philosophically explaining the relationship between the Father and the Son, who is characterized in terms of Philo's Logos.³ That said, Numenius was of particular significance for Eusebius, as demonstrated by the quality and quantity of the fragments he preserved. Of the approximately sixty 'fragments' of Numenius,⁴ twenty-five are from Eusebius' *Preparation for the Gospel* and they are actual citations, rather than paraphrases of Numenius' thought.⁵ Five fragments are drawn from Origen's *Against Celsus*, which further underlines the general appeal which Numenius held for Christian thinkers.

Since the aspects of Middle Platonic thought which are of interest for those examining early Christianity are attempts to resolve the central issues outlined previously, I have adopted a thematic approach here (rather than an author-by-author examination). The first issue to be resolved is the question of affiliation. Platonism always had a strong Pythagorean influence (illustrated by Pythagoreanizing dialogues such as the *Philebus* or the *Timaeus* or indeed by Speusippus' or Xenocrates' exegesis of Plato's writings in terms of the Monad and Dyad). However, during the Middle Platonist period, the Pythagorean influence on Platonism becomes particularly marked.⁶ This is partly the result of a tendency to position older philosophers as authoritative figures, combined with an openness to eclecticism.⁷ The most significant figures for our purposes in the Pythagoreanizing milieu are Numenius and Moderatus, who are usually identified as Neo-Pythagoreans (rather than Middle Platonists); Moderatus went so far as to represent Platonism as little more than a branch of Pythagoreanism (cf. Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 55). Although Moderatus is less significant for our understanding of early Christian philosophy than Numenius, one might note that by locating the First One beyond Being (Simplicius, *On the 'Physics'* I.7.230.23–231.5), he stresses the transcendence of the First Principle in a manner which we find in Christianity.

Theology and the nature of the telos

One major issue during this period was a question that appears to be disarmingly simple: what is the telos (goal) of human life? For the Stoics, the telos was a life led in accordance with nature; a view which we also find in earlier Platonists such as Polemon or Antiochus.⁸ Both the notion of the telos of philosophy as likeness to God and conceiving of the object of philosophy as the truth were views which could easily be absorbed into Christianity.⁹ This is highlighted by the Platonists' opposition to the Epicurean claim that it was, in fact, pleasure which was the telos.¹⁰ Defining the telos as assimilation to God in accordance with what is possible (*homoiosis theōi kata to dunaton*), although deriving its stimulus from *Theaetetus* 176A–C and *Timaeus* 90A–D, readily lends itself to a Christian context, combining as it does both theological and ethical elements. This assimilation is alternatively defined as becoming "just and holy and wise" (*Theaetetus* 176B).¹¹ For Alcinous, this assimilation of God is defined as

living in accordance with the appropriate nature . . . habits and way of life and practices in accordance with reason and instruction and the transmission of theories so as to shun the majesty of human matters and to always be in touch with the Intelligibles.

(Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 28.182.3–8)

This redefinition of the telos also helps to explain both the concern with the nature of the First Principle and hostility to theological conceptions which were perceived to be false; such tendencies resurface in early Christianity. If the goal of life is assimilation to God, then an

incorrect understanding of him will only serve to undermine this telos. Maximus of Tyre, for example, continually stresses the manner in which a false conception of God leads to inappropriate religious behaviour and consequently to unethical practices.¹² He objects to the Indian visualization of Dionysus as a snake or the Persian worship of fire, since these misguided theological conceptions negatively influence the ethics of both peoples, leading them to conduct sacrifices or, in the case of the Persians, to become insatiable, like their conception of divinity, and drawn to foreign conquest.¹³ For Maximus, it is the ethical consequences of incorrect theology which are problematic.

Plutarch links Middle Platonist speculations regarding a divine hierarchy with the notion of telos as assimilation to God in the development of his daimonology. Plutarch (like Apuleius) views the daimon as a transient stage on the path to divinity.¹⁴ An example is the apotheosis of Isis and Osiris, both of whom Plutarch conceives of as great daimones. Isis is further identified with the Receptacle of the *Timaeus* (*Isis and Osiris* 372E).¹⁵ However, to a certain extent, Isis is reminiscent of the Gnostic Sophia. Although Plutarch does not use the name "Sophia", he does describe her as *eidēsis* (knowledge) and *phronēsis* (practical wisdom).¹⁶ Isis and the Younger Horus in their deficiency, which can be mitigated by the divine Logos (Osiris), can be seen to parallel the deficient entities of Gnosticism: Sophia and the Demiurge.¹⁷

Intellectuals during this period tend to view the various gods of traditional mythology simply as manifestations of the same divine principle, leading to a monotheistic manner of reading these texts and thereby both obscuring the difference between them and the Christian texts, while also rendering them suitable for use by Christians. The Middle Platonic stress on the transcendence of the highest God, illustrated through formulations such as "ineffable" (*arrhētos*) reoccurs in Eusebius.¹⁸ Maximus of Tyre too stresses God's ineffable nature: "he is unnameable for lawgivers, and ineffable in utterance and invisible to eyes" (*Oration* 2.10.4–5).¹⁹ This reveals the common heritage of the *Timaeus*.²⁰ Furthermore, Numenius identifies the God of the Jews with the highest principle, his First God. His appeal for the Christians is reinforced by his reference to Plato as a Moses who Atticizes.²¹

While the Middle Platonists generally adopt a weak monotheistic notion of a supreme god heading a hierarchy of various divine entities, it should be noted that Middle Platonic views are not completely unitary and espouse a range of attitudes. For Maximus, for example, the belief in polytheistic strife is itself the result of false theological conceptions; since the earth is subdivided politically, it is assumed by analogy that the same applies to the heavens due to a deficient understanding of the Good (*Oration* 39.5). Instead, Maximus argues for the unity of the divine: the gods all have the same nature although they bear many names (*Oration* 39.5). Again at *Oration* 11, Maximus contrasts his notion of a universal belief in one supreme god, aided in his administration of the cosmos by a number of subordinate gods, with the turmoil of the sublunary world: "there is one custom and account which is unanimous throughout the entire world, that one god is the king and father of all and many gods, the children of the god, rule jointly with this god" (*Oration* 11.5.2–4). This reflects the manner in which Maximus juxtaposes human political divisions and divine harmony.

By contrast, Plutarch's dualistic stance necessarily precludes the notion of cosmic harmony which pervades Maximus' *Orations*. While the most noteworthy illustration of this is the conflict between Seth-Typhon and Osiris in *Isis and Osiris*, we can also observe a greater tendency to more precisely distinguish divine elements in Plutarch than in Maximus. For example, in Sulla's myth (*On the Face in the Moon* 942A–B), the fact that the divinities Cora/Persephone and Demeter come from separate regions is stressed, as is the difference between the names Cora and Persephone. This contrasts sharply with Maximus' preference to avoid imposing strict

theological distinctions when discussing the gods. It should be noted in this context, though, that Plutarch is a considerably more technical writer than Maximus.

Maximus would not view this as a deficiency by any means. In fact, at *Oration* 2.10.14–20, he rejects technical theological speculations in favour of what he regards as more significant: a virtuous orientation towards God. “What need is there for me to scrutinize further and to lay down the law concerning images? They must only know God, only love him, only call him to mind.” This reflects the Middle Platonist attitude, when, in the absence of an established “orthodox” Platonism, a range of different opinions was tolerated.²² Despite this tolerance and avoidance of “sectarianism” which we find in Maximus (and which differs from views found in many Christian texts), Maximus actually denounces philosophers who engage in (what he portrays as) excessive argumentation (*Oration* 33.1). This type of attitude is also displayed by the Christian intelligentsia, when addressing or referring to less educated Christians. For example, Basil at *Hexaemeron* 8.7, 77D criticizes philosophers in a sermon to his congregation by noting that they are blind to truth on account of their intensive study, just as owls are blinded by the sun.²³ Similarly, even though he favours allegorical interpretation, Origen cautions against the public exegesis of Scripture, likening it to casting pearls before swine.²⁴

Just like the Christians, the Middle Platonists theorize about the nature of religious practice. For example, they criticize inappropriate religious practices (such as human sacrifice; cf. Plut., *On Superstition* 171B–E or Max. Tyr., *Or.* 2.6 against sacrifice in general). Numenius, in his reading of the *Euthyphro*, thematizes this tension between traditional religion and philosophy. In Maximus, we have two points of interest when considered against the background of early Christianity: 1) as outlined previously, the notion that fine theological distinctions are not as important as simply believing in God and 2) as a counterpart to the first point, Maximus generally accepts diversity of belief (a position contrary to Christian hostility to heterodox beliefs). Despite this tolerance, he sharply criticizes false theological concepts not only for leading to false religious practices, but also to unethical behaviour.²⁵ Maximus’ aversion to petitionary prayer, for example, reflects an attitude that was widespread during antiquity; we find evidence of some embarrassment amongst the Christians with regard to the demand for “daily bread” in the Lord’s Prayer.²⁶

Plutarch, however, is in favour of many practices that the Christians would dismiss as superstitious (such as divination in *On the Daemon of Socrates* 593C–D) and does not entertain the possibility of inappropriate cultic practice within the context of what he views as mainstream religion: “For nothing contrary to reason or legendary or the result of superstition, as some think, was implanted in the religious ceremonies, but some have an ethical and necessary cause and others are not without a share in historical or natural elegance” (*Isis and Osiris* 353E; cf. 378A). Plutarch is open-minded in acknowledging that all cultures have access to the truth, as is typical of the Platonic tradition (*Isis and Osiris* 377E–378A). Despite this, he reflects the same attitude as Maximus when he notes that superstition is just as dangerous as atheism (*Isis and Osiris* 355B–D). For Plutarch, it is philosophy which is the arbiter between what constitutes (appropriate) religious thought and what should be discarded as superstition.²⁷ It is this which leads Plutarch to advocate for a non-literal interpretation of the Egyptian myths. This is particularly interesting since Plutarch, in opposition to the majority opinion amongst the Platonists, advocates for the literal interpretation of the famous myth of the Demiurge at *Timaeus* 27C–57E, i.e. he argues that Plato had posited a temporal beginning to the world, rather than simply presenting the myth of a temporal generation “for the purposes of exposition”. Yet while Platonic myths can be simply accepted, religious myths need to be filtered via philosophy, so that Plutarch

ultimately subordinates religion to philosophy.²⁸ For Plutarch, this subordination applies to both Greek and foreign accounts:

That ancient natural science among both Greeks and non-Greeks was in the form of an explanation of nature veiled in myths, concealed by means of riddles and conjectures or in the form of a mystical theology in which what is spoken is clearer to the multitude than what is passed over in silence and the things passed over in silence are viewed more suspiciously than what is said, is apparent from the Orphic poems and the Egyptian and Phrygian accounts. But the thinking faculty of the ancients is best exhibited in the rites concerning mystery cults and the symbolic performances during religious services.

(Plut., *On the Festival of Images at Plataea* ch. 1 = Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* III.1.1–2)

The First Principle and the governance of the world

One major way in which the Middle Platonists or Pythagoreans are of interest for our understanding of early Christianity is with regard to their speculations concerning world generation. This can be understood firstly as an attempt to systematize Plato's thought (especially the *Timaeus*) and secondly as part of a more general concern during this period regarding the activity of the First Principle. Plutarch, for example, follows Plato's comments (at *Timaeus* 29A) on the essential goodness of the Demiurge and consequently of his product, the cosmos: "For badness has not been generated as an interlude that is pleasurable to the divinity" (*On Common Conceptions* 1065F–1066A). The interest in the nature of the First Principle and its interaction with the generated realm can be seen as a more technical development of the interpretation of Greek mythology along monotheistic lines. For example, in the context of arguing for a single supreme god, Maximus of Tyre (*Oration* 11.12) positions the subordinate gods as part of a "succession and order of power" between the supreme God and earth.²⁹

Plutarch's examination of the Isis and Osiris myth (in which Osiris is killed and his body is dismembered by Seth-Typhon, upon which Isis reassembles the dispersed pieces and resurrects him) in terms of Platonic metaphysics clearly resembles the similar Platonically-informed exegesis which we find in Philo's or Origen's exposition of Genesis. An obvious difference is that Plutarch has considerably greater freedom to accept or reject elements of the myth than a Christian or Jewish exegete (since for him the myth is ultimately one stemming from a foreign tradition, not one which his religious beliefs require that he accepts).³⁰ It should also be stressed that while the demiurgic myth of the *Timaeus* is subsequently exploited by Philo and the Christians to underpin their exegesis of Genesis, there are major differences between Platonic and Biblical accounts. The model of world generation outlined in the *Timaeus* is one in which a benevolent, but limited, entity orders preexistent matter but is unable to entirely eliminate the recalcitrant elements inherent in the material realm. By contrast, Judaeo-Christian creation envisages *creatio ex nihilo* undertaken by an omnipotent God, even though there too the imperfections of the created world can also be explained in terms of the artistry of the whole, as is the case in the Platonic tradition (cf. Max. Tyr., *Or.* 41.4; Philo, *Heir of Divine Things* 157), or in the Christian tradition in terms of divine self-imitation to allow space for free will (Origen, *First Principles* 1.5.374–388; *Against Celsus* 4.40). In Plutarch's account, Typhon represents this errant cause (*Isis and Osiris* 371B–C), Necessity, in Plato's *Timaeus*: "Typhon is the passive, titanic, irrational and unstable component of the [World] Soul".³¹ In the Egyptian myth, Plutarch distinguishes Plato's three principles: Isis (Matter, the Receptacle), transient Osiris (the Forms) and the World-Soul (immanent Osiris).³²

Plutarch, though, refines the *Timaeus*' image of God as a craftsman, distilling soul stuff in the mixing bowl, concentrating instead on the Demiurge's integration of mathematical series (based upon multiples of 2 and 3) and geometric shapes into the structure of the cosmos. This is seen at *Convivial Questions* 8.2, which examines the Demiurge's continual engagement with geometry. One of the Genesis accounts of creation (Genesis 2:4–2:22) famously depicts God as a potter/builder, yet we can even see a similar attempt to elevate the image in Philo (with God depicted as an architect or town planner at *Making of the World* 17, rather than as a builder). In Christian accounts, this attempt to relativize God's craftsmanship appears to be less pronounced. Certainly, there is a concern with insulating God from contact with matter (cf. Origen and the role of the Son-Logos during creation), but there is less concern with the potential inappropriateness of the craftsman image itself. Philosophically, this is because the Christians (of necessity) accept a temporal creation (whereas a temporal beginning is rejected by the majority of Platonists, given that it raises questions concerning what the Demiurge was doing before the world was generated and suggests that if the world had a beginning it could also come to an end).³³ This is not an issue for Christians such as Origen who anticipate the final judgement when "God will be all in all".³⁴ From a pastoral perspective, the Christians also stress God's craftsmanship. For example, St. Basil points out that God is as artisan as a means of generating sympathy with his congregation, which contains numerous craftsmen (*Hexaemeron* 4.1, 33C–D).³⁵

While Christian sources tend to emphasize Numenius' high regard for Jewish thought, in actual fact, the Jews are just one of a number of non-Greek peoples (such as the Brahmins and Egyptians) whose views are read sympathetically.³⁶ The great extent to which Numenius appears to be influenced by Judaism is probably magnified since it is likely that it is precisely those sections of his thought which were preserved by Christian sources.³⁷ Seen in this light, the pro-Jewish stance claimed for Numenius should really be seen in terms of the openness with which the (Middle) Platonists generally approached other cultural traditions.³⁸

Numenius' best-known doctrine is his postulation of three gods: a First God (First Principle), and the Second God (the Demiurge) who, as a result of his contact with matter, splits to form the Third God (World-Soul).³⁹ Numenius' divine triad, criticized by Porphyry (at *In Tim.* 1.303, 27–304, 7 Diehl = Fr. 21) as an "exaggeration in dramatic style" of Grandfather, Son and Grandson, reveals another tendency during this period: the postulation of a divine hierarchy situated in such a manner to reflect the order of the cosmos. Van Nuffelen points to the hierarchical analogues that come to the fore at this time – the Roman Emperor and his officials and the Great King and his satraps.⁴⁰

From a philosophical perspective, this can be viewed as a result of a tension between transcendence and immanence resolved in favour of a transcendent First Principle, which intervenes in the world by means of an increasingly elaborate chain of subordinate divinities. Such divinities help to insulate this highest principle from the negativity of the material realm. The result in Middle Platonism is a tendency to represent the pantheon of traditional religion as simply aspects of the same (highest) divine principle, illustrated, for example, by the following passage from Maximus of Tyre (*Oration* 11.12):

The Great King himself remains stationary like the law, furnishing to those who obey him security, which exists in him. And many visible gods and many invisible gods share in his power, and the first press around the porticoes themselves, like the ushers and relatives of the king, eating at the same table and sharing his house and the others are the underlings of these and others are inferior still. You see a succession and order of power descend from god to the earth (cf. *Oration* 4.9).

Maximus' representation of the First Principle as a legislator can be seen as part of the interest displayed by Middle Platonic (as well as Stoic texts) to clarify the relationship between the divine and the law of Providence. This tendency towards (a weak) monotheism often leads to a certain Christian sympathy for Middle Platonic or Neo-Pythagorean texts (especially the writings of Numenius).

Despite the Christian interest in Numenius, from their perspective he is also a problematic figure in his attribution of world generation to a secondary god (rather than the First Principle, which he himself identifies with the God worshipped in Judaism). "The First God is inactive with respect to any work and is king and the demiurgic god has authority, passing through the heaven" (Fr. 12.12–14). This difficulty is not particularly apparent, though, when we turn to examine Origen, since he too assigns a demiurgic role to a secondary divinity (appropriately christianized as the Son–Logos).⁴¹ Despite the extent of Middle Platonic concern with the nature of the First Principle, divine ineffability is still stressed, as is also typical for the Christian tradition. Although this aspect is not so heavily accented in Maximus, the impossibility of conceiving the divine (by merely human means) is thematized: "How then might someone swim out and see God? The real answer is that you will see him at that time when he calls you to him?" (*Oration* 11.11.1–2). The claim of ineffability is much more explicitly made at Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 10.164.31–33.⁴²

An image frequently deployed by the Middle Platonists (as well as by the Christians), already touched on earlier, is that of God as king. In a Middle Platonic context, this can be seen to reflect the interest in the nature of the First Principle and its interaction upon the world. The divine king remains transcendent while his regulation of the world is performed by means of subordinate entities. This can again be seen as part of the Middle Platonic tendency to interpret the gods of traditional religion in a broadly monotheistic manner. Just as is the case with Numenius' image of Father and Son, we have a superficial correspondence between Middle Platonic and Christian articulations of the divine, which can obscure the fundamental differences between the uses of these analogies in both traditions.

It should be stressed, though, that the Christians often use Middle Platonic material in a polemical manner and explicitly mask the extent of their borrowing from the Greek intellectual tradition. For example, Eusebius at *Preparation for the Gospel* 1.6–8 undermines Greek claims to intellectual authority by pointing out that their accounts of world generation all disagree. In his view, they are all impious since none of these accounts, he claims, envisages a role for a divine creator. Although Eusebius outlines a range of views (such as those of Thales, Plato, Xenophon) rather than specifically Middle Platonic positions, his source for these cosmological views is the Middle Platonist, Plutarch. Eusebius' criticism that the Greeks do not accept a creator clearly ignores both Plato's Demiurge and its subsequent interpretation by Plutarch and Numenius, with which Eusebius was familiar. Indeed, Eusebius' *Preparation* can be read in terms of 'ethnic' history and, in his attempt to delineate a Christian *ethnos*, Eusebius differentiates the Christians from the Greeks and Jews (as well as from the Phoenicians and Egyptians, but this need not concern us here, since in Eusebius' narrative the Greeks are presented as the successors of the Phoenicians and Egyptians).

We should note that while the Christians borrow heavily from Greek thought (and naturally from Judaism), Christian texts can often still contain both an anti-Greek, as well as an anti-Jewish, narrative. For example, Eusebius accepts the religious and intellectual authority of the group he designates as the "Hebrews", yet claims that due to their subsequent "corruption" in Egypt, they are to be distinguished from their descendants, the Jews. While some "Hebrews" like Philo and Josephus remain (thereby legitimizing Christian borrowing from Philo), Eusebius argues that it is in fact the Christians (rather than the Jews) who are the successors of the original

Hebrews. In fact, what is valuable in Greek philosophy (i.e. the philosophy of Plato) – according to him – was copied from the Hebrews (*Preparation* 10.4.1; 11.9.4; 11.26.8). In the context of such a narrative, then, Eusebius positions the Christian *ethnos* as the true heir of both Hebrew and Greek wisdom, rather than either the Greeks or Jews.⁴³

This is particularly relevant in the current context: while Origen pursues an allegorical approach to Scripture, Eusebius criticizes the manner in which Plutarch adopts an allegorical approach to Egyptian myths in *Isis and Osiris*. Plutarch's openness in interpreting Greek and foreign myth in terms of euhemerism, daimonology or metaphysically within a Platonic framework is simply dismissed by Eusebius as resulting from Greek embarrassment with their ancestral tradition.⁴⁴ Even the words which Plato places in the mouth of the pagan "saint" Socrates are quoted out of context to allow Eusebius to assert that the Greeks lack cosmological understanding (*Preparation* 1.8.15–19; cf. Plato, *Phaedo* 96A–C). In contrast to the reverence for the wisdom of the ancients found in the Platonic tradition, Eusebius instead denounces the "craziness of the ancients" (*Preparation* 1.10.54).⁴⁵ Similar to the manner in which even a tolerant Middle Platonist such as Maximus denounces the false theological conceptions of the Egyptians (amongst others), Eusebius claims that the Egyptians do not have a theology, but rather shameful godlessness, something which is to be "spat out" (*kataptusantes*, *Preparation* 2.1.51). Since Eusebius uses Plutarch's *Isis and Osiris* as a source, it is likely that here he is drawing upon Plutarch's exhortation to spit out the Egyptianizing accounts of Isis (*Isis and Osiris* 358E).⁴⁶ Eusebius adopts the Middle Platonic stance of criticism of (certain aspects of) the Egyptian tradition (which is however qualified since both Maximus and Plutarch reveal themselves to be far more tolerant than Eusebius).⁴⁷ Despite adopting a similar style of argumentation, Eusebius links Greek and Egyptian thought, presenting both as something transcended by the wisdom of the Christian *ethnos*, and relying on Plutarch's analysis of Egyptian myth in *Isis and Osiris* to bolster his case.

Fate and theodicy

The basic Middle Platonic theory (outlined by Alcinous at *Didascalicus* 26 and accepted by Maximus of Tyre at *Oration* 13.4) envisages Fate as having the status of a law and once a particular choice is made, a specific causal chain is initiated in which events are brought about by Fate.⁴⁸ This still allows room for human autonomy even in a cosmos ordered in accordance with divine law (an issue which also concerns Maximus, who wishes to preserve room for human autonomy, just like Alcinous). The attempt to preserve both human autonomy and divine providence in the Middle Platonic account is important, since human autonomy is necessary if there is to be personal responsibility. As Plutarch notes at *De Stoic. rep.* 1056C–D, if assent is not "up to us" then we are not responsible for virtue or vice either. The Middle Platonic notion of hypothetical Fate (in which the consequence depends on the initial action being performed) differs from the Stoic notion of co-fated events (in which both the initial action and its consequence have been co-fated). It represents an attempt on the part of the Platonists to avoid the strict determinism posited by the Stoics, even though the Middle Platonic theory draws heavily upon Stoic material.

In Plutarch's *On the E at Delphi*, divine knowledge is not taken to imply any kind of necessity. Apollo can foretell the future since he is able to work out the manner in which everything is interconnected (387B). This fits the basic Middle Platonic view of Fate as a divine law which still allows the possibility of autonomous human action. Some of Plutarch's comments on Fate, though, are clearly rooted in the historical context in which they are made. For example, the Romans are portrayed as the favourites of Tyche (*On the Fortune of the Romans* 318D–E), echoing the frequent comparison of the Roman Empire to the cosmos (e.g. 316E–317A).

For the Platonists (as for the Stoics), theodicy generally takes the form of ordering with a view towards the preservation of the whole, which tends to exclude any notion of divine intervention on behalf of a specific individual (or group). In the example drawn from Plutarch earlier, the Romans are represented merely as the favourites of Fortune, not of God. The Middle Platonic attitude to petitionary prayer would also seem to exclude any possibility that God could be persuaded to intervene on an individual basis. Indeed, since God's thoughts are universals, it is difficult within a Middle Platonic framework to see how he could even have knowledge of individuals. However, the Middle Platonic conception of the cosmos in terms of a divine hierarchy allows subordinate entities to intervene on behalf of individuals even if the supreme God does not (although this intervention takes place with his approval). For example, the manner in which Socrates is guided by his *daimonion* is a manifestation of the special divine favour granted to him (Plut., *Daemon of Socrates* 589D). Furthermore, God allows *daimones* to rescue some souls (*ibid.* 593E–594A) – those which are already closer to the divine. (The image employed is that of swimmers who only rescue those closer to the shore from drowning, rather than those in deeper water). Furthermore, in Platonism, as in Christianity, there is a firm belief in theodicy to the extent that God/the Demiurge has organized the cosmos in the best possible way (*Timaeus* 29A), whereas for the Stoics any possible arrangement of the cosmos, including the actual one, is nothing more than a matter of indifference.⁴⁹

One might express a few remarks here on another Middle Platonic interest: divination. However, this can in many ways be simply viewed as a manifestation of the other interests which dominate in Middle Platonism: fate, the question of theodicy and the divine hierarchy. The impression that divination played a significant role in Middle Platonic thought is heavily influenced by Plutarch's strong interest in the topic (illustrated by the treatises *On the E at Delphi*, *On the Decline of the Oracles*, *On the Oracles of the Pythia* and *On the Face in the Moon*, which all treat the issue of divination. The topic also crops up in *On the Fortune of the Romans* and *On the Daemon of Socrates*). This interest is obviously influenced by the author's role as a priest at Delphi.⁵⁰ Indeed, Plutarch expressly links divine providence with prophecy and the nature of the supreme God at *Decline of the Oracles* 423C (in the context of whether there is more than one world). Again at *E at Delphi* 384E–F, prophecy is simply a manifestation of divine theodicy, namely Apollo's concern for the welfare of those who consult him. While Plutarch expresses his belief in divination in general, he never argues that every prophetic utterance (even those of the Delphic Oracle) must necessarily be true, but this is the result of the machinations of creatures with non-rational souls (such as Tityus, Typho and the Python), rather than due to any divine deficiency (*Face in the Moon* 945B–C). Even in this context, though, Plutarch's views fit within a metaphysical framework. The reason for the reduction in oracles (illustrated by the reduction in the number of Delphic priestesses in Plutarch's time), as argued in *Decline of the Oracles*, is due to a population decrease, which is simply a reflection of the change and decay typical of the material realm.

Conclusion

The similarities which we observe between Middle Platonic or Pythagorean texts on the one hand and Christian thinkers on the other should not blind us to the very real differences which existed between them. Certain passages from Numenius appear to elevate Jewish thought above that of other peoples, but this is probably a result of what Eusebius chose to cite (and which was consequently preserved). A closer reading of the fragments suggests that Judaism is only one of a number of religious or intellectual currents which influenced his thought. Again many

of the similarities between Middle Platonic/Neo-Pythagorean attitudes and those of the early Christians are less the result of direct adoption from the thinkers considered here, but rather due to their shared Platonic heritage, with the line of influence running via Philo of Alexandria to Christian writers such as Clement of Alexandria or Origen. That said, Eusebius was clearly familiar with Numenius' work, and Plutarch's *On the Decline of the Oracles* is quoted by both Eusebius and Theodoret (e.g. Eusebius *Preparation for the Gospel* 5; Theodoret, *Cure for Greek Afflictions* Book 10 – *On the Oracles*): Eusebius uses Plutarch's *Decline of the Oracles* to support his assertion that daimones are mortal.⁵¹

The Middle Platonists can be seen to exhibit monotheistic tendencies in the same sense in which this could be claimed for Plato himself (i.e. the belief in a supreme, rational principle); this clearly differs considerably from Judaeo-Christian beliefs in a single, supreme God as presented by the Bible. Furthermore, the Middle Platonists' and Neo-Pythagoreans' sphere of interest overlaps with that of many early Christian thinkers, and much of their speculations on world generation can be seen as part of a broader interest in the nature of the First Principle and its relationship to the material realm. At the same time, their theology is linked to their ethics, through the reevaluation of the telos and the importance of an appropriate understanding of the divine nature in order to lead a philosophically acceptable life. Perhaps the most striking point of intersection, though, is the manner in which both Middle Platonists and Christians position their own particular tradition as the arbiter of the truth, as evidenced in their evaluation of Egyptian thought.

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Notes

- 1 On the relationship between the Stoic *logos* and Platonism, see O'Brien 2012: 24–31.
- 2 Philo, *Heir of Divine Things* 205, 140; cf. O'Brien 2015a: 43–56.
- 3 Origen, *First Principles* 1.2.3.59–67; 1.2.6.161–8; 2.6.106–14; *Against Celsus* 2.9.29–36; 2.9.62–73. Cf. O'Brien 2015a: 250–258, 268–269, 284–287. It should be noted, though, that it is a matter of some dispute whether Origen's use of the *Logos* is drawn from Philo or from the Gospel of John.
- 4 Des Places groups together both actual fragments (i.e. citations), as well as testimonia.
- 5 Cf. O'Brien 2015a: 139.
- 6 Dillon 1977: 340.
- 7 Van Nuffelen 2011: 2–3.
- 8 Dillon 1977: 44.
- 9 Cf. Clement, *Stromateis* 1.5.32.4 where Christ is the Truth. Cf. Ramelli 2018: 273.
- 10 Compare Taurus' regular citation of the Stoic Hierocles' maxim: "Pleasure the goal of life: a harlot's creed" (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 9.5). Cf. Dillon 1977: 242.
- 11 Cf. Tarrant 2007: 419. Translations from Greek are my own.
- 12 Cf. O'Brien 2016a: 58.
- 13 *Oration* 2.6.15; O'Brien 2016a: 68.
- 14 *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus; On Isis and Osiris* 361C; cf. Dillon 1977: 47; Van Nuffelen 2011: 165.
- 15 Cf. O'Brien 2015a: 99.
- 16 Dillon 1977: 204.
- 17 O'Brien 2015a: 106.
- 18 *Demonstration of the Gospel* 3, 6 p. 136,4f.; cf. Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 10.165.5 referring to *Timaeus* 28C.

- 19 Cf. O'Brien 2015a: 135; cf. *Timaeus* 41A–B; Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 10.164–5; Apuleius, *On Plato* 15.
- 20 cf. *Timaeus* 49A, 50D, 51A; Ricken 1967: 347.
- 21 Fr. 8.13. This is subsequently echoed by Clement at *Stromateis* 1.22.150.4 or by his comment that Plato is “the philosopher who was taught by the Hebrews” (*Strom.* I.1.10.2).
- 22 O'Brien 2018: 176.
- 23 For a fuller account of St. Basil's engagement with Greek philosophy, see O'Brien 2011; O'Brien 2015b.
- 24 *Against Celsus* 5.29 citing *Matt.* 7.6.
- 25 O'Brien 2016a: 67–68.
- 26 Origen, for example, is forced to clarify that spiritual nourishment is intended (*On Prayer* 27, following *John* 6:27) and even though Gregory of Nyssa (*Fourth Homily on the Lord's Prayer* 51/25, 55/22) accepts the literal interpretation, it is from the perspective that labourers deserve their just rewards (and that the request for “daily bread” stresses necessities, rather than luxuries). Cf. O'Brien 2016a: 62.
- 27 *Isis and Osiris* 355B–C; Van Nuffelen 2011: 60.
- 28 *Isis and Osiris.* 355B–C; cf. Van Nuffelen 2011: 62.
- 29 Cf. Plut., *On the Fortune of the Romans* 316E–317C; Apuleius, *On Plato* 204.
- 30 O'Brien 2015a: 97.
- 31 O'Brien 2015a: 104.
- 32 O'Brien 2015a: 105; Plutarch, *Convivial Questions* 720B.
- 33 Of course, a minority of Platonists (including Plutarch and Atticus) take the myth of the Demiurge literally and accept a temporal beginning.
- 34 1 Corinthians 7.31 and 15:28; Origen, *First Principles* 1.6.2.46–52; 1.6.4.164–7; cf. O'Brien 2015a: 267–278.
- 35 On St. Basil's rhetorical strategies aimed at winning the sympathies of his audience, see O'Brien 2011.
- 36 “With regard to this issue [the nature of god], having maintained and interpreted it with testimonies from Plato, it is necessary to go back and to tie it together to the accounts of Pythagoras and to call upon peoples of good repute, addressing their theological doctrines and opinions and fundamental views as far as they agree with Plato, as many as the Brahmins and the Jews and the Magi and the Egyptians have set forth” (Numenius, Fr. 1a = Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 9.7.1).
- 37 Van Nuffelen 2011: 79.
- 38 This intellectual openness is, in many ways, a hallmark of the Platonic tradition in general; not merely Middle Platonism. Cf. Plato's claim that Greek and non-Greek languages are both capable of equal accuracy at *Cratylus* 389D–390A, his praise for the Egyptian intellectual tradition at *Timaeus* 23B or Plotinus' praise of Egyptian hieroglyphs at *Enneads* 5.8 [31] 4–6.
- 39 O'Brien 2015a: 144–158.
- 40 Van Nuffelen 2011: 101. Amongst the Middle Platonists, the analogy is made at Maximus of Tyre, *Oration* 4.9; 11.12.
- 41 Cf. Origen, *Commentary on John.* I.111, where Christ is identified with both divine wisdom and the Demiurge.
- 42 O'Brien 2018: 174.
- 43 Of course, for Eusebius there is not really such a thing as Greek wisdom, merely what he regards as the Greek plagiarism of Hebraic thought (cf. *Preparation for the Gospel* 10.1.7 and 10.8.18 with the discussion at Johnson 2006: 126–152).
- 44 Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 2.4.4–5.
- 45 Cf. Johnson 2006: 65, 85. “Barbarian” thought is of course non-Greek, but Eusebius' narrative positions it as part of the heritage of the Greeks since he represents them as the heirs of the Phoenicians and Egyptians.
- 46 The image is based upon a citation of Aeschylus (Nauck, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, Aeschylus, no. 354).
- 47 This criticism of Egyptian thought is also found in Philo of Alexandria; see for example *Decalogue* 76–80 on animal worship, *On Agriculture* 89 or *Life of Moses* 2.34.
- 48 The principal Middle Platonic discussions of Fate are Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 26, the treatise *On Fate* falsely attributed to Plutarch and Nemesius of Emesa's *On the Nature of Man* 38. There is also a less technical discussion at Maximus of Tyre, *Oration* 5.4.80–87. Cf. O'Brien (2020).
- 49 Musonius Rufus fr. 42, Hense, trans. Lutz.
- 50 E.g. *On the Fortune of the Romans* 942A–D.
- 51 *Preparation* 5.5.4; 5.16.4; cf. Johnson 2006: 167–169.

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Pagan and Christian philosophy

Plotinus, Iamblichus and Christian philosophical practice

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1 Introduction

What is philosophy? And how are we to think of the relation between ‘pagan’ and ‘Christian’ philosophy? The term ‘philosophy’, first perhaps coined by Pythagoras,¹ signifies ‘love of wisdom’, but philosophy can mean many different things. For Plato in the *Theaetetus*, it is the active likening of oneself to god;² for Plotinus, it is the upward way of dialectic from Plato’s *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*,³ “the purest part of intelligence and wisdom” (cf. *Philebus* 58d6–7 and *Enneads* 1.3 [20].5.4–5: τὸ καθαρώτατον νοῦ καὶ φρονήσεως); for Iamblichus, it is a preparation for, but apparently distinct from, theurgy (‘god-work’ instead of ‘god-talk’):

it is not pure thought that unites theurgists to the gods. . . [but] . . . the accomplishment of acts not to be divulged and beyond all conception, and the power of the unutterable symbols, understood solely by the gods, which establishes theurgic union.

(*On the Mysteries* 2.11)⁴

For early Christian thinkers, philosophy encompasses all of these elements, but it is principally modeled upon the life and death of Jesus Christ, the commandments, the beatitudes, so concretely that a meal can become the ‘philosophic table’.⁵ At the same time, for Origen, “the philosopher [φιλοσοφούντα] will need to prove what comes from reason (τὰ τοῦ λόγου κατασκευάζειν) with demonstrations (ἀποδείξεων) of all sorts, taken from the divine Scriptures and from what follows in rational arguments (τῆς ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἀκολουθίας)” – Christianity without philosophy, based only on authority (αὐτὸς ἔφα), is for the “simple-minded masses” (*Against Celsus* 4.9).⁶ So too for Plotinus, philosophy is a distinctive kind of contemplative practice, a zetetic activity, that seeks as Plotinus puts it “to fill everything with contemplation” (3.8 [30]. 7. 22).

Porphyry describes such contemplative activity as the extensive “disposition in philosophy” that Plotinus received from his teacher, Ammonius (*Life of Plotinus* 3, 14–15: τοσαύτην ἔξιν ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ κτήσασθα), and he characterizes this a little later in the following way:

[Plotinus] did not just speak straight out of these books but took a distinctive personal line in his consideration, and brought the mind of Ammonius to bear on the investigations in

hand (ἴδιος ἦν καὶ ἐξηλλαγμένος ἐν τῇ θεωρίᾳ καὶ τὸν Ἀμμωνίου φέρων νοῦν ἐν ταῖς ἐξετάσεσιν). He quickly absorbed what was read, and would give the sense of some profound subject of study in a few words and pass on (Ἐπληροῦτο δὲ ταχέως καὶ δι' ὀλίγων δούς νοῦν βαθέος θεωρήματος ἀνίστατο).

(*Life of Plotinus* 14, 14–16)

The last sentence of this passage, almost untranslatable in nuance, is deeply in tune with Plotinus' view of creative contemplation that fills the contemplator with profound contemplative insight. In this chapter, without losing sight of all the previously given meanings of the term philosophy, I shall concentrate on this last aspect of the term, namely, the transmission of mind or intellect as a shared contemplative practice that investigates the ground and reality of things from their own threshold rather than from a preconceived ideological stance. I shall do so because I think that this shared practice paradoxically most distinguishes Christian philosophy and yet simultaneously relates it profoundly to the pagan practice of philosophy itself.

In this chapter, I will select five fundamental features of the thought of Plotinus and Iamblichus that major Christian thinkers of later centuries found necessary to think through on their own terms, in the project of developing a Christian philosophical theology. By the term 'philosophical theology', I mean to maintain the thesis that for all these thinkers there is ultimately no philosophy without theology and certainly no philosophy that does not in some significant measure recognize the inadequacies of its own terms. What I propose to examine, in other words, is how Christian philosophical theology engaged in practice with some of the fundamental principles and structures of pagan Neoplatonism – in this case primarily Plotinus, and secondarily Iamblichus. I choose these two figures since they represent two major strands of Neoplatonism, Plotinian Neoplatonism, represented by Plotinus and Porphyry, and its major critic, Iamblichus, who was followed in many details by the later Neoplatonic tradition of Proclus, Damascius, and, for the Christian tradition, Dionysius.

The five features I focus on here are as follows: I start from the more theoretical questions of divine hypostasis and substance, move through more immediate issues such as creation, the making of man, and the nature of freedom and agency, to the question of Christian philosophy itself in the context of theurgy and theology broadly conceived.

2 The 'Hypostases'

Let me now turn to one of the most conspicuous features of Neoplatonism, namely, the Plotinian 'hypostases' (cf. 5.1 [10]. 8–9) that are surely a polytheist stumbling block to Christian thinkers. There are for Plotinus three primary *archai* or originative principles – the One or the Good, Intellect or Being, and finally Soul – that run right through Plotinus' works. In *Ennead* 5.1 [10], chapter 10, Plotinus makes clear that they are the foundation of both all reality and our own being:

And just as in nature there are these three, so we ought to think that they are present also in ourselves. I do not mean in beings of the sense-world – for these are separate – but in [ourselves as] beings outside the realm of sense perception – 'outside' in the same way as those intelligible realities are said to be outside the whole heaven; so the principles of man are said to be 'outside', as Plato speaks [e.g., *Republic* 9, 587a] of 'the inner man'.⁷

In other words, these hypostases do not belong to us, but instead we belong to them. The word 'hypostasis' can mean simply 'reality', 'existent', 'existence', and so it is possible that

Porphyry's title for 5.1 [10], 'On the three primary hypostases', suggests a technical vocabulary that Plotinus himself did not intend.⁸ Nonetheless, Plotinus clearly sees them as divine principles, derived from Plato's *Parmenides*, as he makes clear in 5.1 [10].8.23–27, from *Republic* 6 on the Good, and from the famous three kings passage from Plato's *Second Letter*, together with testimony about the "unwritten teachings" of Plato (and perhaps about Plato's final lecture on the Good as the One).⁹

In other words, Plotinus' hypostases represent an interpretation of the entire pagan philosophical legacy rooted in Plato primarily, but secondarily in Aristotle, as we shall see later. First, the physical cosmos is rooted in the dimension of soul. Here every soul and All Soul from the top down, as it were, includes every soul-perspective; World Soul as responsible for the world's physical structure (that includes our own human organic structures); the Soul of the Earth, the souls of all living creatures, including plants, and so on. Nothing is entirely without soul or life, even apparently non-living things. Here too in the soul dimension we experience each thing not as a simple unity but as a "one and many":

The soul is many and one, even if it is not composed of parts; for there are a great many powers in her, reasoning, desiring, apprehending, which are held together by the one as by a bond. The soul then brings the one to others being herself also one by virtue of something else.

(6.9 [9].1.39–44)

Second, the Intellect dimension is more extensive and intensive than Soul. From Intellect everything flows, not only human minds but the intelligibility and beauty of everything else too – all living creatures, even horses, lowly animal parts, as Plotinus argues in 6.7 [38] and bodies and matter too, as he argues in 6.2 [43].²¹ "The greatest beauty in the world of sense is a manifestation of the noblest among the intelligibles, of their power and of their goodness" (4.8 [6]. 6. 24–26). Here in a non-spatial way the Platonic Forms and Aristotle's Divine Intellects pervade each other in a vast intelligible universe, of which our own lived experiences are but strands unfolded in time and space or partial reflections. Partly because of the identification of Aristotle's Divine Intellect with the Platonic Forms, everything in Intellect is not only object but also living subject. One can perhaps imagine this if we adapt an example Plotinus sometimes uses: in the first proposition or axiom we learn about something, a whole science might be virtually (i.e., in power or potency) present, but we are at first unaware of this. Whereas Soul is a "one-and-many," Intellect is, Plotinus argues, borrowing a phrase from Plato's *Parmenides*, a "one-in-many".

Finally, in Plotinus' view, Intellect cannot be the first principle, since – although it is "one", as Aristotle also affirms (*Metaphysics* 12, 7–10), it is still a *one-in-many*. In thought, there is always at least a doubleness (thinking subject and object thought), and so one needs to go still further – on the "wave" of soul-intellect (6.7 [38]. 35–36) to the purest unity – "the power of all things" (3.8 [30]. 10), to the Good, beyond thought and beyond being (cf. Plato, *Republic* 509). Of the One, nothing can be thought or said, and yet the intense unity of the One is greater than Intellect and Soul; "when you think him as intellect or soul, he is more" (6.9 [9]. 6.12). And this unformed-ness is, according to Plotinus, the first emergence of intellect's own existence (cf. 6.7 [38]. 33), for Intellect timelessly and non-spatially emerges or projects itself outwards, as it were, from the One's power and has to turn back or convert to the One in order to become fully itself. Hence, the life, movement and simultaneous rest of Intellect's birth and being in the power of the One are reflected throughout Plotinus' worldview – all the way down through soul into bodies, as composites of form and matter, and even into the pure flux of matter as such, where

the principle of unity starts to disappear in what Plotinus calls, citing Plato's *Politicus* (273d–e) “the infinite sea of dissimilarity” (1.8 [51].13.16–17) or where the power of rationality to unify disappears into the abyss of otherness (2.4 [12].13.29–32).

One may reasonably want to determine if these hypostases are three divine realities or ‘gods’;¹⁰ how we should understand their interrelation: should we ‘count’ them up as three realities to be added quantitatively? It is fairly clear that this cannot be the case, first, because the Good or the One is beyond substance and, therefore, beyond any countable or additive quantity and, second, because countable quantity is posterior to substance, and Intellect and Soul, for Plotinus, are clearly in some sense ‘substances’¹¹ and therefore prior to anything quantifiable.

But if there is a real distinction between Soul and Intellect, how do we in practice distinguish the ‘substance’ of each except by quantification? Should we say that while we quantify or multiply intelligible things in discursive thought, those realities in themselves are not discursive but prior to discursive thinking? This is, in fact, Plotinus’ view, but it is complicated by the fact that Plotinus maps onto the Intellect and Soul hypostasis dimensions two further distinctions: on the one hand, the Intelligible–Sensible two world distinction and, on the other hand, two different senses of the Intelligible World: the first is Intellect in the strict sense, distinct from Soul, and the second is Intellect in the broader sense that includes Soul and all souls and that permits our souls to be real agents and to live amphibiously between perceptible experience and the intelligible reality that makes our perceptible experience possible. How then should we understand these two kinds of two-world distinction?

The logic of the hypostases surely requires that they cannot be added together as $a+b+c$; and the logic of Plato’s two-world theory also supports this, for these cannot be two worlds in quantitative terms; in Socrates’ criticism of Anaxagoras in the *Phaedo*, for instance, formal causality is not the addition or subtraction of material constituents, but the coming to be of a new organic formal reality,¹² and this is supported by Aristotle’s notion of substance in *Metaphysics Z 17*: *ousia* is not a and b but “something different”;¹³ so, while Plato posits two worlds, he cannot mean two distinct ‘things’ or an episodic aggregate – as Aristotle rightly (if unfairly) points out in his criticism of the Platonic Forms as an unnecessary “duplication” of entities,¹⁴ that is, a sensible and an intelligible world, precisely because the reality of sensible things is derived *wholly* from the intelligible Forms. Thus, the ‘reality’ of things is prior to quantity. Quantity is posterior to the reality of substances.

So any appropriation of, or dialogue with, Neoplatonism on this question has to tackle the three hypostases as nominally and functionally equivalent to three ‘gods’. And this is perhaps even more pressing in the case of Iamblichus,¹⁵ although Iamblichus rejects Plotinus’ hypostasis language, as we shall see the following, in favor of *taxeis* or orders of beings. However, Iamblichus multiplies the entities of the intelligible world and approves of Pythagorean number theory as essential to our understanding of the many substances of the intelligible world: “the substance of the gods is defined by number” (ἐκ δὴ τούτων φανερόν γέγονεν ὅτι τὴν ἀριθμῶ ὀρισμένην οὐσίαν τῶν θεῶν παρὰ τῶν Ὀρφικῶν παρέλαβεν. ἐποιεῖτο δὲ διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν ἀριθμῶν καὶ θαυμαστήν πρόγνωσιν καὶ θεραπείαν τῶν θεῶν κατὰ τοὺς ἀριθμοὺς ὅτι μάλιστα συγγενεστάτην). So the same problem arises even more acutely in the case of Iamblichus: if number is fundamental to the ordering and recognition of spiritual principles – fundamental in fact to the possibility of divine science or theology – how should we understand numbers, whether substantial or arithmetic, as applied to gods, archangels, angels, etc.? How can we avoid counting divine quantities? In fact, in his effort to separate gods who are thought to be simultaneously transcendent and yet immanent in the “elements”, Iamblichus insists on counting in quantities: “what is this mixed form of hypostasis,” he asks, “for if it is a composite, it

will not be one from two but a compound and put together from the two” (On the Mysteries 3.21.151.7–12).¹⁶

This polytheistic threat to Trinitarian thought, as we can see, for instance, in Basil and also Gregory of Nyssa (on ‘not three gods’) has, first, to be reinterpreted and assimilated into Christianity’s competing account of reality. And this task Basil first outlines in his *De Sancto Spiritu* (*On the Holy Spirit*), for here he takes special care to distance his view explicitly from a quantitative view of the “originary hypostases”. At 16.38, he writes: “And in the creation of reasonable natures think for me of the pre-original principal cause of what comes into being, the Father; the creative/demiurgic cause, the Son; the perfecting cause, the Spirit.” And he goes on to clarify: “And let no one think that *I am speaking of three originary hypostases or saying that the activity of the Son is incomplete* for the *arche* of beings is one creating through the Son and perfecting in the Spirit.”

Just as Plotinus asserts of God’s activity in *Ennead* 6.7.1, in accord with Plato’s *Timaeus*,¹⁷ so for Basil no activity of the demiurgic intellect can be incomplete, that is, no demiurgic activity can be a kind of Aristotelian *kinesis* in need of perfection. All is concretely present – common and particular – from the beginning. So while number is a sign indicative among us of the plurality of subjects (*On the Holy Spirit* 17.43), in the case of God by contrast, there is simply the following:

One God and Father and One only-begotten Son and one Holy Spirit. We announce each of the hypostases in its own unity, but when we have to count, we are not carried off by an ignorant arithmetic to a conception of polytheism. For we do not count by addition, making increase from a one to a many, saying neither one, two and three nor again first and second and third. . . . Worshipping God from God, we confess *the proper character of the hypostases* but we abide upon the monarchy, without scattering the theology into a divided plurality.

(*On the Holy Spirit* 18.44, 404, 20–406, 8)

Basil, of course, is speaking of the Trinity, which for him is the paradigm of substance, against Neoplatonic intelligible hypostatic intermediaries, and on the basis of this, he emphasizes four important principles for Christian philosophical thought: 1) the proper philosophical logic of the Neoplatonic hypostases requires that they be non-numerable; 2) as primary designations of substance, therefore, they must apply *primarily* not to the different hypostases of Intellect and Soul, but to God’s substance; 3) God’s substance must be unitary yet triadic; and 4) creation has to be understood holistically not as effected derivatively through Intellect and Soul as subordinate hypostases to the One, but *immediately* through the one-triadic activity of God that is not a physical movement but a single abiding reality.

3 Substance

So Basil, following out the inner logic of the hypostases themselves, is able to dispense with pagan intermediaries such as Intellect, Soul, World Soul, etc. (much as Plotinus had tended to do with the Gnostics) in favor of a greater economy of substance, to which we should now turn.¹⁸ Let me take up Plotinus first and then Iamblichus’ criticism of both substance and hypostases in Plotinus, before coming to what I take to be Basil and Gregory’s project to reframe these questions for Christian thought.

As we have seen earlier, Plotinus typically distinguishes two different senses of the Intelligible World: the first is Intellect and intelligible substance in the strict sense, that is, Intellect distinct

from Soul, and the second is Intellect in the broader sense that includes Soul and all souls. From the first perspective, Intellect alone is substance – a *tode ti*, in fact, and everything secondary is accidental; from the latter perspective, everything is substantial if it is connected to the entire world of substantiality rooted in Intellect. What is quantity, if abstracted from individual substances like you and me, is an intelligible activity if contemplated holistically.¹⁹ This results in a multi-perspectival view of all beings, the ‘sensible’ world included.

First, from the top down, that is, from the perspective of the unified whole, all things are substantial, not just substance as form and compound, but even matter as a “last form”.²⁰ This is in line with Aristotle’s view of matter, form, and compound as different forms of οὐσία in *Metaphysics Z* 1–3,²¹ and it makes good sense, since in Plotinus, Aristotle and Alexander, there is also a *logos* or definition of matter.²² Matter is not just ‘stuff’ but meaningfulness. Second, from the bottom up, by contrast, either sensible reality can be traced back to the intelligible through λόγοι (as in the final chapters of the second of the “logical treatises,” 43, chapter 21)²³ or sensible substance as sensible is pseudo-substance, an imitation (as in treatise 44, chapter 8);²⁴ and, third, from the bottom down, as it were, matter is privation, non-being, and evil, another side of Plotinus’ thinking developed primarily in treatises 12 (2.4), 25 (2.5), 26 (3.6) and 51 (1.8). From the top down and positive bottom-up perspectives employed in treatise 31 above all, Plotinus does not go so far as to include bodies and matter explicitly in the intelligible world (as the Sethian Gnostic treatise *Zostrianos* 48–55 does for the case of angels), but he will take this further step in a broader Platonic treatment of Aristotle’s understanding of substance and the categories in treatise 43, chapters 21–22, where he argues, first, that anything that can be fitted to a *logos* belongs in the intelligible world and, ultimately, that this includes “bodies and matter”²⁵ (in what must have been a sustained debate about the nature of both body and matter, before or after the resurrection, on the Christian account).

By contrast with Plotinus’ positive *homoousios* model that links everything back by focal equivocity to a *unity* of soul and intellect, Iamblichus insists on the *differences* in substances and kinds – of gods, archangels, angels, demons, heroes. For Iamblichus, instead of a shared hypostasis that blurs the differences between kinds, there is need for a hierarchy of different substances. There cannot be a single mixed form of substance: “anything completely transcendent cannot become one with that which has gone forth from itself; nor can the soul produce *some one form of hypostasis* in communion with the divine inspiration” (*On the Mysteries* 3. 21, 150, 9–12: οὐδὲ ψυχή τοῖνον μετὰ τῆς θείας ἐπιπνοίας ἐν τι ποιεῖ ὑποστάσεως εἶδος); and as we saw in the passage cited earlier, “what is this mixed form of hypostasis” *but* quantities? (3.21, 15, 10–12). So, on the one hand, there is a hierarchy of different substances that can be adapted later through Proclus and Dionysius to Christian perspectives, while, on the other hand, there is a multiplicity of gods – hypercosmic and cosmic – that does not fit Christian thinking at all. At the same time, the One beyond the One is so far removed from the Demiurge, who occupies in Iamblichus’ system the lowest rank of the intellectual realm, that the immediacy of Divine substance and activity that one finds in Plotinus is lost. This is why the Cappadocians, for instance, focus in important ways upon rethinking fundamental aspects of Plotinus’ thought, as we shall now show.

One major difficulty for Christian thought with Plotinus’ broader view of substance is that, however cogent a model it may provide, it elides the distinction between intelligible and sensible and radically undermines any real distinction between producer and produced.²⁶ Therefore, the Cappadocians, following Origen and the earlier tradition, insist upon the fundamental distinction between the Uncreated and the Created; and Divine substance becomes the immediate model for the understanding of all created substances, intelligible or sensible. The generative inter-hypostatic relations in Plotinus that undermine the *immediacy* of divine activity but upon

which Plotinus insists as a fundamental principle of his thought, as we have seen earlier, therefore have to be seen as the intra-substantial hypostases of the single Divine substance²⁷ that also feature intrinsically in Plotinus' philosophy, since not only does the One produce Intellect but *Intellect also makes itself*. In other words, this self-making of Intellect requires an inner articulation of its being. So for later Christian philosophy, the apophatic and kataphatic aspects of Plotinus' One, and of Iamblichus' postulation of a One beyond the One²⁸ in order to preserve the One from any contamination of intellectual discourse, have to be refocused into Divine substance which is logically and substantially primary, and Plotinus' multilayered thought, together with Iamblichus' multiplication of intelligible entities, has to be reframed to match the logical economy of this Divine substance.

Quite apart from the Trinitarian model that Plotinus introduces into the Good in 6.8 [39] in order to explain what it means for the Good to be *causa sui*,²⁹ there are, in fact, many triadic models *internal* to Intellect in Plotinus.³⁰ Although Plotinus can describe the emergence and return of Intellect in many different ways, perhaps one of the most distinctive is as follows: out of the power of the One there emerges a double activity often with three or even four emergent moments that are part of a single event: the production of duality/multiplicity from pure unity.³¹ Typically, Intellect is a vertical triad (being-life-mind; object of thought-thinking-intellect) or horizontal duality of subject-object joined by thinking as a third element, in which each moment of generation or articulation is both itself and yet the whole of Intellect. Another way of putting this might be to say that the outpouring or emanation of being from the One is whole or integral and yet everything is simultaneously articulated as itself.

In relation to Trinitarian thinking, in short, Plotinus provides three major models: First, in relation to the Divine Intellect, not only is Intellect an image of its paradigm, the One; Intellect is also internally an image of itself as paradigm. Second, Intellect is caused by the One, but it is also cause of itself; it therefore has an internal relation of cause and caused. And, third, not only is Intellect cause of itself, but in the later chapters of his great work "On the Free Will of the One", 6.8 [39], Plotinus admits he is speaking incorrectly, but to intimate the dynamic reality of the Good's freedom as cause of itself he provides effectively a Trinitarian model for thinking through what it means to say that the Good is 'cause of itself' and thus to articulate what has been called 'the inner life of the One'.³² Let me take the first of these two models. The third model above will not be given separate focus here, since it shows immediately in striking fashion that Plotinus *cannot explain* what it means to say that the Good is pure freedom and cause of itself *without articulating a Trinitarian model*.³³

First, then, how can a single reality be both archetype and image of itself? *Prima facie*, such a notion may seem philosophically absurd. Surely, for Plotinus, an hypostasis is an image or logos of its superior, never of itself. On the other hand, if something is cause of itself, then there must be something like a paradigm-image configuration in its own being. Basil applies this preeminently to the Trinity in *On the Holy Spirit*, as we saw earlier, but it is obvious that Basil is aware that he is in fact applying the logic of Platonism's own thought to the paradigmatic case of Divine Substance, when we find exactly this image-archetype application both to Intellect and to derived substantial being in Plotinus.

Let me illustrate this about Intellect. In a famous center-circle analogy in 6.8 [39].18, Plotinus likens what he calls "intellect-in-one", as immediately rooted in the Good beyond it, to the center of a circle and Intellect itself as a power that "runs around it": "so also is that too [intellect-in-one], as the intellectual power runs around it, *a kind of archetype of the image of itself*, intellect-in-one (τὸ οἷον ἰνδάλματος αὐτοῦ ἀρχέτυπον, ἐν ἐνὶ νοῦν) to be 'in that' (18.41–42). "An image, as it were, conquered by many and into many, and therefore having become Intellect, while that remains before Intellect and generates intellects from its power" (18. 25–30).

Here it is relatively clear that if the Good is beyond substance, in intellectual substance there must be a double internal movement: 1) an internal unitary moment self-dependent and generative of itself and 2) a fully substantial product that is Intellect properly so-called.

If, as one might argue, Plotinus' thought in 6.8 does not represent his usual thinking since he admits that he is not speaking correctly of the Good,³⁴ one must reply that double-act theory internal to Intellect is indeed Plotinus' normal thought (a striking version of which he articulates in one of the final chapters of the treatise preceding 6.8 [39], namely 6.7 [38].40).³⁵ Moreover, the archetype-image configuration is also part of Plotinus' narrative of substantial being in a broader sense, that is, it occurs in his description of the ascent of the soul-self to mystical union. In ascent, the soul 'will come not to something other, but to itself', which is not to be 'in nothing, but in itself'. And for anything to be 'in itself' is to be "in That" (6.7.41–42: τὸ δὲ ἐν αὐτῇ μόνῃ καὶ οὐκ ἐν τῷ ὄντι ἐν ἐκείνῳ), that is, not to be "substance, but beyond substance" [cf. *Republic* 509b9] in intimate co-relation (42–43: γίνεται γὰρ καὶ αὐτὸς τις οὐκ οὐσία, ἀλλ' ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας ταύτη, ἧ̄ προσομιλεῖ). There is, then, something above substance in Intellect that, nonetheless, is correlated with Intellect, since while it may be coincident with the One, it is *not* the One. "If someone then sees that he himself has become this, *one has oneself as a likeness of that, and if one goes from oneself as image to archetype*, then one has the goal of one's journey [cf. *Republic* 532e3]" (6.9 [9].11, 39–46: εἴ τις οὖν τοῦτο αὐτὸν γενόμενον ἴδοι, ἔχει ὁμοίωμα ἐκείνου αὐτόν, καὶ εἰ ἀφ' αὐτοῦ μεταβαίνοι ὡς εἰκὼν πρὸς ἀρχέτυπον, τέλος ἂν ἔχοι τῆς πορείας). In other words, the logic of the archetype-image configuration applies derivatively in Plotinus to the Intelligible-Sensible divide (or the Uncreated-Created divide for Basil) but *primarily* to the internal articulation of Divine substance and secondarily to the substantial self in mystical ascent. Basil, therefore, in *On the Holy Spirit* insists with good reason that, on Platonism's own terms, the archetype-image configuration should be understood as non-subordinationist and non-aggregative in Divine Being, namely, Being that is the proper model for understanding Divinity and from which all later beings receive their own modes of being.

Hence, Basil implicitly uses elements from Plotinus logically against Neoplatonism, (such as, in *On the Holy Spirit* 17ff.), when he argues that the Christian "One" is truly one and neither composite nor a "one from many" (unlike Plotinus' Intellect),³⁶ nor again a formless unity implicitly, but a "one form/shape, as it were", through whose illuminative power "we fix our gaze upon the beauty of the image of the invisible God and are led to the vision beyond beauty of the archetype" (*Spirit* 47, 1–3: ἐπὶ τὸ ὑπέρκalon τοῦ ἀρχέτυπου θέαμα). The striking adjectival substantive, τὸ ὑπέρκalon, in this context suggests that Basil has read *Ennead* 6.7 (esp. 6.7. 32. 26–39f) and is correcting Plotinus' argument that the One is a shapeless beauty beyond beauty, even if Basil agrees that the One must remain unmeasured. Here, then, we witness the demolition and transformation of the fundamental structure of Neoplatonism by a master thinker who argues that by understanding Neoplatonism on its own terms we should reach a somewhat different conclusion from that of Plotinus.

Let me briefly articulate Gregory of Nyssa's completion of the philosophical project initiated by his older brother. As we have seen in Plotinus, Intellect is caused by the One, but it is also cause of itself;³⁷ it therefore must have a relation of cause and caused internal to its being. This follows also from Plotinus' view of Intellect and, in fact, it turns out to be explicitly the case in an early work. In 5.1.10.4, for example, Plotinus describes the internal generation of Intellect as the articulation of a causal process:

Each [intelligible being] is Intellect and Being, and the whole altogether is all Intellect and all Being, Intellect causing Being to exist, and Being giving Intellect thinking and existence by virtue of being thought. The cause of thinking is something different, which is

also cause of Being. Of both therefore simultaneously there is a cause that is other [than themselves]. For they are simultaneous and exist together, and one does not fall short of the other (τοῦ δὲ νοεῖν αἴτιον ἄλλο, ὃ καὶ τῷ ὄντι· ἀμφοτέρων οὖν ἅμα αἴτιον ἄλλο. ἅμα μὲν γὰρ ἐκεῖνα καὶ συνυπάρχει καὶ οὐκ ἀπολείπει ἄλληλα), but this one is altogether two, Intellect and Being, thinker and object thought, Intellect as thinking and Being as object thought. For there could not be thinking without otherness.

(5.1.10.4.28–35)

And Plotinus goes on to educe the “greatest kinds” from Plato’s *Sophist* (from Being, there emerge Otherness, Sameness, Rest, and Motion) as rounding out this full realization of Intellect.³⁸

Here I want to make two precise points. First, in talking of causality, Plotinus could be interpreted as talking about the One, but in fact his argument is exclusively focused on Intellect. There is an internal causal relation in Intellect that he describes here (and in later works) as a *synhyparxis/synhypostasis*.³⁹ Second, the internal procession of Intellect is implicitly triadic: Being and Intellect mediated by otherness and sameness. Here then there is a conspicuous causal model that, on Basil’s understanding of the ‘hypostases’, can and should properly apply to the Trinity.

And, in fact, we find a verbal echo of this Plotinian passage, with exactly this understanding, in two famous passages from Gregory of Nyssa: in *Not Three Gods* and *To the Greeks*. In the first passage, Gregory argues that the three Persons are to be distinguished by origin, the Father as the cause (*to aition*) and the Son and Spirit as caused (*aitiata*), the Son immediately and the Spirit mediately from the Father by the intermediary of the Son:

while we confess the unchangeable nature, we do not deny the difference in respect of cause and that which is caused in which alone we apprehend that the one is distinguished from the other, because we believe that one is the cause and the other is from the cause (τὴν κατὰ τὸ αἴτιον καὶ αἰτιατὸν διαφορὰν οὐκ ἀρνούμεθα, ἐν ᾧ μόνῳ διακρίνεσθαι τὸ ἕτερον τοῦ ἑτέρου καταλαμβάνομεν, τῷ τὸ μὲν αἴτιον πιστεύειν εἶναι τὸ δὲ ἐκ τοῦ αἰτίου); and in what is from a cause, again we recognize another difference. For one is directly (προσεχῶς) from the first, and the other is through that which is directly from the first so that the attribute of being Only-Begotten abides without ambiguity in respect of the Son and the fact that the Spirit is from the Father is not in doubt.

(*Not Three Gods*, 55, 24–56, 10 M)

This triple causality, then, allows for proper subordination, in Christian terms, but not ontological subordination since it refers to a single level of Being, as in the logic of the internal triplicity-in-unity of Intellect in Plotinus.

We should compare Gregory’s even more similar language in *Adversus Graecos* with the lines from *Ennead* 5.1.10. 4, cited earlier.⁴⁰ Gregory writes: “That is indeed why the one as cause of its (two) causeds, we say is one God; since indeed it coexists with them (25, 6–8: διὸ δὴ καὶ κυρίως τὸν ἕνα αἴτιον μετὰ τῶν αὐτοῦ αἰτιατῶν ἕνα θεὸν φάμεν τεθαρρηκότως, ἐπειδὴ καὶ συνυπάρχει αὐτοῖς).⁴¹ Here Gregory is surely reading Plotinus to combat the Eunomian-type view that there can be no *synhyparxis* which Eunomius explicitly repudiates:

It is not only impious but positively ridiculous for those who grant that there is one unique Unbegotten being to say that anything else exists either before it or along with it. Indeed, if something else did exist before the Unbegotten, it is that which would properly have to be called ‘Unbegotten’ and not the second. On the other hand, if some other individual

existed along with the Unbegotten, then by the community whereby each existed along with the other, their being one only and Unbegotten would be taken away. (εἴτε γὰρ προϋπάρχοι τι, τοῦτο δικαίως λέγοιτ' ἂν ἀγέννητον, οὐ τὸ δεύτερον· εἴτε συνυπάρχοι, τῇ πρὸς θάτερον κοινωνία τοῦ συνυπάρχειν ἐκάτερον ἀφαιρεθήσεται τὸ ἐν μόνον εἶναι καὶ τὸ ἀγέννητον εἶναι.)⁴²

Against Eunomius (and, in fact, against Iamblichus too),⁴³ for Gregory, to be ‘cause of itself’ must mean, in the case of God, that the Unbegotten, the Only-Begotten, and the Spirit form a community of nature, the logic of whose relations was anticipated but misunderstood by Neoplatonism. And so Gregory argues for the logic of Plotinus’ position, reshaped by Basil, against Eunomius and Iamblichus, who reject the *synhyparxis-causa sui* model of Divinity in favor of what for them is the only appropriate name: the Unbegotten.

4 Divine activity and the creation/definition of the human being

The fourth feature of Neoplatonic thought I have chosen to examine here flows from the nature of substance outlined earlier, namely, the character of divine activity in relation to the production or creation of subsequent beings and, specifically, the nature of the human being. Who are we human beings? Are we souls or bodies, soul-body compounds or form-matter compounds? A typical caricature of Plotinian Neoplatonism is that, *Platonico more*, we are really souls or rational souls, but Plotinus rejects both hypotheses on the reasonable grounds that, in the first case, while we act *by virtue of soul*, the extension of soul is much greater than can fit the definition of a human being⁴⁴ and, in the second case, that our bodily existence has also to be taken properly into account.⁴⁵

On the other side of the question, in an early work, Plotinus rejects Aristotle’s entelechy doctrine because it *duplicates* levels of being instead of the logical economy he argues is more appropriate. The soul, Plotinus argues, is not an inseparable entelechy in the sense of being a form ‘of’ body, since it is prior to becoming the form of ‘this’ thing (4.7 [7].8⁵, 40–42⁴⁶: οὐκ ἄρα τῷ εἶδος εἶναι τιнос τὸ εἶναι ἔχει, ἀλλ' ἔστιν οὐσία οὐ παρὰ τὸ ἐν σώματι ἰδρῦσθαι τὸ εἶναι λαμβάνουσα, ἀλλ' οὕσα πρὶν καὶ τοῦδε γενέσθαι). Because the Peripatetics make the soul effectively the perishable entelechy of the body, Plotinus argues, they are forced to introduce a second entelechy (intellect) in order to account for the first entelechy of the soul-body relation (4.7 [7].8⁵.16–17: διὸ καὶ αὐτοὶ [i.e., the Peripatetics] ἄλλην ψυχὴν ἢ νοῦν εἰσάγουσιν, ὃν ἀθάνατον τίθενται). If one cannot then reduce this two-stage entelechy to a single material explanation, why should we not be appropriately economical and take proper account of form by interpreting soul in the light of intellect, as makes better sense of Aristotle’s own thought? If so, a single entelechy is all that is needed.

The multilayered definitions of the human being that Plotinus provides in his works⁴⁷ have to be understood, I suggest, within this economy, and particularly the definition he articulates in 6.7 [38], chapters 4–5, which starts from the premise first posited in Plato’s *Timaeus*, namely, that that the Demiurge looked to the intelligible Living Creature in making this world, not to a partial model: “for nothing that is a likeness of anything *incomplete* could ever turn out beautiful” (*Timaeus* 30c: ἀτελεῖ γὰρ εἰκοδὸς οὐδέν ποτ' ἂν γένοιτο καλόν). Similarly, when Plotinus argues in *Ennead* VI 7 [38] that the Demiurge could not have deliberated or reasoned about making the cosmos, but demiurgic activity must be whole and entire before any reasoning, he says explicitly that

if every divine activity must not be *incomplete* (εἰ δεῖ ἐκάστην ἐνέργειαν μὴ ἀτελεῖ⁴⁸ εἶναι), it is not lawful to suppose that *anything of God is other than whole and all*, then *everything must*

exist in any thing which is his (μηδὲ θεμιτὸν θεοῦ ὅτιοῦν ὄν ἄλλο τι νομίζειν ἢ ὅλον τε καὶ πᾶν, δεῖ ἐν ὅτωσιν τῶν αὐτοῦ πάντα ἐνυπάρχειν). So everything must preexist in God as to become unfolded later in time “as if it had been thought out beforehand as to what comes later; and this means that there will be . . . no deficiency.”

(6.7.1.45–48)

Plotinus then develops in subsequent chapters of 6.7 a theory of whole-formation that allows for the priority of soul to body. Plotinus concludes that the human being cannot be simply soul; “this human being here”⁴⁹ must be, he argues, “a productive logos indwelling, not separate” (4, 26–30) so that this human being is

a compound entity, soul in a specific forming principle [i.e., a bodily structure of a certain kind], the forming principle being a determinate activity which cannot exist without the active subject. For this is how the forming principles in seeds are; for they are neither without soul nor simply souls.

(5, 2–6)

For Basil and Gregory later, Plotinus does not go far enough, since *on his own terms* body, and compound being, is a *logos*. Gregory writes in *On the Making of Man* 29:

But since the human being is one, the being consisting of soul and body, we are to suppose that the origin of his structure is one and common (Ἄλλ’ ἐνὸς ὄντος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, τοῦ διὰ ψυχῆς τε καὶ σώματος συνεστηκότος, μίαν αὐτοῦ καὶ κοινὴν τῆς συστάσεως τὴν ἀρχὴν ὑποτίθεσθαι) so that he should not turn out to be older and younger than himself, the bodily taking the lead in him and the other turning up later. But we are to say that in the foreknowing power of God (τῆ μὲν προγνωστικῆ τοῦ Θεοῦ δυνάμει), according to the account adopted a little earlier, the entire fullness of humanity presubstited (τῆ μὲν προγνωστικῆ τοῦ Θεοῦ δυνάμει).⁵⁰

In this passage, Gregory clearly points out that the preexistence of the soul without the preexistence of the body⁵¹ contravenes both Plato and Plotinus’ fundamental principles (that no work or activity of God can be *incomplete*) and he proceeds in the rest of *Making of Man*, chapters 29 and 30 to work out the unfolding of *body and soul together and immediately from God’s activity* (unlike the Demiurge of Iamblichus’ system who is lowest in the intellectual realm) as we actually experience this in seeds, in the growth of limbs, and in the complementary development of organic structure and thought. It is a revolutionary development in the history of thought that has gone almost entirely unnoticed – an intelligible representation of a profound meditation that includes Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus, Basil, and those in Gregory’s pastoral care as a bishop.

And so, in the culminating thesis of the work, in chapter 30, Gregory concludes with an independent examination of the construction of the body from the medical point of view, thus indicating his approval of, and continuity with, a long tradition rooted in Genesis and later in the *Timaeus*’ account of the generation of the human body, on the one hand, and his radical departure from – or Christian completion of – that tradition, on the other, depending on one’s point of view:

For the project was to show that the seminal cause of our constitution is neither an incorporeal soul nor an unsouled body,⁵² but that from animated and living bodies it is generated in the first constitution as a living, animate being, and that human nature, like a nurse,

receives and tends it with her own proper powers;⁵³ and it grows in both aspects and makes its growth manifest correspondingly in each part. For straightaway, by means of this mechanistic/artificial and scientific process of formation, it shows the power of soul interwoven⁵⁴ in it, appearing rather dimly at first, but subsequently shining more brilliantly with the perfection of the instrument.

Even in this final passage we can see several decisive elements for understanding how Gregory receives a textual tradition and thinks critically through and with it. The phrase “neither an incorporeal soul nor an unsouled body” picks up the conclusion of Plotinus’ striking definition of the human being in 6.7 [38].4–5. There Plotinus concludes that the human being cannot be simply soul; “this human being here”⁵⁵ must be, he argues,

a compound entity, soul in a specific forming principle [i.e., a bodily structure of a certain kind], the forming principle being a determinate activity which cannot exist without the active subject. For this is how the forming principles in seeds are; *for they are neither without soul nor simply souls.*

(5.2–6)

Compare Gregory: “*our [seminal] constitution is neither an incorporeal soul nor an unsouled body*” (*Making of Man* 30, p. 253. 18–22: Τὸ γὰρ προκειμένον ἦν δεῖξαι τὴν σπερματικὴν τῆς συστάσεως ἡμῶν αἰτίαν, μήτε ἀσώματον εἶναι ψυχὴν, μήτε ἄψυχον σῶμα, ἀλλ’ ἐξ ἐμψύχων τε καὶ ζώντων σωμάτων ζῶν καὶ ἔμψυχον παρὰ τὴν πρώτην ἀπογεννᾶσθαι ζῶν).

Gregory unmistakably refers to Plotinus at this point, and it is true that the compression of his thought is astonishing, but this is the highly sophisticated philosophical way he thinks. While Plotinus in 6.7, chapters 5–7, goes on to argue for the priority of soul over body, Gregory argues effectively that Plotinus’ *own definition* of the concrete interrelated reality that is ‘this human being’ is in fact contrary to any genetic or seminal priority of soul over body. Otherwise, demi-urgic power would be refuted as incomplete. Whole formation requires, first, a radical equality of body and soul; second, it also needs not a World Soul from outside, as Plotinus had argued famously in the next chapters of 6.7.5–7,⁵⁶ but a concrete “human nature, like a nurse” that receives and complements human growth *with her own proper powers* for psychosomatic development; and, third, this is, Gregory clearly intimates, in accordance with a plausible philosophical interpretation of Plato’s statement in the *Timaeus* that the soul is *interwoven right through* body (if from animated and living bodies our first constitution is established as “a living animate being”).

5 Necessity versus freedom

Thus far, I have tracked the contemplative zetetic practice of philosophy from Plotinus and Iamblichus into Christian thought, but in this fifth feature I want to look briefly at that transition in reverse. What is the nature of production or creation⁵⁷ in Neoplatonism? Does the One produce automatically or necessarily in “an essentially deterministic system” (Blumenthal 1987: 552)? For Henry 1931 *passim*, Dodds 1965: 88–90, Blumenthal 1987: 552–553, 559–560, the One does not will its products. For Trouillard 1955: 74–80, Cilento 1963: 94–101, Kremer 1965: 241–264, Rist 1967: 66–83, Bussanich 1988: 101, Collette-Dučič 2014; Frede 2011: 130–152, Corrigan and Turner 2017 *passim*, the One’s free will is fundamental. I am persuaded by the latter hypothesis, but even today there is no consensus. It is likely therefore to have been a problem that cropped up over the course of Plotinus’ writing career – with pagans, Christians, and Jews. And while it is clear to me that Plotinus’ emphasis on the freedom of the One antedates

6.8, 39th in the chronological order,⁵⁸ nonetheless, there has been much speculation about what prompted Plotinus to write this groundbreaking treatise at precisely this moment of his career. Of the many explanations that have been advanced, none can be definitively ruled out.⁵⁹ Just as Plotinus' own thought was undoubtedly shaped by an inner dialogue with Gnostic works probably throughout his writing career but especially in the so-called long work, culminating in the explicit critique of the Gnostics in 2.9 [33],⁶⁰ so here in the case of 6.8, we cannot exclude from consideration the genuine possibility, as A. H. Armstrong suggested long ago,⁶¹ that Plotinus was concerned with Christian questions from his own circle and from his own thinking to show how freedom is fundamental to Neoplatonic thinking, both free human agency and divine freedom originating from and culminating in the Good. In this context, it is surely no accident that such freedom is also most characteristic of the thought of a thinker so often linked and yet distinguished from Plotinus, Origen of Alexandria.⁶² At the same time, part of the legacy of 6.8, as we noted earlier, reaches, via Iamblichus and Eunomius, into the development of later Trinitarian thought that will constitute a fundamental part of a distinctively Christian philosophical tradition.

6 Philosophy, theurgy, and theology

A common contrast between Plotinus and Christianity, on the one hand, and between Plotinus and Iamblichus, on the other, is first that whereas philosophy is intellectualist with Plotinus, there is a new emphasis upon the primacy of virtue or practice in Christianity; and, second, that while philosophy is contemplative or 'god-talk' in Plotinus, it is primarily theurgic or 'god-work' in Iamblichus, a position that corresponds approximately to Plotinus' supremely confident view that the soul never descends entirely into the body and Iamblichus' contrasting view that the soul descends entirely and, therefore, needs real practical, indeed sacramental, help to re-ascend.

Naturally, there is a different emphasis in Christianity upon everything, including philosophy. As we have seen earlier, Gregory of Nyssa speaks about the "philosophic table" making everything in ordinary life properly philosophical; and Eusebius in his *History of the Church* can say of Origen that his life was entirely devoted to asceticism and study, and he calls this a φιλοσοφάτατος βίος, "a most philosophical way of life", in chastity, food, and sleep restraint, sleeping on the floor, walking barefoot and risking his health, reaching "to the very extreme of poverty"; and all of this is part of Origen's adherence to the "sayings of the Savior in the Gospel" (*Church History* 6.3.9–10). Here there is an entirely new emphasis, it is true, but also much that is deeply shared with the pagan tradition: from Plato and for Plotinus, for instance, in the labors of the soul perspective one sees the "soul's own philosophy" (cf. *Republic* 611e; *Enneads* 1.3 [20].5.8–9); here is where it is necessary "to make the soul impassible from philosophy" (Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.6 [36] 5, 1). Evagrius adds a unique Christian dimension, but his thought is deeply resonant with pagan thinking: "we ought not to labor at ascetic works as merely habitual, but rather with an understanding of thanksgiving (*en sumesei eucharistias*), in order that the soul might not be found naked of such philosophy" (*Eulogius* 30, 32). And indeed too, Plotinus' understanding of philosophy emphasizes the primacy of Platonic dialectic that holds the highest rank (compare I 3, 1, 33 with Plato, *Republic* 7) – something that is not part of Christian philosophy, but philosophy, nevertheless, "has other parts: the study of nature. . . . Moral philosophy derives from dialectic on its contemplative side, but adds the virtuous dispositions and the exercises which produce them"; it thus includes the whole range of thought and practice (I 3, 6, 6–8). This is true to Socrates' famous injunction that "to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods" is "to become like God, so far as this is possible; and to become like God

is to become *righteous and holy and wise* (ὁμοίωσις θεῶν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν: ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὄσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι).” There is nothing intellectualist about this. The ascetic life of virtue aligned with wisdom is fundamental to likeness to god, which Plotinus emphasizes in his work against the Gnostics when he asserts that intellectual contemplation without due measure is “like flying in one’s dreams (2.9 [33].9.43–56).” “Without true virtue, god-talk is just a name” (2.9 [33].15.39–40). By contrast with the Gnostics, Plotinus emphasizes that “the kind of philosophy we pursue, besides all its other goods, shows simplicity of character, purity of thought, pursues dignity, not rash arrogance, combines courageous confidence with reason, much safe assurance, carefulness, and circumspection” (2.9 [33].14.38–43).⁶³

Indeed, one may plausibly suggest that when in his 30th treatise (in Porphyry’s chronological order from the *Life of Plotinus*) Plotinus argues that every production and action is an image or a substitute for contemplation and that contemplation itself or living noetic insight is unrestricted or infinite (3.8 [30].5.29–34), this view cannot be understood in any intellectualist fashion but is rather a proper development of the Platonic–Aristotelian tradition according to which divine activity is the real and immediate ground of all subsequent levels of being; therefore, it is contemplation or insight that gives each action and production its proper level of meaning, not action or making that primarily determines the significance and being of things. All action is at this point saturated by creative contemplation in such a way that it makes no sense to talk of theology as god-talk or of philosophy as intellectualist or theoretical.

It could be argued that Iamblichus’ notion of theurgy complements and intensifies philosophy rather than negates it. When Iamblichus says in the Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell translation that it is not pure thought that unites theurgists to the gods, the word translated as ‘pure thought’ is *ennoia*, that is, rational conception or notion; such notions in Stoicism are derived from sense perception, though they are not so derived in Platonic usage.⁶⁴ However, they do refer to discursive notions in our thinking, as Iamblichus signifies here. He therefore means that our discursive thinking does not on its own unite us to the gods. And when he says a little later in the same passage that “divine causes are called forth into actuality not chiefly through our intellections,” again this means either that our thoughts or understandings are not the primary causes of divine action or that intellection itself is in need of divine activity as its primary motive cause; and with both interpretations Plotinus would be in full agreement. God’s activity is the primary cause of everything.

It might therefore seem better to understand theurgy not as opposed to philosophy, but as its complementary perfection, as Damascius in his *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo* seems to do: on the one hand, he says, to some, such as Plotinus, Porphyry, and many others, philosophy is primary; to others, such as Iamblichus, Syrianus, Proclus, and all the hieratics, hieratic practice is primary. This might suggest a clear-cut division between philosophy and theurgy, but Damascius immediately traces the intrinsic unity of both philosophy and theurgy back to Plato:

Plato, recognizing the many strong arguments from both sides drew them together into one single truth by calling the philosopher ‘Bacchus’, for the one who has separated himself from generation as an intermediate term will lead the one to identity with the other.

(Damascius, *Commentary on Plato’s Phaedo*, 2.1.172, 1–6)

Philosophy and theurgy, therefore, are not opposed, but situated along a continuum that includes hieratic practices, divination, the animation of statues, etc., not all of which, if any, are opposed to the arguments, myths, and other practices we find to be intrinsic to Platonic dialogues.

On the other hand, an apparently small change of perspective can revolutionize everything. For Plotinus conspicuously, ascent to god is *naturally* accessible, since the human soul has not entirely descended;⁶⁵ hence, “you have already ascended and no longer need someone to guide you; concentrate and see” (1.6 [1] 9. 23–24). For Iamblichus (and Proclus), by contrast, the human soul cannot be substantially unified with the divine, as we have seen earlier;⁶⁶ it therefore needs a guide: the theurgist; and theurgy is not an operation *on* the divine, but an operation *of* the divine, by means of symbols and rites, *on* the human being. There is need, therefore, to respect a certain sacramental order in liturgy that is imposed *by the gods* (cf. *On the Mysteries* 1.15.47.9; 2.11.97.16–19) and retransmitted by the sacerdotal class of theurgists, whose efficacy is *primarily divine* and *independent of any human doing* or willed philosophical ascent. The contrast with Plotinus and Porphyry could not be more striking. Plotinus is resolutely opposed to hierophantic (Gnostic) mediators; and even the Good is, Plotinus says in one striking instance, “present to *anyone* when anyone wills” (5.5 [32].12). Iamblichus insists on a ‘sacramental theology’⁶⁷ that privileges the divine and, consequently, the theurgist.

Something similar, if necessarily very different, has to be said for Christian theurgy. When Dionysius speaks of “theurgic lights” (*Divine Names* 1.4.592B) or “initiates in God’s work” (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1.372B) or, again, of the Divine works as the “consummation” of the Divine words (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 3.5, 432B), he intimates a very different practice of theurgy now concerned with the relation between the Old and New Testaments, and also with the sacraments, but this practice intensifies and transforms the older dispensation by dwelling simultaneously inside and outside it within its own contemplative practice. For Dionysius, Jesus is source and mediator: “transcendent mind, utterly divine mind, who is the source and being underlying all hierarchy, all sanctification, all the workings of God” (*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 1, 372A–B). In the ‘sacraments’,⁶⁸

the perfecting rite of God . . . praises in a double sense its divine work of perfection. God, first of all, having become man, was consecrated for us and, secondly, this divine act is the source of all perfection and of all consecration.

(*Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 12, 485A)

So, in Iamblichus’ thought, philosophy is diminished, but sacred scientific theology assumes new significance. Plotinus never uses the word *theologia* (and only twice *theologos*); Porphyry uses *theologia* three times (*theologos* once).⁶⁹ For Iamblichus, however, *θεολογία* is prominent. If all the ranks of beings are distinguished clearly “that bind together a single continuity from top to bottom, and render the communion of all things indivisible” (*On the Mysteries* 1.5.6–9), rather than conceiving them as a substantial unity (with Plotinus), then definition, classification, hierarchy, and “the complete order of scientific theology” cohere (cf. *On the Mysteries* 1.4.14.8–9: *συνγχεῖται πάντα τῆς ἐπιστημονικῆς θεολογίας ἢ διάταξις*). So Iamblichus distinguishes three principal aspects of things that are accessible to processes of logical reasoning:

We will provide, in an appropriate manner, explanations proper to each, dealing in a theological mode with theological questions, and in theurgical terms with those concerning theurgy, while philosophical issues we will join with you in examining in philosophical terms.

(*On the Mysteries* 1.2.7., 2–5)

Here as Clarke et al. note *ad loc.*, this is an elaborate put-down of Porphyry, for whom the truths of theurgy, and probably of theology, may be beyond his skeptical mind-set and pedestrian capabilities (Clarke et al. 2003: 11n21).

However, later with Dionysius, philosophy, theology, and theurgy seem fundamentally coextensive. For Dionysius, theology usually means God's word, that is, the scriptures, whereas theurgy is God's act, that is, the actual fulfillment of God's word (see Luibheid, Rorem et al., *Mystical Theology* 133n1; *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* 214n82). Nonetheless, the teachings of Hierotheus about theology that are secondary only to 'the divinely anointed scriptures' are so far above Dionysius

that in my reverence I would not even listen to, let alone speak of, the divine philosophy (περὶ τῆς θείας φιλοσοφίας), were it not that I am convinced in my mind that one may not disregard the received knowledge of divine things (ὡς οὐ χρὴ τῆς ἐνδεχομένης τῶν θείων γνώσεως ἀμελεῖν).

(*Divine Names* 3, 2–3, 681A–684C)

What is a polemical divide between philosophy and theurgy–theology in Iamblichus' reply to Porphyry's *Letter to Anebo* is reintegrated in the meditative practice of Dionysius.

7 Conclusion

In the milieu of these transformational times between the third and fourth centuries, the boundaries between forms of thought are porous, since what is most distinctive in each is simultaneously a basis for broader community. I have argued here that the internal zetetic meditation or actual contemplative practice that reaches from Plotinus and Iamblichus into the development of Christian philosophical theology in Origen, the Cappadocians, Dionysius, and others is a distinctive part of a tradition that can distinguish philosophy, theurgy, and theology but that also integrates philosophical practice within this hierarchy, a tradition that is at once profoundly inventive and yet true to the best spirit of earlier Platonism.

Notes

- 1 Diogenes Laertius 8.8.
- 2 *Theaetetus* 176a–b.
- 3 *Symposium* 210b3; 210c3–6; *Republic* 534c6; 522c1–6; *Phaedrus* 246c1; 248b6; 265e–266b; and *Ennead* I 3 [20] chapters 2–6.
- 4 Generally on theurgy, see Shaw 1995; Dillon 2002: 290–295, and for a working definition and judicious assessment, Addey 2014: 25 and 129–131.
- 5 Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Macrina* (Corrigan) n2.
- 6 See also *Against Celsus* 3.38; 3.12–13; 3.33; 3.49; 3.57; and cf. *Homilies on Genesis* 14.3; but against pagan mythology and materialistic philosophy, *Against Celsus* 3.49; 3.47. The vexed and ultimately unresolvable question of Origen's identity is beyond the scope of this chapter. For different views see Digeser 2012; Böhm 2002; Edwards 2002; Crouzel 1989.
- 7 5. I [10].10.5–10.
- 8 For assessment, see Narbonne 2012: cxii–cxiii.
- 9 Plato, *Second Letter* 312e; on the unwritten teachings, Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 987a32–b14, 988a9–14; and on Plato's final lecture, Aristoxenus, *Elementa harmonica* II 30–31. See also *Enneads* 2.9 [33].1.12, 15–16; 6.7 [38].42.1–6.
- 10 Cf. 5.1 [10].5.1 and chapter 10 *passim*.
- 11 Compare *Ennead* 4.1 [2] and 4.2 [1] with 5.2 [11].
- 12 *Phaedo* 96a–101e.
- 13 *Metaphysics* Z 17, 1041b11–33.
- 14 *Ibid.* A, 990a33ff.
- 15 For Iamblichus' system, see Narbonne et al. 2012: cc–ccl.

- 16 *On the Mysteries* 3.21, 151, 10–12: Τί δὲ δὴ καὶ ἔστι τοῦτο τὸ σύμμικτον τῆς ὑποστάσεως εἶδος; εἰ μὲν γὰρ τὸ συναμφοτέρον, οὐκ ἔσται ἐν ἐκ δυοῖν ἀλλὰ σύνθετόν τι καὶ συμπεφορημένον ἀπὸ τῶν δύο.
- 17 Plato, *Timaeus* 30c; see also Aristotle, *Physics* 201b16–202a12.
- 18 On the question of substance, see Chiaradonna 2014: 216–230; earlier, and on Plotinus’ genera of being [6.1–3], Wurm 1973; Strange 1987: 955–974; Lloyd 1990: 85–97; Gerson 1994: 79–103; Corrigan 1996; Chiaradonna 2002. There is no space here to treat Aristotle’s notions of substance or of the category tradition, but see Sorabji 2004, vol. 3, 56–127; Strange 1987: 955–974; Bechtel 2012: 106–120; Van den Berg 2014: 251–265.
- 19 See especially 6.2 [43].21; 2.6 [17].3.
- 20 5.8 [31].7.
- 21 *Metaphysics* Z 1029a2–30.
- 22 See 2.6 [17].3.
- 23 6.2 [43].21.32–36.
- 24 6.3 [44].8.30–37.
- 25 6.2 [44].21.50–53.
- 26 On the question of creation in Plotinus, see O’Brien 2011–2012: 72–76, against and Zimmerman 2013: 55–105, in favor, and (with nuance) Gerson 1994: 28–33.
- 27 Plotinus does not call these intra-hypostatic features ‘hypostases’, of course.
- 28 Damascius, *Dub. Et Sol.* ch. 43, I 86 Ruelle.
- 29 6.8 [39].14–21.
- 30 For references, see Corrigan 2004: 28–30, 149–151.
- 31 For double activity, see Rutten 1956: 100–106; Emilsson 2007: 22–68.
- 32 Bussanich 1988: 206.
- 33 See, for example, 6.8 [39].13.50–58; 20, 17–27; cf. Corrigan and Turner 2017 *ad loc.*
- 34 6.8 [39], 13–21.
- 35 6.7 [38].40.5–18; see also Hadot 1988: 360–364.
- 36 See, for example, 5.1 [10].5.1; 8.26.
- 37 For a classic formulation of this, see 5.1 [10].5.17–18.
- 38 Plato, *Sophist* 254d–255a.
- 39 6.7 [38].2.38ff: α συνυπόστασις ὁμοῦ πάντων, of things caused having their causes in themselves (ἐν αὐτοῖς ἂν ἔχοι τὰ αἰτιατὰ τὰς αἰτίας) – that is, of all intelligible things in the broad sense as reaching down into all *logoi* even in the sensible world (see also 6.8 [39].14, 21ff.), but primarily συνυπόστασις in Intellect, as in 6.7.40.44–50.
- 40 Especially 5.1 [10].4.30–32: τοῦ δὲ νοεῖν αἴτιον ἄλλο, ὃ καὶ τῶ ὄντι· ἀμφοτέρων οὖν ἅμα αἴτιον ἄλλο. ἅμα μὲν γὰρ ἐκεῖνα καὶ συνυπάρχει καὶ οὐκ ἀπολείπει ἄλληλα.
- 41 Compare Basil *On the Holy Spirit* 26. 63: true *synhyparxis* applies primarily to the Trinity.
- 42 Eunomius, *Liber Apologeticus* 10.10–15 (Vaggione).
- 43 Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 3.19, 146, 12–14; 3.21, 151, 7–152, 5 (Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell).
- 44 1.1 [53].13, 1–2.
- 45 6.7 [38].4.30–38.
- 46 The unusual superscript in the *Ennead* reference – 4.7 [7]. 8⁵. 40–42 – reflects some chapters missing in the manuscript archetype that were fortunately recovered by the chance testimony of Eusebius’ *Preparation for the Gospel* 15. 10 and 22. In *Preparation* 15. 10, 1–9, Eusebius provides the text for 4.7. 8⁵ (as numbered by Henry-Schwyzler) against the Aristotelian soul-entelechy theory, and in 11. 22, 1–67, the text for 4. 7, 1, 1–8⁴, 28, against the Stoic corporeal soul theory. In almost all the manuscripts, the lacuna extends from 8, 28, *δικαιοσύνη*, up to 8⁵, 49, *τοῦ ὄντος*, while in mss J, M, V (and a copy of M, *Barberinus graecus* 275) alone, it extends from 8⁴, 28, *ἁρμονία* up to 8⁵, 49, *τοῦ ὄντος*.
- 47 A good example is 1.1 [53]. 1–6, culminating in the definition at 7. 1–6.
- 48 See also Aristotle, *Physics* 201b16–202a12.
- 49 See 6.7[38].4, 28–30: “What is it then to be a human being? And this is, what it is that has made *this man, indwelling, not separate?*”
- 50 Compare Plotinus 6.7 [38].1.45–49.
- 51 We should note that neither Plato nor Plotinus (nor Origen, Gregory, or Evagrius) believed in a literal, i.e., temporal, preexistence of the soul. If the soul is represented in Plato or Plotinus as a preexisting body, this is a logical, non-temporal preexistence.

- 52 Compare *Ennead* 6.7 [38]. 1–7 (which is effectively Plotinus’ version of the *On the Making of Man*), especially 5. 5–8: Οὐτῶ γὰρ καὶ οἱ ἐν τοῖς σπέρμασι λόγοι· οὔτε γὰρ ἄνευ ψυχῆς οὔτε ψυχαὶ ἀπλῶς. Οἱ γὰρ λόγοι οἱ ποιοῦντες οὐκ ἄψυχοι, καὶ θαυμαστὸν οὐδὲν τὰς τοιαύτας οὐσίας λόγους εἶναι.
- 53 As opposed to 6.7 [38].7.8–16; cf. 4.3 [27].9. That is, no World Soul, Platonic *Chora*, or Receptacle.
- 54 Compare Plato, *Timaeus* 36e2, *diaplakeisa*; see also Plotinus, I 1[53] 3.
- 55 See 6.7 [38]. 4. 28–30: “What is it then to be a human being? And this is, what is it that has made *this man*, *indwelling*, *not separate*?”
- 56 Especially 6.7 [38].7.8–16.
- 57 For creation, see note 26 earlier.
- 58 See, for example, the emphasis on will in 5.8 [31]; 5.5 [32].12.
- 59 For this, see Corrigan and Turner 2017: 40–43 and 216–221.
- 60 Namely, 3.8 [30]; 5.8 [31]; 5.5 [32]; and 2.9 [33]; treatises divided up and rearranged by Porphyry to make up six groups of ‘Nines’ or *Enneads*.
- 61 Armstrong 1982: 397–406. My own view, nonetheless, is that scope of the objection is broader; see Corrigan and Turner 2017: 216–221.
- 62 For the centrality of freedom in Origen, see Hengstermann 2015.
- 63 Cf. also 6.7 [38].36.6–10 and 6.9 [9].4.11–16 with the comments of Hadot 1988: 348–349.
- 64 On this, see Corrigan and Turner 2017: 141–142, 221–225.
- 65 4.8 [6].8.3; 3.4 [15].3. 18ff.; 4.1 [21].1.12–13; 2.9 [33].2.4–10; cf. 4.7 [28].10.19.
- 66 See also for Iamblichus, Finamore–Dillon, 30, 1–18; for Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, prop. 211; cf. props. 175, 184, 202.
- 67 For this, see Smith 2002: 306.
- 68 For the term and its translation, see Luibheid, Rorem et al. 1987: 232n138.
- 69 For this, see Narbonne et al. 2012: ccxl.

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The philosophy of the later Neoplatonists

An interaction with Christian thought

Sarah Klitenic Wear

Introduction

Late Neoplatonism¹ (c. 350–529) is an intricate philosophical system much closer to the complexities of Scholastic thought than to the classical philosophy of Plato upon which it is based. In the writings of the greatest thinkers of this era, Proclus (412–485) and Damascius (458–550), we see the philosopher as equal parts a commentator on the works of Plato and Aristotle, a theologian, and a priest, integrating contemporary Greek religion into his metaphysical and theological explanations of the writings of Plato. The Hellenes of the fifth century were not alone in this balancing act: Christians recognized Plato’s writings as inspired and in accord with scripture. As a result, they come to understand Christian metaphysics through the lens of Plato.²

Many philosophical and theological concepts of late Neoplatonism have an analogue in Christian thought.³ Because of the expansive overlap between later Neoplatonism and Christianity, this chapter can only provide the most basic survey of metaphysical topics. The chapter will focus on Proclus’s description of the universe with a briefer discussion of Damascius’s thought when the two disagree. Finally, there will be a summary of contemporary Christian views on each metaphysical topic, with the understanding that Christian metaphysics will be addressed in more detail in the chapters in this handbook.

The One

As with Plotinus,⁴ Proclus accounts for the gulf between the unitary One and the plurality of creation. Proclus creates a series of intermediary stages between the One and plurality through a systematized interpretation of Plato’s *Parmenides*.⁵ Namely, he uses the first two hypotheses of Plato’s *Parmenides* to structure the intelligible world, including how the One can be both ineffable and the cause of everything.

Based on a tension found in Plato’s description of the first principle as both One (*Parmenides* 137c ff.) and Good (*Republic* VI 508e–509c), Proclus describes the first principle as both ineffable and the cause of reality (*PT* II 6, 42.16–24). For the first description, he uses the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (that the One is not). This mode of negation says that the One is beyond all names: nothing can be attributed to the One; even the name “one” is merely a

placeholder. For the second description, the first principle as cause, Proclus uses the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (that the One is). Proclus applies negations of the first hypothesis to the One, specifically to the realm of Being that derives its unity from the One. In this way, he attributes a level of intelligible reality to each of the fourteen deductions of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides* (*Commentary on Parmenides* 6.1108.19–29).⁶ Thus, the second hypothesis systematically affirms the negations of the first:

All things are presented in logical order, as being symbols of divine orders of being; and also that the fact that all those things which are presented positively in the second hypothesis are presented negatively in the first indicates that the primal cause transcends all the divine orders, while they undergo various degrees of procession according to their various distinct characteristics.

(Proclus, *Commentary on Parmenides* 1062.10–1062.17,
Dillon–Morrow trans.)

The first hypothesis describes the absolute One (or the “One in itself”), while the second hypothesis describes the One as it is viewed by lower levels of reality. For instance, the One is simple (with respect to itself) or participated (with respect to the generated cosmos).⁷ Thus, even when the One unfolds itself to reveal multiplicity, it remains simple.

In what is perhaps his greatest distinction from Proclus, Damascius adopts Iamblichus's theory of two Ones: that an ineffable first principle precedes a second first principle that is – in some sense – responsible for causation.⁸ However, as we shall see later, Damascius makes a subtle change to Iamblichus's theory insofar as he positions the monad and dyad following the second One so that they become aspects of the second One, rather than principles of the intelligible universe (where Iamblichus places them).⁹

In the first chapter of *First Principles*, Damascius wonders whether the first principle of all things transcends the totality of all things (*ta panta*) or if it remains part of all things.¹⁰ For if the former, “all things” is not really “all things” for the first principle would be missing from that name. If the latter, then the first principle would be grouped with its own products; *ta panta* would be a principle without a first beginning resulting in an infinite regress (something inconceivable for the Platonists).¹¹ Hence, Damascius arrives at the following solution: that there is an Ineffable first One, wholly detached from plurality – all positive determinations must be removed from it because all names include some kind of positive reference to realities.¹² The name of “one” itself must be omitted as that name refers to the quality of unity. Likewise, the negation of attributes with respect to the One refers to the existence of attributes at a lower level and the Ineffable cannot be conceived of as a relative notion.¹³ Still, this ineffable aspect is said to pervade the entire universe – every level contains ineffability.¹⁴ A second One is then posited that is responsible for reality. This One is everything because it encompasses everything as the initial unity from which all things come. Damascius calls it “The One-Everything” (*to hen panta*) in that it produces “everything at once” within itself – it is everything *qua* one, the cause of unity. Next, a second principle transmits otherness to lower realms. This principle of distinction is nearly identical to the “The One-Everything”, but this time emphasis lies in plurality, rather than unity.¹⁵ Damascius calls this “Everything-One” (*to panta hen*), the cause of plurality or the One when it becomes differentiated. Thus, Damascius's major innovation occurs in his teaching on causation. Namely, because Damascius coordinates the cause (the One) with its effects (*ta panta*, or all things), he must position an Ineffable first principle above the One as cause to maintain its transcendence.¹⁶

Fourth- and fifth-century Christians likewise believe that God is at once knowable and unknowable as exhibited in his providential care over creation, as well as his greatness and ineffability. Pseudo-Dionysius (late fifth century, early sixth century), for instance, combines the first two hypotheses of the *Parmenides* in his description of God: e.g., *DN* 596C, “And so it is that as cause of all and as transcending all, he is rightly nameless and yet has the names of everything that is”, a clear reference to *Parm.* 142A, 3, 4–5 (first hypothesis) and 155D, 6–E, 1 (second hypothesis). Throughout the *Divine Names*, in fact, Pseudo-Dionysius applies both the negation of the first hypothesis, as well as the fourteen positive attributes of the second hypothesis to God.¹⁷ Dionysius, unlike his Christian predecessors, uses the prefix “hyper” to distinguish qualities that God transcends, in much the same way as Damascius.¹⁸ Thus, Dionysius’s *Mystical Theology* mirrors Damascius’s description of the unknowable God in his *De Principiis*.¹⁹ Clement, Irenaeus, and John Chrysostom also describe the ineffability of the Father.²⁰ However, in the Greek tradition, Dionysius is the Christian who makes use of the *Parmenides* in a way most similar to what we see in the writings of Proclus and Damascius to describe the divine.

Causation

Hellenes and Christians describe the creation of the universe using imagery from Plato’s *Timaeus*. Their interpretations of the *Timaeus* differ widely, however: Hellenes understand creation as a timeless, continual, inevitable process originating with a disaffected divine principle. Christians view creation as taking place in time through the will of a benevolent creator.

One important tenet of Neoplatonism is that Goodness is always productive (Proclus, *ET* 25). As perfect, final cause, the One must be productive (*ET* 12), and yet as transcendent ineffability, the One must remain removed from lower reality. The One emanates the other two hypostases: Intellect and Soul (*ET* 20). The One’s causal power transfers to these entities below it, each receiving less power than the one prior to it (*ET* 57). Each hypostasis, moreover, also processes from itself things coordinate to it (*ET* 21) so that from Intellect come intellects and from Soul comes souls. At the bottom of this emanation is matter; although inert and nonproductive, it contains divinity in the form of unity. Thus, the first principle reveals its fullness through a superabundant overflowing. This activity lacks involvement in its production (*In Parm.* VII 1167.30), yet imparts unity to lower reality.²¹ As the One reveals itself in creative emanation, it remains within itself insofar as it never diminishes.²² The effect of this emanation returns to its cause thanks to the principle of similarity (*homiōsis*) (*ET* 28). Namely, every effect is similar to its cause and desires its cause: this likeness stimulates reversion (*ET* 29).²³ Still, every cause is greater than its effect (*ET* 7). This triadic motion (remaining, procession, return) is a key element of Neoplatonism that prevents infinite regress in the universe.

Christians interact with the Hellenic position on causation in two different ways. When discussing causation of the Son from the Father, their position appears similar to the Hellenic view of one hypostasis emanating from another. Namely, Christ is said to be begotten or generated outside of time; rather the relationship of causation is one of cause to effect (although here cause and effect are coequal, something not the case for Proclus). The emanation of Son from the Father using Platonist language occurs in Cappadocian thought, for instance.²⁴

When causation concerns the formation of the universe, Christians state there must be a beginning. Philoponus (490–570), as well as Aeneas (c. 430–520) and Zacharias of Gaza (465–536), uses Platonist imagery to show how the world was created at a given moment. In the 480s, Aeneas and Zacharias attack Hellenic views of creation through a critique of Plotinus. In their writings, the two argue against Plotinus’s concept of extension in creation and his idea

that creation takes place co-eternally with the divine without divine will. Aeneas uses Plotinian imagery to show how the world can be created, and yet co-eternal with its creator contra the Platonist understanding of the eternally produced universe.²⁵ In *De aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* 225.6 and 605.11ff, Philoponus argues that God's capacity and activity do not differ as the creative power of God is simple and unchanging.²⁶ God creates at a particular time, but he has the capacity to create at any time.²⁷

Augustine (354–430) critiques the Hellenic view in *De civitate Dei* 10.31²⁸ that the world has an origin in time, but remains forever, according to Plato in *Timaeus* 41A–D. Augustine points out that the Hellenes wrongly interpret this passage to show dependence.²⁹ The Hellenic position Augustine addresses states that God is still the creator of the universe and superior to the cosmos, even though the cosmos is co-eternal with God.³⁰ Augustine escapes the problem of how God can be at once eternal, while still creating at a moment in time, using the Stoic concept of the *spermatikoi logoi*,³¹ seedlike principles that “unfold their numbers” into the visible universe. Using these seeds, God creates without direct involvement with matter.³² For the Christians, the universe never stems from an involuntary by-product of God but from a decision that is a sign of his goodness.³³

Peras and Apeiria

Immediately below the One, Proclus place *peras* (Limit) and *apeiria* (Unlimitedness), contradictory principles that pervade every level of existence. Proclus bases his discussion of Limit and Unlimitedness on *Philebus* 24B.³⁴ Lower levels relate to the One using their connection to *peras* and *apeiria* that reveals the nature of the One.³⁵ *Peras* is responsible for unity and definition in the universe; it is, in a manner of speaking, “the image of the One” that determines and defines individual entities, putting them within boundaries. It allows entities to exist as separate individuals (*PT* III 8 31.12–32.5). *Apeiria*, on the other hand, is the source for difference or plurality in the universe. It is the source of productive motion for the development of lower levels of reality (*ET* 92). These two principles come together in the *mikton* or Unified, which is the third element in this first triad following the One. Intelligible mixture appears at every level, acting as a cause upon lower reality.³⁶ The mixture, as the product of the Limited and Unlimitedness is Being, to be discussed later.

Damascius differs from Proclus by including the Unified in the realm of the One, rather than in the realm of Being.³⁷ The Unified for Proclus functions as the apex of the intelligible realm. Damascius, however, emphasizes the Unified's relationship to the One. This is possible because Damascius renders the second One in two ways: as the One-Everything and the Everything-One, two modes of describing how the one encompasses unity and plurality. As two aspects of the One, the One-Everything and Everything-One are associated with the principles of Limit and Unlimitedness as described in *Philebus* 27. A third principle – the Unified (*to hēnōmenon*), also called “mixed” – appears alongside the One-Everything and Everything-One (or Limit and Unlimitedness.) The Unified acts as the intermediate principle between the One and plurality.³⁸ The Unified contains the nature of the unity and plurality of the Limit and the Unlimitedness, and yet it exists as a separate entity with its own causal operation.³⁹

This language of *peras* and *apeiria* appears in Pseudo-Dionysius's *Divine Names*. For instance, God is “the boundary (*peras*) to all things and is the unbounded infinity (*apeiria*) about them in a fashion which rises above the contradiction between finite (*peras*) and infinite (*apeiria*).” (DN 825B). Here, God acts as the Unified in that he contains boundary and infinity not only in a pre-causal way, but in an active way that imparts these principles through the universe.

The realm of the one: One-Being and henads

The realm of Being concerns the One-that-is (*to hen on*), the subject matter of the second hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. The attributes that were denied of the One in the first hypothesis are attributed to the realm of Being – this sequence of affirmations, moreover, are expressed in a sequence of fourteen levels of being. The attributes are each a form of unity combined with Being (now thought of as One-Being) to create instantiations of the First One.⁴⁰

In their totality, the fourteen levels of the One-Being are classes of henads, participated aspects of the unparticipated One, identified with the gods of Greek religion.⁴¹ Possibly beginning with Iamblichus, Platonists place the henadic realm above the realm of Intellect to stress that the gods are individuations within the realm of the One.⁴² The One is the monad of the henadic realm (*ET* 21.29–30). The henads are critical to bridging the gap between the One and many. The henads are unitary entities, but each has a distinctive “individuality” (*idiotēs*); the properties of the henads account for the different attributes of the One. Thus, the series of attributes in the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* show “the ordered procession of all divine classes, their difference from one another, the properties that are common to whole orders and those that are particular to each.”⁴³ From this individuality arises plurality; that is, plurality arises from and participates in the unity of the One through the medium of the henads. All of reality in some way participates in a henad all of which are organized hierarchically into classes to encompass reality.

A hierarchical structure that is a series (*seirai* or *taxeis*) of interlocking vertical chains allows the One to spread through creation; at the head of every level is a henad.⁴⁴ Thus, every entity belongs to a series and reverts to a particular henad (*ET* 145; *PT* VI 4). For instance, Being participates in intelligible henads, Intellect in intellective henads, and each hypostasis participates in the henads lower to it, as well. Members of the series revert upon the god that is series leader because the cosmic principle of sympathy means that like things naturally revert to that which is like them (*ET* 29). One can return to a god, and ultimately, the One, because there is a sympathy between members of the same vertical series.

The notion of henads appears in Pseudo-Dionysius in two different ways.⁴⁵ First, in *DN* 588B, God is a “henad unifying every henad”. Second, the angels are described as henads. In *DN* 892D, the power of God preserves the “immortal lives of the angelic henads”. Pseudo-Dionysius uses the term “henad” in his *Celestial Hierarchy* where henads are triads of intelligible (angelic) entities. These angels, connected to the divine, function within the realm of God despite their plurality.

A terminological parallel exists for language of the henads and the Christian Trinity. Members of the Trinity, for instance, fully interact existing in a union (*henosis*) because they share being (*ousia*), and yet maintain distinction (*idiotēs*). This thought can be found in Gregory Nazianzen,⁴⁶ Basil⁴⁷ and Cyril of Alexandria. In *De sancta trinitate dialogoi* 423.4–11, Cyril (375–444) demonstrates that the Holy Spirit, Father and Son maintain their individual properties, and yet they interpenetrate without confusion (*asynchytos*). The three have one consubstantial nature, and yet they have three hypostases, each with its own characteristic (*idiotēs*) preserved without confusion. This language parallels terms Proclus uses to describe interaction among henads. Proclus terms the relationship among henads “a unity without confusion” because each henad is said to internally contain all the other henads. The henads are described as gods with each god being a specific manifestation of any given henad. Every order of henad anticipates a divine stratum of gods on lower levels (*ET* 125). When taken together, the gods are said to have an “undivided union (*henosis*) and all-perfect communion with each other”, and yet their own essences are separated to preserve their “peculiar hypostasis unconfused (*asynchytos*)” (*PT* 1.97.25 and *ET* 125).

Proclus calls this order of causes “unconfused” (*asynchytos*) (*PT* 1.89.1), which is to say that each monadic cause (the henad in its pure form) has a separate essence or *idiotēs* (*PT* 1.89.5).

Being, Life, Intellect

After the One comes Being, from which arises Life, and then Intellect (from Plato’s *Sophist* 248e). These three levels allow for greater distinction between the One and Intellect than Plotinus had imagined.⁴⁸ While both Plotinus and the later Neoplatonists understand Being and Intellect as two aspects of the same hypostasis (Being is the object of contemplation, Intellect is the thing contemplating),⁴⁹ Proclus deviates from Plotinus by separating the two. Proclus calls these levels respectively intelligible Being (*to noēton*, the thing thought) and the intellective (*to noeron*, the thing thinking)⁵⁰ and the intermediary level the intelligized-intelligizing principle (*noēton-noeron*): these terms display the close relationship between the entities. Here, Being is an independent level above Intellect, which contemplates it. Life, as the mediator term, is one of the basic attributes of Being. Each member of the triad contains the other members, although in a secondary way. The members also display the doctrine of participation; namely, that because they interlock, the lower levels take part in the lower ranks of the hypostasis just above it. Being, Life and Intellect are each a unified group or *henomenon* (*ET* 115.3).

These levels connect to the triadic motion of remaining (Being), emanation (Life) and Intellect (reversion)⁵¹ (*ET* 101–103.) Each member mimics the behavior of the One insofar as each contains a monad and repeats the threefold motion of remaining, procession and return. The doctrine of motion further states that every being reverts upon the principle from which it proceeds (*ET* 31). Intellect and Soul are not created by the One, but rather they proceed from it, producing their own being.⁵² When an effect proceeds from its cause, it acquires its own existence (*hyparxis*). Thus, as with the One, they can be considered self-constituted because they bring forth themselves and they provide themselves with their own being (*ET* 40). That which is self-constituted never leaves the source of its own being, which is itself. That is why such entities are said to remain in themselves, thus giving themselves a perpetual existence (*ET* 46).

This triad within the realm of One has an analogue with the Christian Trinity, although the members of the Christian Trinity are not broken into levels of subdivision as we see in Proclus’s system. It has been argued that the connection between the Christian Trinity and the Hellenic triad is found in Porphyry’s recognition of the triad occurring at the level of Intellect: Being (or the Chaldean, Father), Life (the power of the Father) and Intellect (activity).⁵³ According to Damascius, Porphyry places the One before the intelligible triad, thus equating the first principle (the One) with the father of the intelligible triad.⁵⁴ In this way, Porphyry conflates the ruling triad of the second hypostasis with the first principle so that the One bears a direct relationship with the intelligible world. For Pseudo-Dionysius, God contains Being, Life and Wisdom (Intellect, for Dionysius), a triad considered by all Neoplatonists but Porphyry to comprise the second hypostasis.⁵⁵ God is at once above Being, Life and Wisdom, and yet contains this Trinity; thus, the Trinity remains embedded within the One, although as a differentiation. Later, in the sixth century, Olympiodorus argues that both Hellenes and Christians are ultimately monotheists because both prioritize a single cause (despite the Hellenic tendency for a series of lower powers and gods.)⁵⁶ Finally, the doctrine of the self-constituted entity occurs in Christian doctrine of the Trinity in Christ’s beginningless generation from the Father.⁵⁷ Like Hellenic causation, the Christian account requires no change, although God is causally responsible.

Intellect

At the level of Intellect exists the Demiurge, the great divine craftsman of Plato's *Timaeus*.⁵⁸ Proclus introduces the more complicated structure of Intellect from Iamblichus, whereby multiple demiurges exist in the realm Intellect, divided into three triads of intelligible gods, then three triads of intelligible-intellective gods, then a set of seven gods.⁵⁹ The Demiurge's function is to mix prime matter in the crater⁶⁰ – the Demiurge acts as creator, in a manner of speaking, so that the absolute One remains unsullied by matter.⁶¹ Damascius adopts Proclus's understanding of Intellect, with a subtle change regarding Intellect's relation to Being.

Proclus and Damascius envision the Demiurge mixing prime matter in the crater to create the cosmos. This stance is not discordant with the Christian understanding of *creatio ex nihilo*, the Christian position that God created the universe from nothing.⁶² Christians, like Hellenes, fear reducing God to a formal cause that merely rearranges existing matter. The Platonists say that God as One emanates creation from itself. The Demiurge is merely the cook stirring the pot, not the source of primordial matter.

Soul

If the One is simple unity, Intellect an unchanging plurality, then Soul is the hypostasis where movement and change take place in time.⁶³ Using the myth of the charioteer from Plato's *Phaedrus*, Platonists show how the faculties of the soul – like the horses and charioteer – are bruised and faulty at the time of the fall.⁶⁴ Proclus divides Soul into a hierarchy of souls: there is the universal soul, a hypercosmic monad (*ET* 109); divine souls that never descend (*ET* 166); then particular, individual souls that do descend. This class was perhaps the most pertinent for late antique Christians.

One theory that distinguishes late Neoplatonism concerns the notion of the individual, fallen soul. Whereas Plotinus argues that the highest part of the soul never descends but remains contemplating intellect, Iamblichus onwards says that the soul descends in its entirety (*ET* 184–211)⁶⁵ Views diverge on how descent affects the soul. Iamblichus posits that soul's essence changes depending on whether it engages in intelligible or corporeal acts.⁶⁶ For Proclus, the soul is eternal in its essence, but temporal in its activities (*ET* 211; 192).⁶⁷

As with Proclus, Damascius understands the third hypothesis of the *Parmenides* as a reference to Soul. Damascius, however, returns to an Iamblichean theory that the soul changes in its substances when it descends because it is, in some ways, affected by its changing activities (*In Parm.* 4.13.8–19).⁶⁸

In *De Princ.* IV 15, 1ff, Damascius critiques Proclus's deviation from Iamblichus's teaching on the topic. For Iamblichus, the soul disperses its essence during the process of descent into body; this is a process breaking apart is *ousia*. Proclus, on the other hand, says that soul is eternal, but its activities are expressed in time. Still, Damascius argues that the change in the soul's substance, mirrored in its change of activities, does not indicate a change in the specific form of the soul's existence (*eidos tēs huparxeōs*).⁶⁹ That is to say, the numeric identity of soul remains – soul can never become “intellect” or “body”.⁷⁰ The soul alters its own qualities depending on its object of contemplation.⁷¹

Souls are housed in vehicles composed of materials that change depending on where the soul is in the universe. The vehicles of the soul assist the soul in its ascent and descent. Proclus adopted Iamblichus's doctrine of the vehicle of the soul (*ochēma*), with minor changes.⁷² Proclus posits two vehicles.⁷³ The first is an immortal ethereal vehicle fashioned by the Demiurge that allows the soul to travel through the cosmos, including the Intelligible realm. The second is

a mortal pneumatic vehicle, made by the younger gods and accumulated as the soul descends through the heavens.⁷⁴ These *pneumata* from planetary gods need to be sloughed off in the soul's return.⁷⁵ The vehicle allows the soul to be punished after death, as well.

Christians, likewise, were concerned with the soul's continuity after death. Rather than a focus on the persistence of the soul, Christians place their concern on the resurrection of the body and whether it ought to be of same flesh as in the earthly life. As with the Hellenic debates on vehicles of the soul, some Christians argue that the resurrection bodies will be pneumatic, thus having the same form (*eidos*), but different matter than earthly bodies.⁷⁶ Origen⁷⁷ and Philoponus⁷⁸ both appeal to form, for instance, arguing that the humans have new bodies in the resurrection, but the same bodily form. Origen says that one is always the same even if the nature of the body is subject to change because the form of the body remains the same, although it may be changed for the better. To describe this principle, Philoponus uses the image of a shadow cast on a river. The shadow would maintain numerical identity while the water would change: thus, form remains, while the matter changes but itself always remains one and the same numerically (GC 106, 12–17).

Matter (and theurgy)

At the bottom of the hierarchy rests inert matter. Whereas Plotinus equated matter with evil (something inert and unproductive), Proclus says that the One's unity descends even to the level of matter, something ultimately derived from the One.⁷⁹ Proclus says that evil comes from a privation of good.⁸⁰

Because the One emanates reality, all of creation – including matter – contains divinity. The doctrine of procession, therefore, allows even the lowest levels of reality to contain divinity in the form of symbols (*symbola* or *synthemata*). This is a key feature of the Platonist ritual, theurgy – a metaphysical interpretation of Greek religious rites. The theurgist reveals the divine symbols embedded within matter so that one may partake in communion with the divine. Thus, while theology describes the divine, theurgy (*theourgia*) consists of *erga*, or divine acts that allow the theurgist to unite with a god. Ultimately, theurgy promotes the divinization of the theurgist who became “like a god” in the process of his ritual.⁸¹ This ritual was necessary, moreover, to return to the divine in Proclus's system because the fully descended soul⁸² can never return to the divine through contemplation alone. Since the higher part of the soul does not remain above, one must rely upon divinity as it appears below in the lower, material world.

Damascius, as with Proclus, uses Chaldean material in his philosophical writings; however, his emphasis remains on the contemplative element, particularly how the Chaldean material prepares the soul for contemplative virtue.⁸³ For Damascius, *Chaldean Oracles* act as divine authority, providing information known only through revelation, such as the number of deities comprising orders.⁸⁴ Instead, the soul uses its own agency through philosophy to return to its essential nature (CP IV 14.13–19).⁸⁵

Christian liturgy likewise relies upon a relationship between the material universe and the divine realm. Dionysius uses the Hellenic term *hieourgia* to signify the ritual enactment of divine works.⁸⁶ In addition, he adopts the Hellenic vocabulary such as *synthema*, *symbolon* and *sphragis* to describe the Christian sacraments. For those fully initiated in the Christian mysteries, the sacrament impresses its mark on all souls who partake in it, according to their ability to receive divine light.⁸⁷

Other Christians, moreover, also use the language of theurgy. Eusebius describes the Eucharistic food as the “symbols (*symbola*) of His body and His saving blood”.⁸⁸ Gregory of Nyssa teaches that the elements of the bread and wine are transelemented (*metapoieisthai*) into the

blood and body for a retransfiguration (*metastoiceiousthai*) of those partaking of the sacred food.⁸⁹ He says that the elements (*stoicheia*) of bread and wine are rearranged during digestion to acquire a new form (*eidos*), but that the substance (*ousia*) remains the same.⁹⁰ Cyril of Alexandria refers to elements being “transferred (*methistēsis*) into the efficacy (*energeia*) of His own flesh”.⁹¹

Conclusion

Neoplatonists express their ontology through the apparatus of the philosophical commentary, particularly theological interpretations of Plato’s *Parmenides*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus* and *Phaedrus*.⁹² Later Neoplatonism distinguishes itself from Plotinian Platonism as evident in a number of tendencies: a proliferation of triads, an intricate hierarchy, and psychic doctrines that depend on a fully descended soul define the Athenian school of Platonism.

There is an interaction between Hellenic and Christian Neoplatonism. The tension between unity and differentiation, triadic divisions in the universe, the threefold motion of remaining, emanation and return, participation in the divine, and identity are all found throughout the early Christian tradition, apparent both in theological doctrine and in the technical vocabulary employed by Hellenes and Christians. Still, Hellenic and Christian Neoplatonism are not two sides of the same coin: doctrines such as God’s love for creation, the Trinity and the Incarnation set the stage for profound ontological differences, making Christianity unique.

Appendix

The universe according to Proclus and Damascius

Proclus:⁹³

The ineffable One – One
Peras apeiria
To he (henadic realm)

Noetic realm:

The intelligible gods (henads): Being
1st intelligible triad: One-Being
2nd intelligible triad: Eternity
3rd intelligible triad: Intelligible Intellect
The intelligible-intellective gods (henads): Life
1st intelligible-intellective triad
2nd intelligible-intellective triad
3rd intelligible-intellective triad
The intellective gods (henads): Intellect
1st intellective triad
2nd intellective triad
3rd intellective triad
Hypercosmic gods (henads): soul
Hypercosmic encosmic gods (henads): soul/Nature
Encosmic henads (gods): nature/cosmos

Damascius:⁹⁴

The Ineffable	
The One	The One-Everything Everything-One
The intelligible realm	The Unified=Intelligible Being (1st triad) ⁹⁵ Life (2nd triad) Being (3rd triad)

Notes

- 1 “Late Neoplatonism” here refers to post-Plotinian Platonism, particularly that of the Athenian school of Neoplatonism. Proclus and Damascius were (arguably) the two most influential scholars of that era.
- 2 Bradshaw 2014: 193–210; Ramelli 2018: 271–291.
- 3 For a review of scholarship on the Platonism of this Father, see De Andia 2016: 77.
- 4 See Chapter 24 of this book.
- 5 There are a number of excellent overviews of Proclus’s metaphysics. See Van Riel 2016; Steel 2011; Chlup 2012.
- 6 Proclus, *Commentary on the Parmenides* 6.1108.19–29.
- 7 Wear 2011a: 5
- 8 Damascius, *First Principles* 43 = II, p. 2, 11ff; II, p. 6, 16ff. C-W.
- 9 Damascius, *Principles* 47 = II, 16, 1, ff. C-W. See Dillon 1996: 123.
- 10 Damascius, *Principles* I.I.4–2.20.
- 11 This principle denying infinite regress is found in Aristotle, *Physics* 3.4 203b6. See Caluori 2018: 275. For a lengthy discussion of the first aporia in *Principles* I, 1–2, how the One is coordinated with *ta panta*, see Grieg 2017: 252–269. Many thanks to Dr. Grieg for giving me access to this fine manuscript; Dillon 1996: 124–125.
- 12 Damascius, *Principles* I.4.13–5.17.
- 13 Van Riel 2011a: 677. E.g. *de Princ.* II.15.1–20; II.28.14–16.
- 14 Damascius, *Principles* I, 24.12.
- 15 G. van Riel 2011a: 679.
- 16 This is the thesis of Jonathan Grieg’s work in his 2017 dissertation. See esp. p. 247.
- 17 See Klitenic Wear and Dillon 2007: 16: *Divine Names* 596C: “he is all, and he is no thing” (*Parmenides* 146C, 1–2, 4–5 (second hypothesis); 141E, 9–10; 142A, 1–2 (first hypothesis)); *Divine Names* 648C: “the divinity of Jesus is the fulfilling cause of all, and the parts of that divinity are so related to the whole that it is neither whole nor part, while being at the same time both whole and part” (*Parmenides* 137D, 2–3 (first hypothesis); 142D, 8–9 (second hypothesis)); 842 B: “He has every shape and structure, yet is formless” (*Parmenides* 145 B, 3–4 (second hypothesis); 139B 2–3 (first hypothesis)); *Divine Names* 825B: “he is at rest and astir, is neither resting nor stirring” (*Parmenides* 146A, 7 (second hypothesis); 139B, 2–3, 9 (first hypothesis)) and has neither source, nor middle, nor end (*Parmenides* 137D, 4, 7–8 (first hypothesis)), he is nothing (*Parmenides* 128B, 5–6 (first hypothesis)), he is no thing (*Parmenides* 141E, 9–10, 12; 142A, 1–2 (first hypothesis)), et al.
- 18 Damascius, *Principles* 6 (I, p. 13, 18–19); 8 (I, p. 22, 16–18); 29 (I, p. 84, 17).
- 19 De Andia 2016 109.
- 20 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.2.26.1, 36; Iren. *Against Heresies* 4.20.5, p. 645, 122.
- 21 Compare with the Dionysian God that overflows due to love of creation.
- 22 Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 31; *Elements* 30 on remaining; Damascius, *Principles* II, 123, 13–22 West-erink-Combès shares Proclus’s position. On Damascius on procession, see Dillon 1997. See also Dionysius, *Divine Names* 1.2 on use of the adverb *monimōs* to signify remaining.
- 23 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection* = *Patrologia Graeca* 46, cols. 124B–D discusses how an immaterial deity could have produced matter since God and matter are seemingly unlike. He solves this by looking at immaterial qualities (e.g., color, extensions etc.) within matter as concepts.
- 24 Basil, *Against Eunomius* 2.17–18; Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 1.33; 1.428.5; cf. Origen, *First Principles*.1.2.4; 1.2.9, et al.
- 25 Aeneas, *Theophrastus*, 47.11–19; Philoponus, *de aeternitate mundi contra Proclum* 225.6; 605.11ff.
- 26 Philoponus, *Eternity of the World* 606.5ff.
- 27 Cf. Zacharias, *Ammonius* 369ff; God creates when he wills but he is always a creator. Aeneas, *Theophrastus*, 47.11–19.
- 28 Augustine, *City of God*, Dombart and Kalb, CCL 47, pp. 308, 7–309, 18.
- 29 See also Augustine, *On the Trinity* 3.9.16 (=3.8.1–11 Mountain, CCL 50).
- 30 Klitenic Wear 2013: 161; Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus*. III 21.1ff.
- 31 Augustine, *On the Trinity* 3.9.16 (=3.8.1–11 Mountain, CCL 50)
- 32 Augustine, *City of God* 22.24 Dombart and Kalb, CCL 48, p. 848 lines 57–63).
- 33 Zacharias, *Ammonius* 527–534; Philo, *De prov.* 1.7, God forms unformed matter with his thinking. See Sorabji 1983: 206. Gregory Nazianzen *Oration* 29.7 and Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.6 argue that God can reason or deliberate whether it is time to create.

- 34 *Platonic Theology* III 8, p. 30, 19ff; *Commentary on the Parmenides* 1118, 22ff.
- 35 Chlup 2012: 78
- 36 Van Riel 2011a: 86
- 37 Rappe 2010: 22
- 38 Van Riel 2011a: 680. Damascius, *Principles* II.17.3–8; I.76.3–77.8
- 39 Damascius, *Principles* II. 17.21–18.25; II.43.20–45.12. Damascius describes the relationship between the three in *Principles*. II 34: “each of the three principles is all things and also before all things. But the third principle is all things in the unity of all things.”
- 40 Van Riel, “Damascius,” 86.
- 41 Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 21; *Elements* 133.
- 42 Damascius, *Principles* I 285.1–5 says that until Iamblichus most philosophers placed gods at the level of Intellect.
- 43 Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I V.20.20–3.
- 44 Chlup 2012: 128.
- 45 See Wear and Dillon 2007: 72–73.
- 46 Gregory, *Oration* 31.9.
- 47 Basil, *On the Holy Spirit*, chapter 5, section 7, line 11.
- 48 Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5. 9.9.11–22.
- 49 Chlup 2012: 93.
- 50 In Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I V I, Life links the subject to the object of thought. See Chlup 2012: 94.
- 51 Proclus, *Platonic Theology* IV I, 7.9–13
- 52 Steel 2011: 641–643 has a lengthy discussion of causality.
- 53 J. Dillon 2000: 1–13; Hadot, *Porphyre et Victorin* 1968, vol. 1: ch. 7; Klitenic Wear 2011b: 107–117.
- 54 Damascius, *Principles*. 43, 1, p. 86, 8ff. Ruelle.
- 55 *Divine Names* 820CD, Wear-Dillon, *Dionysius*, 47.
- 56 Olympiodorus, *On the Gorgias*, Lecture 47.2–3, 243, 16–25; 244.1–17 Westerink. See also Athanassiadi and Frede 1999.
- 57 Aeneas, *Theophrastus*, 45, 21–46, 23; Zacharias, Ammonius, *PG* 85, cols. 1077B–1080C; Philoponus, *On the Eternity of the World* 14, 20–8; Basil, *On the Hexaemeron* 1.7 = *Patrologia Graeca* 29, col 17B–C; *On the Holy Spirit* = *PG* 32, col. 186 B–C; Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Faith* = *PG* 45, col. 140A–B.
- 58 Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* 1.310, 15–24.
- 59 Opsomer 2001a: 52–70; Opsomer 2000: 113–143.
- 60 That the world was created without matter was the prevailing view of Hellenic Neoplatonism, although there were some outliers. Hierocles, student of Proclus (fl. 430), says that God does not need matter for creation. See *On Providence*, in Photius, *Bibliotheca*, codex 214, codex 214, 172a22ff. Bekker (=vol. 3, p. 126 Henry) codex 251, p. 460b22ff.
- 61 Augustine discusses God creating with immaterial principles; *City of God* 22.24 Dombart and Kalb, CCL 48, p. 848, lines 57–63
- 62 Gregory of Nyssa’s theory treatment of the problem is quite complex as he addresses the problem of how a creator can be like its effect.
- 63 This is the formula of Finamore and Kutash 2016: 122.
- 64 Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* III 338, 21–26; Hermias, *On the Phaedrus*, p. 122, 8.
- 65 Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.12.12–14; Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 211.1–2.
- 66 Iamblichus, *On the Soul* 6.8–15, Finamore-Dillon.
- 67 Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* II. 128, 17; Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics* Book 9, 400.26–401.1.
- 68 Damascius, *Commentary on the Parmenides* 272, 6.
- 69 Damascius, *Commentary on the Parmenides* 4.47.6–7.
- 70 Van Riel 2011a: 688.
- 71 Damascius, *Commentary on the Parmenides* 4.17.4–10.
- 72 Iamblichus, *On the Phaedrus* Fr. 2 (Dillon).
- 73 Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* III, 297.20; cf. Hermias, *On the Phaedrus* 136.27ff.
- 74 Finamore and Kutash 2016: 133.
- 75 Finamore and Kutash 2016: 134.
- 76 Sorabji 2005, vol. 3: 182
- 77 Origen cited by Methodius *On the Resurrection* 1.22.3–5; 3.3.4–5; 3.7.1.

- 78 Philoponus cited by Timotheus of Constantinople, *On the Reception of Heretics* = *Patrologia Graeca* 86, 44A; 61C; Nicephorus Callistus *Church History* book 18, ch. 47 = *Patrologia Graeca* 147, 424D; Philoponus fr. 32, Sorabji, *Handbook* vol. 3, 182.
- 79 Damascius generally agrees with Proclus's view of matter, although he also argues that matter is an ineffable entity because it comes from an ineffable cause. It is receptive to the forms. See G. Van Riel 2011b.
- 80 Proclus, *On the Existence of Evils*, 38.1ff Boese. See Opsomer 2001b.
- 81 Hermias, *On the Phaedrus* 96.4–8.
- 82 Plotinus, however, argues that the highest part of the soul remains in the intelligible universe. Hence, for Plotinus, one can return to the divine through contemplation alone.
- 83 Rappe 2010: 57. Damascius, *Principles* III 108–159 Westerink/Combès. Damascius prefers the Chaldean Oracles to the Orphic poems.
- 84 Tanaseanu-Döbler 2013: 267; cf. *Commentary on the Parmenides* III 3. Gods distil information for human consumption (Damascius, *Principles* III 140 f.).
- 85 Rappe 2010: 31.
- 86 The terms *hierourgia*, *hierourgeo* and *hierourgikos* appears fifty-nine times in the corpus.
- 87 Wear and Dillon 2007: ch. 7; Louth 1986: 432–438.
- 88 *Demonstration of the Gospel* 1.10.28.
- 89 Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Lectures* 22.2, 3; 23.72, 73.
- 90 *Catechetical Lectures* 22.2, 3; see also Stone 1909: 103, 104. A change in *eidos* without a change in *ousia* mirrors Hellenic debates on the nature of the changing soul.
- 91 Cyril, *Commentary on Luke* 22.19, 20.
- 92 Chlup 2012: 169 calls this “internalized philosophical piety”.
- 93 Opsomer 2000: appendices 2–4.3.
- 94 Van Riel 2011a: 684.
- 95 Grieg 2017: 270 alters this diagram to emphasize that the Unified is considered Being before it becomes differentiated, at which point Intellect arises.

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Section 4

Individuals



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Justin and Athenagoras

Runar M. Thorsteinsson

Justin

Introduction

Justin “Martyr” was born into a “pagan” family around 100 CE in Flavia Neapolis in Syria-Palestine (Samaria) (*First Apology* 1.1). His extant writings, *The First and Second Apologies*, and *The Dialogue with Trypho* (ca. 150–160 CE), are enormously important for our understanding of the history of early Christianity, including its interaction with contemporary philosophical traditions. His account of his “conversion”, first to Platonism and then to Christianity, is also of great interest to scholarship. According to the *Dialogue*, Justin, ultimately “inquiring about the Divine” (1.3), opened his inquiry by contacting the teachers of philosophy, starting with one from the Stoic school (2.3). However, having learned “nothing new [in Stoicism] about God”, Justin left his Stoic teacher, and went on to a Peripatetic (2.3). As it turned out, this teacher was mostly interested in Justin’s tuition fee, so Justin left him too, and turned instead to a Pythagorean (2.4–5). But when Justin revealed his disinterest in studying the prolegomena of music, astronomy, and geometry, instead of turning directly to theology (or metaphysics), the Pythagorean teacher dismissed him. At this point, Justin went to a Platonist (2.6), and under his guidance, he finally made some progress in philosophy (theology); so much so, in fact, that he began to imagine himself a “wise man”, and “fully expected immediately to gaze upon God, for this is the goal of Plato’s philosophy”.¹ However, when one day he took a walk near the sea, he met a “respectable old man” who started to converse with him about the nature and knowledge of God, the relationship between God and human beings, divine punishment of the unworthy, cosmogony, Plato’s teaching on the soul (etc.), the Jewish prophets, and on Christ (having said “many other things” as well), leaving Justin in a state of sparkling enlightenment:

My spirit was immediately set on fire, and an affection for the prophets, and for those who are friends of Christ, took hold of me; while pondering on his words, I discovered that his was the only sure and useful philosophy (ταύτην μόνην φιλοσοφίαν ἀσφαλῆ τε καὶ σύμφορον). Thus it is that I am now a philosopher.

(8.1–2)

While the question is debated among scholars, the historicity of this account should probably not be taken too literally. Justin appears to be describing a cumulative process, from the “worst” philosophy to the “best”,² which is probably the primary motive behind the story. As we shall see, Justin disliked much in Stoicism, but looked to Platonism with a favourable eye. The identity of the “old man” in Justin’s account is shrouded in mystery,³ but he can well be described as a literary “Christian Socrates”.⁴ The account given in *Dialogue* 1–8 suggests that the main reasons for Justin’s conversion to Christianity were of an ideological nature⁵ and that in Justin’s view, the traditional philosophical schools (or most of them) had failed to devote themselves properly to “the task of philosophy”, namely, to “inquire about the Divine”. However, Justin’s writings show clearly that the interaction with the philosophical schools continued to play an important role for him, even after his conversion to Christianity. By converting to the Christian faith, Justin did not abandon philosophy – philosophy is still “one’s greatest possession”, “most precious in the sight of God”, and it is “philosophy alone” that leads one to God (*Trypho* 2.1).⁶ Rather, Justin’s devotion to philosophy became even stronger as a Christian, for Christianity was the climax and completion of philosophy.

In the following, I shall briefly discuss the various philosophical schools mentioned or alluded to by Justin, then review his relation to and break with Platonism, and finally move on to Justin’s debate with Stoicism.

Justin and philosophy

Justin, then, was a devoted Platonist before he turned to Christianity, and much in Platonism (the so-called Middle Platonism) still stood the test of his Christian ideology. But while Platonism/Platonists/Plato and, to lesser extent, Stoicism/Stoics are most prominent in his discussion, he did refer to other philosophical schools/philosophers as well. But these references are quite rare, compared to the former. Explicitly, he refers to the Cynics only once (*Second Apology* 3.7) and twice to the Peripatetics (*Trypho* 2.1 and 2.3) and to the Epicureans/Epicurus on three occasions.⁷ All of these schools and philosophers are referred to in negative terms. Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans are explicitly referred to five times,⁸ and it is to be noted that these references are fairly positive, relatively speaking. This can be explained by Justin’s background in Middle Platonism, since there was a gradually increasing interest in Pythagorean teaching among Platonists.⁹ Of individual philosophers, aside from Plato and Socrates, the latter of whom was clearly a significant figure for Justin,¹⁰ he knows at least of Empedocles, Heraclitus, and Musonius Rufus.¹¹ Our sources show that Justin had some pupils – Tatian at least – possibly forming a small “school” in the city of Rome, somewhat in line with contemporary philosophical schools.¹²

Justin seems to have had firsthand knowledge of Plato’s works, and he quotes directly from some of them.¹³ Platonism clearly has a primary position among the philosophical schools in Justin’s writings, mostly referred to in positive terms. This strong position of Platonism agrees with the prevailing opinion among scholars that Justin’s philosophical background is mainly to be found in Middle Platonism.¹⁴ Justin freely admits that there are many similarities between Platonism and Christianity (according to his understanding and presentation of Christianity), but he claims that Plato copied extensively from Jewish (and thus Christian) teaching. Indeed, Justin only *seems* to be basing his teaching on that of Plato: “For while we say that all things have been ordered and made by God, we will *appear* to utter the teaching of Plato [cf. *Timaeus*]” (*First Apology* 20.4), which in reality is not the case. As he states elsewhere, “And so when Plato said [*Republic* 617E], “The blame is his who chooses, and God is blameless,” he took this from the prophet Moses and uttered it. For Moses is more ancient than all the Greek

writers” (*First Apology* 44.8). Furthermore, “it is not, then, that we hold the same opinions as others, but that all speak in imitation of ours” (having spoken primarily of Platonism and alluded to Stoicism) (60.10).

According to Justin, Plato’s cosmological conceptions were in fact basically “Christian” (cf. *1 Apol.* 59–60). This agrees with the fact that, in his account of his philosophical journey in *Dialogue* 2–8, he says nothing negative about his Platonic teacher, unlike the teachers of the other philosophical schools. And in this same account, Platonism is depicted as the only school that devoted itself to the primary task of philosophy, to “inquire about the Divine”. Many similarities may also be found between Justin’s Platonism and that of contemporary Platonists such as Plutarch, Alcinous, and Numenius of Apamea.¹⁵ As a matter of fact, Justin’s understanding of the relationship between God and the world is basically Platonic, even after his conversion to Christianity, agreeing roughly with Platonic notions of the transcendence of God, whether epistemological¹⁶ or ontological.¹⁷ In line with Platonic notions, Justin writes that God is “the Father and Demiurge of all things” (*First Apology* 8.2; cf. 26.5), “of ineffable glory and form” (*First Apology* 9.3; cf. 61.11; *Second Apology* 10.8; 12.4; 13.4; *Trypho* 126.2; 127.2), “unbegotten” (*First Apology* 14.1; 25.2; 49.5; 53.2; *Second Apology* 6.1; 12.4; 13.4; *Trypho* 114.3; 126.2; 127.1), “impassible” (*First Apology* 25.2), “unnameable” (*First Apology* 61.11; 63.1; *Second Apology* 6.1), and “superior to changeable things” (*First Apology* 20.2; cf. 13.4; *Trypho* 23.2). Moreover, still being a Platonist in the *Dialogue* account, Justin claims that God (or Being) is “the being who always has the same nature in the same manner, and is the cause of existence to all else” (3.5), and that “the Being [=God] has no colour, form, size, or anything the eye can see. It is beyond all essence, ineffable, indescribable, alone beautiful and good. It comes at once into those souls which are well disposed” (4.1), something that the Christian “old man” does not refute. Neither does the “old man” refute those basic tenets of Platonism that Justin the Platonist puts forth in the account, including the Platonic “concept of incorporeal things” and the “theory of ideas” (2.6).

But Platonism was not Christianity. Whatever their worth, the teachings of Plato are simply inadequate:

And I confess that I both pray and with all my strength strive to be found a Christian; not because the teachings of Plato are different (ἀλλότρια) from those of Christ, but because they are not in every respect equal (οὐκ ἔστι πάντη ὅμοια).

(Second Apology 13.2)

Against the Platonists, in the *Dialogue* account, Justin (still a Platonist) admits that it is impossible for the human soul to see God, that the soul does not transmigrate into other bodies, and that it is not immortal by nature (only by the will of God, as it turns out) (4.6; 5.2–3). A major flaw of Platonism was that many of its teachings were simply useless: According to Justin, the doctrine that the “eye of the mind” was able to “see God”, which is the very “goal” (τέλος) of Plato’s philosophy (2.6), is meaningless and of no use, because those who have seen God after their soul has left the body do not remember this vision when their soul returns to a human body. In other words, there is really no advantage (ὄφελος) in having seen God when it does not affect the way people live their lives (4.1–7). The same is true of the doctrine of transmigration: according to Justin, Plato teaches that souls of the wicked transmigrate into certain wild beasts, but, Justin adds, since they are not conscious of this being a punishment for their previous behaviour, there is really no use (ὄφελος) of the punishment, nor the doctrine itself (4.6–7). This emphasis of Justin’s on the “usefulness” of philosophical doctrines agrees with his statement in *Dialogue* 8.1 that he found Christianity to be the only “useful” (σύμφορον) philosophy. To be sure, the

teachings of (all) the philosophical schools could have partial value: “For all the writers were able to see realities darkly, through the presence in them of an implanted seed of logos” (2 *Apol.* 13.5). However, it is only Christianity that contains the whole truth:

What we have, then, appears to be greater than all human teaching, because the whole rational principle (τὸ λογικὸν τὸ ὅλον) became Christ, who appeared for our sake, body, and reason, and soul. For whatever either lawgivers or philosophers uttered well, they elaborated according to their share of logos by invention and contemplation. But since they did not know all that concerns logos, who is Christ, they often contradicted themselves.
(10.1–3)

Justin commends the Stoics for their ethical teachings, mentioning Musonius Rufus specifically in that respect (*Second Apology* 8.1), but he joins forces with contemporary Platonists by strongly rejecting some fundamental pillars in Stoic cosmology.¹⁸ In that respect, Justin appears to have viewed the Stoics as his primary opponents. Given his background in Platonism, it is likely that this standpoint was something that he brought with him from Platonism. Justin refers to the Stoics quite frequently, both explicitly (*First Apology* 20.2, 4; *Second Apology* 7.3–4, 8–9; 8.1; 13.2; *Trypho* 2.1, 3) and implicitly (e.g. *First Apology* 19.5; 25.2; 43.1; 44.11; 57.1; 60.8–10; *Second Apology* 6.3; 9.4; *Trypho* 1.3–5). His criticism broadly agrees with the criticism put forth by contemporary Platonists, especially against the Stoic doctrine of God as a corporeal being,¹⁹ of the world cycles and cosmic conflagration,²⁰ as well as against the Stoic doctrine of fate.²¹ To be sure, there is a number of parallels in Justin’s view of the nature of God and that of the Stoics: According to Justin, God is “unbegotten” (*First Apology* 14.1; 25.2; 49.5; 53.2; *Second Apology* 6.1; 12.4; 13.4; *Trypho* 114.3; 126.2; 127.1), “needful of nothing” (*Trypho* 23.2), “prescient” (*Trypho* 23.2; cf. also *First Apology* 28.2; 44.11; 45.1), and he “surveys all things, knows all things” (*Trypho* 127.2; cf. also *Second Apology* 12.6). He is “sympathetic towards all people”, “just and good” (*Trypho* 23.2), being “the Father of righteousness and temperance and the other virtues” (*1 Apology* 6.1; cf. 10.1), and “a just observer of all” (*Second Apology* 12.6). Also, God is “impassible” or “passionless” (ἀπαθήης) (*First Apology* 25.2),²² and he created the world for the sake of human beings (*First Apology* 10.2; *Second Apology* 4.2). All of these features agree fairly well with Stoic teaching (some of them also agree with other philosophical schools). It should also be noted that Justin may have derived his famous idea of the “spermatic logos” (σπερματικὸς λόγος)²³ from the Stoics, i.e. the “seminal reason” by which human beings are able to think rationally, but that question is still hotly debated – he may also have gotten the term from Middle Platonism or fused the two together.²⁴

However, despite all these common elements it is clear that Justin disagreed with and fiercely attacked Stoic cosmology, including theology, which is practically the same thing in Stoicism. In line with disagreements between Stoics and Platonists in this respect, the controversy lies in fundamentally different ideas of the physical nature of God as well as of the question of fate and free will. Concerning the former, what Justin strongly rejects, as did the Platonists, is the Stoic notion that God is a corporeal and changeable being (*Second Apology* 7.8–9). According to Justin, the Stoics maintain that God, as a corporeal being, is part of changeable and destructible things, which implies that God is part of evil things as well as good. But God is truly “unmixed with evil” (*First Apology* 6.1) and “superior to changeable things” (20.2). As Justin the Platonist puts it in the *Dialogue*, God is “the Being who always has the same nature in the same manner” (3.5) and is “beyond all essence” (4.1). To be sure, Justin agrees with the Stoics that, in the end, there will be a conflagration (ἐκπύρωσις) of the world (*Second Apology* 7.1–3),²⁵ but unlike the Stoics, the Christians do not believe in a permutation of all things into one another at that point

(7.3), nor do they acknowledge the outrageous idea that “even God himself will be resolved into fire, and [that] the world is to come into being again by this change” (*First Apology* 20.2). Moreover, if everything will happen precisely as it had done in the previous world, as the Stoic doctrine goes, there is no need for human beings to avoid punishment and strive for reward (*Dial.* 1.5), which can only result in moral decay. Similarly, against the Stoic doctrine of fate, according to which everything people do is determined beforehand, Justin emphasizes that each and every one acts according to choice and free will, which means that they are all accountable for their actions (*Second Apology* 7.3–7), which, in his understanding, is not the case in Stoicism. It should be noted that in line with his background in Middle Platonism, much of Justin’s critique of Stoic doctrine is based on stock criticism and standard expressions.²⁶

Athenagoras

Introduction

Little is known of the life of Athenagoras. Tradition has it that he was an Athenian (cf. the traditional *inscriptio* of the *Legatio*: “A plea for Christians by Athenagoras the Athenian, philosopher and Christian”).²⁷ According to one source, Philip of Side claimed that Athenagoras was “the first director of the School at Alexandria” and “the leading man in the Academy”, but there is little independent evidence for this claim.²⁸ His extant writings, *A Plea for the Christians* (*Legatio pro Christianis*) and *On the Resurrection of the Dead* (*De resurrectione mortuorum*), were probably written in the latter part of the second century CE, perhaps between 177 and 180 CE, but the date of the *On the Resurrection* depends on its authenticity as an Athenagorian writing, which is widely disputed.²⁹ It is noteworthy that, apart from Philip of Side, Athenagoras is referred to only once by the Church fathers, viz. by Methodius of Olympus (d. 311 CE), but it is nevertheless unlikely that he was not known to other Church fathers.³⁰ Wherever he gained that knowledge, it is clear that Athenagoras was fairly well versed in philosophical theory as well as the history of philosophy.

Athenagoras and philosophy

Athenagoras’ philosophical register is quite impressive: He refers explicitly to Plato,³¹ Aristotle/Peripatetics,³² some Stoics (he mentions no individual Stoic),³³ Pythagoras/Pythagoreans,³⁴ Socrates (8.2; 31.3), Heraclitus (31.1), Democritus (31.1), Empedocles (22.1; 24.2), Philolaus (6.1), Lysis (6.1), Opsimus (6.1), Thales (23.2) and indirectly to Epicurus (25.2–3). Most of these references are devoted to Plato, but a number of indirect references apply to the Stoics. Athenagoras’ style is Atticistic,³⁵ evidencing good rhetorical training,³⁶ and he writes “as a ‘philosopher’, not as a bishop”.³⁷

Athenagoras’ open interaction with philosophy is mainly found in his *Plea for the Christians*. We shall therefore focus on that text. The writing is, as the title indicates, an apology for Christians and the Christian faith, focusing on charges of atheism, cannibalism, and incest, and offering an exposition of Christian theology that involves comparison of the Christian God and other gods in relation to these charges.

It is clear from Athenagoras’ discussion that his philosophical-theological sympathy lies with the Platonists. Accordingly, it is not surprising to see that he rejects some major tenets of Stoic cosmology and theology, as we shall see. But he devotes some attention as well to ethics: Against charges of cannibalism and, especially, incest, Athenagoras emphasizes that, unlike their accusers, Christians live a pious way of life. They teach that it is even adulterous to *look* at a

woman with lust (cf. Matthew 5.28), let alone being involved in “promiscuous and licentious unions” (*Embassy* 32.1), and they teach that marriage is for procreation, not an opportunity for lust (33.1–2). Moreover, the Christians treat their neighbours as if they were part of their family (32.2), unlike those who slander the followers of Christ and live in accordance with the law of the sea where the strong fish persecutes the weaker one (34.1–2). Following the command of their lord, the Christians even go so far as to teach that one should love one’s enemies (11.1; cf. Matthew 5.44; Luke 6.27–28). Appealing to the philosophical learning of the formal addressees of the plea, emperor Marcus Aurelius and his son, Commodus, calling them “philosopher kings” (βασιλέων φιλοσόφων), Athenagoras asks whether any of the highly educated theorists and logicians ever loved their enemies like the Christians do: “Which of those, I say, are so pure in soul that they love rather than hate their enemies” (*Embassy* 11.2). To underline the basic importance of this principle among Christians, Athenagoras then points out that even uneducated Christians, including artisans and old women, who are unable to compose learned speeches but prove their innate virtue by their deeds, vigorously follow this rule: “When struck they do not strike back; when robbed they do not prosecute; they give to those who ask; and love their neighbours as themselves” (11.3).³⁸

It is noteworthy that Athenagoras does not recall the following words of Socrates in *Crito*, despite his knowledge of the works of Plato: “Then we ought neither to requite wrong with wrong nor to do evil to anyone, no matter what he may have done to us” (49C; LCL). And he exhibits no awareness of the Roman Stoics in this regard, who come very close to advocating love of enemies.³⁹ The Greek-speaking Epictetus, for one, emphasizes that the ideal sage “must needs be flogged like an ass, and while he is being flogged he must love (φιλεῖν) the men who flog him, as though he were the father or brother of them all” (*Diss.* 3.22.54; LCL). Also, Athenagoras explains that Christians refuse to offer sacrifices to the gods because the Christian God does not need any blood or the like (*Embassy* 13.2). In fact, according to Athenagoras, God is in need of nothing, whereas the proper sacrifice to him is to acknowledge him as the creator of the world and to “offer up our rational worship as an unbloody sacrifice” (13.3), clearly alluding to the apostle Paul in Romans 12.1–2, where Paul explains that a proper way of life is his addressees’ sufficient and “reasonable worship”, not actual bloody sacrifice. Although Athenagoras does not show his awareness of such teachings, some philosophers advocated exactly this position. The Roman Stoic Seneca the Younger, for instance, argued that the real service to the deity consisted, not in a bloody sacrifice, but the proper way of life: Proper worship “does not consist in slaughtering fattened bulls, or in hanging up offerings of gold or silver, or in pouring coins into a temple treasury; rather does in consist in a will that is reverent and upright” (*Letters to Lucilius* 115.5; LCL). “Would you win over the gods?” he asks. “Then be a good man! Whoever imitates them, is worshipping them sufficiently” (95.50).⁴⁰ These references show that, in this regard, Athenagoras’ ethics did echo contemporary philosophical teachings. But he makes no mention of Seneca, or of any of the Roman Stoics, for that matter, in his writing(s). His (explicit) references to philosophers are restricted to earlier times in the history of philosophy – although, it should be noted again, he does not refer to any individual Stoic. In fact, “much of what Athenagoras says concerning Christian ethics could be seen as a counter-argument to the Stoic insistence on fate and on the potential lack of personal moral responsibility.”⁴¹

But Athenagoras’ discussion is mostly concerned with the fields of theology and cosmology. It is clear that in that respect he relies heavily on Middle Platonism, much knowledge of which may have come through the handbook of Platonism by Alcinous,⁴² on the basis of which he might also have structured his work.⁴³ As a consequence, he argues against some basic tenets of Stoic theology-cosmology, precisely as his fellow Christian, Justin, had done in his writings. As a matter of fact, it seems likely that Athenagoras was familiar with the works of Justin.⁴⁴ Most

importantly, Athenagoras agrees with Plato that God is a transcendent being, uncreated and eternal (*Embassy* 6.3; cf. 4.1; 8.2; 10.1; 22.2). As such, he is indescribable, beheld by thought and reason alone (4.1; 10.1), whereas created beings and things are apprehended by the senses (15.1). On this, he clearly agrees with Platonic epistemology.⁴⁵ As a matter of fact, according to Athenagoras, God is invisible, “encompassed by light, beauty, spirit, and indescribable power” (10.1). Plato was right when he claimed, as the Christians do, that God is the creator of the world (6.3), and Plato was also right when he argued that God is superior to his creation. God cannot be both superior to as well as part of his creation, since he is indivisible, not consisting of parts (8.2; 22.2). He is himself all things to himself, being immortal and infinite (10.1; 22.3), all-powerful (*Resurrection* 3.1; 9.2; 11.2), and all-knowing (*Resurrection* 12.3; 18.2). The world was not created because he needed it, for he needs nothing (*Embassy* 16.1). But what Plato did not realize is that God created all things by the Logos, his Son, who is from him (4.2; cf. 10.2). The Son is the Logos of the Father “in Ideal Form and Energizing Power” (ἐν ἰδέᾳ καὶ ἐνεργείᾳ) (10.2). Here Athenagoras seems to echo Plato’s *idea* and Aristotle’s *energeia*, using well-known philosophical language to explain the essence of Christian theology.⁴⁶ Moreover, God is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, all at once, but he is nevertheless one (10.2–5) (Athenagoras’ doctrine of the Trinity is probably the earliest we have). Athenagoras notes that Plato, as well as many other philosophers, including Aristotle and the Stoics, certainly claimed that God is one (6.2–5), but he believed that there were other gods in the world, namely planets, stars, and demons, created by the one God (23.4). To be sure, Athenagoras says, Plato rightly distinguished between the created and the uncreated, but he failed to see that there is only one god. For the Divine is unchangeable (22.3), whereas everything in heaven and on earth is subject to change (16.3). Therefore, there are no other gods than the one God.

It is interesting to note that the Christian apologist makes the case that the Christians are not alone in claiming that people will be resurrected from death, and he refers to “many of the philosophers” in that respect, possibly referring to the Stoics and Heraclitus.⁴⁷ Moreover, according to him, “nothing in the teachings of Pythagoras or Plato stands in the way of bodies’ being reconstituted from the same elements once their dissolution to that from which they arose has taken place” (*Embassy* 36.2).⁴⁸ Also, he appears to reject Aristotle’s opinion that Providence does not concern itself with things below heaven (25.2),⁴⁹ claiming instead that God does indeed show providential care of the world (8.3; *Resurrection* 5.1; 18.1–2; 19.4), and will eventually judge human beings according to their deeds (*Resurrection* 18.1; 19.2; 20.3).

In Athenagoras’ opinion, Stoic theology is simply absurd (20.1). For they fail to distinguish between God and matter, and they fail to understand that the two are separated by a wide interval (4.1; 15.1). Athenagoras shows some basic knowledge of Stoic cosmology: According to him, the Stoics believe that there are two main causes in the world, one active (Providence) and one passive (matter). They speak of a world conflagration and that the world will be endlessly created again (19.2). Furthermore, they hold that God is an artisan fire who embraces in himself all the generative principles (σπερματικούς λόγους) that produce everything according to Fate (6.5). But even their theology implies that all created things are subject to change, including matter. But if God is part of nature and matter (6.5; 22.2), it follows, says Athenagoras, that God must be subject to change, which is ludicrous. So is their belief in many gods in addition to the one God, which is so common among the philosophical schools. For since the gods, according to Stoic theory, derive their substance from water, they cannot be superior to matter. Hence, they cannot be real gods (Athenagoras infers) (19.2). Moreover, it is reasonable to presume that God must be the efficient cause of everything, including matter, since the active cause must precede everything that comes into being. In other words, matter cannot be older than God. “Matter needs a craftsman and the craftsman needs matter” (*ibid.*). And if that is so, i.e. that the

gods derive their substance from one of the created elements, and if the Stoic theory is correct that after the world conflagration only the Spirit of the one God will be left, not the gods, (22.2), how is it possible that they are real gods?

All in all, Athenagoras shows lucid knowledge of the forceful debate between contemporary Platonists and Stoics in theological and cosmological matters,⁵⁰ and he clearly sides with the Platonists against the Stoics in his exposition of Christian theology and philosophy. His writings indicate that “[h]e is a *Christian Platonist*, not a *Platonizing Christian*.”⁵¹

Notes

- 1 Translations follow Falls 2003 and Barnard 1997. I follow the text editions of Marcovich 1994 and 1997.
- 2 See Thorsteinsson 2012b: 496–497.
- 3 See the survey in Hofer 2003: 1–4.
- 4 So Skarsaune 1976: 68–71, 1996: 607–608; Van Winden 1971, esp. 63, 118, 127.
- 5 But we should also note Justin’s account in *Second Apology* 12, where he relates how he, not yet a Christian, witnessed the Christians being oppressed and became fascinated by their fearlessness: “For I myself too, when I was delighting in the teachings of Plato, and heard the Christians slandered, and saw them fearless of death, and of all other things which are counted fearful, saw that it was impossible that they could be living in wickedness and pleasure” (12.1).
- 6 Cf. also the discussion in Lyman 2003a: 219–220, 2003b.
- 7 *Second Apology* 7.3; 12.5; 15.2.
- 8 *First Apology* 18.5; *Trypho* 2.1, 4; 5.6; 6.1.
- 9 See Dillon 1996: 37–38, 341–383.
- 10 See *First Apology* 5.3–4; 46.3; *Second Apology* 3.6; 7.3; 10.5–6, 8 (not mentioned in *Trypho*).
- 11 *First Apology* 18.5; 46.3; *Second Apology* 8.1.
- 12 Georges 2012.
- 13 See, e.g., the overview in Lampe 2003: 261–265, 418–422. The passages from Plato are sometimes quoted quite freely, which, on the other hand, also applies to Justin’s quotations of Jewish and Christian writings; see further the discussion in Barnard 1967: 43–74.
- 14 See esp. Andresen 1952–1953. Also Waszink 1965; De Vogel 1978, 1985; Edwards 1991; Heid 2001, esp. 806–808, 822–839. For a different view see Nahm 1992. On “Middle Platonism”, see esp. Dillon 1996.
- 15 For the claim that Justin may have drawn his ideas from Numenius, see Droge 1987: 318 with n. 64. Edwards 1991: 21–33 is more cautious and leaves the question open.
- 16 See *First Apology* 9.3; 61.11; *Second Apology* 12.4; 13.4; *Trypho* 126.2; 127.2.
- 17 See *First Apology* 20.2; *Trypho* 127.2.
- 18 See further the discussion in Thorsteinsson 2012a.
- 19 E.g. Plutarch, *On Common Conceptions* 1085B–C; Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 10.7–8.
- 20 E.g. Plutarch, *Stoic Contradictions* 1051F–1052B; 1053B–D; *On Common Conceptions* 1074F–1075E; 1077B–D; *The E at Delphi* 388E–389C; Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 14.3, 6; 25.4.
- 21 E.g. Plutarch, *Stoic Contradictions* 1050B–D; 1055D–1057C; Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 16.2; 26.
- 22 On “impassibility” in Justin, see further *First Apology* 57.2; 58.3; *Second Apology* 1.2.
- 23 *Second Apology* 13.3; cf. also 8.1; *First Apology* 32.8.
- 24 The classic studies are Holte 1958; Andresen 1952–1953, esp. 170–177. For further references relating to the debate, see Boys-Stones 2001: 184 n. 10. See also the brief but useful discussion in Minns and Parvis 2009: 65–66.
- 25 Cf. also *First Apology* 20.1–2, 4; 28.1; 57.1; 60.8.
- 26 See Thorsteinsson 2012a: 571.
- 27 Translations follow Schoedel 1972. The text edition is that of Marcovich 1990 and 2000. References are made according to the editions of Marcovich. Note that, in the texts cited, Marcovich’s edition does not differ from that of Schoedel.
- 28 See Rankin 2009: 5–6. Philip of Side is referred to in *Codex Bodleianus Baroccianus* 142, fol. 216 (*Patrologia Graeca* vi. 182).
- 29 See the brief but useful overview in Marcovich 2000 (Primary source bibliography): 1–3. Those who argue in favour of Athenagorean authorship include Barnard 1984; Pouderon 1986. Those who dispute the authenticity of the writing include Grant 1954; Lona 1988.

- 30 Marcovich, *Athenagoras: Legatio*, 15.
 31 *Embassy* 6.2–3; 12.1; 16.2–3; 19.1; 23.2, 4; 30.1; 36.2.
 32 *Embassy* 6.2, 4; 16.2; 25.2.
 33 *Embassy* 6.5; 19.2; 22.2.
 34 *Embassy* 6.1; 31.1; 36.2.
 35 Geffcken 1907: 163–166.
 36 Rankin 2006: 119–121.
 37 Grant 1988: 102.
 38 On Athenagoras' refutation of the sophists, see Malherbe 1969b.
 39 See Reiser 2001; Thorsteinsson 2010: 166–175.
 40 Cf. also *Ep.* 95.47; *Ben.* 1.6.3; 4.25.1.
 41 Rankin 2009: 47.
 42 So, e.g., Grant 1988: 103; Rankin 2009: 12.
 43 Malherbe 1969a.
 44 Rankin 2009: 42–43, 156. Sara Parvis (2007: 123) writes that “Athenagoras's *Embassy* (or *Supplication*) is essentially a rewriting of Justin's (first) *Apology* in more intellectually respectable terms.”
 45 On epistemology in Athenagoras, see Rankin 2009: 73–99.
 46 Cf. Grant 1988: 108.
 47 Mansfeld 1983: 227.
 48 Note that Athenagoras does not exactly claim that Pythagoras and Plato offered a theory of resurrection, but only that their teaching does not argue against it. Mansfeld (1983: 226) suggests that Athenagoras may here be thinking of *metempsychosis*, the transmigration of souls.
 49 Cf. Pouderon 1989: 211–212.
 50 See Engberg-Pedersen 2010, esp. 10–12.
 51 Rankin 2009: 167.

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- For primary texts, consult Loeb Classical Library editions and bibliography to O'Brien's chapter in this volume.
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Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyons

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The three authors and their main works

Tatian, Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus of Lyon have more in common than is often assumed. Their most important extant works date from the same period between ca. 173 and the early 180s. Tatian's *Oration to the Greeks* (*Oration*) was written shortly after 172 in Antioch (Lössl 2016), a decade earlier than Theophilus' *To Autolytus*, which was also written in Antioch. The two works show some striking similarities in content, which invite comparison (Prostmeier 2016). Both contain rudimentary Christian world chronicles (Wallraff 2011: 543–547) and show close affinities in their doctrines of God, Logos and creation. Irenaeus' main extant work (*Against Heresies*), completed, at the latest, by the mid-180s, differs from Tatian's and Theophilus' works in purpose and intended audience. All three authors show similarities in their own notion of what philosophy is, their attitudes to ancient Greek philosophy, and their own contributions as Christian philosophers in the areas of doctrine of God (with concepts of one transcendent God, a mediating Logos and a spirit, Pneuma), cosmology (with an emerging concept of *creatio ex nihilo*; May 1994: 148–178; O'Neill 2002), and anthropology (with such concepts as the human being as created by God and endowed with freedom of choice, and a mortal soul with a promise of immortality as a gift from God in form of divine Pneuma). This chapter will attend to each of these areas in turn. But it will first take a closer look at the three authors and their main works.

Where Tatian was born is not entirely certain. His own testimony ("from Assyria", *Oration* 41.1, cf. 29.1–3, 35.1–2) most probably refers to the Roman province of Syria (Nesselrath 2016: 5). Similarly, Theophilus was probably not born, as often found stated, in Mesopotamia, but in the neighbouring Roman province of Osroene (Prostmeier 2013: 363 n. 27). Both authors ended up in Antioch, Tatian, after he had had to leave Rome in 172 upon being "found a heretic" by his Church (Eusebius/Jerome, *Chron. an.* 172; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 46.1/6–8; Lössl 2016: 46–47), Theophilus as the sixth "bishop of the Church of the Antiochians" (Eusebius, *H. e.* 4.20 and 4.24). Irenaeus was probably born in the western part of Asia Minor in the 130s or 140s. Eusebius (*H. e.* 4.14) cites his childhood memory of the aged Polycarp speaking in Smyrna. Polycarp died in 155/6. Via Rome, Irenaeus travelled to Gaul and in 177 became bishop in Lyon. *Against Heresies* was completed in the early 180s (Grant 1997: 1–8; Osborn 2003: 2).

Each author is also credited with other works. Eusebius names Tatian as author of the *Diatessaron*, a Gospel Harmony that was in use in the Syrian church until the fifth century (*H. e.* 4.29.6). He ascribes to Theophilus works entitled *On the Heresy of Hermogenes* and *Against Marcion* (κατὰ Μαρκίωνος), and commentaries on Proverbs (*H. e.* 4.24). Irenaeus also wrote a *Demonstration of apostolic teaching* and works *Against the Valentinian Ogdoad*, *On Schism* and *On Knowledge* (against the pagans). His *Letter to Florinus (Concerning the Sole Rule of God, or That God Is Not the Author of Evil)* further illustrates the philosophical leanings of its author (Osborn 2003: 1).

Their self-reference as philosophers and understanding of philosophy

In order to judge the nature and quality of our three authors' philosophical contribution, it may be useful first to note that philosophy for them, as for their contemporaries generally, was not just an academic pursuit but a way of life (cf. Löhr 2010). Its purpose was to reveal, through rational investigation, the truth about reality, and thereby to teach a good (ethical) and consequently happy life (cf. Karamanolis 2013: 48). Our three authors did not reject this underlying approach, they merely refuted any claims of Greek philosophy to live up to its ideal and put forward instead approaches that were informed by and indeed identified with the biblical (Jewish and Christian) tradition. All three therefore, Irenaeus included, did think of themselves as philosophers (against Osborn 2003: 8).

Tatian rejects the “wisdom prevailing among the Greeks”. Even the “most serious” (πάνυ σπουδαίων, 2.1) of their philosophers are exposed to his colourful satire, which reminds us of the portraits provided by one of our main sources for ancient Greek philosophy, Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, which has been dated tentatively to the early third century (cf. Miller 2018: x). In contrast, Tatian is “one who philosophizes in the manner of Barbarians (non-Greeks)” (ὁ κατὰ βαρβάρους φιλοσοφῶν, *Oration* 42.1). By this he means specifically that he does not claim for himself to be self-taught, like Heraclitus, but “God-taught” (θεοδίδακτος, 29.3), meaning that he relies for his teaching on the authority of certain “Barbarian Scriptures” (γραφαὶ βαρβαρικά, 29.2), i.e. the biblical tradition, which is older and hence superior to that of the Greeks (29.2, cf. Pilhofer 1990: 253–260). The Greeks mock his belief in the transcendence of God, creation by the Logos, the fatal consequences of sin and the resurrection of bodies as “Barbarian” (30.3), but in reality, they are envious of the non-Greeks because of their superior cultural achievements (1.1), which according to Tatian include philosophy. He contends that as a native Syrian (42.1), whose first education was in Greek learning (παιδεία), he is in a special position to teach his Greek addressees his Barbarian philosophy.

Theophilus is less elaborate than Tatian in defining himself as a philosopher against the Greeks but exhibits certain similarities. He begins by presenting himself as a lover of truth (*Autolytus* 1.1) before he specifically criticizes Stoic and Platonic theology (2.4). The Stoics either deny the existence of God (similarly to the Epicureans) or they identify God with nature (or the human conscience). The Platonists declare matter uncreated and thus equal to God. In *Autolytus* 3.2, however, Theophilus refutes Greek philosophy in a roundabout way – very like Tatian – as untrue and useless even to its most famous representatives. In 3.6–8 he rejects their teachings as contradictory and inconsistent (ἀσύμφωνα), in contrast to Christian teaching, which is consistent and truer than Greek philosophy because of its greater antiquity (3.29). The similarities between Theophilus and Tatian are not entirely accidental. They both share material with earlier apologists, above all Justin Martyr (for details see Prostmeier 2016: 194), who, too,

had identified himself as a philosopher, in direct contradistinction to Greek and Jewish counterparts (Karamanolis 2013: 48).

In this latter respect, Irenaeus differs from Tatian and Theophilus. His main work is directed against other Christians; consequently, direct references to Greek philosophy and philosophers are not as frequent as in Tatian and Theophilus, and less central to his argument. In *Against Heresies* 1.25.6, for example, he reports that certain Gnostics venerate painted portraits of Jesus and certain Greek philosophers. In 2.14.1–6, he scoffs that the Valentinian heresy is a hotchpotch of different philosophical teachings. In 2.27.1, he compares his own concept of a “rule of truth” (*regula veritatis*, probably translating κανὼν or ὑπόθεσις τῆς ἀληθείας) with the inconsistency of the multitude of truths (*tantae veritates*) which are bandied about in the debates of pagan philosophers. This last example illustrates that although he is not primarily an apologist such as Tatian or Theophilus, he stands in the same tradition. But he makes certain changes. He does not explicitly refer to his teaching as the one true philosophy, and he modifies the criterion of superior age. In 2.14.2, he rejects the Valentinian teaching (*doctrina*) on grounds of its novelty (*nova*), yet he also pronounces it useless (*inutilis*), because it is built on old doctrines that reek of ignorance and irreligiosity.

God – Logos – Pneuma

Tatian

God is the central philosophical interest among early Christian apologists (Prostmeier 2016: 220). But philosophical inquiry into the concept of God among early Christian apologists also involves an inquiry into the concepts of Logos and Pneuma. The meaning of these terms will become clearer as we explore their use by our three authors.

Let us begin with Tatian: “The emperor,” he writes, “orders us to pay taxes. I accept being a subject. . . . A human being ought to be honoured in a human way; God alone must be feared” (*Oration* 4.2). This is the familiar strain of Romans 13:1–7, or 1 Peter 2:17: “Fear God, honour the emperor”. But what follows is a philosophical reflection:

God – according to our understanding – has no solid existence (σύστασις) within time (ἐν χρόνῳ). He alone is without beginning (ἀναρχος) and indeed he himself is the beginning (ἀρχή) of the entirety of all things that have a beginning. God is spirit (πνεῦμα), but not of the kind that permeates matter (διήκων διὰ τῆς ὕλης). . . . He is invisible (ἀόρατος) and intangible (ἀναφής); for he himself has become (γεγονώς) the Father (πατήρ) of all things sensible and visible. Him we know through his creation, and the invisible nature of his power (τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ) we grasp through his creatures.

(*Oration* 4.3)

Human beings cannot perceive God directly. Only if we understand the world as God’s creation can we draw certain conclusions regarding God (cf. Romans 1:20 and Wisdom 13:5). But we can only do this (*Oration* 4.2) if our underlying attitude is one of “fear of God”. What we perceive, then, if we perceive the world in this way, is a power (δύναμις) that establishes order in the material universe and endows matter with structures, shapes and forms. That power extends also to the spiritual forces in nature, which therefore are not themselves God: “The Pneuma which permeates matter is inferior to the divine Pneuma. It must therefore not be honoured at the same level” (*Oration* 4.4). Still, there seems to be an analogy between God being divine Pneuma and God creating (or designing) non-divine Pneuma in the material

world. Next we learn that, while God is not a part of his world, the power by which he moves it is that of his Logos:

God was in the beginning. The beginning, however, we have had handed down to us as the power of the Logos (λόγου δύναμις); for the Lord of everything . . . was still alone at the time when creation (ποίησις) did not yet exist. But as the full power of all that is visible and invisible was with him, he raised all that was with him into a state of existence (ὑπέστησεν), through the power of the Logos.

(*Oration* 5.1)

The first sentence of this passage recalls the prologue of John's Gospel (1:1–2). But whereas in John 1:1 the Logos was in the beginning, in Tatian's account the Logos does not yet exist distinctly at this point. Only in the next passage he says that "through the will of his [the Father's] oneness (ἀπλότις) the Logos protrudes (προπηδᾷ), . . . not into a void, but he becomes the firstborn 'work' (ἔργον πρωτότοκον) of the Father [cf. Colossians 1:15]" (*Oration* 5.2). Tatian emphasizes that this creation and revelation are not necessities, but results of God's free, willing action (θέλημα). For this reason he postulates that the Logos was not always going out from God, who is essentially oneness. Also, the "going out" is not a separation (ἀποκοπή) but a "sharing" (μερισμός), which entails no loss on the Father's part. Tatian again: "By going forth from the power of the Father the Logos has not made 'logos-less' (ἄλογος) him who generated (γεγεννηκότα) him" (*Oration* 5.4); nor, we could add, has this affected the Father's oneness. This vehement emphasis on oneness has been interpreted as a Monarchian reaction to Justin Martyr's account of the Logos (Hanig 1999).

The negative properties which Tatian attributes to God in *Oration* 4.3, invisible (ἀόρατος) and intangible (ἀναφήγ), too, resonate with works of philosophy. In one of Maximus of Tyre's *Philosophical Orations*, a work roughly contemporaneous with Tatian's *Oration* (Trapp 1997: xi–xii), they are attributed to the (Platonic) Godhead (Maximus, *Oration* 11.9), and in Albinus's (or Alcinous's) "Textbook" of Platonist philosophy, dating from ca. 150 CE, to the soul of the world as opposed to its body (*Didascalicus* 13.1). For all that, his formulation of his concepts of God and Logos is both original and biblical. In addition to the biblical echoes cited earlier, the phrase "God is spirit" (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός) in *Oration* 4.3 can be literally found in John 4:24. One of Tatian's purposes may have been to refute tendencies in some forms of Judaism and early Christianity to treat τὸ πνεῦμα as a distinct divine being besides ὁ θεός. But his philosophical reflection on the distinction between "God as Pneuma" and the "Pneuma that permeates matter" is more specifically directed against the Stoics. He does not say so explicitly, but his use of the verb διήκω to describe the permeation of matter by Pneuma (*Oration* 4.4) is reminiscent of a saying attributed to Chrysippus (third c. BCE), one of the leading younger Stoics (*frg. logica et physica* 473; SVF II 154; cf. Düzl 2000: 31 n. 4, 42 and 361).

After establishing his concepts of God and Logos in principle, Tatian spells out what this means for humanity:

For the heavenly Logos, having become (γεγονώς) Pneuma from (ἀπό) the Father and Logos from (ἐκ) the power of the Logos, created man, in imitation (μίμησις) of the Father, who produced him, and as image (εἰκόνα) of (his) immortality.

(*Oration* 7.1, following the MS reading)

A (qualified) identity of Logos and Pneuma can already be deduced from what was said in *Oration* 4.3 and 5.1. Here Tatian underlines the identity of God, Logos and Pneuma, as a preface

to explaining how the Pneuma links God with humanity (15.1). Humanity is created by the Logos in imitation (μίμησις) of the Logos' own generation by the Father; even more strikingly, it is created immortal; although this immortality is derivative, which means that it can be – and is, in fact – lost, and has to be regained. In *Oration* 12.1 Tatian refers to the “image” (εἰκῶν) which he mentioned in *Oration* 7.1, citing Genesis 1:26 LXX, “image and likeness” (εἰκῶν καὶ ὁμοίωσις). He calls this the “greater” or “more powerful” (*Oration* 7.5) Pneuma, compared with the soul (ψυχή), which is our material Pneuma. Crucially, it is only this more powerful, divine Pneuma which makes the human immortal, as an image of God's incorruptibility (ἀφθαρσία) and as an expression of human participation in God's “lot” or “destiny” (μοῖρα). This latter idea is Platonic, while man is a symbol of God's imperishability in *Wisdom* 2:23.

Now the more powerful Pneuma separated itself from the human beings. As a result, they became mortal (*Oration* 7.5). The point for humanity now is to regain immortality by reuniting the lower Pneuma (i.e. the soul, ψυχή) with the higher Pneuma. For the soul on its own, Tatian argues, is mortal (*Oration* 13.1). Unless it is linked to the divine Pneuma (θεῖον πνεῦμα), it sinks down to the level of matter and dies together with the flesh (*Oration* 13.3). But if it is linked with it, it is also linked with God and will regain its immortality (*Oration* 15.1), the flesh included (*Oration* 15.4–5). Tatian calls on his addressees to actively seek this rejoining of the lower with the divine Pneuma in the hope that through his Pneuma God will save not only the soul but the human being as a whole (*Oration* 15.1; Dünzl 2000: 243). Thus, there is originality in Tatian's account as well as clear marks of an intellectual environment shaped by both biblical and philosophical influences.

Theophilus

Theophilus, the “lover of truth”, is responding to the challenge of his dedicatee Autolytus: “Show me your God!” He undertakes to show that it is possible for human beings to see God, but only with the eyes of their soul (1.2) if they are pure in heart and life. Tatian, too, had argued that knowledge of God required a certain ethical predisposition, but Theophilus goes further here by conceding that God can also, in a spiritual/intellectual sense, be seen. He begins his demonstration of this by stating that “the form (εἶδος) of God is ineffable (ἄρρητον) and inexpressible (ἀνέκφραστον)” (2.3) and cannot be seen by human eyes. He then lists a series of properties, some of which can also be found in Tatian, but multiplying them into a complex picture which combines biblical and philosophical motifs: God's glory, greatness, loftiness, strength, wisdom, goodness and beneficence are all incomparable and beyond human grasp. Other properties indicate God's functions. His light signifies his creation, through which he is, in a certain sense, “visible” to humans. His Logos signifies his beginning (ἀρχή) – he himself being without beginning (ἄναρχος, 1.4; cf. Tatian, *Oration* 4.3) – his mind (νοῦς) his intelligence (φρόνησις), his Pneuma his divine breath (for a detailed analysis of the full list, see Prostmeier 2010: 214–215; for the role of Pneuma as the “breath”, ἀναπνοή, of God, Dünzl 2000: 36–37).

This is not mere metaphysics: it inculcates the right attitude in matters of theology, which includes an acknowledgement that God himself remains always beyond human grasp. Once this is accepted, a philosophical analysis of the concept of God can also take place on biblical grounds, as Theophilus demonstrates in *Autolytus* 1.4: God is without beginning (ἄναρχος) because he has not been generated (ἀγέννητος). He is unalterable (ἀναλλοίωτος) because he is immortal (ἀθάνατος). He is called “God” (θεός) because he “runs” (θέειν = τρέχειν) everything in his steadfastness (ἀσφαλεία; Psalm 103:5 LXX). He is “Father” (πατήρ) because he precedes the universe. He is demiurge (δημιουργός) and maker (ποιητής) because he is creator (κτίστης) and maker of the universe. This apparent tautology could be a biblical response to

Timaeus 28a–c, where Plato avers that it is difficult to “find” Him and, when found, impossible to express Him in words. Theophilus ends his paragraph by stating (citing 2 Maccabees 7:28 and evoking Romans 1:20 and Wisdom 13:5): “‘God made’ everything ‘out of what did not exist’ bringing it into existence so that he might be recognized from his works and his greatness be known” (*Autolycus* 1.4).

In *Autolycus* 1.7, Theophilus sets out how God created everything, namely through his Logos and through Sophia, with the Pneuma taking on a mediating role between Logos and Sophia. The explanation is based on Psalm 32:6: “By his Logos the heavens were established, stable and firm, and by his Pneuma all their power” and Proverbs 3:19: “God by Sophia provided the earth with stable and firm foundations, but the heavens he prepared by intelligence”. Thus, Logos and Sophia provide substance and order, while the Pneuma fills this whole creation with dynamic power. After defending the Christian belief in the resurrection (1.8 and 13) and attacking Greek religion and Roman emperor worship (1.9–11), Theophilus concludes Book 1 with a call to fear and believe in God instead of demanding that he be “shown” (1.14).

Book 2 begins with further critical reflections. In 2.3, Theophilus argues that God is not confined in a place, for any place that held God would be greater than God. Rather, “God is not contained but is himself the place where the universe is located”. Poetry and myth are contrasted with the inspiration and truth of the prophets in 2.5–9. Then, in 2.10, the topic of 1.7 is taken up again, creation through the Logos. Existing “before the ages” (ὑπάρχων πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων, Psalm 54:20), God lacked nothing. It was his wish to create humans, to be known by them. Having his Logos “inside him” (ἐνδιάθετον) in his intestines he generated him together with his Sophia “eructing” him (ἐξερευζόμενος), thus making all things through him. He is beginning (ἀρχή, Genesis 1:1, John 1:1), Pneuma of God (Genesis 1:2), Sophia (Proverbs 8:22) and “power of the most high” (δύναμις ὑψίστου, Luke 1:35; cf. Dünzl 2000: 54–55). Before anything came into existence, God had the Logos as counsellor (σύμβουλος), mind (νοῦς) and intelligence (φρόνησις). When he wished to make what he had planned, he brought him forth by “expressing” him (ἐγέννησεν προφορικόν; on the background of the use of the terms ἐνδιάθετος and προφορικός in this context, see Dünzl 2007: 23–24, 44) as “firstborn of all creation” (πρωτότοκον πάσης κτίσεως, Colossians 1:15). But this projection outward of the Logos did not deprive God of his Logos (οὐ κενωθείς αὐτὸς τοῦ λόγου). Theophilus reinforces this tenet, which he shares with Tatian, by quoting John 1:1–3 at *Autolycus* 2.23.

Thus we have seen that Theophilus takes up the same topics concerning God, Logos and Pneuma as Tatian had done, but in a much more elaborate and also more consistent way. While insisting on the ineffability and inexplicability of God (1.3), he not only accumulates more material (see on this Prostmeier 2010: 224–225), but also offers deeper philosophical treatments on specific points. Cases in point are the use of the originally Stoic concepts of λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and λόγος προφορικός to explain better the role of the Logos vis à vis God and creation, and the reference to the notion of a creation out of nothing at 2 Maccabees 7:28 (*Autolycus* 1.7 and 2.10).

Irenaeus

The purpose of Irenaeus’ *Against Heresies*, our main source, is rather different, although Irenaeus shares his most basic teachings and much earlier material with the two Antiochenes. His opponents, however, are not adherents of Greek philosophy and religion but “Gnostics”, “Valentinians” and other heretics of allegedly Christian background. As a result, *Against Heresies* contains fewer explicit references to classical religion, literature and philosophy but is more “biblical” in character. Even general philosophical propositions are sometimes put forward by way of biblical

citations (e.g. *Against Heresies* 2.13.3: “God’s thinking is not like that of humans;” Isaiah 55:8). But as we showed earlier, in a second-century context he can be treated as a (Christian) philosopher, whose teachings on God, Logos and Pneuma align with those of Tatian and Theophilus.

The main sections relevant for the doctrine of God begin with *Against Heresies* 2.1.1. Here, God is identified with the “Demiurge, who made heaven and earth and everything in them.” Irenaeus wants to demonstrate that there is nothing above or after him and that he was not moved by anyone or anything else. Rather, he made everything by his own decision and freely; for “he alone is God, he alone Lord, he alone creator (*conditor* = κτίστης), he alone Father, he alone the one who comprises (*continens*) everything and guarantees the existence of everything” (2.1.1). Crucially, for Irenaeus, God is not lacking anything. Lack (*extremitas, hystereia*) – or void – is what his Gnostic opponents cited as reason for the creator God to emerge under the auspices of a larger metaphysical power or framework. But, using a similar logical argument to that of Theophilus at *Autolytus* 2.3, Irenaeus retorts that if there existed some such greater, stronger and more powerful entity under the auspices of which the creator God operated, then that entity would himself be God (2.1.2).

In *Against Heresies* 2.13.3, Irenaeus lays down what is basically a philosophical principle: We must not conceive of God in human terms; for God is in every conceivable respect not like human beings. His thoughts are not like the thoughts of humans (Isaiah 55:8). The Father of all (*omnium pater*) is far removed from human affections and passions (properties which Irenaeus’s opponents had attributed to God).

He is simple (*simplex*), not composite; his “parts” are all equal to each other and to himself as a whole (cf. Brox 1993: 96 n. 21), since he is, as a whole (*totus*), sense, spirit, sensibility, thought, reason, hearing, eye, light, and source of everything that is good.

(2.13.3; cf. Xenophanes, Fr. 24 Diels-Kranz)

The gap between Creator and creation cannot be bridged by the intermediaries postulated by many of his opponents. Whatever we say in human terms of God’s greatness and excellence is always in a higher degree inapplicable to God than it is applicable. But then there is a specific positive story about God which is revealed to us by Scripture. “Suppose”, he writes,

someone asks: “What did God do before he created the world?” We shall tell that person that it falls to God to answer this question. But that the world has been created in a perfect state (ἀποτελεστικῶς), by God, with a beginning in time (*temporale initium accipiens*), we are taught by the Scriptures. However, no Scripture reveals (*manifestat*) what God did before that.

(2.28.3)

For his insistence that “the Father” and the “Demiurge” (i.e. the creator God, whom some of his opponents held to be secondary or even antagonistic to the true God) was one and the same God, he again invokes “the Scriptures”: “You call him ‘Demiurge’;” he addresses his opponents, “but the Scriptures only know him as the one sole God. Even the Lord [i.e. Jesus Christ] confesses only him as his own father and knows none other” (*Against Heresies* 2.28.4). Since, therefore, “God is wholly ‘mind’ and wholly Logos” (2.28.5), speaking and thinking are identical in him. To speak of the Logos as an emanation from the Father, as his opponents do, thus Irenaeus, is to misunderstand the entire concept of God.

Satisfied as he is by the scriptural axiom of divine oneness, his pronouncements on Logos and Pneuma tend to be relatively simple. Speculative thinking regarding their distinctive roles in relation to the Father is largely avoided. In this respect, Irenaeus differs somewhat from Tatian

and Theophilus, and instead presents his concept of God in the context of two further concepts, God's plan (οἰκονομία) for the salvation of the world and its completion through a grand “summing up” (*recapitulatio*, ἀνακεφαλαίωσις) of world history in Jesus Christ:

The Church . . . has accepted the faith in the one God, the almighty Father (πατέρα παντοκράτορα), who created . . . everything, and in the one Christ Jesus, the son of God, who became flesh (σαρκωθέντα, cf. John 1:14) for our salvation and in the Holy Pneuma (πνεῦμα ἅγιον), who through the prophets announced [the whole ministry of Jesus up to] . . . his coming in the glory of the Father to “sum up everything” (Ephesians 1:10: ἀνακεφαλαιώσασθαι τὰ πάντα).

(*Against Heresies* 1.10.1)

That Irenaeus avoids thinking too creatively about the roles of Logos and Pneuma in *Against Heresies* might also be shown by a comparison of the following two passages: In *Against Heresies* 1.22.1, Irenaeus professes (citing the “rule of truth”) the one God who created everything through his word. He cites Psalm 32:6 LXX (“by the word of the Lord the heavens are made strong, and by the breath of his mouth their power”) as biblical authority, as Theophilus had done in *Autolytus* 1.7 (see earlier). But in Theophilus’ version of the biblical text, it had been easier to read “Logos” and “Pneuma” as distinct divine beings or powers, and Theophilus had responded to this in his account by highlighting the distinctive roles and even metaphysical states of Logos and Pneuma. In *Against Heresies* 1.22.1, Irenaeus’ emphasis is entirely on the “one God”. The role of the Logos is only hinted at in the scriptural citations (Psalm 32:6 LXX and John 1:3). Irenaeus does not offer any further explanation of his own.

Yet elsewhere he seems to be more forthcoming. In his *Epideixis* or *Demonstration of Apostolic Teaching*, a largely non-polemical text, he treats the same topic and cites the same Psalm verse but formulates the distinctive roles of Logos and Pneuma in more creative terms than in *Against Heresies* 1.22.1:

Because God is a being endowed with Logos, he has through the Logos created all that has a beginning; and because God is Pneuma, he has through his Pneuma adorned everything, as also the Prophet says: “Through the Logos of the Lord the heaven is strengthened, and through his Pneuma all its power” (Psalm 32:6 LXX). Now since the Logos “creates” (in the sense of lending physical substance to creation, and the power to exist), while the Pneuma orders and structures the various powers in their diversity, it is right and fitting to call the Logos “Son” and the Pneuma “Wisdom” (Sophia) of God.

(*Epideix.* 5)

This latter passage suggests that Irenaeus’ thinking on God, Logos and Pneuma was closer to that of Theophilus than one might assume if one only considered the account of *Against Heresies*. Still, with his sharp distinction between philosophical analysis and positive reasoning based solely on scriptural evidence, he opens up a new dimension of Christian philosophical reasoning which was going to have a particular impact in the area of cosmology.

Cosmogony (*creatio ex nihilo*)

Fundamentally, all three of our authors hold a concept of creation out of nothing in that all of them draw a fairly sharp distinction between God and the world and stipulate that the world originated from a free creative act on God’s part. The differences between the three lie in the

degrees to which they elaborate their theories and delineate them against other teachings, whether they are biblical, pagan or “Gnostic”.

Tatian, in *Oration* 5.6–7, explains that the Logos, having been generated in the beginning (ἐν ἀρχῇ γεννηθείς), does in turn himself generate (ἀντεγέννησε) that which we call “creation” (τὴν καθ’ ἡμᾶς ποίησιν). He is doing this by (or for) himself by creating matter (τὴν ὕλην δημιουργήσας, 5.6). For, Tatian continues, neither is matter without beginning (ἀναρχος), such as God, nor is it equally powerful as God. But rather, it has originated (γενητή) and came into being (γεγονυῖα) as having been brought forth, projected (προβεβλημένη) by none other but the one creator of all (τοῦ πάντων δημιουργοῦ, 5.7). Tatian is here doing something which Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 2.28.7) rejects as unscriptural. He is trying to explain *how* God created the world. However, his underlying assumption is scriptural and therefore Irenaean, namely that God created the world. Δημιουργεῖν must signify “creating” (not merely “forming”, against Nesselrath 2016: 47, or even “fabricating”, suggested by Whittaker 1982: 11), as the following sentence makes it quite clear that matter did not preexist. By implication, therefore, it was created out of nothing. Note also that in the following sentence δημιουργός seems to be understood as “creator God”.

By explicating the process of creation with the help of this kind of scheme – God-Logos-matter – Tatian may betray a dependence on Platonist schemes working with the principles of God, forms and matter (compare e.g. Albinus, *Didasc.* 8–10; Apuleius, *De dog. Plat.* 1.5.190; Karamanolis 2013: 75); at the same time he firmly rejects the crucial assumption prevalent in those models, namely that matter is preexistent, eternal and practically godlike. The demiurge is the one and only creator God, whose work is not just forming, shaping or fabricating preexistent matter, but bringing nonexistent matter into being, creating it out of nothing. Thus, Tatian’s talk in *Oration* 5.5 and 5.7 of “ordering (διακοσμεῖν) disordered matter (τὴν ἀκόσμητον ὕλην)” and “changing the confusion (σύγχυσις) of matter” for the better does not betoken a two-stage creation process as set out in Plato’s *Timaeus* (see e. g. 31b, 34c, 53a7, 69b–c, against Karamanolis 2013: 76). He uses this terminology metaphorically in an attempt to explain how human speech (λόγος) works through the combination of logic and rhetoric (cf. Lössl 2010: 140).

Tatian’s position is thus probably closer to Theophilus’ than is often acknowledged, although Theophilus is more explicit in his refutation of the Platonist model and in his profession of creation out of nothing. In *Autolytus* 2.4 he – like Tatian – rejects the idea that matter is without origin (ἀγένητος) and therefore coeval with God. To maintain that God created the world out of preexisting matter, he argues, means demoting God to the level of a human artisan (τεχνίτης). It is even less likely than for Tatian that he had a two-stage concept of creation, i.e. first, creation of shapeless matter, then, formation of individual beings (cf. Karamanolis 2013: 76–77). At one point in *Autolytus* 2.13 he contrasts the “feeble” (ἀσθενές) anthropomorphic approach to cosmogony in the Greek tradition with the boldness of the biblical account, which in his view does far more justice to the grandeur of the universe: God, he says, makes existent beings out of nonexistent ones at his whim (ὡς βούλεται): “‘Things impossible for humans are possible for God’ (Luke 18.27). . . . For this reason, the prophet began his account by speaking of the creation of the heaven” (*Autolytus* 2.13; cf. Genesis 1:1).

Irenaeus, as already mentioned, is different from Tatian and Theophilus in that the declared purpose of his teaching on creation (*Against Heresies* 2.28.7) is to state that God created the material world, not *how*. The former, thus Irenaeus, can be demonstrated from the Scriptures, the latter not. This is a philosophically sharpened version of the statement of Romans 1:20 and Wisdom 13:5, namely that the nature of God is exclusively revealed in creation, which means in turn that exploring the origin and nature of creation is identical with exploring God (*Against Heresies* 3.24.1–25.1). Irenaeus emphasizes the oneness of God in particular against the

Marcionites, whom he accuses (2.1.4) of proclaiming the existence of two gods, one good, the other called “judge” (3.25.3). Rather, he insists, God is one, good and just at the same time, or else he is not God. To be the one, good creator–God is in fact his essential property (4.39.2). This, he adds, is even confirmed by Plato, who in the *Timaeus* “declares God’s goodness to be principle and cause of the creation of the world” (3.25.5, citing *Tim.* 29e). From this, Irenaeus continues, it can be concluded that the purpose of creation is the salvation of humanity (5.18.1, 28.4, 29.1). And God is not forced to undertake this activity. He is doing it willingly, because it is his nature, goodness, that moves him to act in this way (5.4.2).

The idea that God contains everything in himself (2.1.1; see also 2.35.3, 3.20.2, 4.20.6, 4.36.6) seems to echo contemporary Platonist ideas of God, the highest intellect, containing all forms (Numenius, frg. 13 De Places; Plotinus, *Enn.* 5.5.3; cited in Karamanolis 2013: 81). Irenaeus, however, claims that not only form but matter too is contained in and created by the one God. This latter principle is scriptural, and Irenaeus takes it on authority. He cannot explain how it works (2.28.7), but he knows that matter cannot be a principle of creation outside of and coeval with God (2.14.2–4). His Logos is not a cosmic but a metaphysical entity, and to say that he is the agent of creation is not to explain the inexplicable, but to reaffirm that the one God is the sole author of the process. Nothing is outside or beyond him; he wills and it comes to pass. Thus Irenaeus keeps to the content of the scriptural message as he understands it, although he does structure it formally resorting to a (Middle) Platonist metaphysical framework, “for his biblical sources alone cannot explain his use of Intellect as a designation of God” (Osborn 2003: 37, with a reference to Albinus, *Didasc.* 10).

The Logos in Irenaeus has been compared to Plutarch’s world soul (*De Iside* 382bc; *Plat. quaest.* 1001c; cited in Karamanolis 2013: 82), which participates (μετέχει) in the Demiurge and is endowed with his reason, thereby becoming instrumental in bringing order into the material world and sustaining it. Yet again, Irenaeus’ Logos is not just ordering an already preexistent matter; he is (as wholly originating from God) intrinsically involved in creating matter out of nothing, thus simultaneously creating the world. Equally, the Pneuma, who also shares some similarities with the world soul, orders and structures the world as an agency of the one and sole creator God himself. *Creatio ex nihilo* is implied here. When Plutarch calls God “Father” on the ground that “he sowed [something] from himself into [preexistent] matter” (*Plat. quaest.* 1001b), the underlying assumption of the preexistence of matter makes all the difference. In this respect, Irenaeus thinks again along very similar lines to Tatian and Theophilus.

The tripartite nature of the human being (pneuma-soul-body/flesh)

Tatian, Theophilus and Irenaeus also show considerable similarities in the way they talk about the makeup of the individual human being. They all hold what is fundamentally a tripartite model involving spirit (πνεῦμα), soul (ψυχή) and body (σῶμα) or flesh (σάρξ), which they adopt from the Platonist tradition and adapt to their biblical worldview.

We already saw in an earlier section that in 4.4 Tatian distinguishes between a higher Pneuma and a lower Pneuma, which permeates matter and is assimilated to (παρωμοιωμένον) though not identical with the soul. In 12.1, Tatian, confusingly, also postulates two types of Pneuma at the level of the human being, one called “soul”, the other, “God’s image and likeness” (cf. Genesis 1:26; 1 Corinthians 2:14). It is likely that he understands the former to be the soul as assimilated with the hylic Pneuma of 4.4, and the latter to be the human being as united with the divine Pneuma (cf. 13.4). In 15.1, he possibly elaborates on this latter idea when he says that the fallen human soul, i.e. the soul that was deserted by the divine Pneuma because

(making bad use of its freedom) it did not wish to follow it (13.4), must “seek to be reconnected” with this holy Pneuma to share with it a divine (κατὰ θεόν) link or bond. Thus Tatian uses the word πνεῦμα homonymously, but he remains by and large consistent: the human soul (a type of πνεῦμα) is on one hand assimilated with the Pneuma that permeates matter; on the other hand, it is, as Pneuma, God’s image and likeness, namely insofar as it is bonded with the holy Pneuma.

Tatian polemicizes against the definition, very widespread among ancient philosophers, of man being a “living being endowed with Logos” (ζῶον λογικόν, 15.3), capable of intellect (νοῦς) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη; see Renehan 1981: 239–243 for source texts with explanations). From this definition, Tatian suggests, one could argue that there are also “logos-less” (ἄλογα) animals who can pick up νοῦς and ἐπιστήμη. Some philosophers argued precisely that. Plutarch, for example, wrote a work “on the use of the Logos among logos-less animals”. Tatian radically departs from this tradition and reiterates his definition of the human being as the only being that is “God’s image and likeness”. He seems to understand this definition in relational, not in physical or ontological terms. It applies, he says, only to those human beings who are on their way to God (15.3).

In conclusion, Tatian’s philosophical anthropology is not consistent with any of the existing ancient school-philosophical positions, although he uses elements of several of them. His division of the human being is roughly tripartite, as in Platonism. But he has Pneuma, originally a Stoic concept, where the Platonists have intellect (νοῦς). He does not understand Pneuma purely in materialistic terms, as the Stoics do. He does not hold the natural immortality of the soul, as the Platonists do. His distinction between God and creature, expressed in the definition of man as God’s image and likeness, cuts across ancient philosophical concepts. He categorically rejects the definition of man as rational animal, which was widespread among all philosophical schools in antiquity. He postulates the resurrection of the body by God’s will.

Theophilus’ discussion of these topics is much less analytical than Tatian’s, and he is more overtly and more extensively referring to his biblical sources. Thus, Pneuma for him is in the first instance the Pneuma “moving above the water” (Genesis 1:1–2), which God gave to add life to creation, such as “the soul” in the case of man (*Autolytus* 2.13). This passage also illustrates one aspect of how Theophilus conceives of the relationship between Pneuma and the human soul. He had addressed this already in *Autolytus* 1.7 where he accused sinful man of breathing God’s Pneuma yet not knowing God because of the blindness of his (i.e. man’s) soul. In 1.3, too, Pneuma is simply defined as God’s (life-giving) breath (ἀναπνοή) and in this respect distinguished from God’s νοῦς and σοφία. In 1.5, it seems to be conceived of as part of creation and in a way similar to Albinus’ world soul. Theophilus compares it with the rind of a pomegranate (ρόα): Creation is enveloped by the Pneuma, and in turn the enveloping Pneuma together with creation is enveloped by “God’s hand”. This, Theophilus adds, is why man cannot see God with physical eyes: he sits inside creation and cannot see beyond the rind. The use of the term “God’s hand”, too, is intriguing here. It does not occur in Tatian, while Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 5.28.4 and elsewhere) identifies the Son and the Spirit as the creating hands of God. Theophilus in contrast seems to see here the Pneuma more on the side of creation rather than as an aspect of God’s own creating activity. Elsewhere, his understanding of Pneuma is more in line with a New Testament understanding of the Holy Spirit. For example, in 2.9 he calls those who follow God as “bearers of the holy Pneuma”, in 2.30 and 33 the holy Pneuma is said to “teach” the biblical stories, while in 3.23 Moses is said to have been inspired by the holy Pneuma when writing his books.

Theophilus also says a few things about the soul itself. Like God, it is invisible and can only be known through the movement of the body. This is much less than Tatian has to say on the

topic and recalls only vaguely the *locus classicus*, Plato's *Phaedo* (79b), and Pseudo-Aristotle, *De mundo* 6 (399b 14), where it is said that the soul, though invisible in itself, is visible through its works. *Autolytus* 1.5 is only one of three places where Theophilus uses the word σῶμα. When speaking of man's physical dimension, he much prefers the biblical word "flesh" (σάρξ), which occurs eighteen times, though mostly in biblical citations. Philosophically, Theophilus engages much less with the concept than Tatian. In 1.7 he states that God raises man's flesh to immortality together with the soul (ἀνεγείρει γάρ σου τὴν σάρκα ἀθάνατον σὺν τῇ ψυχῇ ὁ θεός), which echoes Tatian, *Oration* 15.2. But unlike Tatian, Theophilus does not defend the belief in a bodily resurrection with a philosophical argument. To conclude, therefore, Theophilus' treatment of anthropological topics, especially the interaction of Pneuma, soul and body in the makeup of man, is philosophically less penetrating than Tatian's and more influenced by biblical exegesis and hermeneutics.

In Irenaeus, by comparison, we find again more philosophical engagement, this time influenced by Irenaeus's debate with his "Gnostic" opponents. In the already-mentioned passage *Against Heresies* 5.6.1, Irenaeus sets out that man as a whole is created in God's image and likeness by the hands of the Father, namely the Son and the Spirit (*spiritus*). The soul and the spirit (*spiritus*), however, are only parts of man. They are not the whole man. The complete man is a mixture and union (*commixtio et adunitio*) of the soul having assumed the spirit of the Father, with the addition of the flesh, formed (*plasmata*) in the image of God.

Irenaeus' main point here is to emphasize that none of the composite parts of the human being (spirit, soul, flesh) can on its own be understood to be the complete human being. But then he does introduce a further complication to his tripartite concept by attributing the divine act of creation to the two "hands of God", the Son and the Spirit. We have seen how Tatian and Theophilus described the role of the Spirit in the creation of man, and this might also be the reason why Irenaeus named the Spirit as an actor in the creation process. Man as a whole is formed by the human soul "assuming" God's spirit (Tatian had called it "assimilating to," *Oration* 4.4), with the "flesh" (*caro*, not "body", as translated by Karamanolis 2013: 190) being "admixed" to complete the full image of God. According to Karamanolis (2013: 191), Irenaeus is here arguing against a position, be it Gnostic or Valentinian, according to which man is only similar to God with regard to spirit (2.29.3). Against this Irenaeus argues that man, as created, is in every respect the image and likeness of God. Irenaeus also follows Tatian and Theophilus in postulating that the soul was created, his proof-text being, as for Theophilus, Genesis 2:7 LXX (ὁ εἰς ψυχὴν ζῶσαν γεγονώς, 5.12.2), and like them he also rejects the natural immortality of the soul, maintaining that immortality is a gift from God (2.34.2). However, unlike Tatian he refrains from explaining how God bestowed this gift on man and how man lost it. Like Theophilus, Irenaeus also polemicizes against the Platonic teaching (*Tim.* 90e–92b) of the soul's transmigration (*Against Heresies* 2.33.1–4). As Karamanolis (2013: 192) has pointed out, he also allots a role to the spirit: "As the soul transforms the body, so the spirit transforms both soul and body, that is, the entire man" (*ibid.*).

This "anthropological" role of the spirit is at the same time strictly "theological": "For Irenaeus the spirit is not responsible for any effect or function of the living body other than making human nature God-like" (Karamanolis 2013: 192–193; *Against Heresies* 5.7.1, 9.1). The soul is responsible for the particular human faculties, sense perception, thinking, understanding, intending (2.29.3). The work of the spirit makes sure that none of these particularities is mistaken for the human being as a whole. What renders (or reveals) the human being as a whole rational, i.e. shaped by reason, is not the soul but the spirit (5.1.3). To be rational in this paradigm is to be created (by God) as a complete human being, soul and body. Even more poignantly, through the incarnation God is included in this distinctly Christian concept of humanity.

Irenaeus is best known for this concept, but this section should have shown that significant elements of it are already present in the work of Tatian and Theophilus.

Freedom and the power to choose

Woven into the idea of creation is the idea of freedom of action, or freedom of the will. This idea is ultimately argued on theological grounds by our three authors. “Creation” (δημιουργία), says Tatian (*Oratio* 4.4), was brought into existence by God (ὕπ’ αὐτοῦ), for us (χάριν ἡμῶν). God had no need (ἀνενδεής) to do this (4.5). He did it because goodness itself is in him alone (7.2). Thus in God, who is good by nature, free action cannot result in anything else but goodness, whether in regard to himself or in regard to everything else apart from him, i.e. creation. When he creates (through the Logos) angels and humans, i.e. beings endowed with his own creative Pneuma, he creates them as by their very nature free (αὐτεξούσιον, *ibid.*), i.e. able, having power over themselves, to accept their state (as creatures), or to reject it.

This has the following implication: Since they are not themselves God (who alone is goodness itself, by nature), they are only good if they freely choose to comply with the will of God. If they act against God’s will, they turn themselves into evil beings and their freedom results in evil and justified punishment, while the good and just receive their deserved praise. The fact that God foresees all this right from the beginning does not negate human freedom. Rather, human beings, who had originally been endowed with God’s Pneuma (which rendered them immortal), turned against God from their own volition and lost their immortality, and the Pneuma receded from them. To make sense of their predicament, humans invented the concept of fate (εἰμαρμένη, 7.3). Through this false concept, they justified the entire edifice of pagan religion, mythology and astrology (8–11; cf. Karadimas 2003). After a detailed and highly polemical refutation of this in his view false and fatalistic conception of reality, Tatian ends with a brief exhortation setting out how humans can regain their freedom: “Die to the world, reject the madness that reigns it! Live for God! . . . We did not come into being in order to die, but we die through ourselves” (11.4).

Theophilus similarly states that God created man free and able to choose (*Autolytus* 2.27). If man obeys God, he will be immortal; if not, mortal. Our current, mortal state has come about through disobedience to God, which was a misuse of freedom. Unlike Tatian, however, Theophilus refrains from stating that man was created immortal in the beginning. Rather, in the beginning man was given the choice between disobedience (mortality) and obedience (immortality). Theophilus thus conceives of immortality as a value added by God to the obedient man’s life, i.e. a form of grace (Karamanolis 2013: 161), whereas for Tatian it is an original possession that was lost through disobedience and has to be regained. Both, however, agree that the ability to gain or regain immortality through the right use of free choice lies firmly with humankind.

Irenaeus’ conception of freedom is closely intertwined with his link between human reason and divine Pneuma mentioned at the end of the previous section. Like Tatian and Theophilus, he states that man “is created free in his will and power over himself” (*Against Heresies* 4.4.3: he probably used the same expression here as Tatian and Theophilus: ἐλεύθερος καὶ αὐτεξούσιος). The reason why this is the case, however, says Irenaeus, is that man is “capable of reason” (*rationabilis*). It is “in this regard” that man is similar to God. It is because man “lost true reason” and handed himself to “every earthly spirit” that he became embroiled in evil and received just punishment. True reason, freedom, power over the self and, in the end, even immortality will be restored when the divine Pneuma is restored in man (5.29.1).

Conclusion

Tatian, Theophilus and Irenaeus were Christian authors writing (in Greek) in the 170s and 180s. They had a working knowledge of a range of school-philosophical positions, with which they critically engaged. As Christians, they also subjected “Greek wisdom” to a more fundamental critique. At the same time, they saw themselves as philosophers and displayed ambitions to develop philosophical approaches of their own in the areas of doctrine of God, cosmogony, anthropology and ethics.

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Clement of Alexandria

Matyáš Havrda

1 Snippets of life

Clement was probably born a non-Christian and raised in Athens, and he must have received excellent grammatical and rhetorical training.¹ There is no reason to think that he studied philosophy beyond the elementary level of a gymnasium.² Indeed, it is likely that he discovered the value of philosophical learning only later in his career, from an already-Christian perspective.³ He mentions six teachers in five regions of the Mediterranean; the first one in mainland Greece, the last in Egypt (*Strom.* 1.11.2). Unfortunately – with the exception of the last teacher, who may be plausibly identified as Pantaenus – we do not know who they were and what they were teachers of.⁴ According to one source, Clement was known in Alexandria in the time of Commodus (180–192).⁵ According to another, he taught there at the catechetical school, where Origen later replaced him.⁶ The first book of his *Stromateis* was written after the death of Commodus.⁷ Clement apparently left Alexandria in the first decade of the third century and died some time in the second decade, possibly in Jerusalem.⁸

2 The word “philosophy”

“Philosophy,” Clement explains, “are the impeccable doctrines (*dogmata*) by each of the schools (I mean, of philosophy), which have been gathered together with the corresponding way of life into one choice set.”⁹ Accordingly, he uses the word “philosophy” in reference to Greek philosophical schools; not as a descriptive, but rather as a normative term: the Stoics “utterly dishonour philosophy” by their views of the divine.¹⁰

Sometimes “Greek philosophy” is contrasted against the philosophy of the “barbarians”, i.e., non-Greeks. Many barbarians have had their “philosophers” or “those who have philosophized”.¹¹ However, by “barbarian philosophy” Clement usually means either the philosophy of the Jews, as rendered by Scripture; or the philosophy of the Christians, which builds on and includes the latter.¹² In the former sense, he also speaks of “the philosophy according to Moses” or “Hebrew philosophy”.¹³ Although he never uses the expression “Christian philosophy”, the notion of “philosophy based on the divine tradition” (*Strom.* 1.52.2) is of the same extension, since “divine tradition” is plainly the tradition of the apostolic church. Other synonyms include

“true philosophy transmitted through the Son” (*Strom.* 1.90.1); “our philosophy” (*Strom.* 2.5.3 and 2.110.1); and “philosophy according to Christ” (*Strom.* 6.67.1). The words “true philosophy” in the full title of the *Stromateis* (“Tapestries of Gnostic Notes in accordance with True Philosophy”) are used in the same sense.¹⁴

What does it take to be a Christian philosopher? In *Stromateis* 4, Clement sets himself the task of showing that “both the slave and the free should philosophize, whether they happen to be a man or a woman by origin”.¹⁵ Here, “philosophizing” amounts to leading a particular way of life, namely the life of temperance (*sōphrosunē*), ready for (martyrial) death. In this sense, one may philosophize even without literacy.¹⁶ However, elsewhere in the *Stromateis*, Clement applies the word “philosophy” to a more restricted use – one that includes a temperate way of life, but accentuates in addition theoretical knowledge. As Clement puts it in the second book, “our philosopher holds unto three things: first, study (*theōria*); second, fulfilling the commandments; third, training good men. When these things come together, they make for a perfect gnostic.”¹⁷

3 Christian teaching

There is some sort of learning associated with faith, accompanying the life of a Christian convert from the beginning. Clement calls it *mathēsis* and describes faith as its culmination.¹⁸ He refers to its contents as “the first bits of learning” (*ta prōta mathēmata*).¹⁹ Most likely it corresponds to catechetical instruction summarizing the main beliefs shared within the Christian community.²⁰

However, there is also another sort of learning, which presupposes but goes beyond these shared beliefs, one requiring literacy and study.²¹ A major aim of Clement’s writings, especially the *Stromateis*, is to defend and elaborate this advanced sort of learning, culminating in knowledge.

This is reflected in the introduction to the *Pedagogue*, where Clement outlines a plan of his literary works, setting it against the backdrop of his Logos theology. Clement insinuates that different parts of his work – at any rate the *Protrepticus* (“exhortatory” oration to the Greeks) and the *Pedagogue* – correspond to different types of activities of the Logos with respect to humanity. First, the Logos *exhorts* by engendering “a desire for life now and hereafter” in the rational soul. Then it *leads* – *paidagogos* being literally a “child-leader” – by healing the soul from passions and training it for a temperate life by means of images and precepts. Finally, in its role as a teacher (*logos didaskalikos*), it trains the soul for the “life of knowledge”, providing “explanations and revelations in matters of doctrine (*en tois dogmatikois*)”.²²

It is unclear if Clement promises to deal with Christian doctrine in another treatise or if anything in his preserved works corresponds to the level of teaching.²³ A natural place to look for an answer is the *Stromateis*: it refers back to the *Protrepticus* and the *Pedagogue*;²⁴ it is much concerned with philosophy; and it discusses knowledge and the idea of the “gnostic”, that is, one who has knowledge. On the other hand, the *Stromateis* too deals mainly with ethical issues, albeit in a different way than the *Pedagogue*: it does not give practical advice of how people should behave in specific circumstances; rather it deals with Christian virtues in a theoretical manner. Thus, the difference between the *Pedagogue* and the *Stromateis* seems to correspond to the difference between practical and theoretical ethic.²⁵ Does the theoretical ethic belong with the “teaching” level of education, as outlined in the *Pedagogue*?

It is attractive to think so. Clement refers to the contents of the *Stromateis* as *ēthikos topos* or *ēthikos logos*, ethical “area” or “account”, traditionally distinguished from other parts of philosophy.²⁶ Moreover, in his plans for the continuation of the *Stromateis*, he envisions some sort of physics (*phusikē theoria*, *phusiologia*) culminating in theology.²⁷

On the other hand, if the goal of the *Stromateis* is to explain and reveal certain doctrines, Clement does not follow this goal in an open and straightforward manner:

The *Stromateis* will contain the truth mixed in the doctrines of philosophy, or rather covered and concealed by them, as the edible part of the nut is covered by the shell. For it is fitting, I suppose, that the seeds of truth be kept solely for the husbandmen of faith.²⁸

When dealing with particular issues, Clement often proceeds by way of quoting, paraphrasing, and commenting upon a variety of sources. His primary source is Scripture, but biblical passages are often accompanied by other material, including Greek philosophical doxography and frequent and substantial quotations from Plato.²⁹

There seems to be more than one goal in this procedure. On the one hand, Clement believes that this method enables those with a correct pre-understanding (“the husbandmen of faith”) to arrive at a correct insight regarding the issues at stake.³⁰ On the other hand, Clement’s interest is also polemical. His discussion is supposed to expose the Greeks as “thieves” of “barbarian philosophy”, who have, among other things, “plagiarized and debased the most important doctrines”.³¹ Thus the cryptic way of presenting true doctrines by mixing them in those of Greek philosophy additionally serves the purpose of exposing Greek doctrines as debased copies of the true ones.

What, then, are the doctrines belonging to Christian philosophy? It would be futile to expect an exhaustive answer of course, not least because only a fraction of the planned work has been preserved. But we may at least arrive at a somewhat clearer idea by paying attention to the interconnection of topics dealt with in the *Stromateis*, and to programmatic passages hinting at the overall plan.

4 Ethical doctrines in the *Stromateis*

In the introduction to *Stromateis* 2, Clement provides a list of issues to be discussed in the framework of “the part before us” – by which he apparently means “the ethical part”, whose starting point is the virtues.³² The items on the list are “the virtues of truth”, namely faith, wisdom, knowledge, science, hope, love, repentance, self-control, and fear of God.³³ Later on, Clement takes on four traditional virtues – courage, temperance, prudence, and justice – adding to them perseverance, patience, chastity, self-control, and piety.³⁴

The discussion starts with a section that sets the agenda of the whole “ethical discourse”. It is an outline of divine education according to sapiential passages in Scripture.³⁵ Employing philosophical and Christian jargon, Clement refers to divine education as “providential dispensation” and “the economy of God”.³⁶ This recalls the “theological” introduction to the *Pedagogue*.³⁷

The discourse on the virtues of truth is a development of these remarks. Virtues of truth are virtues contributing to the attainment of truth according to divine economy. Echoing Proverbs 3:6, Clement notes that there are various ways for wisdom to “turn our ways straight to the way of truth”; the “way of truth” being faith, or rather “*the* faith”, a particular sort of faith, by which the believer accepts Scripture and the apostolic preaching (*kērygma*) as means of divine economy, which leads humanity to salvation.³⁸ In the following paragraphs Clement further elaborates on various aspects of this particular sort of faith, focussing especially on its role as the foundation of knowledge and criterion of truth.³⁹

Another “virtue of truth” is a particular sort of fear, namely the fear of God.⁴⁰ Once again, it is treated against the backdrop of divine economy, where fear is associated primarily with the Mosaic law, understood as an instrument of education.⁴¹ Against the critics who claim that

fear is an irrational passion, Clement defends its rationality (*Strom.* 2.32–40) and points out its connection with other “virtues of truth”, namely faith, repentance, hope, love, and knowledge (2.41.1–2.55.5).⁴² Turning to repentance (*metanoia*), he then deals with the related notions of sin and “that which is up to us” (2.56–71), and concludes by showing that the relation between God and man is based on will, not nature: God wishes to save human beings though the Law, the Prophets, and the Son; human beings, in turn, either wish to accept this gift or not (2.72–77).⁴³

Lurking behind these discussions is the doctrine of the interdependence of virtues, further grounded in a particular view of progress (*prokopē*) and sequence of virtues according to divine education.⁴⁴ In Clement’s view, all virtues are interrelated on the basis of the integrity of the Logos in the economy of salvation. They are also unified on account of their common goal. In a section largely relying on Philo’s treatise *On Virtues*, Clement focusses on specific precepts of the Mosaic law to show how they are conducive to virtues (*Strom.* 2.78–100.1).⁴⁵ He argues that the law “educates to Christ” (cf. Galatians 3:24) and further specifies the goal of this education as becoming “similar to the Lord as far as it is possible for us, who are mortal by nature”.⁴⁶ This interpretation of the goal is, of course, grafted in Greek philosophical ethics; but Clement hopes to show that it was the Greeks who developed their ethical views on the basis of Scripture.⁴⁷

A virtue that seems to be particularly close to this goal is self-control (*enkrateia*). Clement defines it as “the condition of not transgressing that which appears in accordance with right reason”.⁴⁸ Underlying this definition is a psychology of action going back to Stoicism. Animals move on the basis of impulse and impression; but the human soul is additionally endowed with rational capacity, by which it distinguishes among impressions, assenting to some and rejecting others.⁴⁹ Self-control, then, consists in an ability “to hold oneself in check to the extent of not being moved by impulses contrary to right reason”.⁵⁰ The “impulses contrary to right reason” are also called “passions” (*pathē*).⁵¹ Thus, self-control is the control of one’s passions, based on the ability of our rational capacity to follow the “right reason” (*orthos logos*). Now the “right reason”, Clement explains, is the Logos, i.e., Christ.⁵² Passions, on the other hand, are “imprints” made in our souls by evil powers, against whom the believers in Christ wage their fight (cf. Ephesians 6:12).⁵³ As human beings, we have a natural tendency to succumb to passions; but, under good education, we may learn to control them, and even aspire at reaching the state of “freedom from passions” (*apatheia*), which by nature belongs to the Logos only. In this way, by controlling our passions, we aspire at making our condition proximate to the divine nature.⁵⁴ The divine law, Clement believes, prepares us for this fight by its commandments.⁵⁵

It is not surprising, then, that the debate on self-control (*Strom.* 2.105–126) passes into a section dealing with the goal of life. A “doxographic” part, recounting the opinions of Greek philosophers from Epicurus to the Presocratics and back (2.127–131.1), is followed by a summary of the views of Plato and the Old Academy about the goal of life (2.131.2–133).⁵⁶ Promising to respond to these opinions in due time, Clement concludes by setting out the Christian view of the goal, backed up by quotations from the Prophets and Pauline epistles (2.134–136).⁵⁷

The last ten paragraphs of the second and the whole third book of the *Stromateis* may be described as a digression pertaining to the virtue of self-control.⁵⁸ The main question is the following: is the ideal of self-control compatible with married life, or does it imply total abstention from sex, as preached by the so-called Enkratites, radical Christian ascetics? The question is an occasion for Clement to deal with a wide spectrum of views on marriage, bodily pleasure, the value of procreation, celibacy, and related topics; and to explain the correct biblical stance on these issues.

The fourth book, in turn, picks up on the theme of the goal. It explores some aspects of the embodiment of virtues in the life of a perfect Christian, whom Clement calls “the gnostic”.⁵⁹

Specifically, it explores the attitude of the gnostic to suffering and death, and the virtues exemplified by the ultimate “witness” (*martus*) of Christian faith – the martyr.⁶⁰ The inquiry is part of a larger question of “who the perfect one is” and whether everyone – irrespective of social status or gender – can aspire to this goal.⁶¹ Clement answers the second question affirmatively, suggesting that “the entire church” is the place where it happens.⁶² Further, building on the epistles of Paul and Clement of Rome (4.92.2–110.5), Clement further elaborates on the types of perfection and the goals and virtues of gnostic ethic.

In books 5 and 6, Clement appears to be primarily concerned with the virtue of knowledge; again, it is a particular sort of knowledge, whose object is the Logos, as revealed by Scripture and the teaching of Christ. In the fifth book, Clement distinguishes two kinds of faith – a “common faith” (that is to say, faith shared by all Christian believers), serving as the foundation of both salvation and knowledge – and a “special faith” – added as a “mustard seed” (cf. Matthew 17:20 par.) – which instigates the soul towards inquiry.⁶³ Depicting the way to knowledge as an initiation of sorts, Clement takes up the topic of “symbolic genre” – a genre which, as he points out, characterizes the “barbarian philosophy” of Scripture; and he outlines the way towards its correct interpretation, whose initial stage corresponds to baptism.⁶⁴

In book 6, after a preliminary definition of knowledge (*Strom.* 6.3.1–2), Clement draws contrasting pictures of two sorts of wisdom – one pursued by philosophical schools, and one revealed by the Lord through the prophets and through his own coming (*parousia*); and he explores the relation between the two.⁶⁵ Christian philosophers, he argues, are those who love true wisdom, that is, the Son of God, the teacher by whom everything was made.⁶⁶ The goal of their philosophy is knowledge, further characterized as contemplation (*theōria*) of the past, the present, and the future, as “transmitted and revealed by the Son of God”.⁶⁷ At the same time, it is a state of perfection associated with freedom from passions and beneficence, which renders the one who has reached it – the gnostic – “equal to angels”.⁶⁸

Finally, the seventh book deals with the piety of the gnostic, defending him against the charge of atheism (7.1.1–54.4); and it brings the ethical part to a close by enhancing the ideal of gnostic perfection beyond the level of temperance to perfect knowledge and love (7.55.1–87.7).⁶⁹

5 Physics and theology

In *Stromateis* 1, Clement makes a fourfold division of “philosophy according to Moses” into historical, legislative, liturgical, and theological part.⁷⁰ This is an adaptation of a scheme found in Philo, except that Clement’s “theological” part replaces Philo’s “prophetic”.⁷¹ Clement identifies the theological part with epoptics or metaphysics, indicating that the former designation is Platonic, whereas the latter Aristotelian; in addition, he subordinates the historical and legislative parts to ethics, and the liturgical to physics, further adding, beyond the Philonic scheme, dialectic.⁷²

The association of physics with the liturgical part could be based on a cosmological interpretation of the architecture of the Jerusalem temple and the vestments of the High Priest, as described in Exodus 26–28. Philo’s exegesis of these chapters is cosmological throughout, and Clement follows suit to some extent.⁷³ At any rate, Clement’s project of physics includes cosmogony based on Scripture, the Book of Genesis in the first place.⁷⁴ In the continuation of the *Stromateis*, Clement had planned to precede the exposition on physics with a critique of opinions about the principles of nature, including the “most important inventions” of Greek philosophers.⁷⁵ We do not know if Clement ever fulfilled these plans. Occasionally in the extant books, especially books 5 to 7, he seems to give a foretaste of these polemics and expositions.⁷⁶

For instance, in book 5, Clement rehearses the theme of Greek plagiarism, focussing on bits of doctrine pertaining to cosmology and anthropology (both of which must have belonged within his “physics”), as well as theology. He broaches such topics as the existence of matter, the generation of the world, cosmic evil, the distinction between the intelligible and sensible worlds, the end of the world, etc.⁷⁷ In book 6, while dealing with the principles of the gnostic hermeneutic, Clement proposes a “gnostic clarification” of the Decalogue, revolving around similar themes.⁷⁸ Eschatological doctrines were also part of the projected “physics”.⁷⁹

Clement’s theology is not extant, but it would have been based on the trinitarian scheme of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, which Clement accepts as part of the apostolic tradition.⁸⁰ His notion of faith includes the acceptance of particular views concerning God, “the things said in faith”.⁸¹ As mentioned earlier, he speaks of “common faith” in this connection. Although he never cites its content, it probably corresponds to some version of the baptismal confession formula, which would have involved the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.⁸² Hinting, in all likelihood, at the part concerning the Son, Clement makes a distinction between *believing* certain facts about the Son (“that he is the Son and that he came and how and why, and about his passion”) and *knowing* who the Son of God is.⁸³ No doubt the aim of his theology is to articulate the latter.

Clement holds that the Father is known through the Son and cannot be known otherwise.⁸⁴ His main reference texts are Matthew 11:27: “No one knows God, except the Son and those to whom the Son reveals him”,⁸⁵ and John 1:18: “No one has even seen God. The only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, has expounded him.”⁸⁶ The “bosom of the Father”, Clement explains, refers to the invisibility and ineffability of God;⁸⁷ and he draws a contrast between the Son, who is the object of knowledge and even proof, and the Father, who is beyond both.⁸⁸

This contrast seems to be due mainly to the fact that the Father, as the first cause of everything, is ungenerated (*agennētos*), whereas the Son is generated by the Father.⁸⁹ As others before him, Clement describes the generation of the Son as his “going forth” (*proelthōn*) from the Father.⁹⁰ Some Christian thinkers had explained this process as analogous to the expression of thought in speech; hinting at the Stoic distinction between the *logos endiathetos* (internal word, i.e. thought) and *logos prophorikos* (external word, i.e. speech), they depicted the Son as the speech of the Father.⁹¹ Clement rejects this depiction.⁹² For him, the Son is not an expression of the Father’s thought, but rather the very act of that thought. Clement draws a parallel between that which “the barbarians” have called *logos tou theou* (hinting probably at the Johannine *Prologue*) and the Platonic “idea”, understood as “the thought of God”.⁹³ This *logos*-thought originates in God, who is referred to as “the place of ideas” (*chōra ideōn*).⁹⁴ Clement links this expression – which he seems to have found in Philo (*Cher.* 49) – with Plato’s account of the “supercelestial place” in the *Phaedrus*, a place of “colourless, formless, and impalpable being that truly is, beholdable only to the pilot of the soul, the intellect”.⁹⁵ According to Clement, this “beholdability”, i.e. intelligibility, of God is made possible precisely by the Logos, which “goes forth as the cause of creation, and afterwards begets even himself, when the Logos becomes flesh, so that he could be beheld.”⁹⁶

While constantly emphasizing the intelligibility of the Logos, Clement contrasts it against the unintelligibility of the Father. And though he sometimes describes the Father as “intellect” (*nous*),⁹⁷ at the same time he claims that the Father transcends the intelligible realm.⁹⁸ This need not involve a contradiction, insofar as the intellect is not conceived of as the actuality of intelligible entities, but as the origin of intelligible entities which is itself beyond them.⁹⁹ In any case, Clement draws the contrast between the Son and the Father along the following lines: Whereas the Son is “by birth the eldest among the intelligible [entities]”, the Father is “the cause beyond”.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, after a well-known account of the way of “analysis” – the way of

removing dimensions from bodies and the position from points, culminating in “the greatness of Christ” from which we proceed to the “void”—Clement submits that the first cause is “above place, time, name, and intellection”.¹⁰¹ Therefore, he concludes, “the inquiry of God is formless and invisible and the grace of knowledge comes from him through the Son.”¹⁰²

Perhaps the most interesting adumbration of Clement’s theology is found in *Stromateis* 4. First, Clement outlines the distinction between the Father and the Son, noted earlier; then he proceeds to the Spirit, describing it as a plurality of powers, which “contribute” to the Son:

God, then, being not a subject of demonstration, cannot be the object of science. But the Son is wisdom, knowledge, and truth, and all else that is akin to it. Therefore, he allows for demonstration and description. And all the powers of the Spirit, becoming together one thing, contribute to the same thing, that is, the Son. But no concept of any of his powers is indicative of him.¹⁰³

How do the powers contribute to the Son? Clement’s point seems to be epistemological. Having stated that the Son allows for demonstration and description, Clement conceives of the powers of the Spirit as particular attributes of the Son, indicating perhaps that their description and demonstration contribute to the description and demonstration of the Son.¹⁰⁴ Nonetheless, Clement continues, “no concept of any of his powers is indicative of him”; that is to say, none of these attributes suffices to reveal the nature of the Son. In the next step, Clement further elaborates on the nature of the Son as unity in plurality, as opposed to unity pure and simple on the one hand, and plurality on the other:

Thus the Son is not simply one as one, nor many as parts, but rather [one] as all-one; whence he is also the all. For he is the circle of all powers that turn towards one and become unified.¹⁰⁵

This distinction is clearly inspired by a metaphysical interpretation of the first two hypotheses of Plato’s *Parmenides*.¹⁰⁶ It is likely that Clement reserves the first type of unity (“one as one”) to the Father. In another passage, he addresses the difficulty of speaking about and pointing at the “first and eldest principle” of everything, namely the Father, the difficulty being due, among other things, to the absence of any division and limit in the “one”.¹⁰⁷

Clement proposes several ways of dealing with these limits of language, which also appear to be the limits of his theology. One is the way of negation, by which “we might, in one way or another, draw near to the intellection of the almighty, not recognizing what he is, but what he is not.”¹⁰⁸ Another way is relying on a plurality of “beautiful names”, none of which expresses God, but all of which together indicate his power.¹⁰⁹ Yet another way is “silent worship and holy awe”.¹¹⁰

6 Dialectic

Clement uses the word “dialectic” in two ways, one of which may be labelled “Aristotelian” and the other “Platonic”.¹¹¹ In the first sense, dialectic is an art dealing with syllogisms; it is an “exercise of a philosopher concerning reputable opinions for the sake of the capacity to produce a counterargument”.¹¹² More generally, it is the art of asking and answering questions.¹¹³ Mastering it is useful for Christians, as it helps them “not to succumb to the attacks of the heresies”.¹¹⁴ Jesus himself was a good dialectician, as he knew how to respond to the devil’s temptation (cf. Matt 4:4).¹¹⁵

Dialectic in the second sense is “a science enabling one to discover the clarification of things” (cf. Plato, *Pol.* 287a); it is pursued by a wise man “not for the sake of speaking and acting before men, . . . but that he may be able to speak and to do everything, so far as possible, in a manner pleasing to God” (cf. Plato, *Phdr.* 273e). Like Plato, Clement associates it with the art of division:

For the true dialectic is knowledge capable of making divisions among the objects of thought and showing purely and pristinely what lies underneath each thing; or, it is a capacity to make divisions among the genera of things, descending all the way to the most peculiar and making each thing appear purely as it is.¹¹⁶

Clement does not explain these definitions; but he takes them as descriptions of the way to true religious knowledge:

True dialectic, by inspecting things and testing powers and principalities, ascends above them to the most mighty substance of all and dares even beyond, to the God of the universe. It promises the science of things divine and heavenly, followed also by the appropriate way of handling human affairs, as regards both words and acts.¹¹⁷

Notwithstanding the Platonic origin of most of these formulations, Clement insists that true dialectic is mediated by the Son;¹¹⁸ and it is applied in scriptural interpretation, where it helps getting hold of “the continuity of the divine teaching”.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, Clement does not give much detail of how dialectic should be applied to Scripture. At one point he suggests that the gnostic should be able to distinguish between names and objects in Scripture and pay attention to cases when one word has several meanings or several words have one meaning, as it will help him to “answer correctly”.¹²⁰ This is an application of dialectic in the “Aristotelian” sense, but it is subordinated to the programme of “true dialectic”.

Associated with it is also the notion of proof: “Rational exposition concerning things that have been grasped by thought, aligned with choice and assent, is called dialectic. It confirms the things said about truth by demonstration, while disposing of difficulties brought up against them.”¹²¹ Clement had planned to practise this sort of dialectic in the continuation of the *Stromateis*, where he had promised to solve some “difficulties” (*aporiai*) raised against Christian faith by the Greeks and the barbarians.¹²² His interest in the theory of demonstration, attested in the so-called eighth book of the *Stromateis*, was probably part of a project of “true dialectic” as the method of Christian philosophy.¹²³

7 The use of Greek philosophy

Clement defends Greek philosophy against believers who claim that it exhausts us in vain and detains us by things not contributing to our goal; that it ruins our lives, being discovered or instigated by an evil power; that it is a demiurge of false realities and bad deeds, dragging us away from faith; merely a human invention without any benefit – and, in consequence, reject all philosophy and Greek education and require sole faith.¹²⁴ Clement argues that an evil power cannot give rise to anything good; and even if philosophy were instigated by the devil, it would not be able to mislead those eager to learn, had it not contained something true; that human reason is of divine origin; and, generally, that philosophy is more or less directly a work of divine providence, in other words, that it belongs within the economy of salvation.¹²⁵

In particular, Clement applauds the ability of Greek philosophy to “improve the soul”, i.e., to reach roughly the effect of the “pedagogical” phase of divine education.¹²⁶ He acknowledges that, before the coming of Christ, philosophy had been capable of bringing the Greeks to temperance and justice to some extent;¹²⁷ and he sets it in parallel with the Jewish law.¹²⁸ It is apparently in this respect that, in the *Protrepticus*, Clement proclaims Greek philosophy obsolete after the coming of Christ.¹²⁹

Nonetheless, in the *Stromateis*, Clement maintains that philosophy is useful even for Christian education.¹³⁰ He mentions several reasons why it is useful; the most interesting one being that it “exercises the mind” and “stimulates intelligence”, which, in turn, “generates sagacity capable of searching by means of true philosophy”.¹³¹ Thus he suggests that philosophical training gives rise to intellectual virtues, which can then be employed in service of the Christian type of inquiry. Clement also describes philosophy as a “propaedeutic for those who bear the fruit of faith through demonstration”.¹³² This appears to mean that philosophical arguments in favour of certain doctrines can be adapted in such a way as to render the standpoint of Christian faith more convincing. The method of comparing philosophical doctrines with relevant scriptural passages and rethinking these doctrines against the backdrop of divine economy seems to play an important part in this procedure.¹³³ Finally, Clement also appreciates the ability of Greek philosophy to expose sophistic arguments.¹³⁴ Again, he hopes to exploit this feature in the service of faith, over against its critics among the Greeks, as well as against the “heterodox” schools of barbarian philosophy.¹³⁵ None of this, however, is such as to make Greek philosophy indispensable for a Christian thinker, since “the teaching according to the Saviour”, that is to say, Christian philosophy, is self-complete and needs nothing else.¹³⁶

8 Conclusion: Clement’s philosophy

It has been shown in particular by S.R.C. Lilla that Clement’s project of “true philosophy” runs parallel to certain trends in contemporary Platonism; and Clement comes close to his Platonist peers in many points of detail.¹³⁷ On the other hand, Lilla’s contention that, in his version of Christianity, Clement sought to solve the problems of contemporary Platonism is hard to sustain.¹³⁸ The backbone of Clement’s thought is the “salvific economy” of the Logos: a chain of divine epiphanies mediated by Scripture, culminating in the advent of Christ, and further handed down by the apostolic church.¹³⁹ This notion is neither derived from Greek philosophy nor is it really similar to anything found in it. Clement’s main concern as a philosopher is to draw ethical, cosmological, and theological consequences from the salvific economy; and though he takes advice from a variety of sources – and does not shrink from appropriating anything he finds useful – his sources never divert him from the main concern of his thought; on the contrary, they are always adapted to it.

Notes

- 1 Non-Christian: Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*. 2.2.64; but see Riedweg 1987: 117–123; Méhat 1966: 43. Raised in Athens: Epiphanius, *Panarion* 32.6.1; Tollinton 1914: 3f. For the system of education in Clement’s time, cf. Hadot 1984: 215–261. For Clement’s extraordinary rhetorical and literary competence, cf. Steneker 1967; Le Boulluec 2017: 86–94, 103–106.
- 2 Against Rizzerio 1996: 10–17, who suggests that Clement studied with Atticus. Cf. also Tollinton 1914: 5f. For a different (but equally speculative) account of Clement’s formation, cf. Ashwin-Siejkowski 2008: 19–31.
- 3 His earliest known work *Protrepticus* betrays a much less sophisticated and more hostile attitude towards Greek philosophy than the one displayed in the *Stromateis*. Cf. esp. *Protrepticus* 64.1–3; 66.1–67.2;

- 112.1. Even references to Plato are crudely condescending; cf. *Protr.* 68.1–3. This is surely part of the rhetorical strategy of this piece; but it could also reflect an early stage of Clement’s own development.
- 4 For some suggestions cf. Ferguson 1974: 14; Ramelli 2009: 29f. For Pantaenus, cf. Eusebius, *Church History*. 5.11.1; Ramelli 2017: 106–110; Le Boulluec 2017: 60–65.
 - 5 Julius Africanus in Cedrenus, *Compendium of History* 1.441 (Bekker).
 - 6 Eusebius, *Church History* 5.11.1. For the catechetical school cf. van den Hoek 1997; Wyrwa 2005; Le Boulluec 2017: 65–72.
 - 7 Cf. *Stromateis* 1.144.3–5.
 - 8 Scholars have derived the *terminus ante quem* of Clement’s death from two sources: 1. Eusebius, *Church History* 6.14.8–9, quoting a letter from Alexander, the bishop of Jerusalem, written after Clement’s death. However, the letter has been dated alternatively to 216 (Zahn) or 233 (Nautin). 2. Julius Africanus’ *Chronologies*, completed by 221. According to Méhat (1966: 49), Africanus’ remark on Clement, mentioned earlier, is suggestive of being written of a deceased man. For further details of Clement’s biography, see Le Boulluec 2017: 58–74.
 - 9 *Strom.* 6.55.3.
 - 10 *Protr.* 66.3.
 - 11 Cf. *Strom.* 1.68.1; 1.71.4–6. Cf. also *Strom.* 6.35.2; 6.37.3; and 6.38.1. Clement attributes this generous view of philosophy to Plato, in contrast to Epicurus, “who supposes that only the Greeks are capable of philosophizing” (*Strom.* 1.67.1); for the Platonic background cf. Wyrwa 1983: 87–101.
 - 12 Cf. e.g. *Paed.* 2.100.4 as opposed to *Strom.* 1.99.1; 2.5.1; 5.56.2–3; 6.67.1–2 and 8.1.2.
 - 13 Cf. *Paed.* 2.18.1; *Strom.* 1.64.5; 1.72.4; 1.73.6; 1.176.1.
 - 14 Cf. Havrda 2016: 129, with references.
 - 15 *Strom.* 4.1.1. Clement possibly alludes to Aristotle’s (lost) *Protrepticus*, cited (anonymously) in *Strom.* 6.162.5. I’m grateful to Mark Edwards for drawing my attention to this.
 - 16 *Strom.* 4.58.3. Similarly *Strom.* 4.62.4; 4.67.1; 4.69.4. For faith without literacy cf. also *Paedagogus* 3.78.2; *Strom.* 1.99.1.
 - 17 *Strom.* 2.46.1. Cf. *Strom.* 7.4.2; Alcinous, *Didascalía* 3.1 (153.25–28 H).
 - 18 Cf. *Paed.* 1.29.1; *Strom.* 5.2.6.
 - 19 *Paed.* 1.39.1; *Strom.* 5.62.3.
 - 20 Cf. *Paed.* 1.30.2; *Ecl.* 28.3; *Strom.* 5.13.1.
 - 21 Cf. *Strom.* 1.35.2.
 - 22 *Paed.* 1.1.3–3.3. For the philosophical backdrop of this scheme, cf. Havrda 2019.
 - 23 For this contested issue, cf. Le Boulluec 2017: 116–119.
 - 24 *Strom.* 6.1.3–4.
 - 25 Cf. Méhat 1966: 92–94; Wagner 1968; Havrda 2019, whose conclusions are accepted by Le Boulluec 2019: 94–95.
 - 26 *Strom.* 4.1.2; 6.1.1; 7.110.4. For parts of philosophy as *topoi*, cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 7.40.
 - 27 *Strom.* 1.15.2; 4.3.1–2; 6.168.4. Clement possibly dealt with these issues in some of his lost works: the *Hypotyposesis*, which could have been the continuation of the *Stromateis* (cf. Bucur 2009: 6–27; Rizzi 2012); or *On Principles and Theology*, mentioned in *QDS* 26.8. For the tripartite division into ethics, physics, and theology, see further later.
 - 28 *Strom.* 1.18.1; cf. 7.111.3.
 - 29 Cf. Méhat 1966: 115–135; Wyrwa 1983.
 - 30 Cf. *Strom.* 1.20.3.
 - 31 *Strom.* 2.1.1. For the plagiarism theme, cf. Lilla 1971: 31–41; Wyrwa 1983: 87–100, 298–316; Droge 1989; Ridings 1995; Schneider 1999: 55–58. Clement relies on Jewish scholar Aristobolus (186–145 B.C.) claiming that parts of the Torah had been available in Greek translation before the Septuagint was commissioned by Demetrius of Phaleron: “So it is clear that [Plato] took many things [from there], for he was a very erudite man, just as Pythagoras also transferred many things from us to his own body of doctrine” (*Strom.* 1.150.1–3).
 - 32 *Strom.* 2.1.1–2; 2.78.1; cf. Havrda 2016: 52.
 - 33 *Strom.* 2.1.1.
 - 34 *Strom.* 2.78.1.
 - 35 *Strom.* 2.4.1–5.5, based mainly on Proverbs 3:5–12 and Wisdom 7:17–21.
 - 36 *Strom.* 2.4.2–3.
 - 37 Cf. Havrda 2019.
 - 38 *Strom.* 2.4.2. For the Christian content of faith cf. e.g. *Strom.* 2.25.3; 2.29.2–3.

- 39 *Strom.* 2.7.1–2.31.3. On faith as criterion, cf. *Strom.* 2.7.2; 2.12.1. For the whole section, cf. Wyrwa 1983: 142–173. For Clement’s notion of faith (*pistis*), cf. esp. Lilla 1971: 118–142; Schneider 1999: 282–291.
- 40 *Strom.* 2.32.1–40.3 and 2.46.1–54.5.
- 41 *Strom.* 2.37.2–3. Hence the importance of fear in the *Pedagogue*; cf. Schneider 1999: 272–275.
- 42 Cf. Ashwin–Siejkowski 2008: 68–78.
- 43 For the notion of will, cf. Havrda 2011.
- 44 Clement outlines different versions of this sequence. Cf. *Strom.* 2.30.2; 2.31.1; 2.45.1; 2.105.1. See further Černušková 2012: 172n33, with references. For the philosophical background, cf. Lilla 1971: 83f. For the notion of progress, cf. Kovacs 2001.
- 45 Cf. van den Hoek 1988: 69–115.
- 46 *Strom.* 2.91.1 and 2.80.4–5.
- 47 Cf. *Strom.* 2.78.1; 2.100.3–101.1. Cf. Wyrwa 1983: 176–189; Havrda 2011: 37f., with references.
- 48 *Strom.* 2.80.4.
- 49 *Strom.* 2.110.4–111.2. For “assent”, cf. 2.111.4.
- 50 *Strom.* 2.80.4. Cf. Sextus Empiricus, *Mathesis* 9.153; SVF 3.274 and 275 (Arnim).
- 51 Cf. *Strom.* 2.59.6.
- 52 Cf. *Strom.* 2.19.1–2; 2.134.2; cf. *Paed.* 1.101.1–102.4. Cf. Völker 1952: 133f.
- 53 *Strom.* 2.110.1–3. Clement calls this interpretation a “simple account of our philosophy”. For the fight against evil powers, cf. also *Strom.* 2.109.2; 2.120.2–3; 2.126.1.
- 54 Cf. *Strom.* 2.80.5–81.1; 2.103.1. For *apatheia*, cf. Lilla 1971: 103–106; Schneider 1999: 204–230; Kovacs 2012.
- 55 Cf. *Strom.* 2.105.1.
- 56 Cf. Wyrwa 1983: 173–175.
- 57 Cf. Wyrwa 1983: 187f.
- 58 Cf. Wyrwa 1983: 190f.
- 59 Clement adopts this term from his “heterodox” opponents; cf. *Paed.* 1.31.2; 1.35.1; 1.52.2; *Strom.* 2.10.2; 2.117.5; 3.30.1; 4.15.5; 4.114.2; 4.116.1; 5.1.5. The most complete account of Clement’s depiction of the gnostic remains Völker 1952.
- 60 Cf. esp. *Strom.* 4.13–57.1; controversial aspects of martyrdom are further dealt with in 4.70–92.1.
- 61 Cf. *Strom.* 4.1.1; van den Hoek 1993.
- 62 *Strom.* 4.57.2–69, esp. 4.58.2–59.3; 4.67.1–68.2; 4.118–129.1.
- 63 *Strom.* 5.2.4–3.1; Havrda 2010: 4f.
- 64 *Strom.* 5.19.3–13; 5.88.5. For the “symbolic genre”, cf. Le Boulluec 2017a.
- 65 Cf. *Strom.* 6.54.1–56.1.
- 66 *Strom.* 6.55.2.
- 67 *Strom.* 6.61.1–3.
- 68 *Strom.* 6.105.1. For the *apatheia* of the gnostic, cf. 6.71–79.
- 69 Cf. Havrda et al. (eds.) 2012.
- 70 *Strom.* 1.176.1–2.
- 71 Cf. van den Hoek 1988: 60–62.
- 72 *Strom.* 1.176.2–3. For the triad ethics, physics, epoptics/metaphysics, cf. Perkams 2015. As Wyrwa points out, dialectic is neither equivalent to epoptics, nor an additional part of philosophy, but rather “the whole philosophy from a specific point of view” (Wyrwa 1983: 124). See further later.
- 73 Cf. *Strom.* 5.32–40; Van den Hoek 1993: 116–147.
- 74 Cf. *Strom.* 1.15.2; 2.5.1; 4.3.2–3; 6.168.4. For Clement’s cosmology, cf. Lilla 1971: 189–199.
- 75 Cf. *Strom.* 4.2.1.
- 76 Cf. Lilla 1971: 190, regarding cosmogony.
- 77 Cf. *Strom.* 5.89–139; Wyrwa 1983: 305–316.
- 78 *Strom.* 6.133–148; cf. Edwards 2015.
- 79 Cf. *Strom.* 2.87.1; possibly also 4.162.2, referring back to 4.161.2–162.1. For Clement’s eschatology, cf. Ramelli 2012.
- 80 Cf. *Paed.* 1.42.1; 3.101.2; *Strom.* 5.103.1; QDS 34.1; 42.19–20; *Ecl.* 29.1. Cf. Lebreton 1947; Ziebritzki 1994: 124–126.
- 81 Cf. *Strom.* 1.35.2; cf. *Strom.* 2.17.3.
- 82 For Clement’s hints to the trinitarian confession, cf. *Strom.* 5.73.2 (and *Exc.* 80.3); cf. also *Strom.* 1.31.5; van den Hoek 1988: 39f. For “confession”, see further *Paed.* 2.36.2; *Strom.* 4.70–73; 5.71.2; 7.67.1; 7.90.1–2.

- 83 *Strom.* 5.1.2; cf. Havrda 2010: 2–4.
- 84 Cf. *Strom.* 5.71.5; 7.2.2–3; and references below, notes 91–94.
- 85 *Protr.* 10.3; *Paed.* 1.20.2; *Strom.* 1.178.2.
- 86 *Strom.* 1.169.4; 5.81.3; *QDS* 37.1; *Exc.* 8.1–2.
- 87 *Strom.* 5.81.3.
- 88 Cf. *Strom.* 4.156.1; 5.82.3–4.
- 89 For the contrast, cf. esp. *Strom.* 6.58.1; 6.78.5.
- 90 *Strom.* 5.16.5. Cf. Ignatius, *Magnesians* 7.2; Justin, *Trypho* 100.4; Tatian, *Oration* 5.4; Athenagoras, *Embassy* 10.3. The term is also used in a relevant sense by the Valentinians; cf. Clement, *Excerpts from Theodotus* 7.1–2; 32.2; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.14.5. Cf. Krämer 1964: 238–254.
- 91 Cf. Theophilus, *To Autolytus* 2.22.3–4, and (despite Edwards 2000: 160) Justin, *Trypho* 61.2; cf. Casey 1924: 50–56; Mühl 1962: 44–50.
- 92 *Strom.* 5.6.3. Cf. already Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 2.28.5–6, against the Valentinians; cf. Edwards 2000: 162f. and 169f., on Clement.
- 93 *Strom.* 5.16.3. For ideas as thoughts of God, cf. Boys-Stones 2018: 135f., with references.
- 94 *Strom.* 4.155.2; 5.73.3.
- 95 Plato, *Phaedrus* 247c4–8, quoted in *Strom.* 5.16.4. Cf. Wyrwa 1983: 262f. For the notion of God as “place”, cf. also Gyurkovics 2017.
- 96 *Strom.* 5.16.5.
- 97 Cf. *Protr.* 98.4; *Strom.* 4.155.2; 4.162.5.
- 98 *Strom.* 5.38.6; cf. Havrda 2010: 14–18; Le Boulluec 2016: 131.
- 99 Cf. Wyrwa 1983: 130, interpreting the intelligible entities as angels. Cf. also Havrda 2010: 17f. For the Platonist background, cf. Boys-Stones 2018: 152–159.
- 100 *Strom.* 7.2.3.
- 101 *Strom.* 5.71.5. For the way of analysis, described in *Strom.* 5.71.2–3, cf. Hägg 2006: 217–227, with references; cf. also Havrda 2010: 18–21.
- 102 *Strom.* 5.71.5; cf. Philo, *Posterity of Cain* 15.
- 103 *Strom.* 4.156.1.
- 104 The powers of the Spirit probably correspond to the “first-created angels”, mentioned by Clement on other occasions; cf. Bucur 2009: 28–32. Clement must have planned to include angelology in the theological part of his project; relevant passages in the *Excerpts from Theodotus* and *Prophetic Extracts* – fragmentary texts whose origin and purpose is disputed – seem to bear witness to this intention.
- 105 *Strom.* 4.156.2.
- 106 Cf. Whittaker 1969; Lilla 1971: 205f.; Lilla 1994: 38. Cf. already Osborn 1957: 17f. For the Platonist reception of *Parmenides*, see further Boys-Stones 2018: 60, with references.
- 107 *Strom.* 5.81.6.
- 108 *Strom.* 5.71.3. For parallels, cf. Lilla 1994: 37f.; Boys-Stones 2018: 162.
- 109 *Strom.* 5.82.1–2. Cf. Maximus of Tyre, *Diss.* 2.10; Le Boulluec 2016: 126.
- 110 *Strom.* 7.2.3; cf. Hägg 2012: 132–135; Perrone 2012: 145f., with references.
- 111 For the first sort of dialectic, cf. Schneider 1999: 254f. For the second, cf. Wyrwa 1983: 125–131, with references. Cf. also Osborn 2005: 62–68.
- 112 *Strom.* 1.26.4; 1.39.5; 1.41.2.
- 113 *Strom.* 1.45.4 *ad Prov* 22:21.
- 114 *Strom.* 1.99.4. Cf. *Strom.* 6.81.4.
- 115 *Strom.* 1.44.4.
- 116 *Strom.* 1.176.3.
- 117 *Strom.* 1.177.1.
- 118 *Strom.* 1.178.1–2.
- 119 *Strom.* 1.179.4.
- 120 *Strom.* 6.82.3. Clement has either disputes with the “heretics” or teaching in mind.
- 121 *Strom.* 6.156.2.
- 122 *Strom.* 6.1.4. Cf. *Strom.* 7.89.1; Havrda 2012: 263f.
- 123 For *Stromateis* 8, cf. Havrda 2016.
- 124 Cf. *Strom.* 1.18.2–3; 1.20.1–2; 1.43.1; 6.66.1; 6.80.5; 6.93.1.
- 125 Cf. *Strom.* 1.18.3; 1.44.4; 1.94.2; 6.62.4; 6.66.1–5; 7.5.5–6.4. Cf. Lilla 1971: 9–31; Recinová 2012: 110f.
- 126 Cf. *Strom.* 7.3.2; cf. *Paed.* 1.1.4; 1.67.1 (cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 477a); 1.74.3.

- 127 Temperance: *Strom.* 1.80.5. Justice: *Strom.* 1.28.1; 1.37.5; 1.94.2; 1.99.3; 2.7.1; 6.45.5; 6.159.9. Clement regards temperance and justice as inferior, “human” virtues, in contradistinction to “prudence” (φρόνησις) and “piety” (ὀσιότης); *Strom.* 6.125.4–5.
- 128 *Strom.* 1.28.3; 1.99.3; 6.44.1; 6.45.5; 6.110.3; 6.159.9; 6.161.5; 7.11.2.
- 129 *Protr.* 112.1. Cf. *Strom.* 6.55.2: “We call ‘philosophers’ those who love wisdom, the artificer of everything and a teacher, i.e. the knowledge of the Son of God; the Greeks call ‘philosophers’ those engaged in arguments about virtues.”
- 130 Cf. Schneider 1999: 232–264.
- 131 *Strom.* 1.32.4.
- 132 *Strom.* 1.28.1; cf. 1.20.2.
- 133 Cf. *Strom.* 1.20.3. Clement effectively describes the attitude of a Christian thinker to Greek philosophy as one of a thief; cf. *Strom.* 6.89.3.
- 134 Cf. *Strom.* 1.29.4; 1.100.1; 6.81.4.
- 135 *Strom.* 1.28.4; 1.100.1; 6.81.4.
- 136 *Strom.* 1.100.1; cf. 6.162.1.
- 137 Cf. Lilla 1971. For the project of “true philosophy”, parallels between Clement and Numenius are particularly instructive; cf. *Strom.* 1.57.6; 6.57.3 and Numenius, frs. 24 and 1a (Des Places); cf. Waszink 1965: 155–158; Droge 1989: 146–149; Boys-Stones 2001: 140n20 and 192f.
- 138 Lilla speaks of “Neoplatonic problems”; cf. Lilla 1971: 232–234. For the debate on Clement’s “Platonism”, cf. Wyrwa 1983: 14–23.
- 139 Cf. esp. Schneider 1999: 63–82 and *passim*.

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Tertullian and Cyprian

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Introduction

Both Tertullian (155–240) and Cyprian (200–258) claim following their conversions to have forsaken Greek philosophy. The former famously asked: ‘What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Church with the Academy, the Christian with the heretic?’ (*Prescription*, 3.249) and the latter claimed that he had been ‘estranged from the truth and the light’ (*Donatus*, 3). But as Wittgenstein pointed out, in order to have agreement or disagreement ‘in opinion,’ you require a prior, mutual ‘agreement in form of life’ for your dialogue to be intelligible. And the implied conceptual backcloth against which both first agreed in opinion with Hellenism and then disagreed with it was a widely accepted Stoicism that assumed many cultural and political forms in the discourse in which they now engaged.

Let us first outline a Stoic world view selecting specific elements that will assist our exegesis of the philosophical assumptions of Tertullian and Cyprian.

1 Stoic metaphysics and Tertullian’s theology

Zeno of Citium (362–334 BC) taught against Plato that there was no final distinction between matter and spirit (Zeno, *Περὶ οὐσίας* (= Diogenes Laertius, 7.134). The rational order of the universe implies a divine λόγος that permeates all things, ‘like honey through honeycombs,’ as Tertullian points out with approval against the Platonist view of Hermogenes that preexisting matter simply reflects a divine reality that it cannot realize in itself (*Hermogenes*, 44; *Nations*, 2.4). But the divine λόγος is itself material since there is no ontological distinction between matter and spirit: the universe is a monism.

Within the monism, there are two principles at work, the active (τὸ ποιῶν) and the passive principle (τὸ πάσχον). The active principle is the divine λόγος that is material and like a refined fire, and the ‘creation’ of the world is the result of the modification of his spiritual body (Origen, *Celsus*, 6.7). God himself is ‘the fiery mind (νοῦς)’ (Aëtius, 1.7.23). God is spirit, Tertullian will own, but ‘spirit has a bodily substance of its own kind (*corpus sui generis*), in its own form (*in sua effigie*).’¹ The λόγος (*ratio*) must therefore have bodily substance from the same substance as God (*ex ipsius substantia*) when it (he) is sent forth from God when God speaks and his *ratio* becomes *sermo*.²

If *ratio* is spirit, and spirit is *corpus*, then *sermo* too is *sermo* with a *corporeal* form.³ In consequence therefore of Stoic hylomorphism, Tertullian is able to give philosophical justification to his Christian theology. He proposes to designate ‘whatever is the substance of the *sermo* . . . a person (*persona*) and claim for it the name of “Son,” the active principle (τὸ ποιῶν) that creates the world.’⁴ Zeno supports the view that the λόγος as both *sermo* and *ratio* is the ‘maker (*artificem*) . . . of the universe (*universitatis*),’ since he is the ‘shaper (*factitorem*) who fashioned all things in their arrangement (*qui cuncta in dispositione formaverit*).’ The Logos is the soul of the universe and is thus called ‘the soul of Juppiter’ in Stoicism: his nature is attributed by Cleanthes to the spirit that ‘runs through (*permeatorem*)’ the whole. Tertullian will regard the way in which God creates the world in terms of Stoic hylomorphism rather than resorting to a crude anthropomorphism. Before creation, God had not yet uttered his word or *sermo*. It existed in himself as his reason (*ratio*). But in the process of divine reasoning within himself, he was actually forming the Logos that he was afterwards to utter as *sermo* (*Apology*, 21.10 (43–49), cf. Seneca, *Naturales Quaestiones*, 2.45.1 (533)). Thus once the divine Word is uttered, then all things are created in accordance with the hylomorphic postulates just as the Stoic Logos is the fiery substance that produces the empirical fire together with air, earth and water by a process of rationally modifying its substance.⁵ The Son as second person in the Godhead thus assumes a cosmic function understood in terms of Stoic philosophy.

The concept of the Logos as ‘world soul’ in the body of the world is paralleled in that of soul-body in individual humans. The human soul must therefore be material. Thus Tertullian derives support from Zeno, Chrysippus and Cleanthes. Zeno claimed that the body would not die because the soul had left it if the soul was not material like the body.⁶ Cleanthes points to the inheritance of family traits that are not merely physical.⁷ Chrysippus argues that in order for things to be separated or joined, they must have an ontological relationship that in this case is corporality.⁸ Because of the unity of body and soul, once the soul has departed it can no longer grow and develop with the body so that it remains what it was at the point of death: babies will remain babies, adults, adults, the aged, aged and so on: ‘we receive back at the resurrection the self-same bodies’ in which we died, waiting the time when ‘it will be promised again brought to completion (*perfectum*), blended to the proportion of angelic fullness (*ad angelicae plenitudinis mensuram temperatum*).’⁹

2 Cyprian and political theology in the third century

Although Cyprian does not concern himself with Christological reflection against heretics, nor with speculation about the nature of the soul, nevertheless there is point to considering both together in that they both have views on the understanding of eschatology that reflect Stoic metaphysics and that forms an essential though neglected part of the study of that philosophy. Let us now consider this aspect of Stoicism.

2.1 Stoic ontology and eschatology

Creation for Stoicism had no historical final end but nevertheless experienced an endless cycle of decline and renewal. As such it provided a philosophical theology in justification of the myth of the four ages, the age of gold, of silver, of bronze and of iron, and their descent into each other in a cycle of change. Though the universe was a hylomorphic monism, nevertheless there was change as a result of a kind of expansion and contraction of the refined, aetherial fire that was the divine Logos that gave the world its order and movement by a process of internal reasoning. The Logos, the ‘flame’ (Cleanthes), the ‘ray of light’ (Chrysippus) one might say,

congealed into the four elements of empirical fire, air, earth and water and then into the objects of the universe and their rational order (Achilles, *Isogoge*, 8.131; Pseudo Hippolytus, *Refutatio*, 10.6.4; see also Rist 1977: 175–176).

But the universe was not to last in this form, but a kind of contraction was to take place again and the elements resolve themselves once again into the divine, fiery Logos from which they had proceeded. This process was known as the ἐκπύρωσις or the final conflagration that ended one cycle. But the cycles were to proceed again never endingly repeating this pattern. Tertulian compared this Stoic eschatology with ‘the last and complete Day of Judgement’ when not repeatedly but once and for all ‘the wearing out of the present age (*saeculi uetustas*) and all of its rebirths (*natiuitates*) will be absorbed into the one fire’ (*On the Shows* 30.2).

From a post-Enlightenment perspective, it is thus attractive to describe the cyclical process that has beginnings that lead to ends in terms of inorganic chemistry with the words ‘expansion,’ ‘contraction’ and ‘congealment.’ But the source of movement and change was rather personal: the λόγος was personalized as Zeus and preexisted in a reflecting divine mind before becoming a creating *sermo*. Thus the natural order, like the social order in a pre-Enlightenment world in which nature and society were one, was the result of πρόνοια or ‘forethought’ that became εἰμαρμένη or predestined ‘fate’ (Chrysippus, *On Ends* (in Stobaeus, *Excerpts* 1.39.1). As Chrysippus said: ‘When the ἐκπύρωσις takes place . . . then they both turn together into the one common nature of the fiery ether and continue’ (Plutarch, *De communibus notitiis aduersus Stoicos*, 36). But in its ability to give philosophical justification to the myth of the cyclical four ages, Stoic eschatology was able to support a strategy of political legitimation.

2.2 Stoic eschatology and political legitimation

If the divine λόγος permeating all things was a rationally planned organization of present and future shaping an unalterable destiny, then *prodigia* and *portenta*, indicating the future for good or ill, could be philosophically explained, as Balbus the representative of Stoicism was to assure Cotta in Cicero’s dialogue (*Nature of the Gods* 2.39 and 73; cf. Brent 1999: 19–23).¹⁰ The taking of the *auspicia* by the augur before or after the deliberations of a popular assembly or before embarking on a military campaign was necessary to achieve the ‘peace’ and not the anger of the gods (*pax deorum*). Augustus’ Principate was confirmed by his successful performance of the *augurium salutis* that had failed Republican consuls. And thus by slow degrees a Stoic eschatology was created in which the occurrence of hostile *portenta* came to mark the decline of an age into collapse and breakup but favourable *prodigia* the restoration of a new world order.

Thus under Augustus the Principate was to develop on the basis of Stoic rationalism a political philosophy that identified him as the agent of destiny inaugurating the new, golden age (*saeculum aureum*), following the decline and breakup of the age of iron. It was celebrated as such in verse by Vergil (*Aeneid*, 6.792–793) and aesthetically in architecture in the consecration of the Ara Pacis. Here was the myth of the four ages and their never-ending, cyclic repetition duly appropriated in the *Pax Augusta* as a powerful myth of political legitimation. But it was not a myth without rational justification in terms of a powerful, Stoic philosophical theology, as Lucan was to present in his *Bellum Ciuile*. Here, without introducing gods and goddesses into the characteristic, epically devised scene as the unseen movers of events, Lucan introduces a demythologized, Stoic metaphysic: the civil war begins with an *haruspicium* in which the *haruspex* interprets the deformed liver of the sacrifice as showing ‘not the peace (*pax*) but the anger (*ira*) of the gods’ (*De Bello Civili*, 617). But Lucan does not represent the gods anthropomorphically: the anger is witnessed in ‘*natura discors* (nature at variance with itself),’ exhibited in such *portenta* as the ghostly forms of Marius and Sulla, exemplars of civil strife, are seen walking again,

(1.580–583) ancient Sybilline prophecies of disasters were repeated again (1.564–565), women were giving birth to monsters (1.562–563), etc.

The *haruspex* Nigidius Figulus diagnoses what has gone wrong: the universe now lacks ‘right reason’ that Stoicism understood as the operation of the immanent Logos producing natural law that should be reflected in civil law (1.638–672). The universe is no longer governed by law because fate is now hostile to Rome and to humanity: *natura discors* affects therefore both human society and the natural order that it reflects.¹¹ The civil war is simply a reflection of constellations straying from their courses and needs a *dominus* to subdue them (*cur signa meatus/deseruere suos (cum domino pax ista venit)* (670)). And the motifs on the Ara Pacis had already proclaimed that the new political order celebrated in the dedication scenes on the upper panel arise from a nature that now flourishes in supernatural proportions: after the ἐκπύρωσις, the *aetas aurea*.

The proconsul of Asia dedicated an inscription (9 BC) that speaks of Augustus’ birth as year one, initiating a new Calendar. Here the presence of a Stoic metaphysics is inescapable: Augustus is the saviour of a world that would have welcomed its wearing out in decay, its φθορά had not Augustus’ birth brought about a new beginning (Ehrenberg and Jones 1976, n. 98.6–9 = *OGIS* 458 and *SEG* 4.490.40–49). This political eschatology was to continue though not necessarily in any pronounced fashion in the centuries that followed, but the coinage of Cyprian’s age shows a significant recrudescence of that ideology. Cassius Dio (died 235) marks the death of Marcus Aurelius (180) as the transformation of the golden to the iron age (71.36.4).

There was constant conflict between rivals for the imperial purple from Maximus the Thracian (235–238) to Diocletian (284), with constant dynastic changes. The appearance of famine and plague in a world in such political turmoil reinforced the notion that natural and political disturbances had a common cause. Each rival claimant’s rhetoric claimed himself to be the agent of divine destiny transforming the declining age of iron to that of gold.

Thus the rhetor of Philip the First (244–249) claims his salvific appearance in a world in which ‘all things are agitated and changed . . . and the Empire shaken as in a great storm or earthquake’ (Pseudo Aristides, *Εἰς Βασιλέα*, 35.14). Just as Augustus had claimed credit for peace throughout all nature, by land and by sea, as the Ara Pacis depicted, with the earth yielding supernatural abundance, so in Philip’s case, ‘the Providence (πρόνοια) that administers it’ has caused him ‘to sit upon the royal throne as the holiest and most righteous of kings,’ and the ‘true emperor is like the emperor of the universe,’ so that ‘every continent, by land and by sea, garland their patron. . .’ (*Εἰς Βασιλέα*, 35.24 and 36). The *augurium salutis* had been successfully performed by Augustus as augur for the first time because peace had been secured by land and by sea, and as a result the gates of the temple of Janus could be closed. The *Scriptores Historiae Augustae* reveal this revived, millennial perspective in the third-century political situation when they describe Philip’s predecessor, Gordian III (238–245) in 243 closing the doors of the temple of Janus in order to advance against the Persians: thus the illusion of his reign as the golden age requires such a campaign to be a mere interruption of an otherwise universal peace (*Gordiani Tres*, 20.26.3).

Each rival contender for the empire expressed their claims in the images of the Augustan political theology in the coins that they minted. Gordian III issued coins (AD 243–4) for example celebrating FORTVNA REDVX, along with FELICITAS TEMPORVM, along with *cornu copiae* (*RIC* 4.3, p. 31, nos. 143–144; p. 32, nos. 160–161; p. 51, no. 331). Philip’s reign is depicted typically with an image of a hexastyle temple, with a statue of Roma in the centre of its columns, with the claim SAECVLVM NOVVM S.C. (*RIC* 4.3, p. 71, nos. 25 (a) and (b)). Philip is depicted, like Augustus on the *Ara*, as veiled for the sacrifice that he offers over a tripod and holding his *augur*’s wand (*RIC* 4.3 p. 78, nos. 79*–80; for Augustus, cf. Brent, *Imperial Cult*,

Plate 7), but also initiating the *saeculum nouum* in a celebration of the millennium of Rome's founding with lavish games.¹²

The title 'restorer of the world' witnessed in the coinage from Valerian's later reign is represented epigraphically in the time of Gordian and Philip. In the former's case, the title *restitutor orbis* is linked with the 'bounty of the new age (*indulgentia noui saeculi*),'¹³ and in Greek inscriptions that mark his significance as *restitutor* as equivalent to the title *σωτήρ τῆς οἰκουμένης* (Cagnat and Besnier 1899: 502, no. 71; De Ruggiero 1962: III, 557). We see here the revival of a discourse of imperial political theology that had been Augustan and described in the Asian decree a world in terminal decline and awaiting renewal by the emperor's saving activity.

Philip was to adopt his rival and predecessor's imagery when on a Dacian inscription he with his wife Otacilia Severa and his son Philip II are called *restitutores orbis totius*. Rival contenders are engaging in a shared discourse of political legitimation, with a logic that develops new interconnections with each new claim. Pacatianus (died c. 248) marked his brief revolt with the issue of a coin claiming the empire and celebrating 'ROMAE AETERNAE MILLE ET PRIMO,' 'to Rome eternal, year 1001' (*RIC* 4.3, p. 105, no. 6). Here he was clearly appropriating the Philippian ideology of the games inaugurating the second founding of Rome in a new, returning *saeculum aureum*. Pacatianus is now the *restitutor* who dates the new millennium that he inaugurates more accurately as the year 1001, with 1000 simply concluding the final decline of the age of iron. Valerian as successor to Decius claimed the title *restitutor orbis* was to defeat Uranius Antoninus in 354 after his short, Syrian reign (*RIC* 5.1, p. 47, no. 116–119; p. 50, no. 149; p. 51 no. 171, and see also *CIL* 11.3310). The latter claimed descent from Elagabalus and continued his ideology of Sol Inuictus but in an eschatological form that Potter (1990: 151–154) sees reflected in the original edition of *Oracula Sybillina* 13.147–157 where 'a priest will come, the last of all sent from the sun' and will defeat in the name of Sol Inuictus both Persians and Romans in what his coins declare as a new age of the sun.¹⁴

Here we have the immediate historical context in the middle of which Cyprian was to oppose Decius' decree that was to lead to the persecution of his reign. The famous list of past emperors commemorated in his coinage celebrating the divine emperors of Rome's past (the *Diuī*), excluding those subject to a *damnatio memoriae*, should be seen as offering the promise of a new *saeculum aureum* after what Dio had marked as a process of decline into an age of iron. Decius' decree ordering an organized, certificated universal sacrifice (*supplicatio*) to achieve the *pax deorum* in both nature and society was the religious remedy for the social disorder of civil war and discord, and for the corresponding lack of natural resources that had produced pestilence and famine. As such, Decius' *supplicatio* may be seen both to parallel and be an ideological reflection of the Augustus' act of augury, the *augurium salutis*, that initiated the *aetas aurea* that he claimed the Principate to be. This was Decius' ideological justification of his accession to the imperial throne argued in terms of a shared discourse with Gordianus III, Philip, Pacatianus, Uranius Antoninus, and others, that his son Valerian too was to adopt. We have seen that that discourse was shaped by a Stoic metaphysics that also included a Stoic eschatology by which as we shall now see Cyprian's Christian response was to be shaped.

3 Cyprian's use of stoic eschatology in dialogue with contemporary Paganism

Demetrian, a minor Roman magistrate, is addressed by Cyprian in a letter in which he is reported to have claimed that the outbreak of drought and plague in the aftermath of the end of Decius' persecution (AD 249–252) was due to the non-participation of Christians in Decius' *supplicatio*. Cyprian insists that 'you say that we should be made responsible for all those events

in consequence of which the world is now in turmoil and disturbed,' whereas 'we seek God's pardon for . . . your peace and safety.'¹⁵ Cyprian appeals to the 'facts' or the world's 'natural' condition revealed in natural reason. But all such appeals to nature, as presenting the taken for granted and obvious, invariably are never to the brute facts that exist beyond particular, human constructions of the real: Cyprian's analysis is pure Stoicism derived from the cultural and historical background within which his discourse functioned.

'The world even now is telling its own story and bearing witness by producing the evidence for its decline in the form of its own universal defects (*occasum sui rerum labentium probatione*)' (*Ad Demetrianum*, 3.43–46). Examples are to be seen in children being born with grey hairs, the sun's rays becoming weaker, fountains drying up, and, since natural order and that of society are informed by the same principle of rational order (*ratio*), civil disorder, rebellion, corruption in the lawcourts, etc.: these are indications of the 'old age of the world (*senectus mundi*).' The tree is *senectute deformis*, and the fountain *senectute deficiens* (3.60–64). As the 'sentence' that God has passed upon the world, this process is its determined destiny: 'This is the sentence passed upon the world (*Haec sententia mundo data est*), this is the law of God (*haec Dei lex est*), that all things that rise and increase grow old (*ut omnia orta occidunt et aucta senescunt*)' (3.64). 'Whatever now comes to birth (*quodcumque nunc nascitur*) degenerates through the old age of the world (*mundi ipsius senectute degenerat*)' (3.76–78). The world is 'at its end (*in fine*)' (3.80).

For Cyprian, the *senectus mundi* indicates that the time has come for its renewal, and in accordance with a logic that bears a distinctly Stoic form. Cyprian unsuccessfully conceals that influence. Both Justin Martyr (*Apology*, 2.7) and Tertullian had expressly referred to the ἐκπύρωσις in justification of claims about the Last Judgement. As we have seen, there was a final Day of Judgement after the *saeculi uetustas* had experienced all its rebirths (*natiuitates*) and been 'absorbed into the one fire' (*De Spectaculis*, 30.2) Moreover, for Minucius Felix the ἐκπύρωσις is not simply as an apologetic afterthought as a convenient addition to a doctrinal statement of which it has no integral part: he is clear about the Stoic doctrine of *senectus* and decline as part of what leads to the final conflagration, in a passage that Cyprian was to parallel (Minucius Felix, *Octavius*, 34.1–2).

Cyprian's eschatological perspective, for all his lack of explicitness on the ἐκπύρωσις, shows a more sophisticated use of the explanatory possibility of Stoic discourse than the less skin-deep treatment of his immediate Christian predecessors. The image of living together in one house that is the world, as an expression of Stoic universalism, is taken up in such a sense. Cyprian describes Demetrian in relation to his slave when he says:

Your share the same destiny of having to be born (*sors nascendi*), a common physical state of having to die (*condicio una moriendi*), a shared physical substance (*corporum materia consimilis*), a shared principle of rationality in your souls (*animarum ratio communis*). Through equal justice (*aequali iure*) and a common natural law (*et pari lege*) you both come into the world. (8.140–145)

In this life there is 'a natural condition that keeps us together in a shared corporeality (*corporalis condicio communis*).' This is described metaphorically as existing together 'within one house (*intra unam domum*) . . . with a shared fate (*pari sorte*)' (19.371–374).

A similar Stoic perspective is adopted in 252 in the *De Mortalitate*, written to address the distress of his Christian community caused by the aftermath of the plague that having stood steadfast in the recent persecution, they were not receiving divine protection but suffering with their pagan contemporaries without discrimination. Believers suffered the same fate as others

in this world: they possessed ‘that mortality shared with others (*cum ceteris mortalitas ista communis*) . . . for as long as according to the law of our first birth (*quamdiu adhuc secundum legem primae natiuitatis*) that flesh remains in common (*manet caro communis*)’ (*De Mortalitate*, 8.112–114). In consequence, ‘the Christian recognizes and accepts under what natural condition (*qua condicione*), under what law (*qua lege*) he will have become a believer’ (9.129).

The Stoic linguistic register in terms of which Cyprian formulates his case can be documented from Stoic sources. Cicero will describe the social contract as the product of our ‘human condition (*condicio*)’ and moved by ‘a shared principle of rationality (*communis ratio*).’ (Cicero, *Tusculanae Disputationes*, 1.8.15, cf. Seneca, *Letters Morales Ad Lucilium*, 50). There is ‘the same, common principle of reason (*parem communemque rationem*)’ that all humankind possesses. Thus Law (*lex*) and Justice (*ius*) cannot be separated from Nature (*De Legibus*, 1.35). Here we have clear parallels with Cyprian’s use of *ratio communis* and *condicio* as evidence for a universal natural law of birth and death that occur *aequali iure* and *pari lege*.

In addition, Seneca describes humanity’s urge to live in society being the product of natural reason, as living in a world that is ‘one, universal house’ (*De Beneficiis*, 7.1.7). The universe for Cicero is a natural whole, ‘the shared house of both gods and men (*mundus quasi communis deorum atque hominum domus*)’ (*Nature of the Gods*, 2.72 (154)). Here we have the Stoic rationale for Cyprian’s claim that both believers and unbelievers exist for the present age *intra unam domum* . . . *pari sorte*. But the description of the universal *domus* is interpreted by Cyprian within a dimension that synthesizes this notion with Stoic eschatology in a way not found in Stoic, Pagan writers, nor indeed in his Christian predecessor, Minucius Felix, who saw ‘in this house of the world (*in hac mundi domo*)’ evidence of ‘foresight, order and law (*providentiam, ordinem, legem*).’ (*Octavius*, 18.4) The *una domus*, common to all humanity, for Cyprian is like living ‘in your small house (*in habitaculo tuo*)’ where the walls and roof are ‘tottering (*uetustate nutarent*),’ where ‘the house (*domus*), already worn down, already exhausted is threatening the immediate ruin of its rooms collapsing due to age (*aedificiis senectute labentibus*).’ The house is an image of the declining present age: ‘Behold, the world totters and is collapsing (*mundus ecce nutat et labitur*) and witnesses its ruin not now by its age in itself but by its determined end (*et ruinam sui non iam senectute rerum sed fine*)’ (*On Mortality* 25.420–423, 426–427).

In a similar eschatological context, Cyprian will locate the significance of the schism of Felicissimus and Novatian: they are representatives of the ‘poisonous disease of heretical perversity and schisms in the way that ought to happen at the world’s sunset (*in occasu mundi*).’ He appeals to the words of Scripture (2 Tim., 3:1–9) in making this claim, but adds ‘whatever was prophesied beforehand is being fulfilled . . . with the final end of the age approaching (*adpropinquante iam saeculi fine*)’ (*Unity of the Church*, 16.394–395, 408–410). The words of Scripture are interpreted in terms of the expression not found in Scripture, in terms of *saeculi fine* to be understood in terms of their Stoic conceptual register. True brethren will be ‘of one mind in one house (*domo*)’ (Psalm 67.7), and the Passover foreshadowing the Eucharist ‘will be eaten in one house (*in domo una*).’ For Cyprian, that ‘house’ is being shattered in an age now collapsing into ruin as it moves towards its final end.

Cicero too, described against the randomness of Epicurean atomism the order of nature in which

at the last the whole world (*ad extremum omnis mundus*) will be consumed by fire (*ignesceret*) . . . from which once again as from living being and a god (*a quo rursus animante ac deo*), a new world be created (*renouatio mundi fieret*) and the ordered universe arise as before (*atque idem ornatus oreretur*).

(Nature of the Gods, 2.46 (118))

Cicero describes how specifically the individual objects of the universe cohere in a natural order that cannot be ‘without mind or reason (*mentis et rationis experts*)’ (*Nature of the Gods*, 2.44 (115)). The specific terms used in Cicero’s description of this coherence are also reflected in Cyprian’s explanation of how individuals cohere within the church in a common structure whose order is threatened by heresy and schism as it exists *in occasu mundi*. Here is the philosophical justification of apocalyptic predictions of the end and the approach of the Antichrist, *occasum saeculi atque tempus Antichristi* (*Letters*, 58.1.2 (13–15)).

Cicero’s specific description is of hylomorphic unity is:

Thus the world is firmly established and so sticks together in order to continue in existence . . . bodies so interjoined continue in existence (*corpora inter se iuncta permanent*) since they are bound together as if by a certain bond (*quodam uinculo*) placed around them. This bond it effects by that nature which is outpoured throughout the whole world as it establishes all things by mind and *logos* (*ratio*).

(2.44 (115))

Cyprian reflects such a perspective in his attack upon Novatian, who through his schism had separated himself ‘from the body of sacred bishops (*corpus sacerdotum*) . . . bound together by the glue of mutual concord and by the bond of unity (*unitatis uinculo copulatum*)’ (*Letters*, 68.3.2). That unity was effected through the Holy Spirit that filled the church thus uniting it so that Novatian outside the church could not baptize since he could not transmit the Spirit. According to Jn. 20:21–23, Jesus had ‘breathed into (*insufflauit*)’ the Church the Holy Spirit (*Epistula*, 69.1 (225–232)). But since for Cyprian’s assumed Stoic ontology this was into *corpora inter se iuncta* by the *uinculum* effected by Christ as *Logos* (*ratio*), he could make no sense of the Holy Spirit working outside the *domus* thus established where there could only be disunity: this is what effected ‘his flock joined together by the commingling of a number of individuals into one (*gregem . . . nostrum . . . commixtione adunatae multitudinis copulatum*)’ (*Letters*, 69.5.2 (105–116)). Seneca had claimed that ‘this universe in which we are contained is both one and God (*et unum est et deus*),’ and that therefore ‘we are its associates (*socii*) and physical members (*membra*)’ (Seneca, *Letters*, 92.30).

We therefore can discern the specifically Stoic, metaphysical structure of the ‘one house’ as the world in which members of the true Church dwell and the nature of their unity (*Unity of the Church*, 6 (143)). When he refers to ‘this pledge of unity (*hoc unitatis sacramentum*), this chain of union that cannot be split into individual links (*hoc uinculum concordiae inseparabiliter cohaerentis*),’ his metaphysical assumption is of a hylomorphic cosmos infused with the one, divine Spirit (*Unity of the Church*, 7 (163–164)). As in Seneca’s universe, ‘the one church throughout the world is divided into many members just as (item) there is one episcopate of many bishops widely spread in concord in a large number of many bodies (*concordi numerositate diffusus*),’ constituting ‘the catholic church fastened and everywhere joined together (*conexam et ubique coniunctam catholicae ecclesiae unitatem*)’ (*Letters*, 55.2 (426–431)).

4 In conclusion

The claim of the convert to have left all previous philosophy behind when ‘finding the truth,’ is always an illusion and particularly so in the case of Tertullian and Cyprian, both of whom thought and argued against a conceptual backcloth shared with their contemporaries and rooted in what was clearly a Stoic mindset. But Cyprian’s alleged dependence on Tertullian because of Jerome’s most quoted phrase *da mihi magistrum* (*De Uiris Illustribus*, 53) is very difficult to substantiate. Tertullian’s assumption of a Stoic perspective is in interpretation of Christ as *Logos*

within the Trinity, but this is a discussion in which Cyprian hardly participates. His concern is rather what constitutes unity, its maintenance and its loss at the world's end but is nevertheless conditioned by the conceptual backcloth that he has inherited.

Notes

- 1 *Against Praxeas* 7.8–9 (49–54): Quis enim negabit deum corpus esse, etsi deus spiritus est? spiritus enim corpus sui generis in sua effigie. sed et si invisibilia illa quaecunque sunt, habent apud deum et suum corpus et suam formam per quae soli deo visibilia sunt, quanto magis quod ex ipsius substantia emissum est sine substantia non erit.
- 2 *Against Praxeas* 5.2–3 (11–15): ‘. . . habebat enim secum quam habebat in semetipso rationem, suam scilicet. rationalis enim deus, et ratio in ipso prius, et ita ab ipso omnia: quae ratio sensus ipsius est. hanc Graeci λόγον dicunt, quo vocabolo etiam sermonem appellamus. . .’
- 3 *Against Praxeas* 8.4 (19–22): ‘sermo autem spiritu structus est, et ut ita dixerim sermonis corpus est spiritus. sermo ergo et in patre semper, sicut dicit, Ego in patre. . .’
- 4 *Against Praxeas* 7.9 (54–56): ‘Quaecunque ergo substantia sermonis fuit, illam dico personam et illi nomen filii vindico, et dam filium agnosco secundum a patre defendo.’
- 5 Origen, *Against Celsus*, 6.7; Aëtius, 1.7.23; Galenus, *On Incorporal Quaities*, 6; Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, 15.18.1–3.
- 6 *On the Soul* 5.3 (1): ‘Denique Zeno consitum spiritum definiens animam hoc modo instruit. Quo, inquit, digresso animal emoritur, corpus est; consito autem spiritu digresso animal emoritur, ergo consitus spiritus corpus est; ergo corpus est anima.’
- 7 *On the Soul*, 5.4–5 (17–22): ‘Vult et Cleanthes non solum corporis lineamentis, sed et animae notis similitudinem parentibus in filiis respondere . . . corporis autem similitudinem et dissimilitudinem capere et animam, <animam> itaque corpus similitudini uel dissimilitudini obnoxium.’
- 8 *On the Soul*, 5.6 (28–34): ‘Sed et Chrysippus manum ei porrigit constituens corporalia ab incorporalibus derelinqui omnino non posse, quia nec contingantur ab eis (unde et Lucretius: tangere enim et tangi nisi corpus nulla potest res), derelicto autem corpore ab anima affici morte. Igitur corpus anima, quae nisi corporalis corpus non derelinquet.’
- 9 *On the Soul*, 5.6.5–7 (36–41; 54–57): ‘Aetatem enim non potest capere sine corpore, quia per corpora operantur aetates. Nostri autem illud quoque recogitent, corpora eadem recepturas in resurrectione animas in quibus discesserunt. Idem quoque sperantur et corporum modi et eadem aetates, quae corporum modos faciunt . . . Ita dicimus omnem animam quaquae aetate decesserit, in ea stare ad eum diem usque, quo perfectum illud repromittitur ad angelicae plenitudinis mensuram temperatum.’
- 10 *On the Nature of the Gods*, 2.39 and 73, see also A. Brent, *The Imperial Cult and the Development of Church Order* (Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae 45; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1999), p. 19–23.
- 11 Lucan, *Civil War*, 1.641–645: ‘nulla cum lege per aevum/ mundus, et incerto discurrunt sidera motu), aut, si fata movent, urbi generique paratur humano matura lues.’
- 12 *RIC* 4.3, pp. 70–71, nos. 12* – 24; p. 81 no 107 and no 111 (with a reverse of Otacilia Severa); p. 89 nos 158–162 and 164 and p. 104 no. 272; p. 97 nos. 224–225; p. 102 nos. 264–265; Otacilia Severa p. 82 nos. 116–117; p. 93 nos. 200–202; pp. 27–30 nos. 45–51; p. 41 no. 7. Philip II, Banti, *Bronzi imperiali*, IX p. 71 nos. 17, 18.
- 13 In thanks for the repairs at the castle at Ain Mellul, *CIL* 8.20487.1–3: INDVLGENTIA NOVI SAE-CVLI IMP CAES M ANTONI GORDIANI INVICTI PII FELICIS AVG RESTITVT[ORIS] [O] RBIS. . . .; XIII, 9119: IMP CAES M AN GORDIANO PIO . . . RES ORBIS. See also VI.1092.
- 14 For the coinage of Uranius, see Baldus 1975: 452–455; Delbrück 1948.
- 15 *To Demetrian*, 3.1: ‘Dixisisti per nos fieri et quod nobis debeant inputari omnia ista quibus nunc mundus quatitur et urgetur, quod dii uestri a nobis non colantur; cf. 20.400–403: ‘semper et preces fundimus pro pace ac salute uestra.’

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“Hippolytus” and Epiphanius of Salamis

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Introduction

The names of Hippolytus and Epiphanius convey two major anti-heretical projects of the third and late fourth c. AD. The *Refutation of All the Heresies*, problematically associated with the name of Hippolytus, was probably unknown to Epiphanius when he composed his *Panarion* (“remedy box”), but both works testify to an attempt at producing a general, encyclopaedic knowledge on doctrinal deviations, in which philosophy is clearly designated, though in different manners, as a major source of heresy. Their care to gather a universal science on false wisdoms, however, led the author of the *Refutation* and Epiphanius to transmit very important – though sometimes problematical – pieces of information on Greek philosophy and its supposed usage by heterodox Christians, and they do not hesitate to use philosophical arguments against Greek philosophy or Christian heresies. In that respect, they represent important figures in the ancient “dialogue” between Christianity and philosophy, although they do not claim the word “philosophy” for the Christians.

1 “Hippolytus”, the *Elenchos against All Heresies* and the *Syntagma against the Heresies*

To the name of “Hippolytus” are associated two heresiological works which illustrate different attitudes towards Greek philosophy. The most famous and best preserved is the *Refutation of All the Heresies* (Κατὰ πασῶν αἱρέσεων ἔλεγχος) in ten books, composed in Greek by an author living in Rome in the time of bishops Zephyrin (199–217) and Calixtus (217–222). The other one is a *Syntagma* (viz. treatise) *against the Heresies*. Both works, however, must probably be ascribed to two distinct writers, though some scholars still consider that they had the same author.¹

Apparently written after the death of Calixtus in 222 (cf. 9, 12, 26), the *Elenchos* was ascribed by J. L. Jacobi and L. Duncker in 1851 to Hippolytus, known primarily thanks to Eusebius (*Historia ecclesiastica*, 6, 20, 2; 6, 22), Jerome (*De uiris illustribus*, 61) and Photius (*Bibliotheca*, cod. 121 and 202).² According to these writers, Hippolytus was the author of a few exegetical works and of a treatise against the heretic Noetus. Since the list of these works partly corresponds to

a list given at the basis of a statue discovered in Rome in 1551 near the catacomb of St. Hippolytus, scholars tended to ascribe to Hippolytus all the titles mentioned under the statue. This correspondence supported the attribution of the *Elenchos* to Hippolytus, since the *Elenchos*, 10, 32, 4, refers to a work previously written by its author as a treatise “On the Substance of the Universe” (Περὶ τῆς τοῦ παντός οὐσίας), which was thought to be identical to the work Πρὸς Ἑλληνας καὶ πρὸς Πλάτωνα ἢ καὶ περὶ τοῦ πάντος, “Against the Greeks and Plato, or on the Universe” mentioned under the statue. John Philoponus (sixth c.), the *Sacra parallela* (eighth c.) and Photius (*Bibliotheca*, cod. 48) have preserved possible extracts of this work under the name of “Josephus”, i.e. Flavius Josephus. This attribution may date to the third c. and be explained by the fact that the author used the anti-Greek passages of Josephus’ *Contra Apionem*.³

In 1947, the French scholar Pierre Nautin tried to show that the author of the *Elenchos* (and of all the works mentioned on the statue) could not be the Hippolytus known by Eusebius, Jerome and Photius, and author of the *Contra Noetum*.⁴ In 1977, Vincenzo Loi and Manlio Simonetti followed the path opened by Nautin and assumed that there were two Hippolytuses: an oriental Hippolytus, author of exegetical works and of a treatise against Noetus, and a Roman Hippolytus, author of the *Elenchos* and of the works mentioned on the statue of “Hippolytus”.⁵ In 1989, Simonetti argued that the name “Hippolytus” was only possible for this author⁶ – the idea that the statue does represent a Hippolytus was challenged by Margherita Guarducci, who believed the statue represented a woman:⁷ any connection between the statue itself and the list of works would then disappear. In 1995, A. Brent also contended that two writers must be distinguished: the author of the *Elenchos*, a Roman opposed to bishop Calixtus, and a younger one, author of exegetical works and of a work *Contra Noetum* who entered the Roman community after the first one, and who sought to reconcile his community with the community of Calixtus, now governed by Pontianus.⁸ Like Nautin, Brent thought that the *Elenchos* influenced the *Contra Noetum* – Simonetti thought, on the contrary, that *Contra Noetum* influenced the *Elenchos* – but he also assumed that both writers knew each other and that their biographical connexion would account for the fact that, according to Brent, the statue discovered in 1551 contains a list of the works of *both* writers.

The literary problem of “Hippolytus” continues to be disputed today.⁹ A wide consensus is now that the author of the *Elenchos*, whether named Hippolytus or not, has to be distinguished from the “Hippolytus” known by Eusebius, Jerome and Photius. To the latter, however, must be ascribed a second heresiological work. The *Contra Noetum* already mentioned and transmitted in only one manuscript as a “homily” (Vat. gr. 1431) was sometimes considered as the final part of the *Syntagma* against all the heresies known and described by Photius (cod. 121).¹⁰ The content of this work may be partly reconstructed thanks to Epiphanius and Philastrus of Brescia.¹¹ Both authors exhibit striking similarities in their description of 31 heresies, from Dositheus to Noetus. The order of these 31 heresies is the same, and the detail obviously indicates a common source. Since Photius states that the *Syntagma* started with Dositheus and ended with Noetus – he counts 32 heresies but he may be wrong¹² – it seems that both Epiphanius and Philastrus depend on the *Syntagma*. Ps.-Tertullian, author of a treatise *Aduersus omnes haereses*, which seems to depend on the same work.¹³ Those who think that the *Syntagma* was written by the author of the *Elenchos* tend to identify the former work to an earlier heresiological work mentioned in the prologue of the *Elenchos* (par. 1), but the attribution of the *Syntagma* to the author of the *Elenchos* remains disputable.¹⁴

It is difficult to know what could have been the differences between the two treatises ascribed to “Hippolytus”. Either written or not by the author of the *Elenchos*, the *Syntagma* was certainly far more superficial than the *Elenchos*, and it is impossible to say if the author also formulated the polemical thesis of a dependence of heresies on Greek philosophies. According to Photius

(cod. 121), the author of the *Syntagma* sought to make a general survey (σύνοψιν) of the oral teaching of Irenaeus concerning the heretics.¹⁵ It could be a mere rhetorical announcement of the author, but it could also indicate that the latter had known Irenaeus and based his anti-gnostic refutations on informations and arguments which were different from those we find in the *Elenchos*,¹⁶ since in this work, “Hippolytus” may have known real Gnostic documentation.¹⁷ In *Elenchos*, 1, Pr., 1–2, the author says that, in an earlier work, he refrained from speaking openly about the Gnostic “mysteries”, which could entail that, between the composition of the first work (the *Syntagma*, or another one) and that of the *Elenchos*, the author had access to a wider documentation, or maybe transmitted more accurately the documentation he had gathered for his earlier work.¹⁸ But once again, this earlier work may not be the *Syntagma*.

More may be said about the *Elenchos*, though this work is partly lost.¹⁹ The first book is preserved in four manuscripts as a separate work under the name of Origen. Books 4 to 10 are transmitted in one single manuscript (BNF, Suppl. Graec. 464). Books 2 and 3 are lost. The fact that book 1 circulated as a single work is due to the fact that it contains a preliminary and general exposition of philosophical doctrines which may have been used, since late antiquity, for its own sake. The title “Philosophoumena” is given to the work at the beginning of book 1 but also at the end of book 4 and beginning of book 9, but it would more aptly fit the first book devoted to Greek philosophy.²⁰

The refutation of the heresies properly speaking runs from book 5 to book 9. The first four books contained an exposition on the Greek sages. The last book (book 10) consists of a recapitulation of these two parts (philosophers, then heresies) and eventually a last section which the author calls a “discourse of truth”. As is suggested by its title, *Elenchos*, the aim of the work is not so much to refute the heresies as to *denounce* them by revealing their true nature.²¹ According to the author, the heresies have nothing to do with Christianity. They do not stem either from the Bible or from tradition, but only from Hellenism: Greek philosophy, mysteries or astrology. This thesis represents a systematization of an idea previously expressed by Irenaeus of Lyon, but far more sparingly (see his *Against Heresies*, 2, 14, 1–6; 3, 24, 2). Clement of Alexandria also accused heretics of not correctly reproducing what they had borrowed from the philosophers.²² In the same way, Tertullian also argued that Plato had been “the spice seller”, *condimentarius*, of all heretics (*On the Soul*, 23, 5). The *Elenchos*’s originality lies in the fact that the author has the ambition to show the supposed Greek source or sources of each heresy.

In fact, in the core of the text, only four heresies are connected to philosophy and only five philosophers are mentioned in that respect: Valentinus is supposed to have borrowed from Pythagoras and Plato (6, pinax, 3), Basilides, from Aristotle (7, pinax, 2), Marcio from Empedocles (7, pinax, 5; 7, 29, 3), and Noetus, from Heraclitus (9, 8–10). Hermogenes’s theory of untamed matter would have been borrowed from a “socratic myth” (8, 17, 2). There is a quick allusion to Thales in the refutation of the Naassenes (5, 9, 13). In 5, 20, 1, the Sethians are said to be inspired by the *physikoi*, the natural philosophers, but also by the Peripatetic Andronicus in their doctrine of mixture (5, 21, 1). According to 6, pinax, 4, Secundus, Ptolemaeus and Heracleon are said to teach the same doctrines as the Greek sages. Apelles (7, pinax, 12; 7, 38, 3) is said to have borrowed from physical doctrines – he would have stated that the body of Christ is composed of the four qualities of the substance of the universe (cold, warm, wet, dry). Sometimes, only the chapter headings mention a connection between philosophy and heresy, but this connection is not sustained in the text itself: Socrates and the *physikoi* are mentioned in the chapter headings of book 8 (ch. 2 and 4), but not in the text itself. The chapter heading of 6, 5 mentions Markus and Kolarbasus and adds that “some of them devote themselves to magic and pythagorean numbers”. In 8, 2, the chapter heading argues that the Docetes borrowed from natural philosophy. In many cases, no philosopher is mentioned by the author, but sages, Greek mysteries, magic or astrology.²³

The author of the *Elenchos* does not hesitate to repeat himself for the sake of clarity. Even if he already exposed Pythagoras’s, Plato’s and Aristotle’s doctrines in book 1, he does it a second time when he compares Pythagoras and Plato with Valentinus (6, 21–28), and a third time when he deals with the supposed connection of Basilides and Aristotle (7, 14–19). Sometimes, the repetition enables the author to give more doxographical details than in book 1: for instance, in his expositions on Heraclitus/Noetus and Empedocles/Marcion.

Most of the time, the author makes general comparisons between heretical and philosophical doctrines. For instance, he compares Marcion’s theology of two Gods with Empedocles’ idea of two principles, Love and Hate (7, 29, 1–3). He may however compare specific passages from heretics and philosophers. In 6, 37, 2–5, he quotes from Ps.-Plato’s Letter 2, 312d7–e4 (a text often quoted by other Christians as a “pagan” proof of the Trinity), and compares it to Valentinus’s theory of the “aeons” and a Valentinian Psalm.

Hermann Diels, in his important work on Greek doxographic traditions,²⁴ thought that, in book 1, Hippolytus used two distinct sources: in ch. 1–4 and 18–25, a mediocre compendium including biographical data and details about successions (*diadochai*); in ch. 6–16, a good doxographic handbook ultimately deriving from Theophrastus’s lost *Physikôn* or *Physikai doxai*. This analysis, which long remained the *communis opinio*, was challenged by Catherine Osborn,²⁵ and then by Jaap Mansfeld.²⁶ Osborn suggested another interpretation of “Hippolytus’s” sources: ch. 1–4 and 11–16 may derive from one and the same source, whereas ch. 6–9 would stem from a different source.²⁷ Mansfeld contended, against Diels and Osborn, that book 1 of the *Refutatio* was inspired by only one single source.²⁸ According to Mansfeld, the information transmitted in ch. 2–4 is not “bad” but simply different from the data transmitted in ch. 6–9. They could stem from a Middle Platonic/neo-Pythagorean interpretation of early Greek philosophy.²⁹

A parallel with Sextus Empiricus (*Adversus Mathematicos*, 10, 310–318 = *Elenchos*, 10, 6–8) has been differently interpreted. Diels thought that Hippolytus used Sextus;³⁰ Janaček, that both authors had a common source.³¹ Mansfeld argued, on the basis of another parallel (*Elenchos*, 4, 1; 4, 3–6 = Sextus, *Adversus Mathematicos*, 5, 37–39; 44; 50–61), that it was more probable that Hippolytus used Sextus.³² Another source of Hippolytus is Josephus, whose description of the three Jewish “philosophies” (*Bellum Iudaicum*, 2, 8, 2–13) is rephrased in *Elenchos*, 9, 20–29.³³

The work contains verbatim quotations from philosophers, for example Plato. J. Mansfeld argued that a part of these quotations stems from Hippolytus’s intermediary sources, and that others (Letter 2, for instance, in *Elenchos*, 6, 37, 2–5), from a direct reading of the philosophers, probably influenced by the middle Platonist and Christian exegesis of the texts.

As a whole, the work exhibits an intriguing superposition of different sources, which are not always easy to identify – because some of them are lost – but which indicate that the author indulged in a long and accurate work of extraction. This work saved from oblivion a great quantity of information about “heretical” doctrines and texts – which always need to be critically analysed – and also a few fragments from philosophers like Empedocles or Heraclitus which are known only thanks to the *Elenchos*.³⁴ The author also seems to have quite a valuable knowledge of Indian wisdoms.³⁵

The author did not only borrow from Irenaeus the general principle that heretics were inspired by philosophers. Like his predecessor, he also presents heretics as centonizers, mingling philosophical doctrines and giving them the appearance of novelty –

the heresiarchs, taking these (views) as their springboards and sewing them together to serve their own intention, in the manner of those who stitchold rags together, have offered the errors of the ancients as novelties to those who may be fooled.

(5, 6, 1–2; tr. J. Mansfeld)³⁶

The theme of the agreement (*συμφωνία*) between Hellenism and Christianity was used by certain Christians, from Justin Martyr to Theodoretus of Cyrhus, to demonstrate the *truth* of Christian doctrines.³⁷ The author of the *Elenchos* belongs to another tradition, beginning with Irenaeus, which, on the contrary, uses the *συμφωνία* motive to show the *falseness* of certain theologians who claimed to be Christians.

It has sometimes been noticed that even if the general method of the *Elenchos* implies a negative view on philosophy and Hellenism as a whole as a source of heresy, the author's judgement on Greek philosophy is not sarcastic, as is the case in Irenaeus and later in Epiphanius. It is more often neutral, and sometimes more positive than what would have been expected. For instance, after arguing that Monoimus has borrowed his numerological speculations from the geometrical and arithmetical arts, he states that the Pythagoreans were much better than the heretic (8, 15, 3). Plato would have better elaborated on the "socratic myth" supposedly used by Hermogenes (8, 17, 2). In other words, when philosophers and heretics spoke of the same topics or had the same sources, the philosophers were superior.

The basic error of the philosophers is to be wrong about the principles of the universe. They mistakenly took it for God itself and failed to recognize God's "monarchia". This idea, already formulated in book 1 (26, 3), is repeated in the "epitome" of book 10 (32–33). In *De uniuerso*, the author had a more polemical and at the same time more specific approach of Greek philosophy, dealing exclusively with Platonism. According to Photius (cod. 48), the work aimed at showing that Plato contradicted himself and that the Platonist Alkinoos was wrong in his conception of the soul, matter and resurrection. In a second part, the author made an exposition of his own view on these topics, he showed that the Hebrews were more ancient than the Greeks, and he dealt with the constitution of man, with the creation of the world and, eventually, with christology.³⁸ In the *Elenchos*, we find the same way of opposing erroneous views (books 4–9) and a positive statement of truth, though the negative part is far longer than the second one, which, properly speaking, is reduced to the last three chapters of book 10 in Marcovich's edition (32 to 34). It is tempting to consider the *De uniuerso* and the *Elenchos* as two complementary works, but they can also be connected to a third work, the "Chronicle" to which the *Elenchos* refers the reader (10, 30, 5) and in which, like in *De uniuerso*, the author demonstrated the antiquity of biblical tradition over pagan wisdom. Some scholars think that the author may have sought to write a trilogy establishing true wisdom over philosophical and heretical doctrines.³⁹ Photius, however, was not sure about the identity of the author of *De uniuerso*. After stating that the book was transmitted to him under the name of Josephus, he argued that it was composed by the Roman priest Gaius, also the author, according to him, of a work called the *Labyrinth*, a work against Artemon, and another one against Proclus, a Montanist. At the end of the *Labyrinth*, according to Photius, Gaius stated that the work "On the Substance of the Universe" was his work, but the patriarch was not sure whether it was the work he had read.

The way the author refers to the last part of the *Elenchos* as a "True Discourse" (*ἀληθῆς λόγος*, 10, 34, 1) might lead us to think that he seeks to react to the philosopher Celsus, who around 178 or sooner (161–169?), had written a work against the Christians called *Ἀληθῆς λόγος*. This view has been disputed by Winrich Löhr, who argued that the use of the phrase *ἀληθῆς λόγος* is not enough to think that the *Elenchos* is a reaction against Celsus.⁴⁰ This is all the more true as the phrase is not specific to Celsus and might go back to a Platonic background (*Crat.* 385b, *Soph.* 264a etc.). But two more specific aspects of the *Elenchos* could be taken into account: 1) the elitist ambition of the author, who several times addresses the *φιλομαθεῖς*, those who like to learn – Celsus had accused the Christians of holding to an irrational faith, *ἄλογος πίστις*; 2) the very argument which consists in denouncing heresies as deformations of Greek philosophy recalls Celsus's constant argument that the Christians as a whole have misunderstood

Greek mythical and philosophical traditions – especially Plato.⁴¹ If the *Elenchos* has any connection with Celsus, which remains impossible to know, it is difficult to say if the author was simply inspired by Celsus or if he aimed at responding to him, by showing that the heresies alone, and not true Christianity, were deformations of philosophical doctrines. But the term *παρακοή*, used by Celsus to refer to Christianity as a “misunderstanding” of Greek traditions, is never used in the *Elenchos* in that respect. And the polemical strategy of the *Elenchos*, as has already been noticed, can also be interpreted as a systematization of an argument already found, before the *Elenchos*, in Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria and Tertullian.

Interestingly, though the work implies a negative view on philosophy as one possible source of heresy, the author is a good connoisseur of philosophical doctrines thanks to his doxographical sources, or his personal knowledge of philosophers. The parallels he draws between heresies and philosophies may at first sight be interpreted as sheer polemical amalgams,⁴² but according to some scholars, they may not be so unfounded. Miroslav Marcovich argued that, sometimes, when he connects Gnostics with Greek sources, the author of the *Elenchos* pasted actual references to Greek authors made by the Gnostics in order to sustain their views.⁴³ Abraham P. Bos, likewise, argued that Basilides’s doctrines were deeply influenced by Aristotle and that the author of the *Elenchos* had a good intuition when he presented the Stagirite as the source of the Gnostic, and even that he gives a better explanation of Aristotle’s definition of the soul than his contemporary Alexander of Aphrodisias.⁴⁴ Ian Mueller considered, on the contrary, that the Aristotle from whom Basilides is supposed to have borrowed, according to the *Elenchos* – whatever one thinks of this connection between Basilides and Aristotle – is a distorted Aristotle, maybe based on an Aristotle transmitted by handbooks, but also deeply transformed by the polemical intentions of the *Elenchos*.⁴⁵

His own polemical method may also be connected to the philosophical tradition. The way he connects each heresy in a succession story (*διαδοχή*), his denunciation of the novelty introduced by the heretics, his criticism of allegorical readings, his insistence on heretical plagiarism:⁴⁶ all these themes may also be found in Greek philosophical tradition. His attacks against Aristotle have sometimes been thought to stem from the sceptical⁴⁷ or the Middle Platonist⁴⁸ tradition.

The Logos theology of the work may also be connected to a philosophical background (see esp. 10.33.2).⁴⁹ The conclusion alludes to the Delphic principle “Know yourself” but identifies knowledge of self and knowledge of God (10, 34, 4–5).

The reception of this work still needs to be written, especially in post-third century patristic literature, but an influence of the *Elenchos* (esp. book 1) has been detected in two tenth-century Arabic works.⁵⁰

2 Epiphanius of Salamis

Born in Palestine around 310–320, Epiphanius travelled in Egypt to receive a rhetorical education but became acquainted there with monastic life.⁵¹ He then founded a monastery in Besanduc near Eleutheropolis (Palestine) and was ordained priest. He became bishop in 366 and died in 402.⁵² According to Jerome, he mastered Syriac, Greek, Hebrew, Coptic and Latin: an interesting judgement, but hard to believe.⁵³ Epiphanius composed a treatise *On Weights and Measures* used in Scripture and another one *On the Twelve Precious Stones* containing an allegorical interpretation of the precious stones decorating the high priest’s garment (Ex 28, 17–21; 39, 10–14). He also left a few letters, and before writing his *opus magnum*, the *Panarion*, he composed a first anti-heretical work, the *Ancoratus*.⁵⁴

Around 374–377,⁵⁵ Epiphanius wrote a “Panarion”, viz. a “remedy box” containing an antidote against venomous reptiles – heretics (1, Prol., 3, 4–5). The work is preceded by a letter

(= lett.) to the priests Acacius and Paulus, who had apparently asked Epiphanius to make an exposition on the heresies. The *Panarion* folds into three books, containing seven *tomoi*, and refutes 80 heresies – explicitly compared by Epiphanius to the 80 concubines mentioned in the Canticle, and opposed to the “unique” bride, which refers, in his view, to the only true Church (lett., 1, 3). In his prologue, Epiphanius gives a scientific turn to his work by referring to Greek scientists (Nicander of Colophon, Dioscorides, Pamphilus, Callisthenes, Iolaos and others): he will describe and refute the heresies, like these scientists have studied the savage beasts and venomous plants (1, Prol., 3, 1). The work ends on a “Exposition of the Faith” which summarizes “the teaching of the Apostles” (lett., 1, 4).⁵⁶

The three books are organized as follows (lett., 5, 1–2):

- 1 The first book contains three *tomoi* and 46 heresies belonging to the “Barbarism”, the “Scythism”, the “Hellenism”, “Judaism” and “Samaritanism” (viz. all the heresies preceding Christianity), and all their subdivisions, along with the heresies appeared after the Incarnation (from the Simonians to the disciples of Tatian).
- 2 The second book folds into two *tomoi*, 23 heresies (from the Encratites to the Arians).
- 3 The third one contains two *tomoi*, 11 heresies (from the Audians to the Massalians).

As is clear from this structure, Epiphanius has an original and broad conception of “heresy”.⁵⁷ In his work, the term does not refer only to Christian “sects” (60 are described by Epiphanius) but to any form of doctrinal perversion from the time man has been modelled on earth until the year 11 of Valentinian and Valens, and the year 7 of Gratian (1, Prol., 2, 3). Gabriella Aragona speaks of a “universal history of heresy”.⁵⁸ Besides, Epiphanius distinguishes between “mother and prototypal denominations of all the heresies” (Pinax of t. 1: αἱ τῶν αἰρέσεων πασῶν μητέρες τε καὶ πρωτότυποι ὀνομασίαι) and heresies which are derived from these primordial forms of heresy. According to Epiphanius, there existed four matrerial heresies: Barbarism, Scythism, Hellenism and Judaism. They all belong to a certain period of humankind: Barbarism corresponds to the time from Adam to Noah; Scythism runs from the time of Noah to the time of Tharra, Abraham’s father; Hellenism begins with Seruch, before Tharra’s time, with the cult of idols; Judaism begins with Abraham.

Each mother heresy gave birth to specific heresies. For instance, Judaism induced Scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, Hemerobaptists, Osseniens/Osseans, Nasareans, Herodians. Hellenism comprises Egyptians, Babylonians, Phrygians and Phoenicians. These inventors of idolatry transmitted it to the Hellenes, whom the most ancients derive from Ionan, one of the builders of the Babel tower (Gn 11, 1–9). Later, Greek philosophical *haireseis* appeared: those of the Pythagoreans (whom Epiphanius assimilates to Peripatetics), the Stoics, the Platonists, the Epicureans (*pinax* of t. 1, 3, 8), or, according to the core of book 1: Stoics, Platonists, Pythagoreans and Epicureans.

A first and fundamental originality of Epiphanius in the history of the relations between Christianity and philosophy is his broad conception of heresy, which has an important implication on his view about philosophy. Epiphanius does not only state, like his predecessors, that philosophy generated heresies – which he may say, for instance in the case of the Manichaean Skythianos, influenced, according to him, by Pythagoras (*Panarion* 66, 3) – but that philosophies *are* heresies, if “heresy” is to be understood as referring to any form of perversion of thought. Epiphanius’s usage of the term “heresy” implies an extension of this traditional Christian concept, but also, in a way, a return to its philosophical meaning – *hairésis*, to refer to a “school” of thought.

As can be seen, Epiphanius does not follow the historical order of the philosophical schools, and strikingly, he identifies Pythagorism and Peripateticism. Each of the four Greek “heresies”

is described and refuted in notices 5 to 8. They are also summarized in the *pinax* describing the content of tomos 1 (*pinax* of t. 1, 3, 8: Pythagoreans, Stoics, Platonists, Epicureans “and the others”, this “others” giving raise to no description in book 1). In the *Expositio fidei*, at the very end of the work (9, 5–48), Epiphanius gives a far longer list of philosophers, clearly derived from a doxographical tradition.⁵⁹ This time, he distinguishes between Pythagoras and Aristoteles. He then quickly mentions the existence of “philosophers” also among the barbarians: India, Media, Persia etc. (10, 1–7).

The refutation of the four Greek philosophical schools taken into account by Epiphanius in book 1 is very short. Besides a few biographical details, the bishop only retains the doctrines which contradict Christian faith: the Stoics teach that the souls of men are parts of God, they say that matter is co-eternal to God, and they contend that fate rules our lives. Pythagoras teaches the divinization of man, the migration of the souls, and that God is the sky. Epicurus negates providence and reduces everything to atoms. Strangely enough, Epiphanius is not so negative about Plato, except that, like the other philosophers, he taught polytheism and idolatry: he understood God, he knew that there were “three causes” (cf. Letter 2) and that God created matter (*Timaeus*, 38b, quoted by Epiphanius). But sometimes, he writes, Plato also thought that matter was co-eternal to God.

Epiphanius makes strange errors about Greek philosophy. He identifies Pythagoreans with Aristotelians, and attributes to the Stoics the doctrine of the metempsychosis, like the author of the *Elenchos* (1, 21, 3). In *Panarion* 5, he presents Zeno as Cleanthes’s son and seems to identify him with Zeno of Elea. Some, he writes, say that there are two Zenos, but they teach the same doctrine. . . . He states that Pythagoras died in Media (*Panarion* 7, 2) and attributes to the Epicureans the Orphic myth of the primordial egg (*Panarion* 8, 1, 2–3). In the final *recapitulatio*, Epiphanius’s information is far better. There, he distinguishes eight groups (Ionians, Italics, Sporadics, Socratics, New Academy, Peripatetics, Stoics, Epicurus), and under each group, he gives the names of several philosophers. He is here dependent on a different doxographic source. The discrepancy between this list and what we find in book 1 leads to the assumption that he used at least two doxographical writings.⁶⁰

Although he was known in late antiquity as a very learned writer,⁶¹ Epiphanius had, as can be seen, a very bad opinion about Greek philosophy. Like his predecessors, he also regularly rejects Hellenism as a source of heresy. In his refutation of Origen, for instance, he accuses the latter to have been ruined by his Greek education, which resulted only in a “poison” and a noxious food (*Panarion* 64, 72, 9).⁶² But this type of connection between Hellenism and Christian heresies is not so crucial to Epiphanius as was the case in the *Elenchos*, a work which, apparently, he did not know, or at least did not use.⁶³

Concerning heresies, Epiphanius has two major Christian sources: Hippolytus’s *Syntagma* and Irenaeus. The connection between his work and the former is particularly demonstrated by a confrontation between his notice on Noetus, and Hippolytus’s so-called “Against Noetus”, which may have been the final piece of his lost *Syntagma* (see earlier). Aline Pourkier, Pierre Nautin’s student and author of the first monograph on the *Panarion*, thought that, whenever the same heresies were treated by Irenaeus and Hippolytus, Epiphanius used both sources.⁶⁴ According to her, Hippolytus was his main source for his first chapters, which he completed by the use of Irenaeus, but also by making personal additions.⁶⁵ He may also use additional sources (Eusebius of Caesarea, Clement of Alexandria, Origen or the *Acta Archelai* in his refutation of Mani, *Panarion* 66). He also received some information from oral sources: some monks,⁶⁶ and also Basil of Caesarea, who informs him about the Magusaeans (Basil, letter 258).

Epiphanius, however, may also have a firsthand knowledge of heresies. He knows at least the title of several gnostic books (see *Panarion* 26, which includes a list which often converges with the Nag Hammadi Library). Sometimes, he quotes from gnostic texts (for instance in *Panarion*

26, 3, 1: *Gospel of Eve*). Concerning Judeo-Christians, he knows the Book of “Elxai” (*Panarion* 19) and probably oral traditions. He also witnesses to the existence of “Nazoreans” still in the fourth c. AD: in Beroa, he says, Christians still keep on to the Law and are called “Nazoreans” (*Panarion* 29, 1, 2). Elsewhere, he quotes a few documents (in *Panarion* 72, 2–3, Marcellus of Ancyra’s letter to Pope Julius; in *Panarion* 73, 25–26, the creed from the council of Seleucia in 359 and others). Epiphanius sometimes claim to have personally met heretics (*Panarion* 26, 17, 4–9: gnostics; *Panarion* 39, 1, 2: Sethians in Egypt).

Pourkier also demonstrated that most expositions on Christian heresies in the *Panarion* are based on the same plan (following Hippolytus’s *Syntagma*, she thinks): first, a description of the heresy; then the refutation, first by reason, then by Scripture and sometimes tradition. Epiphanius also uses irony and insults.⁶⁷ Pourkier thought that the use of reason was more developed in Epiphanius than in his Hippolytean source.⁶⁸ In Hippolytus, according to her, the logical argument, most often, limited itself to a *reductio ad absurdum*. Epiphanius has taken over this type of argument in his refutation of Saturnil (*Panarion* 23) or his refutation of Tatian (*Panarion* 46). In his refutation of the Nazoreans, likewise, he shows the impossibility for the Jews of practising the Law now that Jerusalem is forbidden to them (*Panarion* 29, 8, 1–5). But Epiphanius extends the use of reason, and also often presents his arguments in the form of a fictitious dialogue with the adversary. For instance, he directly addresses Basilides and criticizes him for holding that Simon of Cyrene, and not Christ, had been crucified. If so, then Jesus would not have saved mankind, and neither Simon, who was just a mortal, and the Son of God would be accused of escaping crucifixion and substituting another one to himself, which is impossible (*Panarion* 24, 8). In the same refutation, the bishop accuses Basilides’s doctrine of the aeons of being inconsistent. If we say that the heaven has been created by angels, and that angels have been created by superior angels, created by other angels, we are necessarily led to a supreme principle, which is the only one that we should name a “cause” (*ibid.*). Then the doctrine of the aeons-angels would be absurd and useless.

The use of reason may also be found in Epiphanius’s refutation of Greek philosophy, but it is less interesting and limits itself to showing contradictions. Though his polemics against the four philosophical schools discussed in book 1 is primarily a short description supposed to be enough to keep the reader from these “heresies”, Epiphanius makes one exception in his notice on Stoicism (*Panarion* 5, the first chapter against philosophers), in which the description of Stoic doctrines is followed by a fictitious speech in which, following his favourite device, Epiphanius addresses a Stoic. This speech aims almost entirely at reducing supposedly Stoic doctrines to absurd positions. If the Stoics contend that God is a demiurge, how can they consider matter as another principle? And if God took from matter, then he is a powerless God. If fate exists, then the laws are useless, and if fate is the cause of education, then schools must be closed. Epiphanius reproduces here traditional arguments already found among his Christian predecessors.⁶⁹ The argument that fate contradicts freewill and makes laws useless goes back to the Platonist Carneades and was already used by Christians before Epiphanius.⁷⁰ Generally speaking, however, there is no reason to connect Epiphanius’s logical argumentation with philosophical tradition: Epiphanius depends on the one hand on a Christian tradition of rational argumentation, and also probably on the rhetorical training to which any scholar was then acquainted – the preliminary exercises, the *progymnasmata*, taught the student how to build a refutation, *anaskeuê* and a confirmation, *kataskeuê*.

Many traditional heresiological patterns may be found in Epiphanius. The idea, for instance, that the Devil is at work in heretics,⁷¹ or that heresies are part of a *diadochê*, a succession which begins with Simon, though, on the other hand, heresies are characterized by a constant process of innovation. Epiphanius multiplies the names of heretical groups in order to oppose the multiplicity which is the mark of heretics to the unity of the true Church. This polemical strategy

leads scholars to doubt the historicity of a few heretical groups mentioned by Epiphanius – were the “Tatianoi”, the Severians and the Encratites different groups, or one and the same? Epiphanius does not only attack doctrines, but the heretics in persons as liars, impostors, perverse men, indulged in magic and astrology. As is the case among his predecessors, he tends to consider that bad doctrines are revealed by bad morals. But Epiphanius adds a new principle: “Each of them models his heresy on his passions” (*Panarion* 25, 2, 1). Another type of argument used by Epiphanius is what Pourkier called the “induction arbitraire” (arbitrary induction), which may be summarized, “you say so and so, so you think so and so”. The same principle may be used in different ways. For instance, “you act like that, so you think that”: Epiphanius considers the Quartodecimans are judaizing Christians only because they celebrate Easter on the 14th of the Jewish month Nisan (50, 1, 1). Another form of the same kind of reasoning is: “you think so and so, so you do that”. The fact that the Basilidians have a rule about silence is interpreted by Epiphanius as if they sought to conceal shameful deeds (24, 5, 5). Another, more traditional pattern, consists in assimilating heretics to previous heretics (polemical amalgam): Menander follows Simon’s impiety (22, 1, 3); “Ebion”, the imaginary leader of the Ebionites, “thinks like [the Nazoreans]” (30, 1, 1).

Conclusion

The author of the *Elenchos*, the author of the *Syntagma*, and Epiphanius illustrate not only oppositions to Greek philosophy which were already traditional among heresiologists – Greek philosophy being condemned as a source of heresy, or, as is the case in Epiphanius, as a “heresy” in itself. They also belong to a category of educated Christians who, as it seems, were strongly opposed to the any conciliation of Christianity and philosophy. The fact that none of these writers use the word “philosophy” to refer to Christianity – contrary to a few Christian writers from the second c. onwards – may be symptomatic of their refusal even to define Christianity as another, superior “philosophy”.⁷² They do not, however, avoid the inevitable paradox of most of the Greek Christian educated authors: their denunciation of philosophical schools and Christian heresies is often based on logical argumentation, and beyond traditional heresiological patterns which ultimately come from Greek philosophy (the notion of *diadoché*, the accusation of plagiarism, the very term “heresy” to refer to a school of thought and the very act of writing against these schools), they also use more specific philosophical arguments (against fate, against Aristotle) even though they may not always be aware of their original background. In the gradual constitution of Christianity as a “philosophy”, these heresiologists raise a voice of dissent, but they also show – without them knowing – how ancient Greek Christianity sometimes appears as a deep continuation of Greek intellectual traditions, even when ancient Christian writers sought to oppose them.

Notes

- 1 See for instance Löhr 2011 p. 38–39, who considers that the earlier work against the heresies mentioned at the beginning of the *Elenchos* (Prol., 1) is the *Syntagma* described by Photius in cod. 121 of his *Bibliotheca*. Norelli considers that this identification must now be rejected (Norelli 2017: 479).
- 2 The history of research is told by Norelli 2011 and 2017. I refer the reader to these two overviews for a more complete exposition.
- 3 This is the thesis of Castelli 2011.
- 4 Nautin 1947.
- 5 Loi 1977 and 1977b.
- 6 Simonetti 1977 and 1989.
- 7 Guarducci 1978.
- 8 Brent 1995.
- 9 See also Richard 1969 and Scholten 1990.

- 10 This was the opinion of Nautin, who made the edition of the text (Nautin 1949). See also Pourkier 199: 115. About diverging views on the nature of the text (“homily” or final part of the *Syntagma*, see Norelli 2017: 473: Norelli considers that it was probably a homily, and rejects a few datings which situate the text in the fourth c.; the author would be the same as the author of the *Syntagma*).
- 11 See Pourkier 1992: 115 and 289.
- 12 The *Contra Noetum* is followed by a “Demonstration of Truth” – which may explain why Photius counts 32 instead of 31 heresies, if the *Contra Noetum* was actually a part of the *Syntagma*.
- 13 See Pourkier 1992: 289. Lipsius 1865 and 1875 was apparently the first one to detect the connexions between Epiphanius, Philastrus and Ps.-Tertullian as witnesses of the lost *Syntagma*.
- 14 See footnote 1.
- 15 We may also understand that the author made a survey of the heresies, not Irenaeus’s teaching (ὧν in Photius may refer to ταύτας, not to ἐλέγγους).
- 16 See Mansfeld: 321.
- 17 See Carabatos-Nédelec 2008.
- 18 See Mansfeld: 322.
- 19 The most recent edition is that of Marcovich 1986, corrected by Litwa 2016. For translations, see the bibliography.
- 20 In 9, 8, 2, the author refers to his presentation of Heraclitus’s doctrine in 1, 4 as contained ἐν τοῖς φιλοσοφο<ύ>μενοις.
- 21 The traditional translation of *Elenchos* by “Refutation” is a bit misleading. It was already used by Irenaeus in the title of his own work against the heresies (*Denunciation and Refutation of the Falsely Named “Knowledge”*). About the literary tradition of the term “elenchos”, see Aragione 2011. On the author’s intentions, see Moreschini 2012.
- 22 Le Boulluec 1985, t. II: 290
- 23 For a fuller list of parallels made by “Hippolytus” between heretics and their supposed sources, see Löhr 2011, on which this paragraph is deeply dependent.
- 24 Diels 1879.
- 25 Osborn 1987.
- 26 Mansfeld 1992.
- 27 Osborn 1987.
- 28 See Mansfeld 1992: 14–19.
- 29 About the significance of the *Elenchos* for our knowledge of ancient doxography, see also Mansfeld and Runia 1997, in which the work is sometimes mentioned.
- 30 Diels 1929: 145.
- 31 Janaček 1959: 19 ff.
- 32 See Mansfeld: 318.
- 33 Marcovich 1986: 35ff, 49 ff. argues that Hippolytus is here dependent on a Christianized version of Josephus, but this hypothesis should probably be rejected (see Mansfeld 1992: 320).
- 34 On Hippolytus as witness of ancient Greek philosophy, see Bertrand 2000. On his testimony concerning Empedocles, see Hershbell 1973; on Heraclitus, see Mouraviev 1991.
- 35 Filliozat 1945.
- 36 The influence of Irenaeus on Hippolytus may also be observed by the parallel between the two authors concerning the Gnostics (books 6–7 of Hippolytus), according to Mansfeld 1992: 318.
- 37 See Morlet 2019.
- 38 See Castelli 2005 and 2011. See also Malley 1965.
- 39 See Löhr 2011: 38. Norelli thought that there might have been a different trilogy – the first heresiological work, *De uniuerso*, and the *Elenchos* – aiming at establishing that Christianity alone was the true philosophy (2017: 434): Greek philosophy was a deformation of a primitive truth transmitted by Moses, and heresies are deformations of philosophy, and Hellenism as a whole. I wonder, however, if the author really used the concept of “true philosophy” to refer to Christianity.
- 40 Löhr 2011: 37 n. 29 (against C. Andresen).
- 41 See Morlet, forthcoming.
- 42 See for instance Poirier 2014, about the superficial way heresiologists like “Hippolytus” tended to think the connexion between Gnostics and philosophy.
- 43 Marcovich 1987.
- 44 See Bos 2000 and 2005, and also Tardieu 1993: 87 (the Stagirite was actually quoted in Basilides’s *Exegetica* and in the *Exegetica* written by Isidorus, Basilides’s son).

- 45 Mueller 1994. Marcovich 1987: 591, however, thinks that the *Elenchos* refers to the actual Aristotle referred to by Basilides.
- 46 These topics are analyzed: Pouderon 2011. About plagiarism, see Vox 2011 and 2012 and the canonical study of Stempfinger 1911.
- 47 Scholten 1990.
- 48 See Edwards 1990.
- 49 See Simonetti 2011.
- 50 See Rudolph 1989 and 1990 and Mansfeld 1992: 325, who assumes that a translation of the whole *Elenchos* or of a florilegium including its philosophical sections may have existed in the east.
- 51 Sozomenus, *Church History* 6.32. On Epiphanius in general, see Nautin 1963; Vallée 1981; Leidwanger 2000; Kim 2015; Jacobs 2016.
- 52 Leidwanger 2000: 184.
- 53 *Against Rufinus* 2.22. It would be too much to say, however, Leidwanger 2000: 186, that Epiphanius’s Greek culture was “superficial”.
- 54 On this work and Epiphanius’s literary production, including the *Panarion*, see the excellent introduction of Aragione 2010 (and Aragione 2014).
- 55 Leidwanger 2000: 186. According to Aragione, Acacius and Paulus wrote to Epiphanius in 375, and Epiphanius may have completed his work in 378 (Aragione 2010: 26, n. 135).
- 56 On Epiphanius anti-heretical project, see Vallée 1981; Riggi 1986; Pourkier 1992; Kim 2010; Gilhus 2015.
- 57 See Riggi 1967.
- 58 Aragione 2010: 42.
- 59 Diels 1929: 175 and 589.
- 60 Pourkier 1992: 480.
- 61 See Jacobs 2016: 52–56.
- 62 See Kim 2015: 19, who sees in Epiphanius’s work a general rejection of “academic Christianity”, typical of Alexandria, in which Greek culture and Christian faith were interconnected.
- 63 Pourkier 1992: 480.
- 64 Pourkier 1992: 147.
- 65 Pourkier 1992: 256.
- 66 See Pourkier 1992: 479.
- 67 Pourkier 1992: 256.
- 68 Pourkier 1992: 481.
- 69 About the inner contradiction of a two-principle doctrine (God and matter), see Theophilus, *To Autolykos*, 2, 4.
- 70 See Amand 1945.
- 71 Pourkier 1992: 487.
- 72 At least in an explicit way. See footnote 39 about Norelli’s assumption that the *Elenchos* was part of a trilogy designed to establish that Christianity alone was the true philosophy.

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Origen and philosophy

Panayiotis Tzamalikos

Introduction

Origen appeared on the stage of history at a time when the new religion of Christianity was despised by heathen intellectuals, but those who dignified themselves as acolytes of the great Classical schools were more or less at a loss. Since both Plato and Aristotle were notoriously obscure, and sometimes inconsistent, what they really believed was hotly disputed almost immediately after their demise. On the other hand, early Christianity was not one: it was a diverse set of beliefs by different groups, quarters, even individual intellectuals, each of which claimed that they were the genuine Christians – just as it happens today.

However, non-Christian beliefs were not less diverse so as to be possible to lump all of them under the label ‘Hellenic’, let alone ‘Platonic’ or ‘Aristotelian’ (which is why ‘Peripatetic’ appeared to be a more convenient term glossing over assorted approaches). This involved not only religious ideas but also philosophical ones, assuming that such an anachronistic distinction would make sense. Plato was seen by many as the chief theologian who supposedly schematised (but not systematised) the archaic religiosity into a more ‘philosophical’ framework; but even those who claimed allegiance to him and proudly styled themselves ‘Platonists’ never attained unanimity. Numenius spelled out this conflict in his treatise *On the Dissent of the Members of Academy from Plato* (*Περὶ τῆς τῶν Ακαδημαϊκῶν πρὸς Πλάτωνα διαστάσεως*).¹ But those who write clearly, they have readers, whereas those who write obscurely have commentators. Avowedly, a good author is one who compels those who read him to read him again, but to do so out of delight not because of befuddlement. In any event, those exigencies could only make room for the sneaking suspicion that Hellenism, although not dead, not even moribund, was no longer a veritable juggernaut.

Origen was aware of this (sometimes irreconcilable) dissidence and remarked that ‘no one could be so bold as to claim that one knows all the doctrines of Plato, since there is so much dissent among those who interpret them’ (*Against Celsus* 1.12). His favourite author Galen had already remarked that ‘there is small dissent among the Peripatetics, but a great one among Platonists and Stoics’.² Later still, Stobaeus also pointed out ‘the disagreement of Platonists among themselves’.³

Therefore, it would be hard to maintain that, during the third century, religious boundaries had been erected between different cultural communities by either the Graeco-Roman or the Christian religions, all of which were in a state of flux and tantalisingly bowled over by introvertive self-inspection rather than criticism of the ‘other’ contestants in quest of absolute truth.

In this state of affairs, hardly could Christianity have been deemed worthy of being paid any particular attention by either the State or Greek intellectuals. Against the narratives about massive persecutions, the highly informed and on in years Origen assured that ‘only a very small number of Christians have died now and then for the sake of religiousness’ (*Against Celsus* 3.18). In any event, Christian writers were by and large hardly conversant with Greek intellectuals. For when Clement of Alexandria, Methodius of Olympus, Eusebius, Athanasius, Didymus the Blind, or the Cappadocians confronted ‘the gentiles’, their actual aim was to convince the Christian flock, not to enter into discussion with ‘the others’. This attitude was abated by Origen, who declared that he wrote the *Contra Celsum* ‘either for those who have not experienced faith in Christ or those whom the apostle calls *weak in faith*’ (Romans 14.1) not for the unperturbed ‘true faithful’.⁴ But Origen was a philosopher who had been a longtime part of the Greek intelligentsia, of whom philosophers such as Porphyry felt that he was a defector that had betrayed the Greeks. In fact, hardly would Porphyry have engaged in standing up to Christianity, had he not his own personal reasons: for one thing, he had met Origen at Alexandria and become an ardent admirer of that genius;⁵ for another, were it not for the fact that Porphyry (presumably swayed by Origen) converted to Christianity for a while but retrograded to Greek religion, reportedly for personal reasons,⁶ hardly could he have ever deigned to confront that ‘shameless rude enterprise’ (βάρβαρον τόλμημα). The peevish but in reality plaintive Porphyry actually mourned Origen’s loss to Greek philosophy, the apostate who kicked Hellenism to the curb declining to balm its wounds (Porphyry, *Against the Christians* fr. 39 = Eusebius, *Church History* 6.19.8).

Nevertheless, it was not only Christianity Porphyry thought ill of: he looked down also on the Greeks as *inferior* ‘others’ who got above themselves. He did not see Plato as an authority, not to mention that his opinion about Socrates could not have been worse.⁷ Having in mind Hermes Trismegistus, he wrote to ‘Anebo’ (supposedly, an Egyptian priest), ‘I seek to learn the truth from him, because from the Greeks I have grown despondent’ (παρ’ ἐκεῖνον λοιπὸν ἐπιζήτῳ μαθεῖν τὴν ἀλήθειαν, ἐπειδὴ παρὰ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀπέγνων),⁸ and cited the famous phrase by Thucydides, ‘the quest for truth by the Greeks is not painstaking’.⁹ Besides, Porphyry wrote an *ad hoc* scoffing treatise included in the first book of his *Φιλόλογος Ἀκρόασις* – in order to demonstrate with rather unbridled indelicacy that ‘the Greeks are thieves’,¹⁰ with specific instances and names of philosophers bolstering his claim. To him, beyond the glamour of the two great stars of Classical philosophy, there were only the irresolvable nebulae of obscurity and inconsistency, owing to appropriation of half-assimilated ‘barbarian’ wisdom.

In Plato’s dialogues *Parmenides* and *Sophist*, his concerns about his own theory of Ideas are plain; hence the tantalised Academy moved through the waves of Pythagoreanism, and then Scepticism. Antiochus of Ascalon was a member of the Academy under Philo of Larissa at a period when Philo had allowed his Platonism to degenerate into an arid Scepticism. Antiochus paving the way to Middle Platonism revolted against this scepticism and struggled to show that the Stoic doctrines were present already in Plato; but when he argued that talk about an immaterial substance (such as the Platonic Ideas) was ‘unintelligible’, and that he saw no possibility for real existence of anything immaterial, transcendent, or external to the material universe,¹¹ he actually moved into Stoicism instead of forcing the Stoa into the Academy, as Sextus Empiricus claimed somehow mourning the eviction of Scepticism from the Academy.¹² Just like Aristotle, Antiochus saw that the notions of self-existent individuality and incorporeality are mutually

exclusive. This is why later Platonists, such as Eratosthenes of Alexandria (Cyrene, c. 275–c. 194 BC) and Ptolemaeus (c. 90–c. 168 AD) sustained that ‘a soul is always in a body’ and it transmigrates ‘from subtle bodies to other ones that are oyster-like ones’.¹³

On the other hand, never did Aristotle proclaim that his Supreme Principle itself is the cause of everything’s *generation*, hence, *existence*: the First Mover moves things, but whether this is also a *creative* principle remained a disputed question during the floating (if not humdrum) times of Late Antiquity, indeed right through the Renaissance.¹⁴ Aristotle’s successor, Theophrastus, was concerned about the problematic and inconsistent character of Aristotle’s exposition, which ‘involves many perplexities, which give rise to difficulties at many points and they are pervious to many different solutions’.¹⁵

In any event, Aristotle remained notorious for his obscurity¹⁶ even though some of his commentators laid themselves out to present this as a deliberate tactics aiming to drive deficient students away and stimulate reflection by the gifted ones. However, this was an embellishment by Ammonius, which his pupils simply reproduced to the letter.¹⁷ Others, however, were not just as lenient: they censured Aristotle for reconditeness, and hot controversy over what he really believed raged for very long, with commentators speaking of Aristotle’s notorious obscurity, complaining that a mantis rather than a scholar was needed in order to decipher what he really believed.¹⁸

Alexander of Aphrodisias remarked that Aristotle suppressed cardinal evidence about Plato’s philosophy, and pointed out that there was something wrong with the way Aristotle treated Plato’s philosophy. Consequently, he wondered how was it possible for Aristotle not to have said a single word about Plato’s mention of the Creative Cause, since Plato had made a clear statement about this in the *Timaeus*.¹⁹ By the same token, why did Aristotle not mention that also Plato had posited a final cause?²⁰ Sextus Empiricus (*Outlines of Pyrrhonism* 3.31) styled the notion of ‘formless matter’ a ‘grotesque tale’ (τερατολογουμένη); and when Hippolytus read Aristotle’s accounts of the soul, he found this unintelligible: once one reads three tracts of Aristotle from start to finish, one cannot say for sure what he actually believed about the soul (Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.19.4). Moreover, whether the soul is eternally immortal after death, or it persists only for a certain period of time, was no less disputed. For Plato’s concern was not about the logical inconsistency of something being both *incorporeal* and migrating *spatially* (for which Aristotle excoriated him), but to show that the soul is immortal (*Phaedo* 102a–107a). However, Damascius reprimanded Iamblichus for asserting that, according to Plato, the posthumous soul is eternally immortal.²¹

The Presocratics sought to discover simplicity assumed to underlie and explain the apparent heterogeneousness of phenomena, which is what ‘saving the phenomena’ was about. As for the beginning of cosmos, the schematic delineation of the difference between Plato and earlier tradition was put as follows: Anaxagoras took for granted stillness and sought to explain movement by introducing the Nous as the First Mover; Plato took for granted disorderly motion and explained order as one instilled by God who ‘thought that order is better than disorder’.²²

However, beyond the distinction stillness/motion, what called for explanation was *how* principles give rise to material reality. Anaxagoras posited *immaterial* causes which arise out of the action of the incorporeal Nous/God. Plato, for his part, sought to explain stillness by positing Ideas as prototypes (or ‘paradigms’) that are participated in by material things, which are mere ‘shadows’ of that fundamental reality. Aristotle, however, saw that Ideas do not explain this essential ‘how’, which is why he ridiculed both the ‘paradigms’ and ‘participation’ styling them ‘idle talking and poetic metaphors’²³ and the Ideas ‘twitterings’.²⁴

This crucial ‘how’ had been explained by Anaxagoras, who was renowned as ‘the first’ to introduce an incorporeal Nous as God who caused the existence of everything,²⁵ ‘the first’ who

wrote a treatise ‘On the First Principles’,²⁶ and ‘the first’ who wrote and published a book on such matters.²⁷ To Anaxagoras, the principles/logoi/generative causes (by virtue of them being *immaterial*) are ‘all in all’ and everywhere, and some of them (which ‘preponderate’) concur in order to produce a certain thing, animal, person, or phenomenon – and then, they sustain it as cohesive causes until such time as they dissolve it into those causes anew. In other words, these logoi constitute the *essence* of things. Simplicius advised that no mistake should be made about Anaxagoras: for when he spoke of ‘distinction’ (*diakrisis*), this was but the ‘intelligible creation’ (*noera poiesis*) itself, that is, the creation of logoi/causes.²⁸

Aristotle seized on Anaxagoras’ inspiration and sought to obscure and ridicule his predecessor caricaturing him as a ‘materialist’; but Aristotle himself never managed to determine what the *essence* of things actually is,²⁹ and wavered between positing this as either matter or form or both of them.³⁰

Origen also believed that the distinction between Platonists and Pythagoreans at bottom did not make much sense, which is why he styled Numenius a ‘Pythagorean’³¹ while regarding him as ‘by far the best exegete of Pythagoras and Plato’.³² However, unlike Numenius, he attributed the notion of ‘good *per se*’ (αὐτοάγαθον) not simply to the Father, but also to the ‘second [not secondary³³] God’, namely, the Logos/Son. He implied this referring to those who hold that the world is god: the Stoics posited this as the first God, Plato the second, ‘and some others among them, as third’ – which is an allusion to Numenius.³⁴ But Porphyry had different views about Plato: after the Good, and then the Demiurge, he attributes to Plato the universal soul as the third god,³⁵ which is an account also reported by Epiphanius of Salamis.³⁶

Origen embraced the Anaxagorean logic and its nearest (if not inside and out) successor, namely Stoicism,³⁷ which posited that the active and cohesive causes are ‘spermatic logoi’, and the universal Nous/Logos is immanent in the world administering everything and everywhere. The *logoi* are not mere ‘thoughts’ (ἐννοήματα or φαντασίαι) in God’s mind, as later faltering ‘Platonisms’ strove to argue³⁸ in order to save Plato’s phenomena, which was an unsettling ideation, but not groundbreaking resolution:³⁹ instead, the logoi are generative, cohesive, and nonetheless disjoining *causes*, *within* things, phenomena, living persons, and animals. Thus he outwitted Aristotle’s criticism arguing against Plato that the generative and cohesive causes of things should be *within* them, otherwise they could not be causes.⁴⁰

To Origen, these causes comprise *the Body of Logos*, which is an idea of Anaxagoras, as revealed by a testimony preserved by Al-Shahrastani⁴¹ reproducing a report by Porphyry.

He [sc. Anaxagoras] is the first who advanced the theory of hiding-and-appearing insofar as he supposed that all things are hidden in *the first body* and their coming into existence is only their emergence into appearance out of that body as a species, a genus, a mass, a shape, and a denseness or a rareness, just as the ear of corn emerges into appearance out of a single grain, a stately palm out of small date-stone, a man, perfectly shaped, out of a paltry drop of sperm, and a bird out of an egg. All these are instances of the emergence of appearance out of hiding, of actuality out of potentiality, of form out of the disposition of matter. Creation (al-ibdd’), however, is only of one thing, and it applies to no other thing except to that *first body*.⁴²

The expression ‘emergence into appearance out of that body as a species, a genus, a mass, a shape, and a denseness or a rareness’ is important, since it confirms what is evident in Anaxagoras but suffered distortions. He spoke of ‘wetness and dryness, and warm and cold’⁴³ as *examples* of principles, but scholars took them as the *only* possible description of principles. To Origen, this ‘first body’ was the *living* Body of the personal Logos that comprises all of the generative, sustaining, cognitive *logoi/causes*, and is adumbrated by means of figurative scriptural terms,

such as ‘paradise’, ‘kingdom of heavens’, ‘precious stones’, ‘luxurious stones’, ‘decoration of Wisdom/Logos’, ‘upper Jerusalem’, ‘heavenly Jerusalem’, ‘Mount Zion’, ‘holy mountain’, ‘city of God’, ‘city of the living God’, ‘city of the Great King’, ‘pleroma’, ‘sons of the kingdom’, ‘Church of the firstborn’. This is why the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’⁴⁴ is ‘our mother’⁴⁵ that ‘begets’ all souls, which is what happened with the soul of Jesus, too.⁴⁶

To those figurative names, Origen added his own, styling this reality ‘our ancient fatherland’ (*arkhaia patria* which numerous later authors employed)⁴⁷ and ‘Body of Logos’ (σῶμα τοῦ Λόγου).⁴⁸ At various points, Origen’s context could leave no doubt that the ‘heavenly Jerusalem’ that ‘gives birth’ to souls is no other than the Anaxagorean ‘Prime Body’, and his expression *Body of Logos* is more meaningful than at face value, since this is pregnant with a rich philosophical legacy. Prior to him, it appears that Clement of Alexandria initiated the formula ‘Body of Logos’ in its abstract *philosophical* purport,⁴⁹ which though did not enjoy currency among later Christian authors, except in the context of speaking about the Holy Eucharist, which bears on the present point only in an attenuated sense.⁵⁰ The analogous expression ‘Body of Christ’ in essence adumbrates the same notion, and Origen employed this abundantly, all the more so since this obtains in the New Testament.⁵¹ Maximus Confessor was the only one who (as he did on numerous issues) followed Origen suit by employing the critical phrase ‘Body of Logos’ and styled Christ ‘the essence of virtues’ (σῶμα οὗν τοῦ λόγου ἐστὶν ἡ τῶν ἀρετῶν οὐσία).⁵²

Once the *logoi* are considered as objects of cognition, they are called θεωρημάτα (*theoremata*, ‘objects of contemplation’). They indicate everything that can be perceived or cognised, whether it is about science, or art, or any sort of contemplation, or any rules of practical activity. Hence, it is possible to say either that the Logos comprises many *theoremata*,⁵³ indeed a ‘system’ of them,⁵⁴ or to say that the created *logoi* are ‘parts’ of Logos, in a sense similar to them being ‘species’ of an all-encompassing genus.⁵⁵ This ‘genus’ is apprehended as ‘Wisdom, in so far as this is the constitution of concepts and contemplation of all things’ (κατὰ μὲν τὴν σύστασιν τῆς περὶ τῶν ὄλων θεωρίας καὶ νοημάτων), and as ‘Logos, in reference to this contemplation of cogitated things being communicated to rational creatures’ (κατὰ δὲ τὴν πρὸς τὰ λογικὰ κοινωνίαν τῶν θεωρημένων).⁵⁶

Origen’s analysis is in fact a rebuttal of certain arguments of Plato by means a Stoic outlook, although (as always) he remained eclectic: for he did not identify the Son *himself* with the *conceptions* of his, which only stand for the human grasp of his activity, and they are classified in terms of seniority.⁵⁷ His difference from Plotinus who identified the *Nous* (Second Hypostasis) with the totality of beings (*nous ta onta panta*),⁵⁸ and made it a ‘second God’ (*theos deuterus*), is all too clear.⁵⁹

However, it is all but coincidence that Origen wrote those things in the beginning of his commentary on John, that is, upon his conversion to Christianity, and more or less simultaneously with his commentary on Genesis and *First Principles*, as he reveals in the latter. It was the period when he had just finished with following the lessons of (the initially Christian, then heathen⁶⁰) Ammonius Saccas, and the similarities of expressions he used with those of his classmate Plotinus are staggering as much as is their import radically different, although they remained lifetime friends and Plotinus’ lifelong respect for Origen (even the Christian one) became proverbial.⁶¹ This is a phenomenon that I have called *bifurcation* of a common teaching they had received.⁶² Plotinus used to send to Origen parts of his tracts that were later entitled *Enneads*, obviously for critical reading. For example, Plotinus’ innovative notion ‘beyond the *Nous*’ was a step beyond Plato’s,⁶³ a famous phrase, thus reinforcing the transcendence of the One, which Plotinus saw as being ‘beyond essence, and beyond activity and beyond *nous* and thought’ (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας, ἐπέκεινα καὶ ἐνεργείας καὶ ἐπέκεινα νοῦ καὶ νοήσεως).⁶⁴ Of this, Plotinus emphasised the notion of being ‘beyond *Nous*’ (ἐπέκεινα νοῦ):⁶⁵ the One is ontologically superior to the *Nous*. As stunning as it is, Origen considered this expression a few decades before Porphyry published the *Enneads*, about thirty-five years before the *Enneads*

were published, which fact is pregnant with historical information concerning both dates and the relationship between Plotinus and Origen.⁶⁶ The interesting point is not the phrase itself, but the fact that Origen considered this, which is clearly an oblique reference to Plotinus' considerations, indeed a quotation from him.

By saying that the God of the universe is Mind, or that the God of everything is *beyond mind and essence*, and is simple and invisible and incorporeal, he would maintain that God is not comprehended by any being other than him who is made in the image of that Mind.⁶⁷

He confirmed this shortly after that point in the same work: he modified the Platonic proposition of God who 'is beyond essence', and made it 'God, who is superior in terms of essence, and dignity and divinity' (ὑπερέχων οὐσία καὶ πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει καὶ θεότητι).⁶⁸ Moreover, as discussed presently, both authors more or less simultaneously introduced in theology the neologistic turn 'altogether one and simple' (παντὴ ἓν καὶ ἀπλοῦν),⁶⁹ but Origen applied this to the Triune God as Nous, whereas Plotinus adumbrated the utterly transcendent One alone, not his multifarious Nous. The formula was the same, but the difference was irreconcilable: Plotinus' adumbration of the Second Hypostasis would claim some similarity to Origen's *Body of Logos*, but it was sheer alien to Origen's *ontology* of the Son. For the Son/Wisdom/Logos willingly *became Christ* for the sake of creation – which pertains not to his ontology, but only to his economic function (γίνεται κατ' οἰκονομίαν),⁷⁰ which he *assumed*⁷¹ out of God's benevolence (εὐδοκία θεοῦ).⁷² In the eschatological universal restoration, everyone will be 'one spirit' with the Lord,⁷³ by which he meant the impeccable Body of Logos which will no longer be 'recrucified' by sin – he did not mean union with God Himself. This union Origen reserved only for the Three Trinitarian Persons: whereas a just man is 'one spirit with Christ', the Lord Himself is with God the Father not 'one flesh or one spirit, but that which is above both flesh and spirit,⁷⁴ namely, *one God* (εἷς θεός).⁷⁵

And yet, the similarity (indeed identity) of expressions that both authors used persists, which is staggering once it is noticed that no other author other than those two ones did ever make use of this locution in the same context, never mind the profound difference of import underlying the selfsame expression.

Origen, wrote that 'the logoi'/causes/theoremata 'of each and every thing' that comprise the Logos are 'like parts in a whole or like species in a genus of the Logos who was *in the beginning with God*, namely, *God the Logos*'.⁷⁶

Plotinus used the selfsame phrase as Origen did, and wrote that 'the whole Nous⁷⁷ encompasses all of *them* as a genus does its species and a whole its parts' (Ὁ δὲ πᾶς νοῦς περιέχει ὡσπερ γένος εἶδη καὶ ὡσπερ ὅλον μέρος). This is what I have called *bifurcation* of the common teaching both authors received by Ammonius Saccas. But what are those '*them*' mentioned here? As usual, Plotinus meant 'beings' (τὰ ὄντα) which 'are one with the Nous'. However, he did not style them 'forms' or 'patterns', as any good Platonist should have done; instead, he wrote that 'each of them is a special force' (ἕκαστον δυνάμις ἰδία), i.e. active *causes*, and (more significantly) he used Anaxagoras' proverbial statement, all things are together and they are distinguished nonetheless (παντὰ δὲ ομοῦ καὶ οὐδὲν ἤττον διακεκεριμένα).⁷⁸ Presumably this was one of the points at which Porphyry saw the *Enneads* as being 'clandestinely mixed with Stoic doctrines' (*Life of Plotinus* 14). However, in fact this was an Anaxagorean one, as Simplicius explained: no logos 'is entirely separate or disjointed from another',⁷⁹ and 'everything that exists in the world is not cut off from all the others as if by an axe.'⁸⁰ Consequently, the universal interrelation ('sympathy') exists 'because of the preexisting intelligible unity' in the realm of principles, since 'to become distinct does not entail complete severance from each other'.⁸¹

Origen opted for appealing to Paul: since 'there is one Body', the universal 'sympathy' stems from the fact that 'when one member suffers, all the members suffer with it' (1 Corinthians 12.25–26),

and 'sin' is but 'irrationality' (ἀλογία) that causes 'recrucifixion' of this Body.⁸² However, he went further by composing a consistent philosophy of history and eschatology,⁸³ seeking to determine how human beings would be restored to their divine 'ancient fatherland',⁸⁴ so that 'the scattered children of God should be gathered all together into oneness.'⁸⁵

The common (usually Anaxagorean) background of the two philosophers made its mark every now and then. For if Origen's thought was antipodal to Platonism, Plotinus was not as a 'Platonist' as he professed himself to be either, because he was aware of Plato's flaws demonstrated by Aristotle and the Stoics. Alexander of Aphrodisias recapitulated Aristotle's view: 'since what is nonexistent can be a principle of nothing' (τὸ γὰρ ἀπλῶς μὴ ὄν οὐδενὸς ἐστὶν ἀρχή), how could it be possible for the Ideas to be 'causes' effecting generation of perceptible things? (ὄλως ἀνύπαρκτοι οὔσαι πῶς ἂν εἶεν ἀρχαί τῶν ὄντων;).⁸⁶ Plotinus sought to overcome Plato's tantalising stalemate (i.e. how sensible things can be produced from immaterial ones?), which is why he concentrated on the relationship of the intelligible and sensible universes. In theory, Plotinus posited the Soul as an intermediary between the Intellect and sensible things. However, the Soul in Plotinus, although a go-between the intelligible and sensible worlds, has not a world of its own: it belongs to both worlds, normally it is thought of as linking them, and sometimes Plotinus feels that it is hardly necessary to make use of the Soul as a link at all.⁸⁷ To Origen having such a recourse was entirely pointless. This is why he found the Anaxagorean (and then, Stoic) idea of *seed* too attractive to ignore: to him, the concentrated unity and power of the seed is considered as superior to the fully grown plant. Hence, he opted for seeing the Nous as 'cause' and adumbrated it by means of Anaxagoras' innovative notion of 'seed' comprising logoi/causes.⁸⁸

Origen described the Nous/Logos in like terms, but with one essential difference: it cannot be said that the Mind *is* a seed, but that it *has created* a seed, which contains all the seeds/logoi for the world to come to be and operate. These logoi were created out of nothing, once the untrammelled divine free will set out to create. Plotinus describes what the impersonal Intellect *is* of necessity and beginninglessly. Nevertheless, in the seed of which 'all parts are together in intelligible union', each part is like the whole, and each part acts just like the whole was entertained by Plotinus⁸⁹ and Origen in exactly the same way. Origen appealed to Exodus, 16:15–16,⁹⁰ where there is a punning with the term 'word' (λόγος, meaning 'commandment' given by Lord) and God the Logos, who came down to the Jews from heaven in the form of 'bread' ('manna'). He urged that, although the book of Exodus says that the manna was bread, this was in fact a 'logos' given by God (τὸ μάννα λόγος ἦν). Consequently, he infers that this was the Logos, who permeates the entire universe and is present also in every individual man.⁹¹ This is why it was written that the manna is 'like a coriander (*korion*):⁹² for this is reputed to be 'a plant that functions as a seed, no matter which part of it is planted; hence, even when it is cut into pieces, it does not lose its power'. He adds then, 'this is precisely what the Logos who permeates everything is' (τοιοῦτο δὲ ὁ δὴ ὅλου λόγος).⁹³

He portrayed what the personal Mind *has* in itself out of his own free will *as of a certain beginning*, which was caused by *no necessity* whatsoever. These logoi are the adorned (or 'embroidered') Body of the Logos, but not the Logos himself, who is beginningless and can be envisaged even in the absence of this 'embroiderment' which is only the result of an act of will, that is, of a free decision which is of a contingent character.⁹⁴ He was anxious to ban any 'Platonic' conception, by warning that 'God's Wisdom subsists not merely as a thought in God's mind, in a manner which is analogous to human mental concepts'; instead, Wisdom is an incorporeal and animate hypostatic personal being, ontologically preceding all creation, and yet it caused all creation to come to be.⁹⁵ When he wrote in the middle of third century, he was fully aware of the emending shift that Middle Platonism had applied to the theory of Ideas positing them as

‘thoughts of God’, an issue that remained persistently in hand, but he was hardly impressed by this. His only concession was that he cited not Plato’s name (which otherwise he did at numerous points) as the father of this theory, but ‘the Greeks’. Upon dismissing the existence of ‘an intelligible world’ (consequently, the Platonic Ideas, too), he declared that his considerations were far too alien to his own conception, and was careful of what he wrote, lest

there would be a risk of giving some men the impression that we are affirming the existence of certain mental images which the Greeks call *Ideas* (qua putent nos imagines quasdam, quas Graeci ἰδέαζ nominant, adfirmare). For it is certainly foreign to our mode of reasoning to speak of an incorporeal world that exists solely in the mind’s fantasy or the slippery ground of thoughts (*mundum incorporeum dicere, in sola mentis fantasia vel cogitationum lubrico consistentem*).⁹⁶

When Origen wrote that reflecting in terms of figments such the Platonic Ideas was ‘alien to’ his ‘mode of reasoning’, he knew what he was talking about. For his logoi/causes were but the *immaterial*⁹⁷ Anaxagorean principles and, on each occasion, their particular concurrence constituted the ‘essence’ of each and every thing or phenomenon. The entirety of principles stemming from the Body of Logos is *not* the equivalent of Plotinus’ Nous, which aphoristically he postulated as the totality of νοητά,⁹⁸ which was an echo from Aristotle’s claim that Nous should be potentially identical with the objects of his thought.⁹⁹ By implicitly relying on Parmenides and referring to Anaxagoras, Aristotle identified Being and Thinking, and decided that ‘the Nous is actually nothing before it came to think’,¹⁰⁰ while setting aside Anaxagoras’ axiom that this Nous is ‘unmixed with everything else’, which he knew perfectly well and stated all the same.¹⁰¹ By contrast, to Origen, the Body of Logos, on the one hand, and the Logos/Wisdom/Son, on the other, are two distinct realities. The Logos is a personal living Hypostasis; he is *one* with the other two Trinitarian Persons in terms of *ousia*, nature, will, and action, whereas his Body was ‘decorated’ with the logoi (‘precious stones’) by the Father.¹⁰² This theory stands close to Anaxagoras’ Nous, which is ‘unmixed’ with everything, and yet ‘the Mind rules over all those who have soul’.¹⁰³ The *Nous* is the creative source of (and yet remaining unmixed with) everything, being present and acting within the world through his principles/logoi. Similarly, Origen said that the Logos rules over the logoi, and yet he is not consubstantial with them.¹⁰⁴

Origen employed Anaxagoras’ innovative concept of God as *Nous*¹⁰⁵ but he went beyond that: this Nous is absolute unity and yet three hypostatic persons; besides, this threeness is sheer oneness,¹⁰⁶ which is why he styled *nous* either the Trinity *in toto* or each one of the Trinitarian Persons.¹⁰⁷ His expression ‘altogether one and simple’ (παντη ἓν καὶ ἀπλοῦν)¹⁰⁸ was applied to God as Nous, whereas Neoplatonists reserved this for the One standing above the Nous¹⁰⁹ – but Origen dismissed this classification as fanciful: there is nothing above the Nous/God, for which Proclus declared himself astonished. Of all the ‘exegetes of Plato’ he cited only Origen and argued that this was the reason why ‘Plato could have never included Origen among his pupils’.¹¹⁰ Consequently, against inveterate verdicts, to Origen, use of the precarious (Gnostic) term *homoousios* with reference to the ontology of the Three Persons¹¹¹ was inexorably indispensable in order to adumbrate the inscrutable notion of the oneness of the threeness and yet unalloyed simplicity of Nous. This is why, to Origen, the generation of the Son is patently neither expansion nor division of the divine nature.

Of all Presocratics, Anaxagoras was the first who propounded this doctrine in the selfsame terms.¹¹² Origen knew of course that both Plato¹¹³ and Aristotle¹¹⁴ had seized on Anaxagoras’ cardinal idea, but he drew on the real source rather than on its followers.

Did Origen respect Plato? He certainly did, because Plato's taught sublime things (*Against Celsus* 1.10), he posited incorporeal principles, he revered Deity,¹¹⁵ he dismissed those Greek myths that were debauched,¹¹⁶ he 'spoke well' by positing God as 'the Supreme Good' (πρωτον αγαθον)¹¹⁷ and affirmed a universal Nous who 'decorated everything',¹¹⁸ which Plato himself acknowledged that he had learned it from Anaxagoras.¹¹⁹ All in all then, Plato 'has been serviceable to many people' (*Against Celsus* 6.2). Furthermore, Plato styled this Nous *Sophia* (*Philebus* 30c; cf. *Laws* 689d), just as Origen himself did of the Son by appealing to the 'more ancient' Old Testament,¹²⁰ which was his standard argument in regard to whatever Greeks wrote on the right lines.¹²¹ However, Origen's grasp of God as Universal Nous¹²² had nothing to do with the Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic theories that identified Nous with an alleged 'cycling' motion of this in one way or another.¹²³ *Tout ensemble*, he believed that Plato was rightly honoured by a lot of people during his own times and later (*Celsus* 6.2). After all, unlike the Stoics (*Celsus* 7.71), Plato did not maintain 'material principles' and posited God not as 'material body',¹²⁴ but as 'the parent of the universe',¹²⁵ who 'has a Son'¹²⁶ and 'all things were created by the Logos of God'.¹²⁷ Thus, he conveniently used Plato's expression 'parent of the universe', but he mentioned the idea of 'soul shedding its wings'¹²⁸ only to reject it (*Celsus* 4.40). And when he came to the critical point of 'incorporeal life', he advanced a view diametrical to Plato's: apart from God, no rational creature can live in incorporeal form.¹²⁹ Likewise, he praised the 'followers of Plato and the Stoics' for having taken exception to Aristotle's 'fifth body' (*Celsus* 4.56). Nevertheless, no matter how successfully Plato touched on certain truths about Deity, the prophets that lived before him were far more divinely inspired and conscious that the source of their writings was God, not themselves (*Celsus* 6.6). In any event, no matter how noble Plato's motives were, to Origen the core of that philosophy was a failure. I should then just epigrammatically point out a few of them in only a marrowy manner.

(1) He had respect for Plato's idealism, but he demolished Plato's theory of Ideas and the notion of 'incorporeal world' at one blow: the Ideas are just human 'imaginary forms', which was also a cardinal Stoic tenet; in fact Origen used Zeno's words, who had styled the Ideas 'nonexistent phantoms of the soul (or, of the mind)' and 'mere objects of thought'.¹³⁰ Rebutting the berating allegations of Celsus, he exploited Aristotle's diatribe against Plato for his own purposes, indeed he relished pointing out Aristotle's acerbic criticism, who styled Plato's theory of Ideas, 'twitterings', or 'idle talking', and mere 'poetical metaphors'.¹³¹ Aristotle's devastating argument was all too clear: Plato styled the Ideas 'causes', but the way he did so could not be more reckless and unscientific: he declared that things are produced simply either because Ideas exist or they are being participated in, but Plato added that he did not actually care about *how* exactly this happens (*Phaedo* 100d). Aristotle signalled this point, arguing that even if it were granted that the Ideas exist, and even if things are assumed to 'participate' in them, this could not suffice to procure their generation; for there is always need for an agent to impart motion, let alone that there are other things that are generated (e.g. a house, or a ring) of which admittedly there are no Ideas.¹³²

(2) There is no incorporeal 'world' whatsoever and 'speaking of an incorporeal world that exists solely in the mind's fancy or in the slippery region of thoughts' was 'alien' to Origen's 'mode of reasoning'.¹³³ He disclaimed the notion of any rational being existing without a body (which was an Aristotelian mode of thinking): in line with Aristotle, who allowed for the First Immovable Mover alone to be incorporeal¹³⁴ and did not conceal that this was no other than the Anaxagorean Nous,¹³⁵ it is God alone who is incorporeal, since 'life without a body is found in the Trinity alone'¹³⁶ and 'we believe that to exist without material substance and apart from any association with a bodily element is a thing that belongs only to the nature of God, that is, of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'.¹³⁷ As late as the fifteenth century, this distinctive feature

of Origen's thought was known as a commonplace.¹³⁸ Accordingly, "No movement can take place in any body which does not possess life, nor can living beings exist at any time without movement" (*First Principles* 1.7.3). In other words, there are no 'incorporeal rational creatures', which was a fundamental Aristotelian axiom granting that soul can exist only in association with a body.

On that ground, Origen declared that his own theory of soul was 'more sublime than Plato's' proposition about

the soul which has lost its wings is borne along until it gets hold of something solid, when it settles down, taking upon itself an earthly body, which seems to be self-moving, because of the power of the soul within it.

(*Phaedrus* 246c)

He did not allow for any common genus which would include both the incorporeal and the corporeal creatures. Instead, he insisted on the threefold distinction: corporeal things, incorporeal *logoi*,¹³⁹ and the Holy Trinity.¹⁴⁰

(3) Origen shunned Plato's dualism body/soul; instead, he posited that a human being comprises body/soul/spirit (or, mind, *nous*);¹⁴¹ the latter comes from without (namely, from God), and in reality this is not a human element but a divine one entrusted to a human being and affected by the conduct of the entity soul/body.¹⁴² Thus, he embraced Aristotle's notion (which ultimately originated with Anaxagoras¹⁴³) of the 'mind' as a divine element¹⁴⁴ that 'comes from without' (ἄνωθεν νοῦς)¹⁴⁵ and made this the lynchpin of his anthropology, although once again he claimed that he received this from the more ancient Old Testament, namely, the Ecclesiastes.¹⁴⁶ As far as extant sources go, Origen was one of the first authors that considered this idea, which Aristotle apparently maintained, although he expressed himself by means of a labyrinthine set of possibilities in order to conclude that *nous* is a supplementary factor which enters an animal from without and this *nous* is divine.¹⁴⁷ As it happened, influence by Anaxagoras is unambiguous,¹⁴⁸ but Aristocles' analysis reported by Alexander of Aphrodisias made this influence clearer.¹⁴⁹

Accordingly, Origen urged that the cognisant agent is not the soul, as Plato maintained: instead, it is the *ab extra* mind entrusted to man by God. Accordingly, God speaks to mind, not to soul;¹⁵⁰ 'mind is the eye of the soul',¹⁵¹ because this mind (or 'spirit') is but the Logos dwelling in each human being and it is exactly this sharing in the Logos that makes men 'rational' (*logikoi*).¹⁵² If a bell is rung at this point, this is definitely not Platonic: it is (1) the Heraclitian notion of universal and independent Logos linking rationality with cosmic arrangement and operation,¹⁵³ as well as that of the Stoic 'spermatic logos' being part of the Universal Logos imparting himself to all men; (2) the idea of 'completion of reason' with age.

Philo, explaining Genesis 2:7, had argued that

as the face is the dominant element of the body, likewise, the mind is the dominant element of the soul: into this only does God breathe, whereas he does not deign to do so with the other parts, whether senses or organs of utterance or of reproduction, which are secondary in capacity.

(*Allegory of the Laws* 1.39)

Hence, 'that which inbreathes is God, that which receives is the mind' 'so that we may obtain a conception of' God (*Allegory* 1.37–38). Origen embraced this and saw human mind, not soul, as the recipient of God's instruction or illumination: the mind 'sees'; 'the logos in us' is 'a messenger' that makes God known to a human being; similarly, 'God the Logos, just like

a guide, reveals the Father, whom he alone knows'.¹⁵⁴ The author who signed 'Gregory of Nyssa' employed this account in remarkably similar terms,¹⁵⁵ and more so did Evagrius.¹⁵⁶ In general, Origen took up some ideas from Philo while eschewing the latter's Platonism, though not his Stoicism; e.g. the 'six days' of the Biblical story imply 'order', not actual passage of time;¹⁵⁷ the 'manna' in the desert should be identified as the Logos;¹⁵⁸ and 'Israel' means 'mind seeing God'.¹⁵⁹

By contrast, to Plato (*Sophist* 248d), it is the soul that 'knows Being (οὐσίαν)'; *nous* is only one 'good' (ἀγαθόν) out of many that 'the soul has received' (*Philebus* 55b), and it is the soul that 'looks upward';¹⁶⁰ hence, 'of whatever man possesses, the soul is the most divine' thing which 'should be honoured next after the gods';¹⁶¹ 'this is not a slave' (*Laws* 776e): it is 'the first and foremost to have been produced' (*Laws* 892c) because 'the soul is the most senior of all things that partake of generation and is immortal' (*Laws* 976d).

To Origen, all of Plato's foregoing references to the *soul* pertain to human *mind*, plus the fact that the latter is entrusted to man by God and it is man's duty to 'serve' this bestowal through righteous activity of the soul acting as a 'priest' ministering the mind¹⁶² in the 'temple'/human body.¹⁶³ This is why he styles the soul also 'chamber of the mind' (οἶκόν τοῦ νοῦ).¹⁶⁴ The soul is but a derivative reality meant to serve the mind, that is, the human nature's *ab extra* element, according to a plain Aristotelian and ultimately Anaxagorean logic. No notion other than this could have been more alien to the Platonic body/soul dualistic saga, which is why Proclus accused Origen as being an anti-Platonist whose outlook 'has been filled full of the Peripatetic novelty' (τῆς Περιπατητικῆς ἀναπέπλησται καινοτομίας),¹⁶⁵ by which Proclus meant outré 'oddity'. The soul's duty is to pursue righteous activity and refrain from wicked one.¹⁶⁶ Once this assignment is fulfilled properly, 'seeing God' (in so far this is possible for human condition to attain this¹⁶⁷) is granted to *mind*, not to soul.¹⁶⁸

The soul indicates a certain *quality*, namely, a specific concurrence of logoi/causes existing in an inferior existential mode. In sheer contrast to Plato, who made man's rationality *part* of the soul (λογιστικόν), Origen saw this as a higher-ranking *ab extra* bestowal. The soul (which to Plato is but a 'part' of the tripartite soul¹⁶⁹) is not dignified with the superior ontological status of mind, which alone is the divine element of human being. This is why life is precarious: its quality hinges on how the soul conducts as a 'priest' administering to the human nous (or spirit) which is posited as impervious to sinning.¹⁷⁰ The soul attends to the logoi (hylic, psychic, spiritual ones) that have been entrusted to the whole of a human being. The essential element is the logoi that have generated this 'whole', particularly those logoi that bestow rationality and (notwithstanding Origen's differences from Stoicism) they are analogous to the Stoic conception of spermatic logoi being contained in the Universal Logos.¹⁷¹ Accordingly, when Origen conceded that 'the soul is something standing in the middle'¹⁷² this had a different import: the soul is not a tier of a Plotinian ontological pattern; instead, this is a manifestation of logoi operating in accordance with the reality of this material world. The 'soul' is not the fragmented human 'essence'; it is the *fallen* human essence. A human being is a *free* rational creature wilfully striving to render those logoi *rational*, that is, to cherish and elevate those logoi to their highest mode of existence and operation.¹⁷³ The spirit as 'part of man's constitution' is not the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁴ Nevertheless, man's spirit (or, nous) can become 'holy'¹⁷⁵ once the soul as 'priest' paves the way to this by means of proper thoughts and deeds, in which case the Holy Spirit may dwell in man.¹⁷⁶ The closer to mind soul stands the more rational she is, which is why mind is 'the eye of the soul' or 'light of the soul' and the like,¹⁷⁷ but once a soul indulges in irrationality or sin, she becomes 'the tomb of the mind'.¹⁷⁸

In Origen, some of the Aristotelian reasoning and theories came to hold a highly important role. One significant aspect of this was his conception of what a human being is. The 'spirit' or

‘nous’ is the divine element in human existence and it is bestowed from without; ‘soul’ is one’s personal *quality*. The aim and task is to restore and ‘give back’ this bestowed ‘spirit’ (or, ‘nous which comes from without’) to the Logos, so as to reinstate the ruptured unity of his Body, thus contributing to restoring the pristine unsullied logoi in their loftiest existential mode.

Porphyry wrote this as an implicit yet clear comment on Anaxagoras’ emblematic axiom, ‘everything is in everything’ (τὰ πάντα ἐν πᾶσι),¹⁷⁹ of course taking for granted that the Anaxagorean logoi are incorporeal, although ‘Anaxagoras did not care to elaborate on the notion of *incorporeal*’.¹⁸⁰

Certainly *everything is in everything*, but in a manner befitting the essence of each reality. For in the [human] mind, the [principles or logoi]¹⁸¹ exist intelligibly; in the soul, they exist as reason; in plants, they exist spermatically; in bodies, they exist as reproduced images (εἰδωλικῶς);¹⁸² but in the Beyond they exist inconceivably and above all substance.¹⁸³

Origen wrote the first book of the commentary on John with the boldness of a pagan philosophical celebrity who had just been converted to Christianity, and his inspiration by Anaxagoras is patent. His *evolutionary* conception of creation suggests that, in the first place, the object that emerged out of nothing were dynamic, constructive, cohesive, and cognitive principles/causes/logoi,¹⁸⁴ which constitute the ‘decoration’ on the Body of Logos.¹⁸⁵ It is ‘because of this creation that it has been possible for the entire creation to subsist’. The real object of creation is the principles (initia) or logoi (rationes)¹⁸⁶ or seeds (semina) or causes (causas).¹⁸⁷ It was Gregory of Nyssa who grasped Origen’s theory, he took up his Anaxagorean evolutionary conception of generation, and spoke of the same *object* as the result of God having created ‘all at once’ ‘the starting points’ (τὰς ἀφορμάς), the ‘causes’ (τὰς αἰτίας), and the ‘forces’ (τὰς δυνάμεις) which came to be instantaneously in accordance with the divine will and they give rise to all things. Thus, reality is ‘always being created’ (πάντοτε κτίζεται).¹⁸⁸ What God made ‘in the beginning of creation’ was establishing ‘instantly’ (ἄθρόως) and ‘collectively’ (συλλήβδην) the ‘starting points, causes, and powers for all beings’ (πάντα τὰ ὄντα) to come to be. This occurred all at once (ἄθρόα καταβολή), and took no duration of time (ἐν ἀκαρεῖ).¹⁸⁹ These are not the individual perceptible things, but the creation of potentialities for perceptible things to come to existence in due course. In other words, Aristotle’s *Anaxagorean* notion of potential/actual being¹⁹⁰ plays a pivotal role in his doctrine of creation. These are the causes that put into operation the realm of potentialities towards generation and becoming. In fact, those logoi are the *essence* of each thing. Hence, generation is but transformation of Essence into Nature, whereas death is transformation of Nature into Essence. This is what Porphyry meant when he wrote that once a logos ceases to act upon a certain entity of matter ‘it becomes immaterial and incorporeal anew’.¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, Origen (disowning Middle Platonists who boiled the Ideas down to ‘thoughts of God’) cared to emphasise that this *created* wisdom should not be conceived in analogy to human mind, which is, so to speak, ‘enriched’ out of a creative plan formed into this,¹⁹² and he distinguished the created Body of Logos (or, ‘wisdom’) from Wisdom/Son as a Personal Hypostasis.

(4) Since there is not self-subsistent incorporeal rational being, there can be no transmigration of souls, which are not part of the primeval reality: a soul is only the product of a specific concurrence of logoi existing and interacting in a lower mode of being. During *all* periods of his life, Origen did not mince his words: instead, he blistered the idea of transmigration by means of such out-and-out diatribe, as ‘folly’ (μωρία), ‘inanity’ (ἄνοια), ‘heresy’, ‘fanciful myth’, ‘false teaching’, and ‘a doctrine which is alien to the Church of God’. He referred to those who ‘maintain’ or ‘introduce’¹⁹³ the ‘myth of transmigration’¹⁹⁴ as exotic ones,¹⁹⁵ who ‘have

been afflicted by the inanity of this absurdity' (*Celsus* 3.75). Besides, he argued that this 'folly' was 'posited by the Greeks'¹⁹⁶ and that his own concept had nothing to do with 'Plato's transmigration', since his own theory 'was more sublime' (*Celsus* 4.17). These averments were not just arid statements of dissent: there were learned anatomisations evincing *why* was 'the myth of transmigration' inexorably overturned once scrutinised in the light of Christian scriptures'. For one of the consequences of this 'folly' was the un-Biblical assertion 'that makes the world incorruptible'.¹⁹⁷

To Origen, there is indeed a notion of preexistent worlds, of preexistent causes and of pre-existent logoi/principles/causes, but *not* one of preexistence of souls.¹⁹⁸ There is only the realm of potentialities, and the logoi determine the prospects of human existence contingent on free action. Origen clearly and confidently propounded the notion of 'different degrees of punishment', which is why he made Jesus' words urging to 'store treasures in heavens'¹⁹⁹ a theme undergirding his idea.²⁰⁰ But any 'treasure' is liable not only to increase but also to decrease. The latter is the consequence of what Origen styled 'recrucifixion of the Body of Logos' following the 'irrationality' that imbues any human 'sin'. During a lifetime, the logoi that effect certain results can possibly modify the individual 'deposit account' of a rational creature, by this meaning the impact that individual free action makes upon the Body of Logos. To any Greek, this was unheard of.

This interactional relation between the Bridegroom/Logos and the Bride/soul adumbrates the precariousness of this rapport: once the 'woman' is faithful to her 'husband', she accumulates 'treasures' in heaven; if she is not, the deposit account abates. Therefore, this is all about human *freedom* being able to affect the Body of Logos. Origen saw this idea also in the passage of Matthew 11:12 ('From the days of John the Baptist until now, the kingdom of heavens suffers violence, and the violent take it by force'). This is how the 'heavenly treasures' are accumulated (and, by parity of reason, dissipated). For 'the violent' are 'those who believe sincerely, and exercise violence by means of utter asceticism'.²⁰¹ Thus, the impact of free human action upon the Body of Logos along with 'universal sympathy' determines a new world arrangement and the preponderant²⁰² causes that will effect this particular setting.

This was a step beyond Stoicism as well as the reason why Origen lampooned the Stoic theory of recurrence of identical worlds. Any human action makes an impact on the *logoi* which constitute Body of Logos, and this impact is a consequence of either virtue or wickedness.²⁰³ The Fall was a detriment to that Body (i.e. to Logos, i.e. to Rationality), since the primal creation was 'wounded' by irrationality (*ἄλογία*) which is only another name for 'sin'. Evil (as either activity or thought) is but 'irrationality', which is one more point on which he followed an Aristotelian and Stoic rather than Platonic rationale.²⁰⁴ Aristotle had determined that any action opposing reason (*παρὰ τὸν λόγον*) it is also an affront to righteous conduct,²⁰⁵ and the Stoics posited that 'all sins are equal', in the sense that any sin is an affront to the Logos.²⁰⁶ Origen employed this by appealing to Heb. 6:4–6, but he extended this to the entire span of time, even before the incarnation of Logos;²⁰⁷ and whenever he exalted righteous action or conduct of life, he described that as having taken place 'according to reason' (*κατὰ λόγον*),²⁰⁸ whereas any sin was an affront to reason,²⁰⁹ i.e. the Logos/Son;

For the *members* that are eaten are many, yet the *body of Christ* is one. Let us then maintain the harmony of the members as much as we can, lest we are accused of tearing the members of Christ asunder.²¹⁰

After all, *ἄλογία* means not only irrationality, but also an existential state of hostility to reason. This means that free action may, or may not, result in harmonious effect on the totality of all logoi, which are a unity as much as they are distinct from each other.

(5) The points of Origen writing *pace* Plato are innumerable: for example, it is not knowledge that procures virtue; instead, knowledge can be attained only as a result of virtuous praxis. Plato (along with the Pythagoreans) was wrong in positing that ‘the world is incorruptible’ (*Celsus* 5.21) and a ‘second God’ (*Celsus* 5.7) let alone ‘a perceptible god made in the image of the Intelligible God’ (*Timaeus* 92c). Also, ‘justice’ is not each part of the soul performing the duties befitting it (ἰδιοπραγία): it is the Logos/Christ (*Celsus* 5.47; 812).

Origen picked up from Plato just some terms and expressions; but these never became *means* for him to express Platonic theories. Otherwise, he dismissed the quintessence of what was known as ‘Platonism’.²¹¹

When Marcellus pointed his finger at the opening phrase of *First Principles*, he argued that Origen took up the first words of this work (‘Those who have believed and have been convinced’) from Plato’s *Gorgias*.²¹² But Eusebius was flabbergasted at Marcellus’ claim associating Origen with Plato only because the former had borrowed the first words of *First Principles* from Plato’s *Gorgias* (although Marcellus did not actually claim that Origen was a Platonist). Against this, the erudite Eusebius retorted that ‘Origen’s fundamental premisses were sheer different’, and exclaimed, ‘what has Origen to do with Plato?’²¹³ The same goes for philological loans from Alexander of Aphrodisias,²¹⁴ Galen,²¹⁵ and Plutarch:²¹⁶ this was just about *terms*, which Origen himself put to use in sheer different intellectual context, aims, and considerations. A striking case is his *Christian* theory of Time:²¹⁷ from the Stoics he took up the *natural* concept of time as ‘extension’ (διάστημα); from Alexander of Aphrodisias he employed the *existential* adumbration of this as (‘co-extended alongside with’ (συμπαρεκτεινόμενος);²¹⁸ and he himself composed a *theological* theory instituting Time as teleological and seeing history as the dramatic milieu in which divine and creaturely free will ceaselessly interact with each other. This theory did not have a long run (only the Cappadocians, Athanasius, Eusebius, Evagrius, and John Chrysostom grasped, whereas John of Damascus plus a couple lexicographical lemmas simply reported this assuming that this was Gregory Nazianzen’s); but it was absolutely new, self-sustaining, and had nothing to do with any Greek theory.

Furthermore, Origen introduced the expression οὐκ ἦν ὅτε οὐκ ἦν (‘there was not when [a time, actually, an ontological state in which] he was not’) for the co-eternity of the Father and Son, which laid the groundwork and became a catchphrase of Nicaea,²¹⁹ since Arius had seized on this formula only to refute Origen’s proposition.

However, as regards his theory of Creation (especially the *object* of creation), Gregory of Nyssa alone was able to follow him and elaborate. Of course, time after time scholars discover ‘Platonism’, ‘Philonism’, or ‘Neoplatonism’ in Origen’s statements, they see allegory as Hellenistic ‘corruption’ and ‘danger’, even though the epistle to Hebrews clearly advances allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament, as do the Gospels, the Revelation, and the Catholic epistles.²²⁰ Obviously, although the Scripture did so, Christian fathers were not allowed to practise this sort of two-level reading of scriptural texts – even when they had to do so in order to contradict Jewish or heretical interpretations.

The case was diametrical with respect to Origen’s usage of Aristotelian and Stoic terms. He held in high regard the Old Stoic masters, such as Chrysippus, Zeno, and Cleanthes, but he criticised them vehemently for holding ‘material principles’ (*Celsus* 1.21; 6.71), he lampooned their doctrine of identical recurrence of worlds (4.68; 5.20; 5.23) and their making (in theory) room for the Logos to perish upon universal conflagration (6.71; cf. 3.72); he reprimanded Chrysippus personally for his allegorical exegesis (indeed ‘misinterpretation’) of an utterly obscene ‘inexpressible’ picture of Zeus and Hera at Samos (4.48; 4.63), and naturally he dismissed the Stoic idea that ‘the world is the supreme God’ (5.7). Origen’s notion of Logos being immanent in creation²²¹ and permeating everything, or the intermittent destruction and

regeneration of the universe, rings a Heraclitean (and then Stoic) bell; however, he maintained also a grasp of Logos existing also in timelessness apart (and prior to) the world. Besides, the recurrence of worlds is not isochronous, but hinges on free moral action of rational creatures. In his theories of God and generation, profound Anaxagorean inspiration carries off the lion's share. Nevertheless, he did not hesitate to criticise Anaxagoras for 'treating' God's creatures such as the sun 'as worthless' by styling this 'a fiery stone' (*Celsus* 5.11), and yet he had very high respect for Euripides, the 'philosopher from stage', largely because this tragedian was a pupil of Anaxagoras.²²²

Origen had no inferiority complex opposite Greek philosophy – quite for the contrary. For he knew *who* he was, and he was a formerly celebrated Greek philosopher; but it was only in the *Contra Celsum* that he revealed the precious trove of his background openly, sometimes speaking high of heathen philosophy, sometimes criticising this severely. Once he was faced with Celsus' challenge, Origen was all too prompt to toss his hat into the ring and felt he should exhibit his superior knowledge of pagan sources in order to discredit what he saw as insolent attempt of derogation. Accordingly, since the peremptory Celsus appeared as having clashed the cymbal against Christianity on philosophical rather than political grounds, Origen sought not so much to refute as to overwhelmingly take him by storm: he quoted from several pagan sources in order to show Celsus' ineptness to grasp the meaning not only of Christian sources but also of Greek ones, his lack of dialectic skill, and his logical inconsistencies. Not only did he refute Celsus' invective, but also cared to show that he was superior to his adversary on this score, frequently by turning his opponent's argument against Celsus himself. In short, during a period when the Greek schoolmen treated Christian mindset contumeliously, Origen sought to disgrace his adversary, while bolstering up his own image as both a well-read Greek scholar and a profoundly learned Christian philosopher.

This is why he had no difficulty with speaking positively of Plato's idealism or of the ethics of Stoics. Actually, he held Stoics in high regard, particularly Chrysippus, whom he styled 'august philosopher' (*Celsus* 4.48) and deemed Zeno one of 'a by no means dishonourable school' (4.54). He styled Greek philosophers 'men who on no account could be despised' and conveniently styled men such as Pherecydes, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato 'honourable' (4.97). He did likewise about high-minded Greek theories,²²³ and conceded that 'Paul saw that in Greek philosophy there are things that are by no means contemptible'.²²⁴ However, he added that those important men said also things that were 'utterly absurd';²²⁵ and 'if Celsus was prone to lampoon Christian doctrines as naïve ones and befitting old illiterate women, he should do much more so with the theories of those men' (5.20). In general, nevertheless, he was all but coy about stating that 'the Greeks are men of wisdom and of no small learning' (*First Principles* 2.9.4).

He styled Stoicism 'an honourable' school (*Celsus* 4.54), and praised their rationale for refraining from fornication (in contrast to the Epicureans doing so on utilitarian grounds).²²⁶ Besides, he espoused the onomatopoeic Stoic (anti-Aristotelian) thesis that names are set 'by nature' (φύσει), not 'by convention' (θέσει)²²⁷ and their notion of 'direct apprehension' (καταληκτική φαντασία);²²⁸ he used terms tacitly endorsing the Stoic import of notions such as 'progress' (προκοπή), '[moral] feat' (κατόρθωμα), 'completion of reason' with age (συμπλήρωσις λόγου),²²⁹ and even the hardly known 'crisscrossing thoughts' (πεπλεγμένος λογισμός) (which Origen would have taken up from Galen).²³⁰ He granted generation by means of *incorporeal* 'spermatic logoi', but he reprimanded the Stoics for positing those logoi (and the Logos himself) as material,²³¹ or making the cosmos 'the supreme god' (*Celsus* 5.7) and pointed out that his theory about the divine Providence that 'permeates all of the world' was different from the Stoic one (*Celsus* 6.71).

At the same time, while he endorsed Aristotle's (actually, Anaxagoras²³²) theory of the 'mind which comes from without', he deplored Aristotle's theory that ruled out generation of corporeal things from incorporeal causes.²³³ However (against Plato, and implicitly cherishing the Aristotelian axiom that banned self-existent incorporeality²³⁴), he precluded self-existent incorporeality for rational creatures, except God; and he was the first after Alexander of Aphrodisias to quote Aristotle's definition of 'homonyms', which played a pivotal role in Origen's exegetical method.²³⁵

Arguing against real existence of the Platonic Ideas, Origen spoke as a Stoic; against the Stoic materiality of principles, he spoke as an idealist; arguing for potential/actual existence, as well as for man's 'mind' coming 'from without', or employing the definitions of 'homonyms' or of 'a verb' or of 'end', or endorsing Aristotle's lampooning the Theory of Ideas, he spoke as an Aristotelist;²³⁶ but he rebutted Aristotle and the Peripatetics by name when he defended Providence, or posited that magic is not mere superstition but a real art, or dismissed the existence of aether, or argued that names are set by nature, not by convention.²³⁷ Little wonder then that he included the Peripatetics in his own black list of philosophers, along with the Sophists, the Epicureans, and Democritus.²³⁸

Furthermore, this champion of strongly agonistic anti-Gnosticism had no problem with formulating his theory of creation in terms that to the uninformed might appear as correlative to the Gnostic ones: he adumbrated the generation of the universe as 'seeds' placed by the Father on the Body of the Son, who in turn created everything.²³⁹ However, he knew full well that this lesson originated with Anaxagoras; hence he was unperturbed by the distorted Gnostic versions of this, as much as he was a self-possessed censurer of the Gnostic caricature of 'Platonism'.

Therefore, to be kindly minded towards either Plato or Chrysippus and other Stoics or Numenius, and occasionally saying a couple of complimentary words about them, or to embrace some cardinal Aristotelian axioms duly transformed to his own purposes, could not make Origen either a Platonist (whether 'a Christian one' or not) nor an Aristotelist nor a Stoic. In other words, assessing his thought is a proposition much tougher than simply picking up or quibbling terms or cursory statements from his writings and making much of them.

He conceded that those who considered themselves 'Platonists' followed these schools because they sought 'more sublime things', whereas Aristotle abided by axioms that would appear plausible for human nature to accept;²⁴⁰ indeed he reprimanded him for dismissing Providence (although doing 'less so than the Epicureans'),²⁴¹ he certainly dismissed the theory of 'formless matter',²⁴² and he disagreed with Aristotle (and the Epicureans) who thought that 'magic' is nonexistent and mere superstition;²⁴³ and yet he took up fundamental ideas from Aristotle, especially on the score of anthropology, non-self-existence of incorporeal living beings, whereas the distinction potential/actual being imbues and underlies his theory of generation. Origen had his own blacklist of philosophy, which comprised 'the Sophists, the Epicureans, and the Peripatetics and all those 'who hold false doctrines', which suggested also the school of Democritus.²⁴⁴ However, he was dispassionately eclectic and took up whatever suited his own purposes. After all, he was a groundbreaking *Christian* philosopher, indeed the one who paved the way to Nicaea, which no Greek philosophical sect could have ever ushered in.

At a time when the articles of faith were fluid, he sought to demonstrate that Christian philosophy was by no means inferior to Greek philosophy: actually that it was superior. Accordingly, he used the title *On First Principles* in his well-nigh inaugural treatise, which was a title characteristic of Greek systematic expositions and synonymous to 'theology'.²⁴⁵ He called attention to the fact that

all those who profess to believe in Christ hold conflicting opinions not only on small and trivial, but also on some that are great and important. . . . On the nature of God . . . it seems necessary first to lay down a definite line and unmistakable rule.²⁴⁶

This is why he called for 'scientific' comprehension of the Christian truth, but those who should strive for this should imbibe the requisite background.²⁴⁷ Origen was more than well versed in Greek literature, including not only philosophy and theology, but also poetry, medicine, and all known sciences. He did not try to conceal the vast background that determined his tutelage: study of philosophy along with geometry, astronomy, music, grammar, and rhetoric was an indispensable introductory stage to theology, and proudly declared that this was the gist of his methodology as a teacher.²⁴⁸ His unvarying declaration was that since the new doctrine was in the bud, it should be codified as a coherent exposition 'by means of scientific demonstration and composition [built so as to be] understood as an organic whole'.²⁴⁹ Besides, by way of introducing brilliant alternatives to Greek notions while building an orthodox doctrine by means of Greek methods at their finest, he strove to be convincing to heathen philosophers, calling upon them to join in.²⁵⁰ The heart of the method involved 'the division of problems' (diairesis zetematōn), that is, a methodical identification and scrupulous anatomisation of the topics that call for reasoned exposition.²⁵¹ The method was as old as Plato and Aristotle, and the Greek rhetorician Hermogenes of Tarsus had made this a topic of theoretical analysis.²⁵²

By such clear statements determining his attitude to the Greek lore, Origen took a view which contradicted a hidebound tradition set forth by a host of earlier Christian authors: Tertullian condemned and banished Greek civilisation altogether along with germane cerebral perusal of ideas.²⁵³ Tatian (informing that he himself had been educated as a Greek)²⁵⁴ propounded a comprehensive dismissal of Greek letters²⁵⁵ (rhetoric, grammar, philosophy, plays of tragedians and comedians, etc.). He argued that this 'wisdom' had been used only for evil purposes,²⁵⁶ and, anyway, the Greek ideas of all kinds had been stolen from 'the barbarians';²⁵⁷ besides, Christian philosophy was a far more ancient one²⁵⁸ (which is the only argument from that approach that Origen endorsed). Theophilus of Antioch likewise claimed that the Greeks put in more embellished manner ideas that they had taken up from the barbarians: even if there were any modicum of truth in their theories, these had been mixed with poison; hence, the upshot was deleterious and it was all but beneficial even to those who propounded such ideas and theories. Consequently, Greek philosophy and art are of no value whatsoever: all of them are wicked lies.²⁵⁹ Hermias asserted that truth could be found only in the Gospel: works of philosophy are useless, obscure, and baffling foolishness, indeed sheer weirdness.²⁶⁰ Ignatius of Antioch reprimanded any contact with Greek writings: only Christian ones procure erudition and banish illiteracy.²⁶¹

It was part of this tradition that presumably Celsus had in mind and claimed that 'Christians do not approach erudite people; they convert only those who are uneducated. They say, anyone who is a fool, anyone who is uneducated, anyone who is childish, let him fear not to follow us'.²⁶² Accordingly, he argued that Christians sought to convert not 'the more intelligent but the most ignorant'. Origen's reply to Celsus (3.44) constituted a break with those earlier Christians who caustically denounced the Greek *paideia* altogether. Although Clement of Alexandria could have sympathised with his attitude, Origen was the first who had no difficulty to declare openly and unequivocally that he could select aspects of that lore and make them part of his syllabus as a teacher. Actually, he set aside Plato's ambivalent attitude to Homer (which eventually resulted in the poet being expelled from the education of youth of the ideal state²⁶³) and styled him 'the noblest of poets'.²⁶⁴ To him, it sufficed to banish 'the improprieties of the Comedy and the licentious iambic poems, and all else which neither improves the speaker nor benefits the hearer' and turn youth away from teachers 'who do not know how to interpret poems philosophically and to choose in each case those which contribute to the welfare of the young'. But it was precisely this selectiveness and his method of philosophical interpretation that did not ostracise Greek letters; instead, he made them an essential preparatory stage of his

overall teaching, and proudly declared, ‘we are doing something which we are not ashamed to confess’ (*Celsus* 3.58).

By the same token, when he contended that certain arguments of Celsus against Christians could entail, among others, that ‘those who are convinced that the mind which comes from without is immortal and this alone will live out delude themselves with vain hopes’ (*Celsus* 3.80), he meant not only heathen philosophers just because he spoke in third person: in fact, first and foremost he meant *himself*, while feeling that this particular view was shared by some Greek philosophers, namely, Peripatetics.²⁶⁵ For it was Origen who argued that, of the human entity, body/soul/nous (or, spirit), only the nous will survive in the end and ‘restoration pertains neither to body nor to soul, but only to mind’.²⁶⁶ He saw this also in the pericope of 1 Cor. 6:17, ‘But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit’, and made much of it, arguing that, in the eschatological end, the soul will no longer be soul, but spirit united with the Body of Logos, which will be ‘spiritual’ again, and no longer ‘recrucified’ by sinful action.²⁶⁷

This was Origen’s attitude to philosophy. He paid an unfairly high price for this, of which he did not deserve the least bit. But always it pays to be in the vanguard, to be one of the first, let alone peerless. For oftentimes one is gainsaid by pedestrian oppugners of subsequent generations, who normally are neither superior nor the ‘first’ nor ‘the few elect’, and who for that matter are itching for calling into question the unsurpassable pioneer.

Conclusion

Origen converted to Christianity when he was almost fifty years of age, and already an illustrious Greek philosopher. He joined the new religion wholeheartedly and did not suffer from any complex of dislocation. He was an assiduous student of the controversial doctrines that made waves, and aware of the confusion that followed the two great stars of Greek philosophy. He mined the golden ore of the Greek legacy in an intergraded and inventive manner, but he did not allow his Greek spiritual forbears to do the thinking for him. His analyses are brilliant alternatives to Greek notions using Greek methods at their finest while building an orthodox doctrine from which he did not deviate a bit.

This makes it impossible to discern any aspects of Greek philosophy being there without more or less revision, adjustment, qualification, or refinement. As a formerly Greek *philosopher*, he was an Anaxagorean fascinated by the notion of Nous being the Supreme Principle and interpreted Plato accordingly as Proclus complained. But once he is assessed as a Christian *theologian*, nowhere is there any seam which could allow for his ideas to be categorised in accordance with any (real or imagined) division of epochs. There are numerous facets of his thought that place him in a mindset that definitely could be recognised as anti-Platonic,²⁶⁸ and normally he selected from firsthand reading either Stoic terms and theories, or Peripatetic ones, which he had learned not from Aristotle himself, but from the commentaries of Alexander of Aphrodisias, who quoted Aristotle’s words lemma after lemma and then commented on each of them – a paradigm Origen himself used in his Christian commentaries. However, the aspects of his Aristotelian logic are not covered in Platonic colours, as it happened with the basis for the study of philosophy in Neoplatonic classes. Unlike such Middle Platonists as Albinus (who used the Aristotelian logic in such a way as to attribute this to Plato), Origen did not allow for unprocessed incorporation of any Greek school into his own exposition. This is why it is impossible to tag him by means of any name of the Greek schools. He just culled facets of Greek ideas in a highly knowledgeable, critical, and meticulously eclectic manner, and then he built on the insights he gained therefrom, bolstering them by means of scriptural passages, in which

he argued that the ultimate authority was concealed and waited for the inspired exegete to shed light on them.

No matter what affinities or differences vis-à-vis Greek philosophy, in reality he always spoke as a *Christian*. However, some of his theories were hardly grasped, and only a few intellectuals were able to keep pace with his analyses (on the subject of generation, it was Gregory of Nyssa alone), which (for the most part, tacitly) involved an enormous long-established and time-honoured armoury. On the issue of transmigration of souls, the distance between Origen's scathing fulmination of this theory and unscholarly allegations about them is at its widest. For excoriating this 'myth' was not just a whimsical pick: it was the indispensable corollary from some of his fundamental tenets that happened to accord with certain arguments of Aristotle controverting Plato, all of which Origen endorsed: self-existence of *incorporeal* rational creatures is impossible;²⁶⁹ *motion* of soul should involve its *spatiality* and entail its materiality, but spatiality and motion could apply only to a moving *body*;²⁷⁰ hence, it would be absurd to concede that an incorporeal soul (or *any* incorporeal) performs *spatial* transitions from one body to another. Thus, certain pivotal theses of Origen, which knowledgeably agnised what the notion of *incorporeal* involved and entailed, had a bearing on Aristotle's reasoned arguments explicitly or implicitly controverting Plato.

Once Origen converted to the new religion, he felt that he did not cease to be a *philosopher*, if 'a philosopher according to Christ'.²⁷¹ Since he was satisfied that now he was practising philosophy in its most sublime and profound manifestation, he saw as his duty to contribute to universal conversion to the real God and transformation of the entire world by means of this new philosophy (*Commentary on Romans* 2.4.5).

Origen has been threnodically treated as a figure to sympathise with while bewailing his heretical and 'naïve' views allegedly being poor loans from Greek thought. However, any stab of pathos is pointless. For in reality, he saw himself as Paul's kindred spirit and learned continuator who should put his own erudition to full use and demonstrate not only that Christianity was real philosophy, but also that this was the acme of *all* philosophy, which could inspire the literate, comfort the illiterate, and save them all. His thoughts poured themselves out as a torrent of observantly chosen words embracing and scrutinising every possible or contingent implication of the scriptures and of the events that had taken place at Galilee only two hundred years ago. He was not just a bookworm: he was an insatiable philosopher who set great store by existential *experience*, and who turned himself into an apostle avid to save souls while his background honed his skills as an exegete. Accordingly, he had an entirely new vision of how to move the flock by putting to use the shocking Greek methods and syllabus.

Origen was not interested in afterlife alone. He wanted to dispel the ignorance and see even the obtuse bottom rung being tamed and behave to each other in a benign manner. His idea of 'deification' being possible *hic et nunc*²⁷² meant that he brought the heaven down to the earth, instead of waiting for the earth to turn into heaven. If then eternity is a prospect to be attained, his promise was that eternity could be arrived at as of now. Accordingly, he saw the universe as a revelation, but in order for this to be so seen one had to see life as a pilgrimage guided by the revelation of the Incarnate Logos.

In the history of philosophy, Origen *ipso facto* is an unperturbed and uncategorised author whose thought constitutes an unexampled chapter of its own revealing a perfect match between Christian philosophy and Greek exegesis that imparted the later episcopal 'orthodoxy' the gravamen of its anti-Arianist doctrine. He addressed the uninitiated lot of common people as much as did he so with the erudite. The technical expressions that populate his analyses smoothed the way for him, who refused to clash the patriotic religious cymbal by means of a wholesale

denunciation of anything Greek, as it happened with Justinian's high-handed heroic fiasco. He had a hankering for reaching out for cosmic reckoning the truths of history and eternity, and strove to transport his audience in the eye of history, in the verge of eternity, into an ocean of light. This is why Origen matters for us and always will.

Notes

- 1 Numenius in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*, 14.4.16; 15.5.1. Numenius, *Fragmenta*, section 3, fr. 24.
- 2 Galen, *On his own Works*, p. 41.
- 3 Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 1.49.37: "Even among the Patonists indeed there is much dissension". Likewise, *op. cit.* 1.49.32.
- 4 *Celsus* Proem.6. Nevertheless, earlier, cf. Tatian, *Oratio Ad Graecos*. Hermias (the Apologist styled 'Philosopher' for that matter), *Satire on Pagan Philosophers*. Later, Basil of Caesarea, *On Reading Pagan Literature*. Gregory of Nyssa, *To the Greeks*. Ephraem Syrus, *We Are Not to Be Deceived by Pagan Errors*. Theodoret, *Cure for Pagan Distempers*.
- 5 Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium Primum*, Patrologia Latina 50.663 (trans.): 'As to his [sc. Origen's] incredible learning, if any one is unwilling to receive the testimony of Christians at our hands, let him at least accept that of heathens at the hands of philosophers. For that impious Porphyry says that when he was little more than a boy, incited by his fame, he went to Alexandria, and there saw him, then an old man, but a man evidently of so great attainments, that he had reached the summit of universal knowledge'. Porphyry wrote likewise. *Against the Christians*, fr. 39, in Eusebius, *Church History* 6.19.5; copied by *Suda*, letter omega, entry 182, and Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopulus, *Church History* 5.13.
- 6 The claim was that, in a quarrel with some Christians in the backstreets of Caesarea of Palestine, Porphyry was beaten and, as a result of this, he abandoned Christian faith in resentment. Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, 3.23. Theodore Anagnostes, *Epitome of the Tripartite History*, 3.153. Theophanes Confessor, *Chronography*, p. 52. George Monachus, *Chronicon*, p. 539, and *Chronicon Breve*, Patrologia Graeca 110.664.34–39. Augustine, *City of God*, Patrologia Latina 41.306. Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopulus, *Church History*, 10.36. See also the fragments of Greek theosophists (fifth–sixth century), *Tübingen Theosophy*, 85. Anonymous, *Scholia on Lucian* (commenting on Lucian's *Death of Peregrinus*), 11.
- 7 Porphyry drew on a *Life of Socrates* written by Aristoxenus of Tarentum (fl. c. 335 BC), a Peripatetic philosopher and pupil of Aristotle. Porphyry's testimony is reported by Theodoret, *Cure for Pagan Distempers*, 12.61.
- 8 Michael Psellus, *Opuscula ii*, pp. 155. This phrase which Psellus claims that Porphyry wrote to Anebo does not exist in the edition of Porphyry's *Epistle to Anebo* by A. R. Sodano.
- 9 Thucydides, *Histories*, 1.20; quoted also by Synesius of Cyrenia, *Encomium on Calvitius*, 10; Isaac Tzetzes, *On Pindaric Metres*, p. 27; Nicephorus Gregoras, *Letter*, 132.
- 10 The book is no longer extant, but Eusebius naturally copied an extensive portion of this. *Preparation for the Gospel* 10.3.
- 11 See Cicero (Antiochus was one of his teachers), *On Ends*, 3.22–31; 41–48; 4.5; 5.7; 5.14–21; cf. *De Legibus*, 1.38; 1.54.
- 12 Sextus Empiricus, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, 1.235.
- 13 Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 1.49.39.
- 14 Tzamalikos 2016: 554–569: 'Is the Immovable First Mover also a poietic cause?'
- 15 Theophrastus, in Themistius, *Paraphrase of the De Anima*, pp. 107–108.
- 16 Tzamalikos 2016: 570–579: 'Who is to blame for obscurity?'
- 17 Ammonius of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Categories*, pp. 1, 25. Simplicius, *Comentary on the Categories*, p. 3. John Philoponus, *Commentary on the Categories*, pp. 1, 29. Olympiodorus of Alexandria, *Prolegomena*, pp. 1–2; In *Aristotelis Meteora*, p. 4. Elias of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Categories*, pp. 108, 124.
- 18 Sophonias, *Paraphrase of the De Anima*, pp. 1 (proem); 31.
- 19 Alexander quotes *Timaeus*, 28c3–4.
- 20 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, p. 59.
- 21 Damascius, *On the Phaedo* (version 1), 207. In *op. cit.* 177, he expounds the profound differences between eminent Platonist (citing names) on 'which kinds of souls are immortal'.
- 22 Pseudo-Plutarch, *Teachings of the Philosophers*, p. 881A, quoted by Eusebius, *Preparation*, 14.16.2.
- 23 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 991a & 1079b.

- 24 Aristotle, *Posterior Analytics*, 83a. Origen revelled in quoting this in *Celsus* 1.13; 2.12.
- 25 Eusebius, *Preparation*, 1.8.19; 14.14.8. John Philoponus, *Commentary on De Anima*, p. 82. Asclepius of Tralles, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, p. 63. Sophonias, *Paraphrase of the De Anima*, p. 17.
- 26 Eusebius, *Preparation*, 10.14.12; 14.14.8; 14.16.12. Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, p. 27. Themistius, *How to Speak to a Philosopher*, p. 317d.
- 27 Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis*, 1.16.78.4. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 2.11.
- 28 Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, p. 301.
- 29 Aristotle, *On the Soul* 414a. Cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, pp. 244; 539; John Philoponus, *Commentary on De Anima*, p. 212.
- 30 Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1029a; 1032b; 1035a; 1044a; 1070a. Ironically, Aristotle had grasped that ‘essence’ of a thing is ‘a cause’. *Metaphysics*, 983a, 997b, 1041a–b, 1043a–b, 1050b, 1070b, 987b (ref. to Plato and Pythagoras; controverting them, in 1092b); *On the Soul*, 414a–415b.
- 31 *Celsus* 1.15; 5.38; 5.57.
- 32 *Op. cit.* 4.51.
- 33 See Tzamalikos 2016: 964–1095.
- 34 *Celsus* 5.7. He had perused Numenius’ work, which he cited mentioning him by name. *Celsus* 1.15; 4.51; 5.38; 5.57.
- 35 This passage is from Porphyry’s lost history of philosophy, attested by Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* 5.1, p. 271 and Cassian the Sabaite (Pseudo-Didymus), *On the Trinity*, *Patrologia Graeca* 39.760.17–27. John Malalas drew on Cyril’s testimony citing his name. *Chronography* 7.15.
- 36 Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 5.1, p. 185 (referring to ‘Platonists’).
- 37 Origen was unswayed by the Stoic axiom making the *logoi* material. He reprimanded this idea (*Celsus* 6.71), but otherwise he saw reality functioning by means of those *logoi*, which along with Anaxagoras he posited as immaterial.
- 38 Theiler 1930 argued that this was an innovation introduced by Antiochus of Ascalon. However, see Albinus/Alcinous, *Epitome of Platonic Doctrine*, 4.7; 9.1–3; 10.3.
- 39 Cf. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 5.3.16.3. Pseudo-Plutarch, *Teachings of the Philosophers*, pp. 878B (& Eusebius, *Preparation*, 15.45.2–4); 882D. Porphyry, *Commentary on the Categories*, p. 91. Hippolytus, *Refutation* 1.19.2. Pseudo-Galen, *Philosophical History*, 25. Stobaeus, *Anthology* 1.10.16a. John Scholasticus, *Prologue and Scholia to Dionysius on the Divine Names* 5.183.6. Arsenius of Monembasia, *Apophthegmata* 8.100c.
- 40 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 991a–b & 1080a. This was a standard thesis of his. See *Physics* 253a; *On the Soul* 409a. Accordingly, Eustratius of Nicaea argued that ‘no matter whether Ideas are a kind of [God’s] thoughts or separate entities, either way they cannot produce real-world effects’. *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 56.
- 41 Al-Shahrastani (Taj al-Din abu al-Fath Muhammad ibn Abd al-Karim al-Shahrastani, 1086–1153, was a Persian historian of religions, doxographer, philosopher, and theologian).
- 42 Wolfson 1976: 508. Italics are mine.
- 43 Anaxagoras, in Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, pp. 34, 156–157, 174, 176, 179, 181.
- 44 Heb. 12:22. Cf. Origen, *First Principles* 4.3.8; *Homilies on Jeremiah* 5.13; 12.3; *Celsus* 7.29; V3.5.
- 45 Gal. 4:26. Cf. Origen, *First Principles* 4.3.8; *Homilies on Jeremiah* 5.13; *Celsus* 4.44; *Commentary on Matthew* 14.13; 16.15.
- 46 *Commentary on Matthew* 14.17.
- 47 Origen, *Extracts on Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca*.12.1584.20–40; *Homilies on Exodus* (Lat.), 2.1. Basil of Caesarea, *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* 6.1; *On the Holy Spirit* 27.66; *Homilia Dicta in Lacis*, *Patrologia Graeca*.31.1456.11–13. Pseudo-Athanasius, *Questions to Duke Antiochus*, *Patrologia Graeca* 28.620.25–28. Pseudo-Basil of Seleucia, *On the Life and Miracles of Siant Thecla* 1.7 (line 75). Cassian the Sabaite (Pseudo-Didymus), *On the Trinity*, *Patrologia Graeca*.39.697.45–47. Cassian the Sabaite (Pseudo-Caesarius), *Quaestiones et Responsiones* 121. John Chrysostom, *On the Cross and the Thief*, *Patrologia Graeca*.49.401.16; 409.38–39; *et passim*. John of Damascus, *Exposition of the Faith* 85. Michael Psellus, *Hagiographic Orations*, 1a (lines 8 & 65); *Funeral Orations* 10.3; *Letter*, 5. Michael Glycas, *Proverbs*, section 8, line 163. See this discussed in Tzamalikos 2007: 287–291; also, Tzamalikos 2012a: 400.
- 48 *Commentary on John* 1.13.79; 10.35.220 & 229; 10.36.235 & 236 & 286; *Commentary on Matthew* 13.21; 11.18; 13.21; 13.24; 14.1; 14.17; 14.23; *commSerMatt*, pp. 126; 146; *Ten Books on the Song of Songs* (fragmenta), p. 175; *Commentary on Ephesians*, frs. 5; 9; 16; 17; 33. Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations* 37, copied by Bessarion, *On the Sacrament of the Eucharist*, section 10.7).

- 49 Clement of Alexandria, *Paedagogus* 6.47.3: “he says that he will adorn the body of the Logos in his blood”.
- 50 For example, see the notion of the ‘Body of Logos’ (*soma tou logou*) in Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechetical Orations*, 37; copied by Bessarion, *On the Sacrament of the Eucharist*, section 10.7.
- 51 1 Cor. 12:27; Eph. 4:12; Col. 2:17. Cf. Origen, *Commentary on John* 1.13.79; *op. cit.* 10.35.229; *op. cit.* 10.35.220; *op. cit.* 10.36.235; *op. cit.* 10.36.236. Likewise, *op. cit.* 10.36.286; 20.11.81&82; *Commentary on Matthew* 13.21; 11.18; 13.21; 13.24; 14.1; 14.17; 14.23; *commSerMatt*, pp. 126, 146; *Ten Books on the Song of Songs* (fragmenta), p. 175; *Commentary on Ephesians*, frs. 5, 9, 16, 17, 33.
- 52 Maximus Confessor, *Questions and Doubts*, 191, lines 53–54. Cf. Origen, in *Catena on Matthew*, p. 180; *Commentary on Matthew* 12.14; *commSerMatt*, pp. 145–147; *Fragments on Matthew* 83 (Klostermann); *Scholia on Matthew*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.304.15–18; *Commentary on Ephesians*, fr. 33; *Selections on Nummers*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.583. Cf. *Against Celsus*, 6.6; 8; *Commentary on Matthew*, 12.14; *Commentary on Ephesians*, fr. 33.
- 53 *Commentary on John* 5.5.1 & *Philocalia* 5.4.
- 54 Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.18.126; *Commentary on Matthew* 17.21; *Scholia on the Song of Songs*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.280.53–55 & 17.281.10–11.
- 55 *Against Celsus* 5.22.
- 56 *Commentary on John* 1.19.111.
- 57 For example, the Son is ‘beginning’ only in so far as he is considered as Wisdom: he is not ‘beginning’ as either Logos or Life or the rest of his conceptions (*ἐπινοῖαι*). *Commentary on John* 1.20.117–118. In any case, the Trinitarian ‘God is one and entirely simple’ even if the Son ‘becomes many’ for the sake of redeeming the entire creation which is need of being set free. Hence, the Son is ‘many goods’, but although his conceptions are many, nevertheless he is ‘one personal Subject’: *Homilies on Jeremiah* 8.2.
- 58 Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.5.3.
- 59 Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.9.5.11–12 & 21–23; cf. 5.9.8; 6.6.8; 6.7.36; 6.7.39; 6.8.9; 6.9.2; 6.9.5.
- 60 Porphyry, *Against the Christians*, fr. 39, in Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.19.7.
- 61 Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 14.
- 62 Tzamalikos 2016: 6–7.
- 63 Plato, *Republic* 509b. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads*, 5.3.13; 5.4.2.
- 64 Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.7.1; Cf. 5.1.8; 5.4.2; 6.8.16. Damascius, *First Principles*, p. 48.
- 65 Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.8.9 & 5.1.8 & 5.3.11; 5.3.12; 5.4.2; 5.8.1; 5.9.2.
- 66 Origen, *Celsus* 7.38. See Tzamalikos 2016: 1032–1040: ‘Origen writing after 265 AD’.
- 67 Origen, *Celsus* 7.38.
- 68 Origen, *Commentary on John* X3.25.152. Cf. Plato, *Republic* 509b. Origen, *Celsus* 6.64.
- 69 *Commentary on John* 1.20.119; cf. *Celsus* 7.38.
- 70 *Commentary on Matthew* 17.20; cf. *Commentary on John* 1.20.119–120.
- 71 *Commentary on John*, I: 9.55; 17.101; 19.111; 31.222; 34.244.
- 72 *Fragments on John*, 1.
- 73 Origen made much of the pericope of 1 Cor. 6:17, ‘But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit’.
- 74 Reference to 1 Cor. 6:17.
- 75 *Dialogue with Heraclides* 3.
- 76 *Celsus* 5.22; cf. John 1:1.
- 77 I have refrained from using ‘Intellect’ for Nous, because I believe that this widespread translation is inaccurate, but explaining this is beyond my present scope.
- 78 *Enneads* 5.9.6; cf. 6.7.5(2–4): any *logos* is a specific *activity*, which makes its mark by means of the material entity it acts upon. Cf. 5.9.8.
- 79 Anaxagoras, in Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, pp. 157, 176.
- 80 Anaxagoras, in Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, p. 176.
- 81 Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, p. 461. He quotes Hippocrates having posited that ‘there is one confluence, one union, one sympathetic correspondence’.
- 82 Hebrews 6:6. *Commentary on John* 10.10.12.89–90; 25.3.15.126.
- 83 Origen did not call the literal factuality in question. As for the modern trend alleging that Origen was interested in History only as a parable, I have explained the folly of this. See Tzamalikos 2007: chs. 10, 11.
- 84 On this expression and idea, see Tzamalikos 2007: 87–88, 288–290.
- 85 *Commentary on John* 25.3.13.98.
- 86 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, p. 724.

- 87 Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.8.7.
- 88 Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.6.1; 3. 2.2; 7.11; 4. 3.10; 4.7.5; 4.8.6; 4.9.3; 4.9.5; 5.3.8; 5. 9.6; 5.7.3; 5.9.9; 6. 3.16; 6.7.5; 6.8.3.
- 89 Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.6.1; 3.2.2; 3.7.11; 4.8.6; 4.9.3; 4.9.5; 4.4.39; 5.7.3; 5.9.9.
- 90 Exodus, 16:15–16: ‘This is the bread which the Lord has given you to eat. This is the word which the Lord has commanded’.
- 91 See Tzamalikos 2006: ‘The Place of the Logos’, pp. 165–172.
- 92 Kourion is a kind of plant, namely, the *adiantum capillus-veneris*.
- 93 *Extracts on Deuteronomy*, Patrologia Graeca 12.808.51–809.1 (using the example of the seed of coriander, commenting on Exodus 16:14). In fact, he drew on Philo, *Allegory of the Laus* 3.170–171.
- 94 See Tzamalikos 2006: 120, 129, 135, 148, 150, 2007: 417.
- 95 *Op. cit.* 1.34.243. *First Principles* 1.2.1: the wisdom of God has hypostatic existence (aliquid insubstantivum) . . . ‘once it is rightly accepted that the only-begotten Son of God is God’s wisdom hypostatically existing’. *Op. cit.* 1.2.9: ‘the breath then . . . comes to have a subsistence of its own’. This ran sheer contrary to Philo, who identified the totality of Ideas with the Logos (styling him ‘Idea of Ideas’); *Making of the World*, 25; cf. *op. cit.* 16.
- 96 *First Principles* 2.3.6.
- 97 Perhaps, Aristotle had realised that Anaxagoras’ principles were *immaterial*. He slipped into such a confession inadvertently (*Metaphysics* 991a15–17), but there is no reason for downgrading his gut factor: his project was to tarnish all of his predecessors; hence, he chose to make a caricature of Anaxagoras’ philosophy in order to aggrandise his own contribution. See Tzamalikos 2016: 77–78, 231–233, 274, 333, 394.
- 98 Cf. *Enneads* 3.9.9(6–7); 5.3.5(27–28); 5.5.3(1); 5.9.5(26); 5.9.6(1); 5.9.89(16–17); 6.2.18(13–14); 6.2.21(55–56); 6.4.4(1).
- 99 Aristotle, *On the Soul* 429b30–430a2. To be sure, Porphyry was quite right in advising that the *Enneads* ‘are implicitly mixed with Stoic and Peripatetic doctrines’. *Life of Plotinus* 14.
- 100 Aristotle, *op. cit.* 429b30–31.
- 101 Aristotle, *op. cit.* 405a13–17. Commentators could not understand how was it that the Nous is unmixed with everything and yet it causes things to exist. Although Aristotle wrote that Anaxagoras’ Nous was incorporeal, some of them believed that it was the soul that Anaxagoras posited as incorporeal. Proclus, *In Platonis Parmenidem*, p. 1214. Others could not see how it was possible for Nous to be ‘unmixed with everything’ and yet ‘present in all those that have a soul’, or ‘how an unmixed Nous could he possibly know’. John Philoponus, *Commentary on De Anima*, p. 91. Sophonias, *Paraphrase of De Anima*, pp. 12, 17, 133. Of course, all of these were echoes of Aristotle’s misled and misleading considerations.
- 102 *Commentary on John* 1.38.283; cf. 1.34.244; XI10.22.147.
- 103 Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, pp. 156, 177. Cf. Aristotle, *Physics* 404b: ‘Anaxagoras alone’ posited that Mind ‘is impassible and it has nothing in common with the rest of beings’.
- 104 *Commentary on John* X3.25.149–150.
- 105 *First Principles* 1.1.6: “God . . . is . . . the mind and fount from which originates all intellectual existence and mind. *Celsus* 4.54: God is ‘the Supreme Mind’ and the ‘Nous’. *Op. cit.* 7.38: God is ‘Nous’.
- 106 *Commentary on John*, 1.20.119: ‘God is altogether one and simple’. *First Principles* 1.1.6: ‘God . . . is a simple intellectual existence . . . simple and wholly mental existence . . . the simplicity of its divine nature’. *Op. cit.* 1.3.7: ‘The power of the Trinity is one and the same. . . . There is no separation in the Trinity’. *Op. cit.* 1.4.2: ‘This blessed and ruling power, therefore, that is, the power that exercises control of all things, we call the Trinity’. *Celsus* 4.14: God is ‘simple and incomposite and indivisible’. *Op. cit.* 7.38: God ‘is simple’. *Op. cit.* V3.38: God ‘is the creator and father of each and every mind’.
- 107 *First Principles* 1.1.6; 1.1.7; *Celsus* 4.54 (‘the Supreme Nous’ created everything, and all qualities were bestowed on matter by ‘a certain Perfect Nous’).
- 108 *Commentary on John* 1.20.119; likewise, *Celsus* 4.14.
- 109 *Enneads* 5.3.11(26–27); 5.3.13(16–17); 5.9.14(1–3). Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* 5.1, p. 384; 5.3, p. 211. Damascius, *First Principles*, pp. 37, 42, 47, 58–59, 65, 76, 79, 84, 90. Naturally, since the Nous comprises all the nohtav, Damascius declared that ‘unlike the One, the Nous is not simple’ (*op. cit.* p. 25).
- 110 Proclus, *Platonic Theology*, 5. 2, p. 31.
- 111 Origen, *Commentary on Matthew*, fr. 14 (Klostermann), columns 1 & 2; frs. 257; 572. *Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew*, Codex Sabaiticus 232, Jerusalem Tzamalikos 2020, folios 18v (bis: Son and

- Father; Three Persons); 94v (Three Persons); 194v (Son and Father); 195v (Three Persons); 240v (Three Persons). Athanasius (*De Decretis Nicaenae Synodi* 33.13) reported that he was ‘aware of certain scholars and bishops of old that had used the term *homoousios* in reference to the theology of Father and Son’, but no one paid attention to this acknowledgement. Of course, he had Origen in mind, too. At least, in the case of the Nicene shibboleth “there was not when he was not” he cited Origen by name as the father of this.
- 112 Themistius, *Paraphrase of De Anima*, p. 14: “Anaxagoras states that nous is wholly unmixed and simple”. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.9.
- 113 Plato (acknowledging Anaxagoras) *Phaedo* 97c–d; *Phaedrus* 270a; *Cratylus* 396c, 400a, 413c; *Philebus* 30c–d, 58d, 59d; (as if the idea were his own) *Philebus* 22d; *Phaedo* 98a; *Timaeus* 39e; 47b; 47e; 48a; 51e; *Laws* 714a, 897c, 898a, 966e, 967b.
- 114 Aristotle (ref. to Anaxagoras), *On the Soul* 404b, 405a–b, 429b, 430a; *Metaphysics* 1065b, 1069b, 1072a, 1075b, 1091b; *Physics* 203a, 256b, 265b; *Protreptic*, fr. 110; (no ref. to Anaxagoras), *On the Soul* 407a–408b, 431b, 432a; *Eudemean Ethics* 1217b; *Nicomachean Ethics* 1096a; *Physics* 198a; *Fragmenta Varia*, Category 1 (in *On the Soul*), fr. 38; Category 1 (in *On Prayer*), fr. 49.
- 115 *Celsus* 1.15 (& *Philocalia* 17.2) & 4.48 (& *Philocalia* 17.6), referring to *Philebus* 12c.
- 116 *Celsus* 4.50; cf. 7.6, once again, contradicting Plato. *Republic* 334b; 377d; 378d; 379c; 383a; 387b; 389a; 595b; 600e.
- 117 *Celsus* 6.11. Cf. Mark 10:18; Luke 18:18.
- 118 *Philebus* 28c; 28e; 30d; *Phaedrus* 98a–b; *Timaeus* 36d; 47e; *Laws* 963a; 967b.
- 119 *Phaedo* 97c; *Cratylus* 400a; 413c; cf. 396b. Aristotle, *On the Soul* 405a. Plutarch, *Pericles* 4.6.
- 120 Cf. Wisdom of Solomon 1:6; cf. 7:7; 7:21–22.
- 121 Cf. *Celsus* 1.19; 5.43; 6.7; 6.13; 6.15; 6.21; 7.30. Josephus reporting a testimony by Aristotle’s pupil Clearchus of Soli wrote that Aristotle was taught by a certain Jew. *Against Apion* 1.176. So Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 1.15.70, and Eusebius, *Preparation* 9.5.1; 9.6.2.
- 122 *First Principles* 1.1.6; 1.1.7; *Celsus* 7.38.
- 123 Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 47b; *Laws* 897c. Aristotle, *On the Soul* 407a. Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.2.3; Porphyry, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, Book 2, fr. 51, in Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus*, vol. 1, p. 394 Diehl (cf. p. 28). Proclus, *Platonic Theology*, vol. 5, p. 130. Simplicius, *Commentary on De Anima*, pp. 46, 312, *Commentary on Categories*, p. 351. John Philoponus, *Commentary on De Anima*, pp. 132, 136. Sophonias, *Paraphrase of De Anima*, p. 23. Gennadius Scholarius, *Commentary on De Anima* 1.8. Anonymous, *Scholia on Euclid’s Elements*, Book 1, scholion 1.
- 124 *Celsus* 1.21; 3.29; 4.14.
- 125 Origen, *Celsus* 1.6, paraphrasing Plato, *Timaeus* 28c4–29a3. See also God being styled ‘parent of the universe’ in *First Principles* 1.3.1; cf. 2.1.1 & 2.1.2 (‘the parent of all things’). Cf. *Commentary on John* 1.38.277: the Father is *Nous*. Also, *Celsus* 8.38: God is ‘the Creator and Father of every single mind’.
- 126 Origen, *First Principles* 1.3.1; cf. 1.1.6.
- 127 Origen, *First Principles* 1.3.1. Cf. *Celsus* 6.8, reference to Plato and quotation from *Letters* 323d.
- 128 Plato, *Phaedrus* 246c2; 248c8.
- 129 See *infra*, p. 9.
- 130 Zeno, fr. 65 von Arnim; Cleanthes, fr. 494 von Arnim.
- 131 *Celsus* 1.13 (& *Philocalia* 18.7); 2.12. Cf. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 991a (& 1079b).
- 132 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 991a & 1080a. This was a standard thesis of his. See also, *Physics* 253a; *On the Soul* 409a. Accordingly, Eustratius of Nicaea argued that ‘whether Ideas are a kind of [God’s] thoughts or separate entities, either way they cannot produce practical effects’. *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 56.
- 133 *First Principles* 2.3.6.
- 134 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1012b; 1049b; 1073a; 1076a; etc. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, pp. 265, 267, 311, 686, 700, 708, 722; and *passim*.
- 135 Aristotle, *Physics* 250b; 256b; 265b; *On the Heavens* 301a; *Metaphysics* 984b; 989b; 1075b8; *On the Soul* 404a; 405a–b; 429a.
- 136 *First Principles* 1.1.6; 1.6.4; 2.2.2; 4.3.15; 4.4.8; *Homilies on Exodus* (Latin) 6.5.
- 137 *First Principles* 1.6.4; cf. *op. cit.* 2.10.1.
- 138 Gennadius Scholarius, *Eptome of Aquinas’ Summa Contra Gentiles* 2.91: ‘Origen said that, apart from the Holy Trinity, there is no incorporeal self-subsistent [rational] being’. Contrary to sixth-century detractors and modern scholars alike, Gennadius (with Thomas Aquinas) knew that to lay the notion of ‘animate incorporeal individual minds’ at Origen’s door was a malicious distortion.

- 139 Commentators of Late Antiquity recognised that the logoi/active causes are entirely different from the Platonic Ideas. Consequently, those modern scholars who invented the unstudious scheme ‘logoi or Ideas’ are nescient of the germane perspicacious Late Antique scholarship.
- 140 See Tzamalikos 2016: 1389–1401: ‘Three classes of Being’.
- 141 *Commentary on John* 2.21.138.
- 142 *Commentary on John* 2.21.138. See *infra*: the soul is a ‘priest’ administering to this bestowed nous in the ‘temple’ of human body.
- 143 Stobaeus, *Anthology* 1.48.7 (*apud* Aëtius).
- 144 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1177b; *Generation of Animals* 737a; 744b; *Metaphysics* 1072b; *On Respiration* 472a.
- 145 *First Principles* 1.7.4: ‘My own opinion is that the spirit was put into them [sc. animate and rational beings] from without (*ego quidem suspicor extrinsecus insertum esse spiritum*)’. Cf. *Celsus* 3.80; *commSerMatt*, p. 144. H. Crouzel and M. Simonetti saw this as ‘affirmation de préexistence des âmes!’ (*Origène, Traité des Principes*, 5. II, p. 108, note 23). However, the notion of *ab extra* mind entrusted to man by God is simply an allusion to Origen’s Stoic notions of ‘spermatic logos’ and of ‘completion of reason’ (*sumplerosis logou*), both of which are focal of his anthropology.
- 146 Ecclesiastes 12:7. Origen, *commSerMatt*, p. 144.
- 147 Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 736b5–28.
- 148 See Tzamalikos 2016: 594–598. The Anaxagorean Nous is ‘unmixed with everything’ and yet ‘there are certain things in which he is present’. Besides, ‘the Mind, both the greater and the lesser one, is the same’. Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, pp. 164 & 157 respectively.
- 149 Aristocles of Messene (second century AD), *Fragmenta*, fr. 4, in Pseudo-Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima Libri Mantissa*, pp. 111–112.
- 150 Origen, *Commentary on John* 10.5.18; 10.40.283; 10.3.23.137; 11.10.3.17; 30.2.27.339; *Fragments on John*, frs. 3; 13; *Exhortation to the Martyrs* 47; *On Prayer* 16.3; 17.2; 23.2; 24.2; 27.10; *Homilies on Jeremiah*, homily 18.2; *Fragments on Jeremiah*, fr. 15; *Homilies on Luke*, homily 1, p. 6; *Fragments on Luke*, frs. 18; 66g; 121a; 187; *Celsus* 5.60; 6.20; 7.33; *Fragments on Psalms*, on Psalm 127:3 (‘Wisdom is wife of the mind’ or ‘sister of the mind’); on Psalm 140:2; *Fragments on Proverbs*, PG.13.24.45–46; *Exposition of Proverbs*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17: 188.10; 197.35–37; *Dialogue with Heraclides* 16;
- 151 *Scholia on Luke*, *Patrologia Graeca*.17.336.5–8; *Fragments on Luke*, fr. 195; *Dialogue with Heraclides*, 17; *Exposition of Proverbs*, *Patrologia Graeca*.1: 189.54–56; 200.9–10; *Fragments on Psalms*, on Psalms 118:148; 129:3–5; 138:7; 138:14–16; 142:8.
- 152 Cf. Tzamalikos 2006: ‘The place of the Logos’, pp. 165–172.
- 153 Heraclitus, H. Diels – W. Kranz, *Testimonia*, fr. 16, in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Dogmaticians 1/Against the logicians* 1, 7.131.
- 154 *Commentary on John* 1.38.277. Cf. *Celsus* 7.33; 1.2.7.
- 155 Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Knowledge of God*, *Patrologia Graeca* 130.265.35–41.
- 156 Evagrius of Pontus, *Chapters of Evagrius’ Disciples* 1.125 (& John of Damascus, *Sacred Parallels*, *Patrologia Graeca*.95.1169.49–50).
- 157 Origen, *Selections on Genesis*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.97.25–32 & Philo, *Making of the World* 13; cf. *Allegory of the Laws* 1.2; *On the Decalogue* 101.
- 158 Origen, *Selections on Deuteronomy*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.808.45–55 (quoting Wisdom of Solomon, 7:23); *Fragments on Jeremiah* fr. 2, *apud Philocalia* 10.2. Jesus assured that the *manna* that descended from heaven was he himself. John, 6:41; 6:51; cf. 6:58. Origen, *Celsus* 2.9; 7.16; *Commentary on John* 1.21.131; 10.17.99; 10.35.313; *et passim*.
- 159 Origen, *Commentary on John* 2.31.189; *Fragments on Luke*, 45b; 66g; *Celsus* 7.33 & Philo, *Allegory of the Laws* 3.1863.212; *Posterity of Cain* 92; *Confusion of Tongues* 56; *Who is the Heir of Divine Things?* 78; *et passim*.
- 160 *Republic* 529a. Cf. Pseudo-Plato, *Spuria* 372a: ‘And if you ask me what the name *soul* applies to, I will reply, this is that through which we come to know’.
- 161 Plato, *Laws* 726a; cf. *op. cit.* 726b: the soul ‘is the most divine of all things’.
- 162 *Commentary on 1 Corinthians* fr. 29.
- 163 Cf. John, 2:21. However, not only Jesus’ body, but also every human body is a ‘temple’. Origen, *Commentary on John*, 10. Prologue.1; 10.24.141; 10.37.239&252; 10.39.263–264; 10.42.297; *Celsus* 2.10; 3.25; 3.32; *commSerMatt*, p. 227. Cf. 1 Cor. 6:19. Origen, *Commentary on John* 10.35.228; 10.37.240; *Fragment on 1Cor*, frs. 16; 32; *Selections on the Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.1169.45–51; *Celsus* 4.26; V3.19.
- 164 Origen, *Exposition of Proverbs*, *Patrologia Graeca*.17.200.9.

- 165 Proclus, *Platonic Theology* 5.2, p. 31.
- 166 *Commentary on John* 11.10.3.17; *Celsus* 6.4 (& *Philocalia* 15.6); 5.3.33; 7.43; *Commentary on Matthew* 16.11; *Fragments on 1Cor.* fr. 53.
- 167 *Fragments on John*, fr. 10.
- 168 *Commentary on Matthew* 17.19; the same, in *schLuc*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.364.49–365.2; likewise, *Fragments on John*, fr. 10; *Fragments on Luke*, fr. 186.
- 169 Plato, *Phaedrus* 253c–e; *Timaeus* 89e; *Laws* 898c; *Republic* 435c; 439d; 440e; 441a–e; 550b; 553d; 571c–d; 580d; 605b.
- 170 *Commentary on John* 30.2.18.218.
- 171 *Celsus* 5.22; *Commentary on John* 6.30.154.
- 172 *Commentary on John* 30.2.18.218–219.
- 173 Cf. Porphyry, *Sententiae* 10 and later, note 158.
- 174 *Dialogue with Heraclides* 6.
- 175 *Commentary on Ephesians*, fr. 21.
- 176 *Homilies on Jeremiah* 8.1.
- 177 Cf. *Fragments on Luke*, fr. 195; *Scholia on Luke*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.336.24–25; *Selections on Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12: 1236.6; 1424.38; 1520.49; 1681.22–23; *Exposition of Proverbs*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.200.9.
- 178 *Selections on Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.1445.51.
- 179 A testimony attributed to Aristotle by Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, pp. 291, 303, 340, 658; *On Mixture*, p. 228; *In Librum De Sensu Commentarium*, p. 68; likewise, Syrianus, Simplicius, John Philoponus, Asclepius of Tralles, Olympiodorus, Michael Psellus.
- 180 Asclepius of Tralles, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, p. 63.
- 181 Further in this text, Porphyry once again designates the ‘principles’ *logoi*.
- 182 The adverb εἰδωλικῶς means an object being seen through its reflection by a mirror, which is why grasp of this object is vague. Once involved with perceptible things, the principles/logoi are grasped indirectly, that is, through the results of their activity upon matter. Using modern language, this adverb could be *grosso modo* translated ‘virtual reality’. See Hermias of Alexandria, *Scholia on the Phaedrus*, p. 113, interpreting Porphyry and Iamblichus. Likewise, Proclus, *Commentary on the Republic* 5.1, p. 77, and *Commentary on Cratylus* 182. Michael Psellus, *Theologica* 76, line 29.
- 183 Porphyry, *Sententiae* 10. Likewise, Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.8.8 (13–24). Proclus, *Elements of Theology* 103; *Commentary on the Parmenides*, p. 929; *Commentary on the Timaeus* 5. 1, p. 8; 5. 2, pp. 26, 44; *Commentary on Euclid*, p. 145. Damascius, *First Principles*, p. 243; cf. *Commentary on the Parmenides*, p. 159. Prior to Porphyry, Zeno had seen the reality and function of logoi in exactly the same way. Zeno, fr. 158, in Themistius, *Paraphrase of the Physics*, p. 35. Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, p. 35; besides, he explained Anaxagoras’ generation in the same terms. *Op. cit.*, p. 301: ‘it is plain that the intellectual distinction which followed the state of unity, in which all things were together, was itself creation’.
- 184 *Commentary on John* 1.19.115; 1.19.111–115; 1.34.244; 1.38.283.
- 185 Cf. *Commentary on John* 2.18.126: ‘In as much as he is Wisdom, there is a system of objects of contemplation within him’.
- 186 *First Principles* 1.2.2–3.
- 187 *First Principles* 2.9.2.
- 188 Gregory of Nyssa, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, p. 174.
- 189 Gregory of Nyssa, *Defence of the Hexaemeron*, p. 72; likewise, pp. 113, 132; *On the Making of Man*, pp. 189, 204.
- 190 See Tzamalikos 2016: ch. 6: ‘Potentiality’, pp. 323–420; cf. pp. 598–606.
- 191 Porphyry, *On the Harmonics of Ptolemy*, p. 14. Proclus put the idea in the same mold. *Institutio Theologica* 103; cf. *On Plato’s Parmenides*, p. 929; *Commentary on the Timaeus* 5.2, pp. 26, 44.
- 192 *Commentary on John* 1.34.244.
- 193 *Fragments on Luke*, frs. 17c; 17e; *Selections on Ezekiel*, *Patrologia Graeca* 13.808.2.
- 194 *Celsus* 1.20 (& *Philocalia* 18.5); 5.49.
- 195 Cf. *Celsus* 6.36; *Commentary on Matthew* 10.20; 13.1 & *Fragments on Matthew*, p. 8.
- 196 *Commentary on John* 6.10.64; 6.11.66&70; 6.12.72&73; 6.14.86; *Celsus* 1.13; 1.20; 3.75; 5.29; 5.49; 6.36; 7.32; 8.30; *Commentary on Matthew* 10.20; 13.1–2; *Fragments on Matthew* (47.2), pp. 5–8.
- 197 *Celsus* 5.21; cf. *Commentary on John* 6.14.86.
- 198 See the compelling arguments by Edwards 2002: 89–97. Despite occasional criticism by some scholars either sticking to the ingrained notion of ‘Platonism’ in Origen, or arguing for the unscholarly and

- nonsensical ‘Christian Platonism’, none of them has ever managed to do away with or abate the force of Edwards’ insightful analyses.
- 199 Matthew 6:19–21; Luke 12:21; Mark 10:21.
- 200 *Commentary on John*, XI10.21.138–139; *Commentary on Matthew* 10.14; *Homilies on Jeremiah* 17.4; similarly, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 8.2 (Latin).
- 201 *Commentary on Matthew*, fr. 228 (Klostermann).
- 202 Cf. Anaxagoras, in Simplicius (drawing on Theophrastus), *Commentary on the Physics* 5.9, pp. 27, 155, 173; *Commentary on De Caelo*, pp. 606, 632.
- 203 Cf. Origen, *Commentary on John* 10.10.13.107: ‘there is nothing between committing sin and not committing sin’.
- 204 Chrysippus, *SVF, Fragmenta Moralia*, frs. 445, 500, 501. Origen, *Celsus* 2.79; 3.75; 4.32 & 85–86 (*Philocalia*, 2.20); *Homilies on Luke* 17; *Scholia on Luke*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.348.30–34; *Fragments on Luke*, fr. 216; *Exposition of Proverbs*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.209.9–14; *Extracts on the Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.1664.33–36.
- 205 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1151a; *Magna Moralia* 2.6.26; *Problemata* 949b; *On Virtues and Vices* 1250a; *Poetics* 1461b.
- 206 *SVF* 3.141.22–29; 3.142.5–8; 1.54.13–18; 1.100.3–4; 3.119.21–32; 3.141.30–142.9.
- 207 *Commentary on John* 10.10.12.89–90; 25.3.15.126; *Homilies on Jeremiah* 13.2.
- 208 *Commentary on John* 30.2.2.6; *Commentary on Matthew* 11.12; 11.18; *Scholia on Matthew*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.304.26–29; *Commentary on 1 Cor*, 23; *Commentary on Ephesians* fr. 29; *Selections on Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca*.12.1133.50–51.
- 209 *Commentary on John* 10.10.37.344; *Philocalia* 18.21; *frPs*, on Psalm 54:3–4 & *Extracts on the Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.1464.27–29; *Celsus* 3.50; 5.23.
- 210 Origen, *On the Pasch*, p. 122 (on Rom. 12:4–5, cf. 1 Cor. 12:25–27).
- 211 For example, Ideas are ‘imaginary forms’; there is no such thing as ‘an intelligible world’; there are no self-existent incorporeal beings; and ‘transmigration’ is ‘a myth’ and a ‘folly’.
- 212 Cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 454e.
- 213 Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.4.26–27.
- 214 On Alexander of Aphrodisias and Origen, see Tzamalikos 2007: 269, 404, 2012a: 305–306, 352, 516, 581, 2012b: 173, 313, 368, 377, 2016: 397–398, 354, 512, 522, 597, 658, 672, 676, 843, 869, 927 (God styled *autotheos*); 928–929, 978, 991–992, 996–997; *Scholia*, pp. 40, 147, 166, 199, 262, 265–268, 277, 279, 294, 300, 304, 330, 337, 345, 385, 397, 402–404. Eusebius expressed explicitly his respect for Alexander of Aphrodisias. *Preparation* 6.8.39–6.9.32.
- 215 On Galen and Origen, see Tzamalikos 2006: 169, 200–201, 219, 245, 323, 373, 2007: 169, 368–269, 2012a: 218, 239, 397, 2016: 397–398, 658, 676–677, 849, 865, 929, 954, 1049, 1230, 1244–1245, 1258; *Scholia*, pp. 40, 84, 320, 323, 402. See Galen and Alexander of Aphrodisias considered in apposition: Tzamalikos 2012a: 597; *Scholia*, pp. 212, 242, 262, 307, 320, 386, 402. On allegedly common ideas between Galen and Plutarch, see Tzamalikos 2016: 1438, 1503.
- 216 On Plutarch and Origen, see Tzamalikos 2006: 122, 201, 219, 2007: 15, 45, 2012a: 220, 238–239, 371–372, 2012b: 80, 326, 343, 377, 2016: 676, 854; *Scholia*, pp. 40, 267–268, 294, 322, 337, 368. See joint considerations of Galen and Plutarch in Tzamalikos 2012a: 218, 239, 289, 345, 405, 2012b: 163; *Scholia*, pp. 73; 97; 246; 262; 388.
- 217 See Tzamalikos 2006: 218, 262–265, 309, 2016: 299.
- 218 Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, p. 699; cf. *op. cit.* p. 449; 818; *Commentary on the Topics*, p. 80; *Commentary on the Meteorology*, p. 78. Cf. Galen, *De Anatomicis Administrationibus*, p. 370; *On Bones for Novices*, p. 777; *On the Dissection of Veins and Arteries*, p. 823; *On the Use of Parts* 5.3, p. 710; 5.4, pp. 59; 202; *On Respiratory Difficulties*, p. 915; *On Symptoms*, p. 323; Pseudo-Galen, *Introduction*, p. 716. Cf. Tzamalikos 2006: 210–218, 262–265, 300, 2016: 229, 992.
- 219 Athanasius acknowledged his dues to Origen, but once again, this was ‘the voice of one crying in the wilderness’. *On the Decrees of the Nicene Synod* 27.1. See Tzamalikos 2016: 843, 890, 910, 991–992, 1054.
- 220 Cf. Luke, 1:51–53 & 68–71; 4:27; 1 Cor. 9:9; 10:4; Gal. 4:24; Eph. 5:31–32; Heb. 7; 9:5; 1 Peter, 2:6–8; Re5. 14:8 – not to mention the mystical interpretation of the Old Testament in Heb. 7.
- 221 Plato saw the Cosmic Soul (which the Creator placed within the body of the universe) as to be the source of life and reason. *Timaeus* 34b.
- 222 *Celsus* 4.77; 7.36; cf. 7.6.
- 223 *Op. cit.* 5.43; cf. 7.61 (& *Philocalia* 15.11); 3.51 (& *Philocalia* 18.22).

- 224 *Celsus* Prologue.5; likewise, *op. cit.* 3.80; 4.45; 6.58; 7.42; *et passim*.
- 225 For example, he criticised Zeno and Chrysippus for having posited God as material body. *Celsus* V3.49. So he did of Empedocles for holding the doctrine of transmigration of souls (*op. cit.* 1.32), and (*op. cit.* 5.21) of Pythagoras and Plato who maintained that the world is incorruptible.
- 226 *Op. cit.* 7.63; cf. 5.47.
- 227 *Celsus* 1.24 (& *Philocalia*, 17.1); 5.45 (& *Philocalia*, 17.3); *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 46; *Exposition of Proverbs*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.164.28–31; *Selections on Genesis*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.116.12–14.
- 228 Origen, *Celsus* 1.42 & *Philocalia* 15.15.
- 229 *First Principles* 1.1.6; 1.3.6. *First Principles* 1.1.6; 1.3.6; *Commentary on John* 1.37.270; 37.273; 2.24.156; 20.13.107; 31.279; *On Prayer* 29.5; *Celsus* 1.33; 4.84 (*Celsus*); 5.42; *Philocalia* 9.2; 20.11; *Commentary on Romans (I.1–XII.21)*, frs. 5; 14; 39; *Commentary on Romans (III.5–V.7)*, pp. 136, 144, 146; *Fragments on Psalms*, on Psalm 118:9; *Fragments on Luke*, fr. 228; *Commentary on Matthew*, 13.16; 14.7; 14.8; 17.33; *Scholia on Matthew*, *Patrologia Graeca*.17.301.24.
- 230 This means morally or logically conflicting thoughts simultaneously besieging one's mind. Origen, *Fragments on Psalms*, on Psalm 118:61; also Origen, in *Catena on the First Letter to the Corinthians*, p. 35.
- 231 *Celsus* 1.21; 3.75; 4.14; 5.23; 6.71.
- 232 Stobaeus, *Anthology*, 1.48.7 (in Aëtius).
- 233 Cf. Aristotle, *On the Heavens*, 305a31–33; *Metaphysics*, 1075b29.
- 234 Cf. Aristotle, *De Anima* 432a3–7. Cf. Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics*, p. 532. Besides, 'it is impossible for that which is incorporeal to be commingled with a corporeal body'; *Topics* 149b2.
- 235 Aristotle, *Categories* 1a. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, pp. 241; *Commentary on the Topics*, p. 97. Origen, *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.1. See Tzamalikos 2007: 206: 'Homonyms'.
- 236 ('homonyms'), *Homilies on Jeremiah* 20.1; ('verb'), *Fragments on John*, fr. 110; ('end'), *Extracts on the Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.1053.14–15; (Theory of Ideas), *Celsus* 1.13; 2.12.
- 237 (Providence) *Celsus* 2.13; 3.75; (magic), *Celsus* 1.24 (& *Philocalia* 17.1); (aether), *Commentary on John*, X3.21.126; *Celsus* 4.56; (names), see note 234.
- 238 *Celsus* 2.27; cf. 1.43; 7.66; V3.45.
- 239 However, the Gnostics meant 'creation of the first Ogdoad of Aeons', which had nothing to do with Origen. Epiphanius of Salamis, *Panarion* 5.1, p. 426, copying from Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.1.18–19 (quoting from Gnostic writings).
- 240 *Celsus* 1.10 (& *Philocalia* 18.2); cf. 1.43; V3.45.
- 241 *Celsus* 1.21, having in mind that Aristotle dismissed only the sublunar Providence. Cf. *op. cit.* 2.13; 3.75; *Commentary on Romans (III.5–V.7)*, p. 130. On the Epicureans dismissing Providence altogether, see *Celsus* 1.8; 1.10; 1.13; 1.21; 2.13; 4.4; 4.75.
- 242 *First Principles* 1.3.3; *Celsus* 3.41; 4.61; *Philocalia*, chapters 19 & 24.
- 243 *Celsus* 1.24; cf. 1.68; 2.51; 6.32; 6.41; *Extracts on Numbers*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.584.16–19.
- 244 Origen, *Celsus* 2.27; *Commentary on John* 5.3.45, cf. 1.43; *Commentary on John* 5.3.66.
- 245 The title *Peri Archôn* characteristically had been used by Greek authors, and Aristotle reportedly had written a treatise under this title, too. See Tzamalikos 2016: 142–146. Albinus/Alcinous clearly saw this title as equivalent to 'theological exposition'. *Epitome of Platonic Doctrine* 8.1; 12.1. Likewise, Clement of Alexandria, *The Rich Man's Salvation* 26.8. Iamblichus, *On the Mysteries* 8.3.
- 246 Origen, *First Principles* 1. Preface.2.
- 247 *Commentary on John* 10.33.288; *Scholia on Luke*, *Patrologia Graeca* 17.344.34–43.
- 248 Origen, *Letter to Gregory Thaumaturgus* 1 (*Philocalia* 13.1). Cf. *Celsus* 3.58; 7.49.
- 249 Origen, *Fragments on John*, fr. 7; cf. *Fragments on Lamentations*, fr. 20; *Selections on Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.1441.9–14.
- 250 *Celsus* 3.57; 4.53.
- 251 *Celsus* 3.39; *Commentary on John* 6.46.241; 10.3.13.82; *Extracts on the Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca*.12.1441.11–13. *frProv*, *Patrologia Graeca* 13.29.48–51.
- 252 Plato, *Cratylus* 425e; *Sophist* 217a; 235c; and *passim*. Aristotle, *Prior Analytics* 46a–b; *Posterior Analytics* 91b; 97a; *De Anima* 402a; 410a; 417a; and *passim*. Hermogenes, *On Legal Issues* 1; 4.
- 253 Tertullian, *Indictment of Heretics* 7.14.
- 254 Tatian, *Oration to the Greeks* 42.1.
- 255 Tatian, *Celsus* 1.1.
- 256 Tatian, *Celsus* 1.1; 1.3; 2.1; 26.2.
- 257 *Celsus* 1.2; also, *Celsus*, in *op. cit.* 6.1. Cf. [Plato], *Epinomis* 987e.
- 258 Tatian, *Oration* 31.1; 41.1.

- 259 Theophilus of Antioch, *To Autolytus*, 2.2; 2.8; 2.12; 2.15; 2.22; 2.33; 3.1–2; 3.6; 3.16; 3.18; 3.29.
- 260 Hermias, *Satire on Pagan Philosophers* 19.
- 261 Pseudo-Ignatius of Antioch, epistle 9.1.2. Cf. Otto Bardenhewer, *Geschichte der altkirchlichen Literatur*, vol. IV, p. 193.
- 262 *Celsus* 1.26; cf. 1.9.
- 263 Origen recalled this in *Celsus* 7.54.
- 264 *Celsus* 7.6. But ‘Moses was more ancient than Homer’; *op. cit.* 4.21; 6.7; 6.43. Cf. *op. cit.* 4.91: ‘Homer, the admirable poet’. Quotations from Homer abound in Origen’s work, and his excerptors were not shy about making such points part of their anthology. Cf. *Philocalia* 20.18 (*Celsus* 4.94); 20.21 (*Celsus* 4.91, which includes the foregoing reference to Homer).
- 265 Cf. Aristocles of Messene (first century AD), *apud* Pseudo-Alexander of Aphrodisias, *De Anima Libri Mantissa*, p. 112. He claimed that Aristotle himself maintained the immortality of ‘the mind that comes from without’. So reported Aeneas of Gaza, *Theophrastus*, p. 7. John Philoponus disagreed and argued that Aristotle did not hold this opinion. *Commentary on De Anima*, p. 541.
- 266 Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 13.2. Cf. *First Principles* 2.8.3; *Celsus* 3.80; *Commentary on John*, 10.3.61.429.
- 267 *Fragments on 1 Corinthians*, fr. 39; *Selections on Psalms*, *Patrologia Graeca* 12.1592.54–57. Cf. this theme recurring in *First Principles* 1.8.4; 2.3.7; 2.6.3; 2.10.7; 3.6.6; *Commentary on John* 11.10.4.23; 10.10.16.134; 30.2.25.326; *On Prayer* 26.3; *Celsus* 2.9; 6.47; *Commentary on Matthew* 14.7; 16.16; 15.24; 16.8; 17.33.
- 268 See the incisive study by Edwards 2002. Also, *passim* in Tzamalikos 1991, 2006, 2007.
- 269 Cf. Aristotle, *On the Soul* 432a3–7 (‘nothing has a separate existence, except sensible magnitudes’). Cf. *Physics* 204a8–10.
- 270 Cf. Aristotle: ‘motion’ and ‘bodily nature’ are involved with each other; *On the Heavens* 274b4–5; 288b4–6; 304b13–14; *Physics* 212b7–8 & 29. Cf. Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Commentary on the Metaphysics*, p. 686. Simplicius, *Commentary on the De Caelo*, p. 426; *Commentary on the Physics*, pp. 620; 1243. John Philoponus, *Commentary on De Anima*, p. 97. Michael Psellus (commenting on Aristotle’s *Physics*), *Opuscula ii*, p. 77 (‘anything that moves, it has to be a body; of no incorporeal could be said that it moves’, hence, ‘any incorporeal or indivisible is incompatible with motion’, and ‘motion means corporeality’; *Metaphysics*, 1069b24. Moreover, ‘whatever moves, it is a body’; *Physics* 212b29; 223a19–20). Only a body could be said to be here or there. *Physics* 212b29; cf. 233a19–20. Change is concurrent with materiality, and vice versa. Cf. *De Anima* 432a3–7; *Physics* 204a8–10; 240b).
- 271 Origen, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Latin), 3.1.15.
- 272 *Commentary on John* 2.2.17; 30.2.27.388; *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 25; *On Prayer* 25.2; 27.13; *Commentary on Matthew*, 16.29; 17.32; *Scholia on Luke*, *Patrologia Graeca*.17.365.1–2; *Extracts on Ezekiel*, *Patrologia Graeca*.13.769.29–31; *frPs*, Psalm 81:1.

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The Sethians and the Gnostics of Plotinus

Tuomas Rasimus

Introduction

The Sethians were early Christians who revered the third son of Adam and Eve, Seth, as their spiritual ancestor and savior who had in recent times incarnated in Jesus of Nazareth. The Sethians likely called themselves Gnostics, and scholars who still use the term “Gnostic” now tend to use it solely of the Sethians.¹ The overall Sethian worldview, often transmitted through biblically based creation myths and apocalypses, is generally Platonic in the sense that there is a clear distinction between the world of ideas and the sensible cosmos. Influence of Plato’s *Timaeus* and Neopythagorean metaphysics is felt throughout the Sethian text corpus, despite the fact that the demiurge and the cosmos are depicted in extremely negative terms. Yet, the main issue at hand is that, in light of relatively new evidence, the Sethians appear to have made a positive impact on the metaphysics of Plotinus, the reputed founder of Neoplatonism, and of his star-student Porphyry, who is sometimes seen as a systematizer of Plotinus’ thinking.

From Plotinus’ biography by Porphyry (*Life of Plotinus* 16), as well as from Plotinus’ own work (*Ennead* 2.9[33]), we know that Plotinus had Gnostic friends and that Gnostic apocalypses were circulated in Plotinus’ seminars in the mid-260s Rome. Admittedly, Plotinus himself, as well as Porphyry and a fellow student, Amelius, came to spend considerable time, energy, and ink to refute Gnostic views that were apparently gaining favorable attention among the seminar-ians. Nonetheless, Plotinus’ early works show certain affinities with Gnostic views and, thanks to the Nag Hammadi finds, we are now in possession of ancient Coptic translations of two of the Gnostic apocalypses that circulated in the seminars, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. These texts stand firmly in the Sethian tradition and abound in metaphysical concepts that are familiar from Neoplatonism and usually regarded as inventions by Plotinus and Porphyry. Yet, the presence of such material in Sethian texts, some of which seem to antedate Plotinus’ public career, casts serious doubts on the often-held assumption that the third-century Sethian metaphysics was merely copied from Plotinus and Porphyry.

In the following, we will first examine the metaphysics of three important Sethian texts, the *Apocryphon of John*, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes*,² and pay particular attention to how these texts explain the coming into being of multiplicity from the unitary first principle (God/the One), and how they employ triadic patterns and language in describing the process. We will

then examine how Plotinus and Porphyry deal with the same issues. The hypothesis that best explains all currently available evidence is that some important Neoplatonic doctrines (the procession-and-return scheme, the being-life-mind triad, and the enneadic structuring of that triad) were first developed in a rudimentary form by the Sethians and that their formalization and adoption into Neoplatonism as doctrines compatible with Plato and the *Chaldean Oracles* resulted from an exchange of ideas between Porphyry, Plotinus, and his Sethian Gnostic friends.

1 Sethian metaphysics

1.1 The Apocryphon of John

The most famous and popular of Sethian texts, the *Apocryphon of John*, has come down to us in four Coptic copies. These date to the fourth and fifth centuries, but a Greek version was known to Irenaeus of Lyons already before 180 CE. The author of the *Apocryphon* claims to be John son of Zebedee who, from early on, was credited with having written the Gospel of John (Culpepper 1994). The author of the *Apocryphon* wishes to clarify certain themes left unclear or unanswered in the Gospel, including what are God and the divine realms like. Although at times the *Apocryphon* reads like a running commentary on the early chapters of Genesis, the first part of the treatise is a metaphysical exposition of the first principles in a Neopythagorean fashion with additional influences from Plato's *Parmenides* and *Timaeus*.

The author of the *Apocryphon* begins his exposition by describing God as father, spirit, blessedness-giving blessedness, life-giving life, and one who always exists. Yet the author also makes heavy use of negative theology: God is unsearchable, ineffable, and nonexistent above those who exist. Several times alternatives are negated in order to show that God is beyond what is negated of him. For example, God is neither unlimited nor limited, but something superior to these (BG 22.7–25.22). Use of negative theology was common among Middle Platonists and derives ultimately from Plato's *Parmenides* (especially its first hypothesis, *Parm.* 137c–142a).³

According to the *Apocryphon*, God is a unitary monad and the ultimate source of everything, including matter. This is a Neopythagorean idea. Whereas Plato and the Old Academics, Pythagoras and the Old Pythagoreans, as well as Aristotle and the Stoics, were all dualists in the sense that matter (or the dyad/passive element) was a principle independent of God, the Neopythagoreans in the first century BCE introduced to Greek philosophy the idea that everything, including matter, derives from one single source. Although school Platonism did not truly espouse this doctrine until Plotinus, it appealed to some Christian Platonists because it meshed well with biblical monotheism. This is the case with the *Apocryphon*, too.

Neopythagoreans had already worked out the basic solutions for the problem of deriving multiplicity from unity. It could happen either by (1) self-duplication, (2) self-division, or (3) exteriorization (Krämer 1967: 320). While such solutions are sometimes arithmetic and dry, the Neopythagoreans (including Christian ones) also found ways of expressing them with poetic beauty by recourse to myths and examples from nature: God can *duplicate* himself in a water-mirror (cf. Narcissus), the self-*division* can be compared to the splitting of the original androgyne (cf. Plato, *Symposium* 189d–193d; Genesis 1–2), and the *exteriorization* can be described as childbirth or an egg birth (cf. Phanes).

The *Apocryphon* contains traces of all these metaphors in its explanation of how multiplicity arose. God, the Invisible Spirit, contemplates (*noein*) himself and sees his thought (*ennoia*) as a mirror image in the spiritual water, which is his own essence surrounding him. The image (*eikōn*) looks back, as mirror images do, conceives from the gaze, and gives birth to a child, the self-begotten (*autogenēs*) Christ. This one then requests and receives Intellect (*nous*), Will, and

Logos, which he not only uses to create everything but which also makes him complete (BG 26.14–32.19). This is a metaphorical description of the divine mind's fertile self-reflection, which produces the fully articulate Intellect below its ineffable source.

We notice here the mirror and childbirth metaphors working in unison, as well as the description of a supreme triad as three intellectual principles: the first one who contemplates, the second one who is a thought, and the third one who becomes the fully articulate divine mind and engages in creation. This shows affinities with second- and third-century interpretations of Plato's *Timaeus* 39e,⁴ which found three intellects in the passage, distinguishing among (1) the ideas contained in the "living being," (2) a mind that contemplates them, and (3) a (lower aspect of that) mind that deems how to impose the ideas on matter. Such interpretations are found in Numenius (frg. 22 des Places), Amelius (in Proclus, *Commentary on Timaeus* 1.306.1–14), and Plotinus' early works (*Enneads* 3.9 [13] 1).⁵

Although the image of God in the *Apocryphon* is said to be *androgynous*, and is even called "triple-male" (and a "triple-power"), it is grammatically a feminine entity, depicted as a child-bearing mother. She is called "Barbelo," and one of her more important attributes is eternal life. As the second principle, the receiver of the father's formative gaze, and a mother figure, Barbelo resembles Plato's Receptacle, called "mother" at *Timaeus* 50d and identified by some Middle Platonists as a universal life-principle.⁶ But even more so, Barbelo resembles Hellenistic Jewish interpretations of Plato's Receptacle that had assimilated her with Wisdom. Personified Wisdom (Sophia) appears in certain biblical books as God's tool in creation, his image, and even his spotless mirror (Prov 3:19–20; 8:22–30; Wisd 7:26). As the image of God, she provides the model for Adam and Eve, who were created according to (*kata*) the image of God (Gen 1:26–27).⁷ Proverbs even identifies Wisdom with the tree of life, thus creating an additional link with Eve, who is called "life" in Genesis 3:20[21]. The first-century Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria, applied epithets of Plato's Receptacle from the *Timaeus* to Wisdom, such as "wet-nurse" and "foster-mother," and depicted her as an image of God and life-principle, the "mother of those who are in the world," which in turn resembles Eve's additional title, "mother of all living," in Genesis 3:20[21] (Philo, *Worse Attacks Better* 115–116; *Allegory of Laws* 1.43).

The *Apocryphon's* presentation of the supreme triad as Father–Mother–Son, and the introduction of a Wisdom-like mother figure between the Father and Son, have little to do with the developing trinitarian doctrine. Rather, keeping in mind the *Apocryphon's* Johannine framework, the triad appears to result from a Philo-type reading of the Gospel of John, where mother Wisdom as the Platonic Receptacle is read into the Gospel, in order to complete the family portrait of Father and Son; she is identified with Life, often qualified by the evangelist as eternal. There are intimate connections among the Father, Son, and Life in the Gospel. Consider the following examples, which could be multiplied: "I [the Son] am in the Father and the Father is in me" (10:38; 14:10–11); "just as the Father has Life in himself, thus he has granted the Son to have Life in himself" (5:26); and, "In the beginning was the Logos [= the Son], and the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God. . . . In him was Life" (1:1, 4). The three are not only mutually present in each other but are also found at the very beginning of all things. Once the Gospel is exposed to a Platonic reading, as is the case with the *Apocryphon*, the missing primordial mother, the feminine life-principle, can easily be detected in the Gospel's concept of (eternal) life, interpreted as Lady Wisdom.

The son to whom the mother gives birth in the *Apocryphon* is described in Johannine terms as the Only-begotten (*monogenēs*), who created everything through his Logos (cf. John 1:1–3, 18). It is to be noted that the Logos, though depicted mythologically as the Son's fellow worker he had requested from the Father, is not really a separate character but merely a personified

attribute of the Son himself. Similarly, eternal Life, which Barbelo had requested from the Father, is really a characterization of Barbelo herself.

Below the supreme triad of Father–Mother Barbelo–Son Autogenes are found four lights that house the heavenly Adam, Seth, seed of Seth, and repentant souls. The heavenly realms in the *Apocryphon* are populated by many other characters as well, but they are all personified aspects of the supreme triad or inhabitants of the four lights. Thus, the whole divine realm is arranged on four levels according to the famous Pythagorean tetractys. The perfect number ten, symbolized by the tetractys, was achieved by adding $1+2+3+4=10$, and pictured as ten points forming a four-level triangle. Here, the unitary Father represents 1, the androgynous Mother 2, the Son completing the triad 3, and his four lights 4. The perfect number ten is also identified in the mother's internal structure and in the father, who is the ultimate source of everything (BG 29.8–18). The metaphysics of the *Apocryphon* is thus greatly influenced by Neopythagorean monism and number mysticism.

A few words concerning the demiurge. In Middle Platonism, the demiurge was generally distinguished from the supreme God, but their relationship was a positive one. Similarly, Philo and early Christians could consider Wisdom or Christ-Logos as God's tool in creation. In Sethian mythology, the distinction between the supreme God and the demiurge is maintained, but the Sethian demiurge is considered evil, rebellious, and ignorant. He comes into being as a result of a tragedy. According to the *Apocryphon*, Sophia, a lower Wisdom figure dwelling in the fourth light, attempts to procreate without her partner and brings forth a monstrous fetus, a lion-headed snake called Yaldabaoth – a demonized caricature of both the biblical creator and the Platonic demiurge.

A tiny fraction of light Yaldabaoth had inherited from his now grief-stricken mother allowed him to create the cosmos according to the indestructible pattern, which, however, he had never seen and which he was unable to copy in any successful manner. This is an obvious stab at *Timaeus*, according to which the demiurge created the best possible cosmos by consulting a divine pattern (30a–c, 39e). Only here in the *Apocryphon*, the sensible cosmos is far from perfect due to the evil creator's inability to understand the divine pattern. The author of the *Apocryphon* thus interprets the *Timaeus* on two levels: Christ is a good demiurge who creates the divine realms through his Logos, whereas Yaldabaoth is an evil demiurge who unsuccessfully attempts to replicate the divine pattern in matter (Sophia, too, is a demiurgic figure in that she brings forth Yaldabaoth).

Yaldabaoth later creates Adam but delegates the construction of his soul-body to demonic helpers and is himself tricked into blowing his inherited light into Adam's face. This is an obvious parody of the Genesis creation account (2:7), but also of *Timaeus* (41–42), where the demiurge creates the immortal part of the human soul but commissions “younger gods” to construct its mortal parts. It is somewhat unclear where this Sethian attitude towards the creator and his creation derives, but it found its way to later Sethian texts like *Zostrianos*. Such an attitude was, in fact, one of the deciding factors in Plotinus' eventual break with his Sethian Gnostic friends.

1.2 *Zostrianos*

According to Porphyry, Gnostic apocalypses of Zoroaster and Zostrianos circulated in Plotinus' seminars. Porphyry and Amelius were said to have extensively refuted these two apocalypses, and Plotinus himself wrote against Gnostic views in general (*Enneads* 2.9). While the apocalypse of Zoroaster may or may not be identical with the book of Zoroaster excerpted in the *Apocryphon*,⁸ the Nag Hammadi collection contains a Coptic translation of *Zostrianos* (Codex VIII,1). This is confirmed by the attribution of the Coptic text to the figure of Zostrianos, the large

amount of Neoplatonic material it contains, and the fact that Plotinus' paraphrase of a Gnostic text in *Ennead* 2.9 (6, 10) corresponds closely to pages 8–10 of our Coptic version of *Zostrianos*. For all the attention it received, this text stood at the center of the Gnostic controversy in Plotinus' seminars.

Zostrianos is presented as a heavenly, visionary ascent by the eponymous seer. He reaches the highest level of the Intellect (called *kaluptos*, hidden) and comes as close as possible to reaching a vision of the Invisible One. *Zostrianos* presupposes much of the same metaphysics as the *Apocryphon*, but elaborates it further and modifies some key elements. The primary triad of Invisible Spirit–Barbelo–Autogenes is still there, as are the four lights below them, but new ontological planes have been added further down and a large amount of new entities inhabit all levels of reality. The most important difference, however, concerns the primary triad. Barbelo is now a masculine aeon, divided in three levels called hidden (*kaluptos*), first-manifesting (*prōtophanēs*), and self-begotten (*autogenēs*). These levels, in fact, describe the coming into being of Barbelo himself as the self-begetting divine Intellect. He originally existed only in a hidden, seminal state within the Invisible Spirit, then came forth as the first-manifesting intellect, but halted and turned around to gaze back at his source; thus, he came to know the Invisible Spirit and completed his own self-begetting process (15, 64–66, 81–83). Unlike the *Apocryphon*, *Zostrianos* does not posit a separate Autogenes-Son below Barbelo. Rather, it is Barbelo himself who is the self-begetting, androgynous Son of the Invisible Spirit. Nonetheless, we notice a similar use of childbirth and mirror metaphors (the emergence out of and the gazing back at the source), as we did in the *Apocryphon*, but these metaphors are now used in reverse order, yielding a process that closely resembles the way Plotinus explained the coming into being of Intellect: the so-called procession-and-return scheme (see what follows).

The triad describing Barbelo's emergence has been superimposed upon the Sethian family triad of Father–Mother–Son: Barbelo had his hidden preexistence in the Father, and his third phase as the self-begotten one replaces the Son. And yet, because the three stages of Barbelo's emergence are not chronological but causal, taking place eternally and simultaneously, the three stages became seen as separate hypostases that together make up the triadic aeon of Barbelo, the divine intellect.

In many ways, such tripartitioning of the intellect corresponds to the aforementioned interpretations of Plato's *Timaeus* 39e. Here in *Zostrianos*, the hidden existence of Barbelo, containing the “truly existent ones,” corresponds to the ideas in the “living being”; his first-manifestation (also called the perfect mind) to the contemplative intellect, and his completion as the self-begotten one, who engages with the lower realms, to the deeming/planning intellect (Turner 2001: 411, 718–719).

Additional triads are also used in *Zostrianos* to describe this process and the nature of its three stages. The most important one is the existence–life–blessedness triad, which is a variant of the famous Neoplatonic being–life–mind triad. While many later Neoplatonists used it as a general principle to describe the emergence of lower hypostases out of higher ones, thinkers like Marius Victorinus and the author of the *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary* used it specifically to explain the genesis of the Intellect out of the One. The triad in *Zostrianos* works just this way, although blessedness is used for mind and the order of the second and third members varies from time to time (as it does in Plotinus).

In *Zostrianos*, the preexistence of Barbelo/Intellect within the One is not only expressed through the concept of *kaluptos*, the hidden seminal preexistence, but also through the concept of the Invisible Spirit's *triple-power*. In a remarkable series of passages (which are later found in almost identical form in Victorinus' *Against Arius* 1.49–50), the One is said to unite

in his simplicity the three powers of existence, life, and blessedness (64.11–68.26; 74.8–21; 75.6–24; 84.18–22), which, as we have seen, correspond to the three phases of Barbelo's emergence. Thus, it is not only the first member of the triad (*kaluptos-existence*) that is found seminally within the One, but all three. A rudimentary form of this solution is found already in the *Apocryphon*, where the One is characterized as a unitary monad existing eternally as a life-giving life and a blessedness-giving blessedness, and whose image (Barbelo) is a triple power.

The doctrine of the Intellect's seminal preexistence within the One was an ingenious if radical solution to the problem of deriving multiplicity from unity. Plotinus himself eventually came to consider it unsatisfactory, compromising as it did the One's absolute unity, but he had held such a view in his early works. Porphyry, nonetheless, espoused this doctrine, as he found it compatible with the Middle Platonic *Chaldean Oracles* (see the following).

The author of *Zostrianos* sometimes makes a distinction between life and vitality, as well as existence and "to exist," thus approximating the classic Neoplatonic arrangement of the triad into an ennead, where each member contains the other two and where such verbal distinctions (paronyms) are routinely used. Such an enneadic arrangement, though still somewhat implicit in *Zostrianos* and the *Apocryphon*, is, however, explicitly attested in another Sethian text known to have circulated in Plotinus' seminars, *Allogenes*.

1.3 *Allogenes*

According to Porphyry, the Gnostic texts circulating in Plotinus' seminars included also apocalypses of *Allogenes* and *Messos*. The Nag Hammadi version of *Allogenes* (Codex XI,3) is a revelation from *Allogenes* (meaning "stranger") to his son *Messos*.⁹ The text contains metaphysics very similar to what is found in *Zostrianos* and includes instructions for obtaining a vision of the One through a series of mental exercises. In relation to *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* is remarkable for its emphases on the unknowability of the One and the probably consequent strengthening of the role of its triple-power, which appears here almost as an entity on its own, arranged internally as an ennead.

Both *Allogenes* and the *Apocryphon* include a section where the first principle is described in terms of negative theology, and these sections contain material that is sometimes identical. This may point to a common source, a possible Sethian commentary on the *Parmenides*, although it is also possible that *Allogenes* is simply dependent on the *Apocryphon*. At any rate, what the use of such negative theology means in practice is that the One cannot be known. Knowledge of the One comes into being as the second principle, Barbelo, but what lies above is unknowable. Thus, in order to attain a vision of the One, a seer must be ignorant of him (61.14–19). This is the famous concept of learned ignorance of which Plotinus often spoke: one must "let all learning go" in order to proceed from the Intellect to a mystical vision of the One (*Enneads* 6.9 [9] 3–11; 6.7 [38] 36; cf. *Chald. Or. frg.* 1 Majercik; Porphyry, *Sent.* 25–26).

Probably as a result of such strong emphasis on the unknowability and utter transcendence of the One, *Allogenes* pays considerable attention to the One's triple-power. Whereas in *Zostrianos* the Invisible Spirit had in himself a triple-power of existence-life-and-blessedness, by means of which Barbelo both seminally preexisted in and was exteriorized out of the One, here in *Allogenes* the triple-power has practically become an independent hypostasis. Called a mediator and a traverser of the boundlessness of the Invisible Spirit (49.6–7; 61.19–20), it is identified with the more familiar triad of being-life-mind (of which the existence-life-blessedness in *Zostrianos* and Victorinus is a variant).

Remarkably, *Allogenes* depicts this triad as an ennead. The *locus classicus* for this Neoplatonic doctrine is Proclus' *Elements of Theology* 103:

All things are in all things, but in each according to its proper nature: for in Being there is life and mind; in Life, to be and to think; in Mind, to be and to live; but each of these exists upon one level intellectually, upon another vitally, and on the third existentially.

This structing of the triad, where each member contains the other two, but predominates in turn, and where the three triads are further distinguished by using paronyms, can be expressed as follows:

BEING	to be	existentiality
life	TO LIVE	vitality
mind	to think	INTELLECTUALITY

Here is, then, the slightly garbled passage from *Allogenes* (49.26–38 Funk):

He is Vitality, and Intellectuality and That-Which-Is. For then That-Which-Is constantly possesses its Vitality and Intellectuality, and < . . . > Vitality possesses non-Being and Intellectuality. Intellectuality possesses Life and That-Which-Is. And the three are one, although individually they are three.

Although the passage from *Allogenes* lacks some of the clarity of Proclus, we can nonetheless detect the enneadic structure, where each of the three members contains the other two, and we can also detect the use of paronyms (Life & Vitality; That-Which-Is and non-Being).

Until the Nag Hammadi finds, scholars were accustomed to thinking that the enneadic structuring of the triad was a post-Plotinian invention, probably by Porphyry. While it is not impossible that the Sethians learned of the triad and its enneadic structure from Plotinus and Porphyry, it seems likelier that these are, in fact, Sethian innovations. This is a relatively new and radical idea, so one needs to carefully consider all the currently available evidence, Sethian, Plotinian, and Porphyrian, alike.

2 Metaphysics of Plotinus and Porphyry

2.1 Plotinus' metaphysics and relationship with the Sethians

Plotinus began writing at the age of forty-nine and only after he had been lecturing for ten years. His works were published posthumously by Porphyry, who also arranged them thematically into six *Enneads*. These writings have been characterized as an extremely unsystematic presentation of an otherwise carefully worked-out philosophical system (Armstrong 1966: viii). Plotinus' writings grew out of his teaching, which explains their unsystematic nature, but his philosophical system itself was a result of years of deep reflection on both the structure of reality and a way of ascent to the One.

Plotinus was a strict monist like the Sethians and most Neopythagoreans in that he, too, posited one, single principle as the source of everything, including matter. Plotinus, however, went further than most thinkers in insisting how the One is absolute oneness, absolutely transcendent, and beyond being and intellect. Whereas Middle Platonists in general had considered the highest principle a divine intellect, thus essentially following Aristotle, this would not do for

Plotinus, for whom intellect implies multiplicity (in order for something to think it must *also* exist) and thus cannot be the absolutely unitary One. Yet, the One as the source of everything must somehow produce multiplicity whose first manifestation is the divine intellect. How does this happen?

Plotinus says that the One, in its superabundant perfection, overflows without changing or diminishing, and thus produces otherness as a kind of a “natural byproduct.” This overflowed otherness then halts and turns back to gaze upon its source and is thereby filled. Thus, it becomes Intellect. Yet, looking towards the One, the Intellect really sees itself, an existing and thinkable representation of the One (*Enneads* 5.1 [10] 7; 5.2 [11] 1; 5.5 [32] 5). Such is Plotinus’ procession-and-return scheme.

In describing the Intellect’s established structure, Plotinus often uses the being-life-mind triad: the divine Intellect consists of a thinking subject (*mind*), an object of its thinking (*its being*), and the thinking activity itself (*its life*) (Hadot 1960: 130–132). But apart from such “horizontal” use of the triad, Plotinus sometimes utilizes it also “vertically,” in discussing the Intellect’s coming into being. This is particularly the case in Plotinus’ early works. In such cases, however, the object of the Intellect’s thinking *is* the One. This so-called Two Intellect theory is based on *Timaeus* 39e (*Enneads* 3.9.1), but it compromises the One’s transcendence by making it into an actual object of thinking (*noēton*) while also placing the ideas outside the Intellect.

In one of his early works (5.4 [7]), Plotinus even goes so far as to grant the One a thinking different from the thinking of the Intellect, as well as life, and an existence at rest. In other words, he allows the being-life-mind triad to preexist within the One, “hyper-horizontally,” as it were, and then exist actually on the level of the Intellect. This is somewhat uncharacteristic of Plotinus, and he, in fact, later rejected and forcefully refuted his own Two Intellect theory as a *Sethian* misinterpretation of the *Timaeus* (*Enneads* 2.9.1, 6)¹⁰

These views do come close to *Zostrianos*’ distinction within the Barbelo aeon of *kaluptos* and *prōtophanēs*, and the Invisible One’s triple power of existence-life-blessedness. Of course, Numenius had also taught a Two Intellect theory based on *Timaeus* 39e, and it is often thought Plotinus was influenced by Numenius here. Yet, Plotinus himself associates the theory with the Sethians, and Numenius is also not known to have used the being-life-mind triad as such or the procession-and-return scheme.¹¹

Because Plotinus uses the being-life-mind triad throughout his writings, starting from his very first work, but never properly defines or explains it, the great French scholar Pierre Hadot (1960) was convinced that Plotinus made use of an already established concept. This may well be the case, but Hadot’s suggestion that Plotinus found it in a now lost Platonic handbook, whose author would have developed the formal triad out of Plato’s *Sophist* 248e–249a to combat Stoic materialism, lacks evidence (it is also hard to see why only being, life, and mind would have been picked out of the *Sophist* passage, but not, for example, motion and soul).¹²

Hadot did not yet have access to *Zostrianos* or *Allogenes*, but today, this new evidence suggests a different picture. We know from Plotinus’ own words that he had Sethian friends whom he continued to consider friends even as he was refuting some of their central doctrines and attitudes (*Enneads* 2.9.10). We have also seen that, unlike Numenius, the Sethians used the being-life-mind triad similarly to Plotinus and that, importantly, the *Apocryphon of John* already contains rudimentary forms of both the triad and the procession-and-return scheme. It thus stands to reason that the Sethian authors of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* could have simply worked out the triad and the scheme out of this earlier Sethian material (that itself was based on a Philo-type reading of the Fourth Gospel).

Plotinus, who had probably never accepted the Sethian doctrines of an evil creator (Yaldabaoth) and an emotional world soul (Sophia) – doctrines which he absolutely rejects in

his work against the Gnostics, as he does their bypassing of Plato's authority – could, however, easily have accepted some of their metaphysical solutions, if he found them both elegant and compatible with Plato. Though Plotinus eventually discarded the Two Intellect theory and the interpretation of *Timaeus* 39e that went with it, he used the being–life–mind triad throughout his career and often connected it to *Sophist* 248e–249a. It seems somewhat likely, then, that Plotinus learned of the triad and the procession-and-return scheme, perhaps still in their rudimentary forms, from his Sethian friends and appropriated them as Platonic doctrines compatible with the *Sophist* passage. After all, Plotinus says that his metaphysical doctrines are not new with him, but that they are compatible with Plato (*Enneads* 5.1.8).

The triad is thus arguably a Sethian invention, appropriated and perhaps even formalized to some extent by Plotinus. What about its enneadic structuring that we meet in later Neoplatonism and *Allogenes*? In light of the Nag Hammadi evidence, can one still uphold Hadot's theory (1968) that the enneadization of the being–life–mind triad was invented by Porphyry?

2.2 Porphyry's metaphysics: Surviving sources and scholarly reconstructions

Much of what Porphyry wrote has been lost. What does survive is fairly silent about the first principles. However, *testimonia* by later authors helps to fill in many gaps. Apart from being Plotinus' student, Porphyry was fond of the Middle Platonic *Chaldean Oracles*. The *Oracles* survive, albeit in a fragmentary form, and their hexametric utterances reference a monistic (thus, Neopythagorean) system where the Intellect exists below the supreme principle called the Father, and between these is situated a feminine entity called Power (*dunamis*). The Father is also a triadic monad and an intelligible (*noēton*) that does not exist (*huparchein*) without the Intellect (frgs. 1–6, 20–26). According to *testimonia*, Porphyry understood the summit of the Chaldean system as an ennead. He then must have combined the Chaldean ennead with Plotinus' triad, as Porphyry is said to have spoken of three triads of being–mind–and–life (using paronyms) and of the supreme principle as the One, Father, and existence (*huparxis*) (Lydus, *On the Months* 159.5–8; Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* 3.64.8–9; cf. Porphyry, *History of Philosophy* 223).

As it happens, the theological works of the fourth-century Christian Neoplatonist, Marius Victorinus, abound in exactly this kind of “enneadic” metaphysics. Victorinus seems to be quoting extensively from some unidentified Neoplatonist in order to prove the trinitarian concept of Godhead. As we saw earlier, Victorinus applies a variant of the being–life–mind triad to the Trinity in speaking of God's triple power of existence–life–and–blessedness. Not only does the Father–existence contain in himself the Son–life and Spirit–blessedness, but all three contain each other, leading to an ennead of three triads whose internal differences are expressed with paronyms (Clark 1981).

Operating on the rather strange premise that any Neoplatonic idea not found in Plotinus must be an invention by Porphyry, Pierre Hadot proceeded to show through a comparative analysis that the match between Victorinus' fragments (Hadot identified 89 of them) and what is known of Porphyry and his metaphysics is a near-perfect match in terms of vocabulary, style, and contents. What is more, Hadot concluded that since no other suitable candidate is known, Porphyry must be Victorinus' source. Hadot then applied the same methodology to the *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary* and concluded that it, too, must have been written by Porphyry (Hadot 1968).

Hadot, of course, wrote before the Nag Hammadi texts had been entirely published and thus had no access to *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. However, today we can see that these two Sethian texts contain the same metaphysics as Victorinus' sources. Furthermore, applying Hadot's own

methodology to these sources, the results are quite devastating for his theory. Not only is the match between Victorinus' sources and these Sethian texts at least as good as it was in the case of Porphyry,¹³ but these Sethian texts also prove that Porphyry is no longer the only suitable candidate. While the Sethians may not be the actual authors of the fragments in question, many of the ideas that they contain appear to be Sethian innovations.

Hadot's supporters have recently argued that the Coptic translations of *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* must be based on substantially revised Greek texts that had been updated in light of Plotinus and Porphyry's criticism (Majercik 2001). Yet there is no evidence for this claim, and there are, in fact, some indications to the contrary. Plotinus' paraphrase of *Zostrianos* (*Enneads* 2.9.6, 10) contains a set of unique concepts found concentrated on pages 8–10 of the Coptic manuscript, so at least in that case no substantial revisions seem to have been made. Moreover, Michel Tardieu demonstrated in 1996 that one of Victorinus' fragments corresponds so closely to material in *Zostrianos* that both must depend on a common source. Pierre Hadot (1996) himself accepted this conclusion and even admitted that this one source was probably Gnostic.

Yet, the most decisive argument against Hadot's overall thesis concerning the being-life-mind triad – that it was found by Plotinus in a lost handbook and turned into an ennead by Porphyry – is the presence of a rudimentary form of the enneadic triad in the Sethian *Apocryphon of John*. What is more, these speculations in the *Apocryphon* are essentially based on the author's Philo-type reading of the Gospel of John and other biblical materials (especially Wisdom of Solomon and Genesis), which is how he came upon some of the crucial concepts and vocabulary, such as a triadic concept of godhead, the term "life" for the intermediary feminine principle, the fertile gazing back towards the source (Wisdom as image and spotless mirror of God), and the concept of mutual implication.

Although we cannot date the Greek texts behind the Coptic versions of the *Apocryphon* precisely, we do know that a version was known to Irenaeus before 180 CE. More importantly, the *Apocryphon* stands in the same Sethian tradition as *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, and probably also the source common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos*. The *Apocryphon* can thus be seen to have provided these texts with raw material for the formalized triad. On this basis, one can consider the development of the triad from its rudimentary form to a formalized ennead to be essentially an internal Sethian development. However, one would be wise not to exclude the possibility of positive influence from Plotinus – and perhaps even Porphyry – in the formalization process.

Regarding the enneadization, the usual assumption is that Porphyry found something in the *Chaldean Oracles* that made him arrange its supreme triad into an ennead. But the surviving *Oracles* contain only cryptic statements to this end, such as "The world honors you as a triadic monad" and "In every world shines a triad, ruled by a Monad" (frgs. 26–27). It is, of course, possible that Porphyry's fuller version contained clearer utterances, but based on the available evidence, it seems easier to think that he discovered the ennead at Plotinus' seminars and found it compatible with statements in the *Oracles*. The enneadic structure is, of course, found explicitly in *Allogenes*, which circulated in the seminars, but one can also deduct the structure from Plotinus' early works, where he had allowed the being-life-mind triad to both preexist in the One and actually exist on the level of the Intellect (*Enneads* 5.4). This is a doctrine that Plotinus himself later rejected, but then again, Proclus tells us that Porphyry stayed faithful to Numenius and, like him and the *Oracles*, professed a belief in two intellects.

3 Summary and conclusion

The author of the Sethian *Apocryphon of John* conceived of the true godhead as an intellectual triad of Father–Mother–and–Son. His description of the intellect's autogeneration via mirror

and childbirth metaphors anticipates the later Neoplatonic procession-and-return scheme and being-life-mind triad, but the *Apocryphon*'s speculations derive from the author's Philonic reading of the Gospel of John and other biblical materials. Later Sethians then modified this material into the recognizable Neoplatonic scheme and triad, as we can see in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. These texts circulated in Plotinus' seminars and Plotinus, on his own testimony, had been open to the ideas of his Sethian friends. Though he later discarded his Two Intellect theory as an essentially Sethian misinterpretation of *Timaeus* 39e, Plotinus continued to use the being-life-mind triad, which he does seem to have inherited somewhere, as Hadot already suspected. Today, the Nag Hammadi evidence, which was not yet available to Hadot, suggests that Plotinus learned of the triad from his Sethian friends and appropriated it as a Platonic doctrine, compatible as it was with *Sophist* 248e–249a. It may even be due to Plotinus' own influence on his friends that the raw material in the *Apocryphon* received its recognizably Neoplatonic form in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. Porphyry, then, having arrived at the seminars, learned of the triad and its enneadic structuring (either from *Allogenes* or Plotinus' early works) and appropriated these ideas as compatible with his dear *Chaldean Oracles*. At any rate, the original innovators of these important metaphysical concepts appear to be Sethian Gnostics, whose role in the history of Neoplatonism has been greatly underestimated.

Notes

- 1 For Sethian or Classic Gnosticism, see Schenke 1981; Turner 2001; Rasimus 2009; Brakke 2010.
- 2 For the sake of brevity, I leave out of discussion the other "Platonizing Sethian treatises," the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes*, that contain similar metaphysics. For these, see Turner 2001.
- 3 See Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 10.3–6; Aristides, *Apology* 1.4–5. See also Turner 2001: 382–385.
- 4 Plato, *Timaeus* 39e7–9: "Intellect perceives the ideas existing in the truly living being; such and so many as exist therein he deemed that this world also should possess."
- 5 Additional influence was exerted by Plato's *Second Letter* 312e and its scheme of three kings.
- 6 Plutarch, *Isis and Osiris* 372e. See Dillon 1996: 163–164, 204–205.
- 7 Usually, however, Philo assigned this function to the Logos, as in *Leg. all.* 3.96. See Runia 1986: 471–72; Dillon 1996: 164.
- 8 Two Coptic versions of the *Apocryphon* contain a reference to a Book of Zoroaster, which is said to describe in more detail the creation of Adam's psychic body (II 15.29–19.10 par.). The apocalypse of Zoroaster in Plotinus' seminars could refer to this Book of Zoroaster (Plotinus, *Enneads* 2.9.14, alludes to a similar view of the human body) or even to another edition of *Zostrianos*, because a cryptogram at the end identifies the contents as oracles of Zostrianos and teachings of Zoroaster. It is also possible that the apocalypse of Zoroaster is another, now lost Sethian text.
- 9 There are other texts named after *Allogenes*, such as the fourth treatise in the Codex Tchacos and the ones mentioned by Epiphanius (*Panarion* 39.5.1). However, unlike the Nag Hammadi version, none of these other books is known to contain Neoplatonic material.
- 10 Plotinus himself never uses terms like "Sethian" or "Gnostic" (it is Porphyry who labels *Enneads* 2.9 "Against the Gnostics"), but throughout 2.9, he discusses doctrines found in texts that are today labelled Sethian. Thus, by association, the Two Intellect theory that "they" hold is Sethian.
- 11 Numenius might, however, lurk behind Plotinus' use of the triad in its "non-canonical" order of being-mind-and-life. In some such instances, Plotinus seems to apply the triad to his three hypostases of One, Intellect, and Soul, which may have been inspired by Numenius' system of three gods or intellects, the first one of which is essential being (*autoön*, frg. 17 des Places), the second one intellect (22), and the third one the animator of bodies (12). See Edwards 1990.
- 12 Plato, *Sophist* 248e–249a: "But for heaven's sake, shall we let ourselves easily be persuaded that *motion* and *life* and *soul* and *mind* are really not present to *absolute being*, that it neither *lives* nor has *intelligence*, but awful and holy, devoid of mind, is fixed and immovable?"
- 13 For a detailed analysis, see Rasimus 2010.

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Arnobius and Lactantius¹

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Introduction

Of the two Christian intellectuals profiled in this chapter, Arnobius and Lactantius, the latter is likely more familiar. Lactantius' fame might be ascribed to two significant events: his authoring of the *Divine Institutes* (hereafter *DI*) and his connection to both Diocletian and Constantine during transformational moments in the late Roman world. As has oft been remarked, Lactantius makes no mention of Arnobius in any of his extant writings. This would perhaps seem not so strange except that we know with some certainty that Arnobius was Lactantius' teacher in rhetoric in Sicca, in North Africa. Chronologically, there exists some overlap between the two, with a date for Arnobius's death in c. 330 and then c. 250–330 for Lactantius. Attempts to explain this apparent oversight most often rely on Jerome's assessment of Arnobius' sole-surviving work, the seven-book *Adversus Nationes*. In his *Chronicon*, Jerome notes that the text was written as a response to the bishop's doubt over the apologist's conversion, as Arnobius was a latecomer to Christianity.² To follow this thread, we might infer that by the time Lactantius was writing the *DI* and other treatises, he had no knowledge of his former teacher's conversion. Similarly, Arnobius makes no mention of Lactantius, again implying that, peculiar as it may seem given what we know elsewhere about the networks of rhetoricians and continued pupil-professor communications in the ancient world, once Lactantius left for Nicomedia, the two had no further interactions.³

Despite the myriad ways in which Arnobius and Lactantius stand as unique and independent individuals, they each inherited an intellectual tradition and shared a pedagogical foundation in classical rhetoric and, as we shall explore, philosophy. Beyond this, however, they shared a cultural identity as late antique North African Romans: their scholarly language of choice was Latin (though both likely knew Greek) and their social, cultural, religious, and political frames of reference were more identifiably Roman than Hellenic. This seemingly obvious point bears remembering and further investigating, for it is in this distinct combination of identities that we find means of understanding the ways in which these two authors, like other of their North African forebears, strike us as being so very different from their contemporary Graecophone authors of the patristic and late antique Christian intellectual landscape.

In the space that follows, I outline and summarize the distinguishing characteristics of both Arnobius' and Lactantius' work and lives, beginning with the professor and ending with the pupil. We will consider how they made use of philosophical ideas, authors, and arguments, and how their particular methods shaped their construction of new philosophical ideas or their contributions to long-existing philosophical conversations; special attention to questions of the divine nature and emotions will serve to focus our inquiry. By the end, I hope for two points to have emerged: first, that what I will refer to as the Roman context of these authors made for a particular approach to understanding Christianity; second, that this context was distinct in critical ways from that generally experienced by their Graecophone contemporaries in the first four centuries CE, a consideration which facilitates understanding of how and why their ideas frequently diverged from those which posterity has shown to be the consensus.

Arnobius

Neither the apologist himself nor other authors provide much information about Arnobius. We can place his birth around 255 CE, his death around 330 CE, and the writing of his sole surviving work, *Adversus Nationes*, between 302 and 305 CE.⁴ It seems that most if not all of Arnobius' life was spent in Sicca Veneria, in Africa Proconsularis (modern-day El Kef, Tunisia). The context for Arnobius' penning of this seven-book opus is similarly shrouded in uncertainty: Jerome shares that Arnobius wrote in an effort to convince the bishop of the authenticity of his late conversion to Christianity, although the content and tone of the work do not necessarily support this view, and the ideas promulgated therein do not seem to have been taken up by others.⁵

We can reliably assert that, as Lactantius' teacher, again on the testimony of Jerome, Arnobius was skilled in the art of rhetoric and was perhaps well known enough to help his pupil in acquiring his eventual post as chair of rhetoric in Nicomedia. His training in Latin rhetoric would have created deep familiarity with classical Roman authors such as Cicero and Seneca and we find as well in his works plentiful references to and quotations of Varro and Lucretius. In addition to creating a sense of the ways in which Arnobius was steeped in Republican and early Imperial Latin thought, the undercurrent of these earlier authors' texts suggests that Arnobius was familiar with Roman philosophical thought and, even if only by transmission through Cicero and Lucretius, elements of classical Greek philosophy. One finds throughout his works numerous references to Plato as well as mentions of Pythagoras, Socrates, Aristotle, and others.

Adversus Nationes is striking for the scope and focus of its diatribe against an unnamed opponent, whose imagined criticisms of Christianity and whose responses to Arnobius' attacks on Greco-Roman religion the apologist crafts and replies to in each book. In a way that will be familiar to students and readers of Augustine, Arnobius takes as his main target the nature of and stories about the Greco-Roman deities, from the established divinities of the traditional pantheon to the lesser-known *numina* of wheat, thresholds, and fingers. On the one hand, the apologist frames his criticisms of these divinities in what we might identify as religious terms, by which I mean that he consistently refers to Roman *religio*, to rituals, worship, iconography, and related practices in his denunciation of polytheistic gods and goddesses. On the other hand, the underlying principle that unites most of his condemnations is arguably philosophical insofar as it is rooted in questions concerning the divine nature and the interpretation of stories about the divine. Although Arnobius rarely names any philosophers or philosophical schools in direct recrimination, the elements of Roman religion with which he takes greatest issue are those that are fundamentally philosophical in nature, and his most consistent criticism is of those philosophers who argue in favor of allegorical interpretation of texts.

The tenets which inform Arnobius' distaste for the Roman gods and goddesses have their origin in classical Greek philosophical tenets that challenge the anthropathic and anthropomorphic natures of the conventional deities. That this is a thematic strain of the work is made clear early on, as Arnobius in Book I.17 asks his imaginary interlocutors whether they "see what base feelings, what unseemly frenzies, you attribute to your deities?" thereby placing their gods on equal footing as animals.⁶ While Arnobius' criticism is leveled at the "great worshippers and priests of the deities," he relies on a generalized philosophical consensus as support for his opinion, stating that

wherever, as the philosophers hold, there is any agitation, there of necessity passion must exist. Where passion is situated, it is reasonable that mental excitement follow. Where there is mental excitement, there grief and sorrow exist. Where grief and sorrow exist, there is already room for weakening and decay; and if these two harass them, extinction is at hand, viz., death, which ends all things, and takes away life from every sentient being.
(AN 1.18.2)

A similar line of argument pervades later books of the work. In Book III.11–20, for example, Arnobius contends that the pagans have brought on the wrath of the gods (rather than the Christians being the cause of the alleged afflictions to the empire) through their representation of them with sex, shape and appearance, and, even in some cases, deformed human figures. Imagery and statuary of the divinities are the focus of Arnobius' attack in Book VII, with sacrifice offering the apologist another opportunity to discuss the improper attribution of the passions to divinities in VII.4–12.

Arnobius' presentation of the philosophical argument about divine emotions in its greatly truncated form in Book I and then in bits and pieces throughout most of the remaining books of *Adversus Nationes* echoes the viewpoints of philosophers from Xenophanes onward and aligns his idea of the divine nature with that which dominates in Graecophone authors of the first four centuries CE (and beyond). Interestingly, however, unlike other philosophers and theologians, Arnobius has absolutely no interest in employing allegorical or metaphorical interpretive strategies when it comes to the pagan divinities. His criticisms of such allegorical readings are in fact just as vicious as his decimation of the various elements of Roman pagan religious behavior, at one point equating this type of hermeneutic with sophistry (and thus positing his own non-allegorical interpretations as valid in the same way that philosophers claimed validity for their schools of thought over and against those of the sophists: AN V.33.1). Book V, for example, introduces another interaction with the anonymous interlocutor whose defense of allegorical reading, of understanding that stories "contain in them holy mysteries, theories wonderful and profound, and not such as any one can easily become acquainted with by force of understanding," Arnobius finds reprehensible (V.32.2)

For the apologist, it is not only that the stories of the gods and goddesses describe dishonorable deeds and qualities but that there was no clear way in which the interpretive method was learned or passed on and that the allegorical strategy for interpretation fails as a systematic way to make sense of those tales. In V.33, Arnobius questions "from whom you have learned, or by whom has it been made known, either that these things were written allegorically, or that they should be understood in the same way;" this view suggests that without have consulted the original author or a sort of master-interpreter, those making the claim for allegorical reading have no support or evidence (V.33.4). Taking this line of inquiry further, Arnobius maintains that a lack of consistency (i.e., how a reader knows when to substitute and what to substitute for what word or phrase or idea) undermines any potential arguments for the equitable application

of this reading strategy and, moreover, that the absence of uniform interpretation renders any non-literal interpretation fruitless (V.33 *passim*). If a reader does not know which portion of a text should be read for its allegorical rather than its literal sense or what mechanism for decoding the allegory they should employ, applying such a strategy remains impossible.

The only workable option in Arnobius' mind is to read the text literally and to refrain from "making that obscure, by means of fair-seeming allegories, which has been spoken plainly, and disclosed to the understanding of all" (V.33.5; see also V.41). This is not unrelated to his perspective that one cannot read an entire text or narrative allegorically because one cannot deny that specific historical events occurred. Arguments for the impracticality of an intermittent application of allegorical reading occupy Arnobius further in Book V, eventually leading him to determine that "if the causes and origins of the mysteries are traceable to past events, by no change can they be turned into the figures of allegory; for that which has been done, which has taken place, cannot, in the nature of things, be undone" (V.39.7). If Arnobius rules out reading a full text allegorically and his opponents rule out not reading a text allegorically, the intermediate option of reading some parts of a text allegorically and others not gives rise to his focus on the problem of knowing which parts to read allegorically, as these chapters of the book make apparent.

At this point, having established that a literal reading of texts about the gods and goddesses (or what we would now call mythology) must be pursued, Arnobius is free to undertake his attack on the ways in which those deities are described. Although we have seen already a snippet of Arnobius' arguments against the gods (i.e. the philosophically aligned tenet that immortal beings should not possess anthropomorphic or anthropopathic qualities), Arnobius turns in his final two books to discussing how the actions and behavior of those deities run contrary to what he and other Christians would understand to be characteristic of "true" divinity. Insults to divine personhood abound: whereas improper subjects used to be talked about in veiled terms, those insisting on allegorical reading now demand that "venerable things are at your instance vilely spoken of, and what is quite pure is related in filthy languages, so that which vice formerly concealed from shame, is now meanly and basely spoken of." Adapting a similar argument against those who argue that the gods themselves wish for humans to employ allegorical reading, Arnobius maintains that even if that were so, it is nonsensical to think that divine beings would wish for tawdry tales to be told about them; if one were to be truly "devoted to the services of religion, not only the gods themselves, but even the names of the gods should be revered" (V.44.6).

Five books of arguments against the interlocutor culminate in the opening of the sixth book, as Arnobius pivots to more constructive statements about the gods (VI.2). Framed as an explanation about what the Christians believe about the pagan deities, Arnobius effectively offers a laundry list of qualities that are opposite to those which he has previously used to characterize those same gods and goddesses. At the crux of this lengthy set of traits is the qualification that Christians believe these to be associated with "true gods" (*dii certi*); the identification of attributes that the apologist has already shown to be associated with the pagan deities as attributes that are contrary to or absent from those which true gods possess clearly marks the pagan deities as the opposite of "true" (though Arnobius refrains from going so far as to call them "false") and thus relieves Christians from the duty of worshipping them. This move further complicates our understanding of Arnobius' relationship to philosophy: on the one hand, he is content to adopt the common philosophical consensus about the divine nature as unmoved and undisturbed. On the other hand, he resolutely refuses to engage in any sort of non-literal reading (i.e. strategies common to Stoic and other philosophical schools' interpretation of texts) by which to explain and explicate texts that represent divinities in ways that challenge those assertions.

We might view Arnobius' approach as one that allows him to retain the sanctity of texts central to Christian belief, and which place primary on the teachings of Jesus Christ (II.37–41). While other apologists were perhaps less willing to engage in scriptural conversations or to adopt apologetic arguments that relied upon scriptural sources, Arnobius throughout this text presents Jesus as a teacher whose life and legacy are on par with philosophers such as Socrates. In this way, not only Jesus himself is posited as a relatively recent addition to a long line of sages and philosophers but also Christianity is posited as another or an alternative philosophy or philosophical school. In Arnobius' configuration, he and his fellow Christians are perfectly justified in not worshipping deities whom they do not identify as "true," perhaps particularly because that determination was based upon long-and widely-held beliefs about the divine nature. Couched as they are in questions of proper and improper behavior and morals, Arnobius' statements about the nature, actions, and qualities of the divine further root his vision of Christianity as socially or pragmatically centered, an idea to which we shall return later.

Lactantius

It is by now a commonplace in scholarship about Lactantius to state that he was born in Cirta, Numidia, in c. 250 CE, that he wrote a number of important apologetic works, and that little is known about him other than what Jerome shares in his *Chronicon*. From the later Latin writer we learn that Lactantius wrote the *Divine Institutes*, an *Epitome* of that text, *On the Workmanship of God*, *On the Deaths of the Persecutors*, and *On the Wrath of God* (as well as *De Ave Phoenixe* and a *Symposium*, attributed to him, and a collection of letters in addition to a poem about his journey to Nicomedia which have been lost), that he was appointed chair of rhetoric in Nicomedia by Diocletian in about 303 CE, and that he later served as tutor to Constantine's ill-fated son, Crispus. The death of the would-be successor to the imperial seat provides us with a *terminus ante quem* by which to date Lactantius' own demise, c. 330 CE. We have remarked already that Arnobius is believed to have been his teacher of rhetoric in North Africa, but that no known correspondence exists between the two, nor does either one make mention of the other anywhere in their extant work.⁷

Nor is much known about how Lactantius came to be appointed to the chair of rhetoric by Diocletian. If historical precedent is any guide, as in earlier antiquity, elevation to such a prestigious post suggested prominence in one's craft and remains indicative not just of the rhetorician's own talents but also of the broader educational system of which he was a part. This training involved practice and priming in the rhetorical tradition as well as in the philosophical. As noted earlier, for a Latinate author, this training would have relied heavily on Cicero (as also on Quintilian and, to some extent, Seneca), thus firmly situating Lactantius in the tradition of rhetorician-philosophers and helping us to identify earlier Roman authors whose texts likely influenced and whose quotations peppered the pages of Latin apologetic in the first through fourth centuries.

Although *Divine Institutes* and its sociohistoric context have merited extensive treatment in scholarship, somewhat narrowly focused readings of his work may have eclipsed other important elements of his contributions to the evolving intellectual history of late antiquity. These include his interactions with Greco-Roman philosophies and philosophers both in the *DI* and in his minor works as well as his building upon those philosophical foundations in service of his own apologetic and philosophical-religious endeavor. Lactantius' philosophical thought has received substantial scholarly treatment, yet most discussions of the topic regard Lactantius or his work at a relative distance from his cultural contexts, namely those of a late antique North African and as a classically trained *rhetor*.⁸ The complexity of the doxographic tradition in which Lactantius and his contemporaries partook requires more time and attention than can be

allotted here; it will suffice to note that these late antique Latin authors were keenly aware that they were writing for an audience of similarly trained and educated individuals.⁹ When it comes to philosophical questions, Lactantius engages elements of philosophy in two main ways: first, to create consensus over a philosophical question or problem and, second, to construct, in a Christian theological framework, a playing out of that problem in such a way that his response (most often located in an emerging dogmatic tenet) answers the question in a final fashion, thereby dispelling the need for further debate and argument and crafting what might appear to be a philosophically reasoned solution. A few examples of this two-pronged approach using the lens of divine emotions from across his corpus will be useful for exploring the apologist's methods.

Although we draw our first example not from the *DI* but from *De Ira Dei*, the principles it demonstrates are equally apparent in and significant to Lactantius' broader argument(s) in the seven-book tome. Written in c. 316, the central argument of *On the Wrath of God* is that the *summus deus* is in fact moved by anger, a position which, as we saw with Arnobius, stands in stark contrast to tenets and positions long held by many philosophers, apologists, and theologians across the Graecophone and Latinate worlds. Rather than sweeping this historical consensus under the rug, Lactantius explicitly draws attention to it by rhetorically organizing the content of the treatise to take his reader through various stages of reasoning. He begins by singling out the Stoics and Epicureans, noting early on that they got it all wrong when they averred that the divine did not experience emotions. In Lactantius' view, to prove the veracity of his contention (that god does have anger), he must first explain how one comes to know the truth of god. There are three steps, on the second of which philosophers get stuck, since they do not understand the true divine nature.¹⁰ Many of the chapters that follow do so in the style of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, not least in how Lactantius puts forth the argument of a specific philosophical school only to undermine it with counter-arguments.

This method of construction quickly followed by deconstruction becomes a standard feature of Lactantius' work. It also muddies his relationship to those philosophers and philosophical schools: is he setting up Epicurus and others as mere straw men only to knock them down in service of his own argument? Or did he see any value in their teachings? Although a cursory read of this treatise and others might lead one to view Lactantius' criticisms here as cranky rantings against traditional and long-respected philosophers, when taken in the broader context of his work and his corpus we can see them instead as critical moments in the construction of his own argument. There are two elements to this. First, Lactantius must create the impression of philosophical consensus on those elements of his position required for the eventual conclusion that god has anger. While the philosophers can be correct about some things regarding which everyone is in agreement, the apologist must narrate a sense of evolution (or, perhaps, dispensing with the past) as philosophers and their schools come to realize the actual (Christian) truth.¹¹ Lactantius thus positions himself as the philosopher-theologian, the intellectual responsible for imparting to his own contemporaries (Christian and non-Christian) the precepts and tenets of the religion as he sees it (*Divine Institutes* I.1–3 and V.4.6).

One piece of Lactantius' criticism of the philosophers' consideration of anger resides in its failure to examine all possibilities. The Epicureans, for example, argued that the supreme god did not experience any emotions and that he was in no way moved by consideration for humans. Although the Stoics come off in a slightly better light because they allow for god to possess kindness (*gratia*), Lactantius criticizes them for their inability to fathom that god might also have anger. For Lactantius, it can only be the case that because god is moved by kindness, he must also possess anger (*Wrath of God* 6.1). This claim represents the pinnacle of the preceding five chapters throughout which Lactantius laid out the arguments of previous philosophical schools and pointed out their problematic thinking one-by-one, showing that each one is

false. By formulating the problem of anger like a reworked logical problem, Lactantius makes a distinct contribution to the ongoing philosophical and theological conversation about divine anger, first in suggesting the interrelatedness of anger and kindness, and second in approaching the question from an ethical perspective. Unlike Arnobius, who invokes the anthropathic nature of the pagan gods as an irrevocable stain on their authentic divinity, Lactantius presents divine emotions as valid and necessary both for divinities and for humans.

As we have seen, though, in *On the Wrath of God*, Lactantius largely limits his philosophical opponents to the Stoics and Epicureans. Lactantius' knowledge of Epicurean and Stoic philosophy, likely based on handbooks and his reading of Cicero and Seneca and his mimicry of *De Natura Deorum's* structure in this text suggest that he was consciously modeling himself and his text on its Ciceronian predecessor. One might argue that such intentionality to these organizational and thematic parallels also indicates that Lactantius saw his work as continuing or, perhaps, replacing the earlier Roman's work. Both Cicero and Lactantius were engaged in acts of translation when working with philosophy, whether this be the literal translation of classical Greek philosophical ideas expressed in the Greek language to a Roman audience or, for Lactantius, the creation and transmission of Christian precepts to a non-Christian, elite, educated, and erudite audience. A broad look at some of the moves he makes in *Divinae Institutiones* further demonstrates the extent of this reinvention.

The first two books of the *DI* pick up on the threads of false religion and error briefly explored in the shorter treatise. The apologist's method across these two books is also strikingly similar, as he endeavors to create the impression of consensus in the ancient and philosophical literature (or, at least up to a point). Among the contentions in these books we find traces of Euhemerism (the gods are really just glorified humans) and sharp criticism of the behavior and characteristics of the pagan divinities (a common theme in apologetic discourse).¹² It is not only the masses, those "people of dull and blunted perception," who worship gods and goddesses unworthy of being considered divine, but also the philosophers too whose beliefs run amok. Early in Book II, Lactantius begins his attack on the Stoics especially, whose beliefs about the nature of divinity shows that philosophers are "not just stupid and wicked, but also blind, inept and mad. . . . They think the sun and moon are gods, while you think the stars are too" (*DI* II.5.4 and 5.10).

Books III and IV, similarly paired, address the topics of false wisdom as well as true wisdom and religion. Some of Lactantius' most critical arguments against philosophy and philosophers appear in these pages, as he seeks to undermine philosophical authority and set up his audience to accept the *vera sapientia et religio* offered by Christianity. Here Lactantius diverges slightly from his previously stated intention to bring to bear evidence only associated with classical antiquity – writing for a classically trained and educated audience, he (unlike others, he notes,) understands that biblical source material will not be convincing to non-Christians. Looking to the words of the prophets, acceptable because they could be understood by pagans as figures akin to the sibyls, he walks the reader through the prophesied events of Jesus Christ's life and death as a basis for Christian wisdom.¹³

The central concern of Book V is with justice, which Lactantius identifies as "either the supreme virtue or the source of virtue," and the history as well as treatment of which by both poets and philosophers he goes on to explicate (*DI* V.5.1). As the book develops, the apologist lays out a series of contentions: that the pagans themselves are given to vice because their gods behave viciously, that god allows evils so that the faithful might apply and exercise their virtue, and that evil people will one day reap their reward. Close associations between justice and virtue throughout this book prepare us for the sixth, for which knowledge and its relationship to virtue serve as the subject matter and the seventh, neatly linked, which takes justice as its focal

topic. Having dispensed with the material that required (or for which there existed) some sort of philosophical consensus and having shown the ways in which Christian thought was more convincing, he moves toward describing the nature and character of justice, which is critical for a truly Christian life. Lactantius' concern with establishing a set of norms and principles for appropriate Christian living carries him into this seventh and final book, in which he describes the rewards (earthly and heavenly) that those who follow these habits and rules will attain.

Interspersed throughout each of the seven books we find articulations of Lactantius' thinking about the nature of the divine and divine emotions more specifically. If the apologist's claims about divine wrath in *On the Wrath of God* were not clear enough on the matter, at multiple points in *DI* he engages philosophers on the question of the emotions.¹⁴ Perhaps not surprisingly, the Stoics remain a favorite target; Lactantius' representation of their arguments and his ripostes to them offer a window into what is arguably his most distinct contribution to philosophical conversation, namely his re-framing of the emotions as imbued with virtue, action-oriented, and necessary for the preservation of order and justice; like Arnobius, his notion about them depend in part on a literal reading of texts describing or illuminating the divine nature. A consideration of Lactantius' attacks on the philosophers at a few moments in *DI* illuminate the relationship between textual interpretation, emotions, and moral philosophy.

References to the philosophers' misunderstanding of emotions runs throughout *DI* but receives distinct treatment in Book VI (*On True Worship*). While holding forth on the types of actions and behaviors that exhibit justice, Lactantius pauses to remark that pity is clearly a virtue and that its treatment by philosophers as a vice aptly indicates their nonsensical approach to the emotions more generally: to distinguish virtue from vice is a simple task, he argues, but the philosophers only do so in an earthly context and fail to apply the same framework to the divine realm. Those who "despise this life [and] have other virtues before us" have not fallen into the trap of treating "some virtues as vices and some vices as virtues," like the Stoics, who "deny man all the feelings that stir the soul, desire, joy, fear, and sorrow" (*DI* VI.14). For Lactantius, these emotions and others are natural and innate, to attempt to eradicate them or to rename them (as he argues the Stoics seek to do) is to deny the existence of one of the things that makes humans human.

Importantly, the emotions are mutually dependent – an argument for which we saw a preview in *On the Wrath of God*, with anger (*ira*) and kindness (*gratia*) – and that they are thus framed in a way parallel to Lactantius' framing of virtue and vice. Just as "there can be no kindness without anger," so too "where there are no vices, there is no room for virtue either, just as there can be no victory when there is no adversary" (*Wrath of God* 6.1). This formulation points to two significant contributions on Lactantius' part. First, by addressing the question of the existence of virtue and vice, the apologist keys into a long-standing debate about the origin and purpose of evil.¹⁵ In suggesting that an opposite pair (e.g. anger and kindness, vice and virtue) coexist and by attributing that coexistence to a divine being's intention and providence, Lactantius implicitly challenges arguments that deny god's responsibility for the existence of evils. Second, against the Stoics and other philosophical sects, Lactantius crafts an argument for the utility of emotions and in a subtly Aristotelian fashion posits that an appropriate amount of joy, or fear, or almost any particular emotion is a perfectly human and in fact necessary reaction to a specific circumstance or event. In this conception, it is not that the emotions themselves are bad, but that "vices can develop if we exercise the affections badly, and virtues can if we exercise them well"; similarly, "it is good to be emotionally moved in the right direction, and bad in the wrong direction" (*DI* VI.14–16).

Lactantius resolves his discomfort with the Stoic valuation of emotions by maintaining that the philosophers misconstrued vice and virtue, thereby focusing his critique on the ethical

underpinning of their tenets. This approach has parallels earlier at *Divine Institutes* II.4ff, when Lactantius criticizes the Stoics for their “physical explanations” for the nature of the Greco-Roman divinities and likewise for their failures in the area of logic (as a division of philosophy). While natural philosophy is dismissed because some of its proponents “thought everything could be known: plainly they were not wise; some thought nothing could be known: they were not wise either, attributing too little to man just as the other attributed too much” (*DI* III.6.1). Logic is dismissed primarily because it requires a level of education and erudition that excludes large swaths of the population, women and slaves among them. Such a dismissal of these two branches of philosophy (natural and logic), “because they cannot produce bliss,” allows Lactantius to privilege and focus on the third, which he terms ethics (*DI* III.13.6).

This dismissal of all branches of philosophy in favor of ethics as most important offers Lactantius another opportunity to point out the problem with philosophical schools: “even within ethics . . . it is plain that all philosophy is hopelessly mistaken because it neither prepares us for the practice of justice nor brings the duty and purpose of man to joint fulfilment” (*DI* III.13.7). Even Cicero is wrong in thinking that “philosophy is simply the pursuit of wisdom . . . and wisdom itself is knowledge of things divine and things human.”¹⁶ For Lactantius, philosophy’s sectarianism and lack of unanimity in any opinion renders it nothing more than an exercise in thought. Further, philosophy is a system that must be taught: its students have to learn how to read, to write, to understand geometry, music, astrology, and much more (*DI* III.25–26 *passim*). This steep learning curve excludes not just the uneducated but the unable-to-be-educated. Philosophy thus comes to stand in stark contrast to the “teaching of heaven,” which is coherent and accessible to all (*DI* III.26.1).

Conclusion

Much of our discussion thus far has focused on how both Arnobius and Lactantius either adapted or called upon elements of the Greek philosophical tradition to articulate their own arguments about the divine nature and the distinguishing characteristics of Christianity as they understood it. To round out this portrait, we will close with a few words about how these moves, rhetorical and strategic, help us to understand how each contributed to existing and evolving conversations about philosophy and religion in the fourth century CE. First and foremost among these remained the ongoing debate about the divine nature as it was revealed and as it was to be conceptualized on the basis of texts, from Homer through the Gospel of John. In their dismissal (explicit for Arnobius, implicit for Lactantius) of allegorical reading as a legitimate means to interpret texts in which divinities were represented in philosophically incongruent ways, both our North African apologists make a case for the literal reading and interpretation of foundational texts. Such a clear contradiction of the dominant strain and consensus, particularly as it manifests in the Graecophone tradition, both distinguishes Arnobius and Lactantius as divergent thinkers and helps to explain why their views remained less than popular in the ages that followed.

A rejection of widely held opinion demands that an alternative be presented; for Arnobius and Lactantius, this meant a need to define a vision of Christianity that aligned with those attributes and arguments of philosophical doxography which they deemed worth preserving. In the case of Arnobius, commonly held philosophical tenets about the divine nature were invoked as criteria for authentic divinity. Yet Arnobius dismisses those same individuals and philosophical schools when their ideas involve interpretive strategies designed to explain why the gods, whose nature accords with those tenets, are described or represented in ways contrary to that nature. Lactantius too locates his identity in juxtaposition and opposition to philosophers, here

especially Stoics and Epicureans, by reframing an argument about divine emotions in such a way as to refute the valuation of anger (and divine anger) by philosophers. In so doing, Lactantius also implicitly advocates for a more literal reading of texts that describe the divine nature: if one accepts that anger can and should be attributed to the *summus deus*, that he is represented this way in the textual tradition is no longer problematic.

In closing, we might note that both apologists saw Christianity as system of social or moral philosophy. While Arnobius sprinkled his text with brief discussions on the figure of Jesus Christ as teacher of moral behavior and living, we see in Lactantius a vision of Christianity that both denies its own sectarian nature but also presents its beliefs as open, non-discriminatory, and equally available to all who wish to learn and live it. Not unlike the Stoics and others before them, for both, the philosophical conversations that matter are less abstract and more about the practical philosophy of daily life, of social contacts and proper behavior. This reframing of the pressing issues for debate offers us an important glimpse into the lived experience of not just the apologists but also their audiences and contemporaries.

Notes

- 1 I remain grateful to Mark Edwards for his invitation to explore the philosophical facets of both Arnobius' and Lactantius' works. While the chapter that follows here cannot be fully comprehensive of this topic, I do hope that it illuminates the discussion and inspires the reader to seek out additional resources.
- 2 *Chronicle* AD 327.21.g: "In Africa, Arnobius the rhetor is considered important, who when he was in Sicca teaching the youths to declaim, and, being still a pagan, was compelled by dreams to believe, although he had not obtained from the bishop by asking the faith that he had always attacked, he composed the most splendid books against the former religion, and finally, as if with these as offerings, he requested and obtained the covenant of faith." Cp. the brief entry on Arnobius at *On Famous Men* 79.
- 3 On the nature of study of rhetoric in North Africa in the third century CE, see Simmons 1995: 113–117. At *Famous Men* 80, Jerome mentions the relationship between Arnobius and Lactantius, though Lactantius himself does not state that Arnobius had been his teacher and was unlikely to have known about the conversion. See Bryce 1990: 2–3. For a more general overview of the ways in which mentoring relationships were continued in late antiquity, see Criore 2007 and Watts 2006.
- 4 See Simmons 1995.
- 5 Simmons 1995: 6–21. Jerome's mention of the reason behind the composition of *Against the Nations* is given only in the *Chronicon* (in the year of the 276th Olympiad, which is to say 327 CE – a decidedly later date than Jerome elsewhere attributes to him). It is in *De Viris Illustribus* 79 that Jerome includes the information about Arnobius having been Lactantius' teacher of rhetoric, and here that Jerome gives the title of the work as *Adversus Gentes*, although our earliest manuscript titles the work *Adversus Nationes* (meaning *Against the Nations* in either case).
- 6 *Against the Nations* I.17.1; see also I.17ff–I.19. All translations of Arnobius are from *Library of the Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans), volume 6.
- 7 On what Lactantius was likely to have read, see e.g. Bryce 1990 and Ogilvie 1978.
- 8 For some of the ways in which Lactantius and the *Divine Institutes* have been studied as a way of opening up the fourth century and Constantinian religion and politics especially, see Digeser 2000; Schott 2008; Drake 2000; and to a somewhat lesser extent, Colot 2016.
- 9 For a consideration of how Lactantius cited works and authors, see Glucker 1995. See also Barnes 1989; Long 1995.
- 10 *Wrath of God* 2.5. Cf. *Divinae Institutes* II.5.4–6.2 and *Epitome* 21.1–5.
- 11 Over chapters 4–17 in particular, Lactantius works to build a sense of consensus among philosophical schools regarding the divine nature and the question of divine emotions. By introducing his understanding of Christian thought on the matter, Lactantius both adds his voice to these conversations and casts Christian theology as an alternative philosophy, both in line with and a natural extension of previous schools and sects.
- 12 *Divine Institutes* I.13–16.
- 13 On Lactantius's knowledge of and relationship to biblical sources, see Monat 1982.

14 See e.g. *Divinae Institutiones* V.5 and VI.14–16.

15 For Lactantius, evils exist from god and for the explicit purpose of providing humans an opportunity to apply their faculties of wisdom and discernment. See e.g. *De Ira Dei* 13, *passim*.

16 *Divinae Institutiones* III.13.10, quoting Cicero, *De Officiis* 2.5.

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Philosophy in Eusebius and Marcellus

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Introduction

For all their theological differences and open hostility towards each other, the early fourth century bishops Eusebius of Caesarea and Marcellus of Ancyra stand together as two of the most astute, well read and fascinating thinkers to grapple with the Greek philosophical tradition in all of Christian antiquity. Eusebius, bishop from c. 313–339, discussed particular philosophers in a wide range of writings: the comparative world chronology reference book, the *Chronicon*; the innovative *Ecclesiastical History*; the apologetic treatises, *Preparation for the Gospel* (in fifteen books), *Demonstration of the Gospel* (originally twenty-five books, now extant in ten), *Theophany* (in five books), and the *Tricennial Oration* in praise of Constantine; the theological works, *Against Marcellus* and *Ecclesiastical Theology*; and finally, scattered material on philosophical subjects in his biblical commentaries on Psalms and Isaiah. A much scarcer corpus of writings survives from the hand of Marcellus, bishop from c. 314–336/7 and exiled thereafter: only the *Letter to Julius of Rome* and the fragments of the *Against Asterius* (preserved in Eusebius' *Against Marcellus* and Epiphanius' *Panarion*). But, if the modern attributions to Marcellus of two works, one apologetic the other heresiological, are correct, we can see an ampler engagement with the Greek philosophers. These are the *Exhortation to the Greeks* (*Cohortatio ad Graecos*, attributed in the single early manuscript to Justin Martyr)¹ and the *On the Holy Church* (attributed to Anthimus of Nicomedia, who died in the Diocletianic persecutions).²

The attributions to Marcellus of these two works are based upon internal features that would seem to date them to the fourth century (most obviously, for instance, the reference in *On the Holy Church* to “Ariomaniacs”) and upon features of language that are distinctive to Marcellus. We should nevertheless remind ourselves that not only are we missing much of the securely attributed writings of Marcellus from which such a comparison can be made with these two works, but we are also missing an unascertainable number of writings of other Christian intellectuals from the late third and early fourth centuries. Furthermore, *On the Holy Church*, on the one hand, displays a sloppiness not characterized by the *Exhortation*,³ and the *Exhortation*, on the other hand, exhibits personal interest in and travel to Cumae in Italy and Alexandria (Pharos) in Egypt,⁴ neither of which are attested in our biographical hints about Marcellus, though they are likewise not precluded by our sources. With such cautionary notes in mind, we

shall nonetheless tentatively consider the two works as belonging to him because of the striking verbal and conceptual⁵ similarities.

The following survey of Eusebius' and Marcellus' interactions with philosophy will treat them first in terms of the sources at their disposal for such engagements, second in terms of the sorts of uses to which the philosophers could be put within their respective arguments, and finally in terms of their thinking on some central areas of their thought.

1 Quotations

Because Eusebius gives little indication of continuing expansion of his knowledge of the Greek philosophical tradition over the course of his literary career, we may limit our consideration of the philosophers he had read to the evidence of his massive *Praeparatio Evangelica*, which he composed soon after becoming bishop of Caesarea (in other words, during the years 314–324).⁶ This treatise displays a wide reading in the Platonic corpus and imperial-era Platonism. Quotations from Plato litter the second half of the *Praeparatio* (in particular, the apex of Platonic engagement in Books 11–13⁷). In sum, he quotes from eighteen Platonic works.⁸ The quotations of later Platonists in the immediate context of the second half of the *Praeparatio* are marshaled to confirm his selections of Plato, but they also see significant usage elsewhere for different purposes (to which we shall soon turn). These later Platonists (with some Neopythagoreans) include: Plutarch, Ps-Plutarch, Apollonius of Tyana, Numenius, Atticus, Severus, Plotinus, Longinus, Porphyry and Amelius. In fact, Eusebius is one of the most significant sources of all Late Antiquity for fragments of otherwise lost works of Porphyry of Tyre, one of the greatest anti-Christian intellectuals before the modern period; these range from his interpretations of religious phenomena (the *Philosophy from Oracles*, *On Images* and *Letter to Anebo*, as well as *Against the Christians*)⁹ to a polemical text on psychology (the *To Boethus*) and a dialogue on plagiarism in classical and Hellenistic-era authors (the *Recitatio Philologica*). Most of the quotations from Plato and his latter-day disciples are too extensive to allow us to conclude that he merely used one or more florilegia, and in any case, insofar as he may have used such collections they most likely would have been ones of his own composition from personal study.¹⁰

In addition to the Platonic philosophical tradition, Eusebius cited a more limited range of works from the Cynic, Epicurean, Stoic and Peripatetic traditions: Alexander of Aphrodisias, Aristocles of Messena, Arius Didymus, Oenomaus of Gadara, Diogenianus and Timon of Phlius. Aside from these texts, however, Eusebius appears to have had less access to, or at least less interest in, philosophers outside the Platonic tradition.¹¹ There is, in any case, a complete absence of direct quotation from the writings of the founding figures of the other schools.¹²

Marcellus' extant writings, if we supplement the *Letter to Julius* and the fragments of his *Against Asterius* with the misattributed *Exhortation* and *On the Holy Church*, still total only a small fraction in comparison to the wealth of material that survives from Eusebius' hand. We nonetheless find serious and judicious use of philosophical quotations and allusions in these writings. Quotations of Plato (from at least six works) occur in all of his works except for the *Letter to Julius*.¹³ The *Exhortation* also includes quotations of Ps-Aristotle, the Hermetica and the Pythagorica, although those from Plato remain the most pronounced.¹⁴ His numerous references to the teachings of other philosophers such as the Pre-Socratics (and even frequently of Plato and Aristotle as well) seem to derive from the doxography of Ps-Plutarch as well as other doxographical literature.¹⁵ One wonders if he may not have had other sources as well, such as the middle Platonist Atticus.¹⁶

2 Uses

Both Eusebius and Marcellus, for all their variance in literary and cultural temperament and theological outlook, put their philosophical resources to remarkably similar uses within their respective apologetic treatises. There are two primary modes of argumentation that both share. The first is what may be called the argument from discord.¹⁷ Presuming that truth is necessarily unitary, the argument from discord refuses the opponents' truth claims by pointing to the disagreement among the opponents on the nature of certain fundamental philosophical questions. The doxographical writings of Ps-Plutarch become a fundamental resource for the argument from discord, since they concisely laid out the dizzying diversity of viewpoints on key issues such as the nature of the cosmos and its various components, the nature of the soul, the existence, location and nature of the divine, and so on.¹⁸ Greek philosophers could come under heavy censure for such discordant doctrines, while the ancient Hebrews and the Christians of more recent times could be heralded as transmitting a singularly harmonious set of teachings about God, cosmogony and human nature.¹⁹

Closely connected to the argument from discord was the argument from dependence.²⁰ Since Christians had been highlighting significant features of the Greek philosophical tradition that resonated with their own truth claims, Eusebius and Marcellus could not easily dismiss the Greek philosophers in their entirety. Especially Plato had taught the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, the permanent being of a demiurgic God who could be claimed to be the source of all created beings (if not as their immediate parent then at least through mediating creator gods). To allow for these areas of truth within Plato's thought without entirely ceding the philosophical high ground to Platonism, Eusebius and Marcellus, following a path already laid down by their apologetic predecessors, asserted the Greek dependence in these areas upon the older and wiser ways of the ancient Hebrews.²¹ At first, Eusebius only suggests the agreement of Plato and Moses, but soon asserts that Plato paraphrased or translated from Moses' writings. Marcellus likewise makes the bald claim that both Homer and Plato transmitted Moses' teachings, which they encountered during their travels to Egypt.

Marcellus goes beyond the assertion of Platonic borrowings and asserts in a fragment of his *Against Asterius* that the anonymous authors of several Greek proverbs – and indeed the very act of creating proverbial statements in Greek – were influenced by Solomon's proverbs.²² In spite of Eusebius' criticism of this portion of Marcellus' theological treatise, he himself had made roughly similar claims in his *Praeparatio*. While Marcellus alleged that the idea of hiding deeper truths in enigmatic utterances was at issue in the borrowing from Hebrews by the Greeks, Eusebius had located what he thought were Platonic echoes of particular proverbs from the biblical corpus.²³

What makes Eusebius' argument from borrowing unique among all Christian apologists before and after him is a massive collation of Platonic and biblical passages that fill most of Books 11–13 of his *Praeparatio* (though a similar collation is available on a much smaller scale in Marcellus' *Exhortation* 29–33).²⁴ In this comparative tour de force, Eusebius shows a high level of familiarity with a wide range of Plato's corpus as well as the writings of Platonists of his own era, covers a broad range of thematic topics from theology to education, and gradually moves from the more generic assertion that the agreements he was finding between the biblical and philosophical traditions could have come about in any number of ways to the eventual asseveration that Plato was all but stealing his ideas from the biblical writers (whether in written or orally transmitted form during his sojourn in Egypt).²⁵

Both Eusebius and Marcellus were quick to remind readers that the truth of Plato's philosophy was only partial: he had not maintained with adequate clarity and purity the fuller truth of

Hebrew wisdom. Both were likewise ready to remind the reader of the disagreement between Plato and his own disciples and even the discord internal to his own corpus.²⁶ In contrast to Eusebius, Marcellus does not provide direct quotations in this portion of his argument, but only makes general gestures to some well-known problems of Plato interpretation, such as the fact that some passages of the dialogues represent the soul as comprised of two parts while elsewhere it is said to consist of three. Eusebius, on the other hand, claims:

for my part I very greatly admire the man, and esteem him as a friend above all the Greeks, and honour him as one whose sentiments are dear and congenial to myself, although not the same throughout; but I wished to show in what his intelligence falls short in comparison to Moses and the Hebrew prophets.²⁷

Marcellus possesses an additional distinctive feature in his application of the argument from dependence. Heresy can be explained and simultaneously assailed through the claim that the heretics' doctrinal failings were the result of undue influence from philosophy.²⁸ For instance, in a striking fragment of his *Against Asterius*, he criticizes Origen for inadvertently modeling his *On First Principles* upon Plato's doctrine of first principles, thus "he was led astray by the arguments of philosophy, and composed certain things incorrectly because of them."²⁹ The borrowing could be proven, Marcellus averred: the opening words of Origen's *On First Principles* echoed a phrase of Plato's *Gorgias*.³⁰

Again, the primary argument of his short heresiological treatise, *On the Holy Church*, is predicated upon the argument of dependence: all heresies derive from inappropriate dependence upon various branches of the Greek philosophical tradition. Everyone had to be taught from someone else, but the heretics were not taught from the apostles, disciples or bishops; instead they taught each other.³¹ After a brief survey of intra-heretical influences, he claims: "Now all these derived the starting points of the impiety from the philosophers Hermes [Trismegistus], Plato and Aristotle" (Marcellus, *On the Holy Church* 7, tr. Logan) The "Ariomaniacs" stole their idea of three hypostases from the earlier heretic Valentinus, but he filched his ideas from Hermes and Plato (*Holy Church* 8–9); however, they took their notion of "a second god created by the Father before the ages" from Hermes Trismegistus (*Holy Church* 10–11). Eusebius, whom Marcellus includes among the "Ariomaniacs," is next said to have applied the epithet of "begotten" to this second god under the influence of Plato's *Timaeus* (which Marcellus misnames the *Gorgias* at *Holy Church* 12–13). The text then continues with yet more areas of suspect doctrine and identifies their philosophical sources.

3 Themes

The picture that begins to emerge in an analysis of Eusebius' and Marcellus' respective use of philosophical sources is that the latter has a singularly bleaker attitude towards Greek philosophy in general than does the former. For Marcellus, it was not only the case that the philosophical tradition itself was plagued with the discord arising from its failure in acquiring truth and, furthermore, that any truth it did possess was not its own but was borrowed from the pure wellsprings of Hebrew wisdom. Greek philosophy was also the culprit, according to him, for the infusion of doctrinal deficiencies into an originally pure Christianity so as to produce the various heresies. His theological opponents could be attacked effectively, he thought, if they could be found to be unduly attached to philosophy. Nowhere in his writings does he conceptually mark out a space for a Christian philosophy or claim that Christianity is the true philosophy.³²

Eusebius, on the other hand, did allow for just such a possibility of a true philosophy, which basically was the sum of Christian truth claims. Christians who exemplified purity of life and thought had attained “such a peak of philosophy” and “such an excess of philosophic life” (*Preparation* 1.4.9.10); their courageous display of belief in the immortality of the soul during times of persecution proved those reputed to be philosophers instead “to be but children” (*Preparation* 1.4.14). Even while seeing most of what went under the name of philosophy among the Greeks as arrogance, sophistry and ignorance, at least some philosophers had had the good sense to travel abroad in search of truth and transmit it, however partially, back to their Greek homeland. Eusebius would disagree with those like Marcellus who blamed philosophy as the deleterious catalyst of heresy. Instead, he derived a certain pleasure in remarking on Christians who were well read in philosophy and especially an intellectual of Origen’s caliber who had caught the attention of pagan philosophers who could not deny the depth of his immersion in philosophical literature.³³ At the same time, with Marcellus, Eusebius would deny that Christian wisdom was identifiable with Greek philosophy. The latter was, with all due emphasis and a sustained series of proofs and reminders, a late caricature at best of the original Hebrew way of thinking and living. Like Marcellus, Eusebius could not countenance the possibility of Christian Platonism; such would not be truly Christian.

Nonetheless, there were areas in which each Christian thinker shared some basic language and conceptions with the philosophical tradition that they read, criticized and ultimately rejected. In the area of theology proper, Marcellus makes two claims that are of interest for our present investigation. First, he emphasized against his opponents (especially Asterius, but also Eusebius himself and others), that God was always only an “indivisible monad” (*adiairetos monas*), which expanded into a triad while remaining a single *hypostasis*.³⁴ Such language does have at least a partial philosophical pedigree in Neopythagorean thinking about the Monad and Dyad. In fact, it was a Neopythagorean conception that the Monad extends into a Dyad as a point extends into a line, and then further into a Triad as the line is widened to become a surface.³⁵ Marcellus’ emphasis upon God as a singular unity expanding into a triad certainly seems to echo such philosophical thinking. Yet, he avoided the term “dyad” altogether³⁶ and furthermore maintained that the Monad remained one; its extension into a triad was not an extension of substance.

This refusal of a substantial expansion of the Monad is due to a second claim that recurs in several fragments, which have to do with Marcellus’ adoption of the language of *dynamis* and *energeia* to speak of the Word being in God “in power” but expanding into the triad “in activity alone.”³⁷ In the former case, the Word was only a word,³⁸ it remained substantially and subsistently God since it was “in God”; in the latter case, again, it remained substantially and subsistently God while becoming incarnate only “in activity.” The juxtaposition of *dynamis* and *energeia* at first glance recalls Aristotle’s famous division (as seems to be the case in Constantine’s evocation of these terms during the proceedings at Nicaea³⁹). But, such a connection between the theologian and the philosopher is almost certainly to be eschewed here since for Aristotle *energeia* demarcated a thing’s realization (which is prior to its capacity or *dynamis* logically, temporally and substantially),⁴⁰ the activity associated with that realization, or the substance formed of matter in its potentiality;⁴¹ whereas for Marcellus it denoted a thing’s external activity not its substantial realization or even the activity expressive of its realization. In the incarnation the Word separated from God only in activity, not in *hypostasis* or *ousia*, and it certainly did not fulfill its *hypostasis* or *ousia*. Marcellus’ notion of incarnation refuses any assumption that it was an activity which brought about a realization of God’s being.

At the same time, therefore, that this sort of *terminology* is surely adopted from philosophical discourses, in neither of these two areas of Marcellus’ theology could we say that he was

following philosophical *lines of thinking*. And, of course, he would have wanted it that way. Given his usage of the philosophers in the argument from discord, which displayed the inability of philosophers to maintain the truth, or the argument from dependence, which castigated heretics for their borrowing from philosophy, Marcellus no doubt intended to exhibit a studied distance from such traditions of thought.

While Eusebius cannot properly be labeled an “Arian” (in spite of an initial period of support for Arius, which was based upon an only partial understanding of that presbyter’s thought), his articulation of the nature of God and particularly the nature of the relation between the Father and Son was severely at odds – both before and after Nicaea – with the sort of position delineated by Marcellus.⁴² For Eusebius, one abandoned a truly Trinitarian formulation of the Godhead if one denied a separate *hypostasis*, or individual existence, to the Son. While he expressed a clearly subordinationist position for the Son, the Son was not merely part of an expanding (and contracting) triadic activity of a Monad, as for Marcellus. The Son was, for Eusebius, begotten “before all ages” (not merely at the incarnation) and thus the Son was ever truly Son just as the Father was ever truly Father. One can therefore assert that the Son is “coexistent” with the Father,⁴³ even while denying that the Son “co-subsists” with the Father.⁴⁴ The individual subsistence (*hypostasis*) of each must be conceptually protected at the same time that their ineffable closeness and the oneness of deity must be maintained.

In the *Praeparatio*, Eusebius had attempted to prove that such thinking was not foreign to the best in the Platonic tradition. Plotinus’ *Ennead* 5.1, from which he made several successive quotations, might be deemed to provide striking support since it had been given the title by Porphyry “On the Three Principal Hypostases.”⁴⁵ The essay parsed the ways in which the three main components of Plotinus’ ontological schema, One-Mind-Soul, were firmly established in Plato’s thought. But as is now frequently recognized nowhere in the essay does Plotinus name them collectively three *hypostases* or designate the One as a *hypostasis* (or even as having a *hypostasis*),⁴⁶ nor does Eusebius cite it for this purpose.⁴⁷

In fact, aside from the title of the treatise Eusebius had no good grounds within the philosophical literature at his disposal for so labeling the components of the Christian Trinity. Of course, Porphyry, who assigned the title to *Ennead* 5.1 (though it may have already been common among Plotinus’ students as a descriptive), would elsewhere explicitly designate the three ontological levels as *hypostases*. In the fourth book of his *Philosophic History* – a work (or at least a portion of a work) that Eusebius gives no indication of knowing – Porphyry writes, “Plato said that the substance (*ousia*) of God went forth as far as three *hypostases*: that the highest God was the Good, and after Him also the Demiurge was second, and third was the Soul of the world. For the divinity went forth as far as Soul.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, since (1) Eusebius seems unaware of this text and (2) he can nowhere cite a philosophical text that designated the ontological triad as three distinct *hypostases*, while (3) Origen had distinguished the Father, Son and Holy Spirit as “three *hypostases*”⁴⁹ (and thus, had he known Porphyry’s text he no doubt would have explained it as dependent upon this sort of Christian precedent), we should recognize Eusebius’ theological formulations as expressing what he felt to be an inherently Christian understanding of the divine.

Although he masterfully compiled sundry philosophical passages that might express a first and second cause of all that exists and even apply the language of father and son to them, designating the second a word or reason (*logos*) as image of the former, Eusebius nonetheless saw his theological project as something distinctively Christian (or Hebrew) and carefully delineated his conceptions of the deity so as to remove any misguided accretions that might come with his philosophical language. For instance, it has been noticed that Eusebius strategically omits Plotinus’ emphasis on the One’s austere aloofness and immovability in creation in his quotations

of *Ennead* 5.1,⁵⁰ or again, when considering the analogies of light and fragrance in the fourth book of the *Demonstratio* (both of which had occurred in quotations of Plotinus found earlier in the *Praeparatio* to gesture at the begetting of Mind from the One⁵¹), he emphasized the limits of such analogies to the theological truths to which they otherwise might point.⁵²

Furthermore, he may have been content within the immediate context to adopt the tag “second God” when quoting from pagan philosophers who had employed it to refer to an entity that Eusebius sought to identify with the second cause, namely the Son “through whom” the Father created the world.⁵³ And yet, he exhibited significant concern to emphasize the oneness of God in his *Demonstratio* and *Theophania*.⁵⁴ Of course, the hypostatic existence of the Son was not to be sacrificed in such an emphasis; rather, it was to be held simultaneously with God’s oneness. The near identity of the Son as image of the Father was so close as to render likely the theological mistake (as he saw it) of collapsing the Son’s hypostatic integrity. And thus Eusebius deemed it necessary to proceed on the theological tightrope that he sought to present for his readers in much of Book Four of the *Demonstratio* (Edwards 2013: 141–144).

Eusebius’ fundamental conception of the other member of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, seems to derive more from his interactions with Marcellus and the Bible than Platonic thought.⁵⁵ Although he explicitly invoked Platonic-Plotinian quotations about the Soul or World-Soul as part of his argument for Greek dependence upon Hebrew wisdom in the *Praeparatio*, it is unlikely that such material was formative of his articulation of a doctrine of the Holy Spirit, as expressed most notably in his *Ecclesiastical Theology* 3.5–6. On the other hand, if we reach below the ontological levels of deity to those “so-called gods” of pagan cult, we discover that Eusebius not only clinched his biblically founded identification that “the gods of the nations are daemons”⁵⁶ but also expressed their dubious ontological status through the incisive reporting of several works of one of the greatest contemporary Platonists, Porphyry of Tyre. With carefully selected quotations from this anti-Christian philosopher, Eusebius was able to establish the connection of traditional cult to wicked daemons and affirm the reasonableness of the Christian rejection of such religious practices and theologies (*Preparation* 4–5).

The interaction of the biblical and the philosophical is likewise seen in his consideration of human nature and its relationship to the divine. The doctrine of the human person as comprised of two parts, a sensible and an intelligible, a body and soul, cannot be simplistically or unproblematically derived from the Bible (though there are many references to the “soul” and “eternal life”).⁵⁷ For instance, although he avows that “in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul Plato differs not at all in opinion from Moses” (*Preparation* 11.27.1, tr. Gifford), none of the passages quoted from Genesis 1 quite so explicitly state that humans are most essentially immaterial souls or that they are by nature immortal as Eusebius claims (at best they declare that humanity became “a living soul” upon God’s combination of “dust from the earth” and “a breath of life” and that it was made “in the image of God”).⁵⁸ Such explicit statements on the soul arrive only with the quotations from Plato and Porphyry.⁵⁹ The notions of human free will,⁶⁰ the providential administration of the things of this world,⁶¹ and the necessity of reason and rational forms of sacrifice⁶² all have some basis in biblical texts, but receive their more precise articulations and broader conceptual framework on the basis of what amounts to several dozens of pages of philosophical quotations.

We must keep before us the fact that Eusebius would no doubt have denied being influenced by pagan philosophy⁶³ – instead, for him it was pagan philosophy that had been influenced by the more ancient Hebrew wisdom preserved in the Bible – but, his work has all the marks of a fecund conversation with the philosophical tradition. At the same time, what makes Eusebius such a thoroughgoing biblicist is his concern to subordinate all philosophical formulations to the wording of Scripture: “all [Plato’s] sayings which have been expressed in a felicitous manner

will be found to agree with the doctrines of Moses, but in whatever he assumed that did not agree with Moses and the prophets, his argument will not be well established.”⁶⁴

Conclusion

Eusebius and Marcellus offer us, in some sense, a snapshot of the range of philosophical interactions within the Christian intellectual culture of the early fourth century. Both exhibit a concern to engage principally with Plato and the Platonic heritage; both consider quotation an effective mode of applying that engagement; both adopt and adapt the apologetically useful arguments from discord and from dependence; both utilize language and concepts of the philosophical tradition in developing their own theological and anthropological articulations. As has become clear, at the same time they differ fundamentally on the degree of harmony that ought to be found between Greek and Hebrew wisdom. Indeed, Marcellus restricted himself to identifying his project as one of formulating wisdom and “godly piety” (*theosebeia*) as separate from any Greek tradition, while Eusebius went much further and accepted *philosophia* as an appropriate label for the way of life and thought of ancient Hebrews and contemporary Christians.⁶⁵

Ultimately, then, Christianity was, for Eusebius, the true philosophy that the Greeks later only partially and imperfectly imitated from Hebrew models. For Marcellus, on the other hand, Christianity was a rival to philosophy; it was a wisdom and form of piety that had to be learned and the only teachers for it were Moses and the prophets, not the philosophers or poets of the Greek past. His writings join those of Eusebius in displaying exquisitely the influence of Greek philosophy and *paideia* upon the Christian intellectual culture of Late Antiquity – but this was an impact he preferred to deny or ignore, whereas Eusebius firmly embraced the comparative enterprise of culling that which was true from the dubious and identifying the areas of concord or disparity between the two traditions.

Notes

- 1 Riedweg 1994: 1.160–182, followed by Pouderon 2009: 42–46.
- 2 Logan 2000; Seibt 1994: 64–66.
- 3 Logan 2000: 86, 88.
- 4 Pouderon 2006.
- 5 Seibt 1994: 64–66.
- 6 Studies of what Eusebius read and how he deployed quotations from his reading continue to advance our knowledge of this important aspect of Eusebius as a litterateur; see, e.g., Carriker 2003; Inowlocki 2006; Carotenuto 2001; Mondello 2017.
- 7 Cf. Eusebius, *Theophany* 2.24–46.
- 8 These are the *Apology*, *Cratylus*, *Alcibiades* (including material not in the independent manuscript tradition of Plato), *Crito*, the *Epistles*, *Euthyphro*, *Gorgias*, *Laws*, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, *Philebus*, *Politicus*, *Republic*, *Sophist*, *Symposium*, *Theaetetus*, *Timaeus* and the Pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*. See index to Mras 1954.
- 9 For brief introductions to each of these works with further bibliography, see Johnson 2013: 21–49.
- 10 See Inowlocki 2006: 151, 152–154.
- 11 Zambon 2006: 69–70. For the reception of these traditions among other Christian intellectuals, see Morlet 2014: 143–167.
- 12 See, however, the index entry for Aristotle at Mras 1954: 442.
- 13 These are the *Apology*, *Laws*, *Meno*, *Phaedrus*, *Republic*, *Timaeus* and possibly *Protagoras*.
- 14 See the useful lists of citations at Riedweg 1994: 2.621–627.
- 15 For the relationship to Ps-Plutarch, see Riedweg 1994: 229–233, 235, 245–246, 248–249, 253, etc.; Mansfeld and Runia 1997: 1.164–166.
- 16 For possible use of Atticus, see Riedweg 1994, *passim*.
- 17 See Boys-Stones 2001: 123–150; Johnson 2006a: 142–149; Morlet 2014: 37–42.
- 18 See the entirety of *Preparation* 14–15; *Theophany* 2.47–50.

- 19 E.g., *Preparation* 14.3.
- 20 See Johnson 2006a: 130–136.
- 21 Eusebius, *Preparation* 11.1–13.3; *Theophany* 2.19; Marcellus, *Cohortatio*, 29–33.
- 22 Marcellus, *Against Asterius* fr. 125 Klostermann (= 23 Vinzent), cited at Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.3.1–8 and 13.
- 23 Eusebius, *Preparation* 11.13.8; 11.14.8; 12.18.1–4 and 6; 13.3.40; cf. *Preparation* 11.4.6, where he implies, without clearly stating, that the ethical branch of Greek philosophy was derived from its corresponding branch in the Bible, particularly the proverbs of Solomon.
- 24 See Morlet 2014: 136–138.
- 25 Downplaying this fact, see the otherwise illuminating discussion of Karamanolis 2014.
- 26 Marcellus, *Cohortatio* 7.1; Eusebius., *Preparation* 13.14–18.
- 27 *Preparation* 13.18.17; trans. Gifford. This should be balanced by his statement in the *Theophania*: “It seems right to me, therefore, to consider this man more reprehensible than [all] the rest. . . [although] the kindred character of his doctrines drew me to him,” since out of fear for his life Plato accepted those whom he knew to be not gods (*Theophany* 2.41; trans. Lee).
- 28 For predecessors, see Morlet 2014: 32–36.
- 29 Marcellus, *Against Asterius* fr. 88 Klostermann (= 22 Vinzent), cited at Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.4.21–23; trans. Spoerl/Vinzent.
- 30 Origen, *First Principles* 1.praef; Plato, *Gorgias*. 454e1–2.
- 31 Marcellus, *On the Holy Church* 3–4. Cf. Marcellus, *Against Asterius* fr. 38 Klostermann (= 20 Vinzent), cited at Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 1.4.21.
- 32 Though he will criticize philosophy for not living up to its own name: *Cohortatio* 35.2; 36.1.
- 33 See Eusebius’ quotation of Porphyry, *Against the Christians* fr. 6 Becker (= fr. 39 Harnack, at Eusebius, *Church History* 6.19.1–11), with commentary at Becker 2016: 136–167.
- 34 Marc., *Against Asterius* fr. 67 Klostermann (= fr. 48 Vinzent), cited at Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical Theology* 3.4.2–3; on the Monad, see also, fr. 66 (= 47V); 71.21–22 (= 73.4V); 77.22–21 (= 91.1V); 78.1 (= 92.1V); 76.27–28 (= 97.6V); for discussion, see Lienhard 1999: 56–58; Spoerl and Vinzent 2017: 21. It should be noted, furthermore, that Marcellus does not explicitly state that he believes God to be a single *hypostasis* only that those who believe in a second *hypostasis* are incorrect; see Vinzent 1997: xxvi–xxvii, xxx–xxxii.
- 35 See Iamblichus, *Theology of Arithmetic* 3.16.4–11; for discussion (which may unduly politicize Marcellus’ adoption of such language), see Seibt 1993, citing Iamblichus 417; more extensively Seibt 1994: 460–521.
- 36 In a very different context, Eusebius also omits the dyad in a discussion of the monad and triad; *Tricenial Oration* 6.11–13.
- 37 Marc., *Against Asterius* fr. 52 Klostermann (= 70 Vinzent), cited at Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 2.2.12; fr. 71 Klostermann (= 73 Vinzent), cited at Eusebius, *Against Marcellus* 2.2.6; fr. 60 Klostermann (= 110 Vinzent), cited at Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical Theology* 3.3.43 (which refers to God’s “effective activity” or *energeia drastikē* in creating the world); for discussion, see Lienhard 1999: 54–56.
- 38 Cp., Eusebius, *Theophany* 1.23, 38.
- 39 Eusebius, *Letter to Caesarea* 16 (= Urk. 22, pg. 46.16–21); see Seibt 1993: 418–419, whom I do not follow here in seeing Constantine’s use of *dynamis/energeia* language as functioning similarly to that of Marcellus. Instead, Constantine’s usage appears to follow the Aristotelian conception while Marcellus’ follows a Neopythagorean conception (possibly a Christian Neopythagorean conception such as that of Anatolius of Laodicea, whose importance for Eusebius has been noted by Seibt 193: 418 n. 15; cf. Johnson 2006b).
- 40 And thus, for Aristotle, being “in power/potentiality” (*dynamis*) can never be attributed to an eternal entity (*Metaphysics* 9.8, 1050b6–8) – precisely what Marcellus claims for the Logos “in God.”
- 41 See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 9.8 and 8.6, respectively.
- 42 See Johnson 2014: 123–131 and 2020.
- 43 *Demonstration of the Gospel* 5.4.9, 226d; cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.6.53. One should beware of Ferrar’s imprecise translation. For discussion, see Johnson 2020.
- 44 See Eusebius, *Demonstration* 4.3.5, with brief discussion of Johnson 2020.
- 45 For discussion of the Christian reception of this chapter, see Aubin 2016. For textual discussion of Eusebius’ reception of it see Goulet-Cazé 2007; Zambon 2006: 55–78.
- 46 Mind and Soul are both, however, said at different places to “subsist” or to “have subsistence”; see Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.3.16; 5.1.6.6; 5.1.7.27.
- 47 Aubin 2016: 11–20, 21–24.

- 48 Porphyry, *Philosophical History* fr. 221 Smith.
- 49 Origen, *Commentary on Matthew* 15.31; *Commentary on John* 2.75; Aubin 2016: 12–13.
- 50 Ricken 1978: 330.
- 51 Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.6.28–45, quoted at *Preparation* 11.17.3–7.
- 52 At least with respect to the light analogy, he is often taken as offering a tacit correction to Origen – and this may be true – but Plotinus must be maintained as part of the intertext here. Ricken 1978: 327 reminds us that the light analogy is, at any rate, rooted in biblical and liturgical traditions.
- 53 On Eusebius' application of the epithet "second" to the Son, see Edwards 2013: 143.
- 54 Eusebius, *Demonstration* 4.1–3; *Theophany* 1.27–33.
- 55 See Drecoll 2013.
- 56 Psalm 95:5 LXX, quoted at *Preparation* 4.16.20.
- 57 Cf. Eusebius, *Tricennial Oratio* 7.1.
- 58 *Preparation* 11.27.1–3; cf. *Theophany* 1.44–79.
- 59 Pl. *Alcibiades* 133c and *Phaedo* 79a–81c, cited at *Preparation* 11.27.4–19; Porphyry, *To Boethus* frs. 242–245 Smith, cited at *Preparation* 11.28.1–16.
- 60 Eusebius, *Preparation* 6.6; *Sepulchre of Christ* 12.3–5. (The title *On the Sepulchre of Christ* is now given to *Tricennial Oratio* 11–18).
- 61 Eusebius, *Preparation* 7.10; *Theophany* 1.6–24 and passim; *Tricennial Oratio* 1.4; 6.3–9; *Sepulchre of Christ* 11.8–17.
- 62 Eusebius, *Preparation* 4.4, 10–14; *Tricennial Oratio* 2.5; cf. *Demonstration* 1.10.
- 63 Indeed, we should be wary of seeing pagan philosophy as an isolated tradition that could be combined with an equally isolated Christianity – neither Platonists nor Christians of the third and fourth centuries existed in intellectual, literary or social vacuums.
- 64 *Preparation* 11.28.19; trans. Gifford, altered. Eusebius frequently provides a thorough mixture of biblical and middle Platonist terminology (especially on the Logos), e.g., at *Tricennial Oratio* 1.6; see Ricken 1978: 324, 327; Edwards 2013: 143.
- 65 *Preparation* 1.4.9, 10, 14; 11.3.10; 11.23.12.

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Arius and Athanasius

Winrich Löhr

Arius and philosophy

The teaching of the Alexandrian presbyter Arius – insofar as it can be recovered from the few available sources – was informed by the tradition of Christian philosophy, particularly Origen. It is possible, but difficult to demonstrate, that in addition Arius was drawing on philosophical (Middle Platonic or Neoplatonic) sources; moreover, a critical awareness of Gnostic theological speculations (which were in turn informed by Platonist concepts) can be surmised.¹

Just like Origen, Arius taught a hierarchical trinity of three hypostases – but he particularly stressed the differences between Father, Son and Spirit, which are unlike each other “one being more glorious than another by an infinity of glories” (West 11). At the top is God, “who is unbegotten, . . . invisible to all” (West 9) and absolutely ineffable, “he alone having neither equal nor like, none comparable in glory” (West 4). This God has a Son who is the beginning of all things begotten (West 6) and who is neither equal nor consubstantial (*homoousios*) with the Father: indeed – as Arius writes, employing a phrase that is somewhat paralleled in Porphyry – “he has nothing proper to God according to his own proper hypostasis” (West 7).² The Son came into existence by the will of the Father (West 15): this is meant to indicate a wholly spiritual manner of begetting, fitting for incorporeal substances.³ The Son that is begotten by the Father receives “life and being and glories” (*kai to zēn kai to einai . . . kai tas doxas*) without the Father suffering any loss or diminution (Arius, in Athanasius, *On Synods* 16.3). Here Arius describes how the incorporeal being (*hypostasis*) of the Son is constituted, and his phrasing – particularly the triad of ‘life, being, glories’ – recall explanations that are found in Plotinus and Porphyry, in particular the Neoplatonic triad of ‘life, being, intellect’.⁴ Whereas God the Father is one and absolutely simple – since his being admits of no parts or division – the Son represents multiplicity, providing a plethora of accesses to the salvific knowledge of the Father:

He [i.e. the Son] is conceived by so many countless/concepts, as spirit, power wisdom/ glory of God, truth image and Logos. / Understand that he is conceived also as effulgence and light.

(West 17/18)

The contrast between the simplicity of God and the mediating multiplicity of his Son has parallels in Jewish, Christian and Pagan Platonist theologies of the first three centuries C.E.

God the Father can be known and praised only through the Son. The Son who is not equal to the Father and can neither know nor communicate the Father comprehensively is the fullest possible revelation of the Father, or as Arius expresses it:

One equal to the Son the Supreme (*ho kreittôn*)⁵ is able to beget/but more excellent, superior or greater he cannot.

(West 19)

Arius stresses the absolute ineffability of God claiming that God “is to himself what he is, that is to say, unutterable”. The stress on the ineffability of God can be understood as Arius’ interpretation of Plato’s famous statement in Ti.28c3–5:

It is difficult to find the Maker and Father of the Universe, and if he is found, it is impossible to communicate him to all.

The absolute ineffability of the Father implies the Son’s limited knowledge and imperfect communication of the Father’s being. Since the Son, being a product of the Father’s will and therefore having a beginning, does not fully know his origin in the Father who is unbegun, he does not know his own being (*ousia*) (West 22).

Arius chooses to reinterpret negative theology in a distinctly Christian key: if God is essentially unknowable and incommunicable, the revelation through the Son communicates this ultimate unknowability by imparting salvific if fragmentary knowledge of God.

Athanasius and Philosophy: Introduction

As we are largely ignorant about Athanasius’ life prior to his becoming bishop in 328 C.E., we know as little about any philosophical schooling as in the case of Arius. In his writings, Athanasius explicitly quotes only one pagan philosopher, Plato, with epithets that pay him grudging respect.⁶ Philosophers are invariably mentioned in a derogatory way or in an eristic context.⁷

Just like Arius, Athanasius presents his own version of the tradition of Christian philosophy, copiously and without acknowledgement drawing on his predecessors, particularly Origen and Eusebius of Caesarea.⁸

Just like them, Athanasius is trying to demonstrate that Christianity is superior to pagan philosophy: the outlines of this argument are most clearly presented in his bipartite apologetic work, *Against the Pagans (Contra Gentes)* and *On the Incarnation of the Logos*, and in his *Life of Antony*. Although it has been assumed that the two apologies were the work of the young Athanasius, in fact their date and thus the occasion and immediate context of their conception are all but unknown.⁹ The *Life of Antony* must have been written shortly after the death of its protagonist in 356 C.E.¹⁰

As with other Christian writers before him, Athanasius’ demonstration of the superiority of Christian wisdom allows him to integrate fragments of ancient philosophy. If ancient philosophy promised a knowledge of self, the universe and God that transforms human beings and thus enables them to live a life attuned to their rationality, Athanasius – following his model Eusebius of Caesarea – demonstrates that only salvation by Jesus Christ, the true Logos-Son of God, can make good on this promise. Only Christianity teaches a kind of worship and a way of life that is in harmony with the deepest insights of Greek philosophy. Philo of Alexandria had already claimed as much for Judaism.

In arguing his position, Athanasius is in implicit and explicit dialogue with, first and foremost, the philosophy of Plato and his successors. Although it is possible to find traces of ideas and arguments that derive from Plotinus and Porphyry,¹¹ it remains unclear to what extent Athanasius was familiar with their writings: for some, if not all, of these borrowings Eusebius of Caesarea seems the probable intermediate source. Both Athanasius and Eusebius attack the combination of philosophical monotheism and (limited) acceptance of traditional pagan cult practice as propagated by Platonist philosophers such as Porphyry.

Let us first consider the two apologies of Athanasius. In *Against the Pagans*, Athanasius refutes the pagan gods and critically discusses various theories and arguments that are meant to rationalize idolatry (11–29). The worship of the pagan gods and idolatry, Athanasius explains in the preceding section, result from the fall of the human soul, God's image that is created immortal (2–11). The fall from the contemplation of God is punished by the loss of immortality for which man had been destined from the beginning.

The second part of *Against the Pagans* (30–47) demonstrates how man (i.e. his soul) can return by itself to God: this is possible either by contemplating God in one's own intellect or by contemplating the created order as revealing its creator, the Logos of God.

In *On the Incarnation*, Athanasius starts again with the creation of man, God's immortal image, through God's Logos (1–3). Now the focus is on the incarnation of God's Logos as the means of salvation: First, since the punishment for the fall from the contemplation of God was the loss of immortality, the incarnation of God's logos is meant to restore mankind to immortality. In this way God acts as befits him: Being truthful he punishes man with the penalty prescribed by his own law. However, being also benevolent he does not want man to perish (cc.4–10). The second reason for the incarnation is to restore God's image in man and to return mankind to the true knowledge of God (11–16). The modalities of the incarnation are discussed (17–19), as are the death of the Saviour – he did not die of illness, nor in a manner chosen by himself, nor in secrecy – and his resurrection (20–32). Jewish and pagan criticisms are refuted (33–40, 41–45). Against the pagans, Athanasius stresses the universal presence of God's Logos in the providential order of creation. Moreover, the present age (this is written under the impact of the 'Constantinian revolution') witnesses the evident triumph of the true knowledge of God conveyed by the Logos incarnate (46–55): Pagan idolatry, oracles and magic are waning, the exemplary lives of Christian martyrs and ascetics demonstrate Christ's power, as do his miracles that surpass those of pagan demigods such as Asclepius, Heracles and Dionysos (49). Whereas eloquent philosophers have achieved little or nothing, the proclamation of the crucified and risen Christ has cast out demons and has converted men to a virtuous and continent life (50). Only Christianity reaches even remote nations, rendering bellicose barbarians peaceful by its teaching (51–52), as Christianity advances and idolatry diminishes through the defeat of the demons (55). After this triumphalist vision of the inevitable progress of Christian enlightenment, the reader is asked to complement study by a virtuous life, purifying his soul in order to understand the Logos of the saints (57).

Athanasius' bipartite apology proclaims a Christian philosophy that is centred on the rational soul, its fall and its restoration by the Logos-Son incarnate. There is an evident and often noted incongruity between *Against the Pagans* and *Inc.*:¹² whereas in *Against the Pagans* Athanasius seems to envisage a return of the soul to God by spiritual exercises familiar from ancient philosophy, *Inc.* stresses the salvific role of the Logos incarnate.

Originally, Man is made in the image of the Logos of God, in order continuously to contemplate the Logos by the purity of his soul, admiring the providence of the Father and thus to live a perfect and immortal life.¹³ His mind detaches itself from both sense perception and all bodily imagination and clings to the divine and intelligible things with the power of mind (*têi dynamei*

tou nou) granted by the Logos. Adam, a kind of archetypal philosopher, “had his mind fixed on God in unembarrassed frankness and lived with the saints in the contemplation of intelligible things, which he enjoyed in that place which the holy Moses figuratively called paradise”.¹⁴ The reference to Gen 2 and 3 helps Athanasius to claim that the contemplative, philosophical life is Man’s destiny from the beginning: like other Christian philosophers such as Justin Martyr, Origen, or, his immediate source, Eusebius, Athanasius implicitly rejects the philosophical elitism of Platonists and Peripatetics.

Athanasius on the Soul and Its Fall

Athanasius accepts Plato’s view according to which soul is life and as such moves itself and the body.¹⁵ Moreover, soul is immortal: It is the body that dies after the soul has departed from it. Even when the body is buried, it does not cease moving.¹⁶ Athanasius distinguishes the rational soul of humans from the irrational soul of animals.¹⁷ In its original, contemplative state the rational soul¹⁸ is superior to the body and its senses: whereas the sense organs only see, hear, taste and smell, the soul and its mind are needed in order to judge, distinguish and determine what is perceived by the eyes, the ear, the tongue and the nose. Athanasius compares the bodily senses guided by the rational soul to a lyre whose cords are struck by the player: the rational soul directs the senses and is able, for example, to divert the eye from seeing or the nose from smelling. Whereas the irrational soul of animals is confined to that which is immediately present, man’s rational soul can reach out to those things that are outside the body, or totally absent, or can go over its own reasoning and evaluate it.¹⁹

The bodily senses perceive bodily and mortal things, but the soul contemplates immortal realities:

Thoughts and Ideas about immortality never leave the soul, but remain in it, becoming as it were tinder for the assurance of immortality.

(Against the Pagans 33.38–40)

As his body lies motionless on the ground, the rational soul of man transcends its boundaries and contemplates the heavens. It also moves in his dreams, picturing the heavenly realm, conversing with saints and angels or travelling abroad, meeting friends and even foreseeing his actions on the next day (*Against the Pagans* 31.38–43; 33.24–28).

How did the rational soul cease to cling to the divine and intelligible realities and thereby become enslaved to the bodily senses?

Athanasius interprets the story of Gen 3 as narrating the turning away of the soul from the contemplation of God to the contemplation of the body. This happens when men disregarded the better things, shrank from their full and direct apprehension and instead began to focus on what is closer to them, the body and its sense perceptions. In this way they began to take delight in bodily pleasures and to prefer their own (*ta idia*) to the contemplation of divine things.²⁰ Disturbance and impurity of the soul followed, and finally men forgot the power of mind the Logos had granted them (Inc. 11,23f). Fearful of forsaking bodily pleasures, rational soul became fearful of death. Since it could not satisfy its desires, it turned to injustice and even murder (*Against the Pagans* 3.25–31).

Athanasius emphasizes that evil did not exist from the beginning (*Against the Pagans* 2.1), nor does it have – other than is claimed by some Greeks and certain heretics²¹ – an independent reality: the explicit polemic neatly camouflages the acceptance of a Neoplatonic axiom.²² It is rather a product of soul that – turning away from the noetic realities – began to regard body and

bodily pleasures as a good thing and in this way began preferring what is not (*ta mé onta*), that is evil, to what is (*ta onta*), the good (*Against the Pagans* 4.1–18). Alluding to Plato, Athanasius comments:

It was as if someone, damaged in his mind, should demand a sword to use against those he might meet, thinking this to be sensible behaviour.²³

Athanasius makes explicit the Platonic ontology here deployed by explaining that what is good because it has its exemplar (*paradeigma*) from God, whereas what is not has merely been invented by the thoughts (*epinoiai*) of human beings.²⁴

Soul, once inflamed with pleasure, and “being easily moved by nature (*ousa gar tén physin eukinētos*),²⁵ is unable to stop: according to Athanasius, soul mistakenly believes that it can do no wrong when it exercises its natural capabilities in complete freedom:

And it assumed that, once in movement, it would preserve its own rank and would not sin when it acts according to its capabilities.

(*Against the Pagans* 4.31–33)

Soul, however, is not created for movement pure and simple, but movement towards the right goal. If it loses sight of this it can be compared to a reckless charioteer in a stadium.²⁶ Turning away from the higher things, it perverts the use of parts of its body, using the hands for murder, the ears for disobedience, the tongue for perjury and other parts for adultery (*Against the Pagans* 5.2–11). There is no other reason for all kinds of sin than this movement of rational soul away from God.

Athanasius’ reading of Genesis 3 turns on the Platonic definition of the soul as self-moving. To put it into perspective one may compare Plotinus’ comparable but different account in *Enneads* 5.1.1:

What is it, then, which has made the souls forget their father, God, and be ignorant of themselves and him? . . . The beginning of evil for them was audacity (*tolma*)²⁷ and coming to birth and the first otherness and the wishing to belong to themselves. Since they were clearly delighted with their own freedom (*autexousion*),²⁸ and made great use of self-movement (*pollô tôi kineisthai par hautôn kechrēmenai*), running the opposite course and getting as far away as possible, they were ignorant even that they themselves came from that world.

(Translation Armstrong)

According to some treatises of Plotinus, matter – being devoid of form and measure – is absolute evil, whereas soul, having come into contact with matter, is only accidentally evil.²⁹ The evil of the soul that is descended into the body arises when it is overcome by what is worse, by mental pictures, desires and passions and begins to act without consulting the reasoning faculty. The false opinion formed by the soul is then the result of an ‘irrational thinking’. The soul that is in contact with matter and is no longer pure intellect becomes subject to desires, passions and fears.³⁰

Athanasius, who cannot accept any part of God’s creation being absolutely evil, avoids talking of matter being absolutely evil. He is only interested in the moral evil of the soul which arises from its mistaken judgement with regard to the value of bodily pleasures. The ‘fall’ of the soul, the role of the body, of bodily senses and of bodily pleasures are emphasized; this implies

that only an ascetic lifestyle can realize the full potential of human beings. According to Plotinus, however, it is the soul coming into contact with matter and managing to impose form on it – if only imperfectly – that produces body.

The ‘fall’ of the soul, Athanasius argues, is inexcusable because human beings could have avoided it: “The road to God is not far from us . . . but it is within us (Deuteronomy 30.14/ Luke 17.21),”³¹ that is to say more precisely “it is each one’s soul and the mind within it (*tên hekastên psychên einai kai ton en autêi noun*).”³² And Athanasius describes this ‘inner road’:

For just as they turned away from God with their mind and invented God from non-existent entities, so they can rise towards God with the mind of their soul and again turn back towards him (*houtôs anabênai tõi nôî tês psyches, kai palin epistrepesai pros ton theon*).³³

This possible turning back towards God is a process of purification:

They can turn back if they cast off the stain of all desire (*rhypon pasês epithymias*)³⁴ which they have put on, and wash themselves until they have eliminated every addition foreign to the soul (*heôs an apothôntai pan to symbebêkos allotrion têi psychêi*) and show it simply as it was made, in order that in this way they may be able to contemplate in it the Logos of the Father, according to whom they came into being from the beginning.

(*Against the Pagans* 34.15–19, translation altered)

Quoting Gen 1.26, Athanasius continues:

Therefore, when the soul has put off every stain of sin (*ton . . . rhypon tês hamartias*) with which it is tinged, and keeps pure only what is in the image, then, when this shines forth, it can truly contemplate as in a mirror³⁵ the Logos, the image of the Father, and in him consider the Father, of whom the Saviour is the image.

(*Against the Pagans* 34.22–26, translation altered)

The soul being the image of the Logos reflects it like a mirror. Purifying the soul would mean getting rid of additions to the soul, that is, irrational desires that are foreign to its rationality.³⁶ Once purified and being completely restored to its original state, it could properly function as a mirror again; man could contemplate in his purified soul the Logos, and in the Logos the Father.³⁷

According to Athanasius, the firm conviction that there is a fundamental difference between the body and the soul, and that the soul, not the body, is immortal, is the prerequisite for the refutation of idolatry and knowledge of the Logos and his Father. And he demands:

That the soul is immortal must also be included in the church’s teaching for the complete refutation of idolatry.

(*Against the Pagans* 33.1–3)

If Athanasius here evokes the ‘road within us’ as a human possibility, he seems to respond to a (Neo)-Platonic spirituality that recommends it. Porphyry’s *Letter to Marcella* presents a Platónico-Pythagorean version of the ‘inner road’ which prescribes inner purification and asceticism: God cannot be contemplated through a body or through a soul which has been darkened by evil, but is reflected as in a mirror in the purified intellect. Purification means a virtuous and ascetic life, and a rejection of bodily pleasures which lead to the love of money,

injustice and impiety. If the body is unclean, this uncleanness is transmitted to the soul (*On Abstinence* 1.31–32).

Athanasius, however, continues: if knowledge of God cannot be adequately realized by the inner road, it has to be complemented by knowledge of God gained from considering the order and harmony of creation (*Against the Pagans* 34.29–31). And in chapters 35–46, Athanasius demonstrates that order and regularity in the visible cosmos point to a maker (35–37), that this maker must be one and not many (38–39), that this one maker is the Logos of God (40–44) and that this Logos reveals God his Father (45–47).

The lengthy celebration of the possibility of gaining knowledge of God by contemplation of the activity of the Logos as the demiurge of the visible universe is paralleled in Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.1–2, dealing with the activity of the third ‘hypostasis’, soul. Plotinus ponders how to advise souls that have abandoned the highest realities and have consequently fallen, living in self-contempt. He proposes to remind every soul of its origin and dignity:

Let every soul, then, first consider this, that it made all living things itself, breathing life into them, those that the earth feeds and those that are nourished by the sea, and the divine stars in the sky; it made the sun itself, and this great heaven, and arranged it itself, and drives it round itself, in orderly movement; it is a nature other than the things which it arranges and moves and makes live; and it must necessarily be more honourable than they, for they come into being or pass away when the soul leaves them or grants life to them, whereas she exists for ever.

(Translation Armstrong)

The Athanasian Logos

The Logos-doctrine of Athanasius as set out in *Against the Pagans* and *Inc.* owes a considerable debt to Eusebius of Caesarea, not least as a channel of Platonic and Neoplatonic ideas and arguments. The Father of the Logos-Son is described by both Eusebius and Athanasius – just as in Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic theologies – as “beyond all being and human thought” (*hyperekeina pasês ousias kai anthrôpinês epinoias*): This phrase reads Plato R. 509b in the light of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*.³⁸

Eusebius does not only compare the second and third god of Numenius to the Logos-Son, but also the second ‘hypostasis’ of Plotinus, mind (*nous*).³⁹ The Logos-Son thus construed is on the one hand identical to the Platonic world of ideas (*nous*). On the other hand, however, since he is involved in creating, sustaining and administering the visible world, he is close to the (World) Soul as construed by Middle Platonists or Neoplatonists.⁴⁰ Drawing on Eusebius, Athanasius attributes to the Logos the characteristic qualities and activities of the (world) soul of Middle Platonists, Plotinus and Porphyry. The assimilation of the Logos to Soul becomes evident when Athanasius compares both the rational soul and the Logos-Son to the musician who strikes the cords of a lyre or compares the Logos directly to the rational soul (*Against the Pagans* 31.24–34; 42.22–30; 43.8f).

The Eusebian/Athanasian model of the Logos also seems somehow akin to Platonist reflections on the presence of the incorporeal principle in the corporeal world as are found in Plotinus and Porphyry. The Logos is transcendent with regard to his own creation. He unites multiple and even opposing elements into a harmonious whole.⁴¹ He is everywhere, because – being incorporeal – he is without parts and indivisible.⁴² He grants life to everything and illuminates everything.⁴³ He prevents creation which “is always in a state of flux and dissolution” from returning to nothing, ordering it and making it remain firm.⁴⁴ He is by his powers wholly

present in each part of the universe⁴⁵ and yet contains everything⁴⁶ and moves everything “while he himself remains unmoved with the Father” (*Against the Pagans* 42.28–29). It is only outside creation, in the Father, that he is wholly and in every respect.⁴⁷

He does in no way partake of creation, but all creation partakes of his power (*On the Incarnation* 43.32f). Whereas according to Eusebius the Logos-Son partakes of the divinity of the Father, Athanasius here marks a sharp difference by attacking the language of participation in order to express the full divinity of the Son.⁴⁸

Since the Son is fully divine, he is able to make human beings divine (*On the Incarnation* 54.11f), that is, sons of the heavenly Father (*Against the Arians* 1.38–39). The Spirit who also communicates divinity to human beings is likewise not a creature, but divine (*Letter to Serapion* 1.24).

In his incarnate state, the Logos does not share the attributes of the body: His divinity remains entirely unaffected and is not subject to the passions of the body but rather sanctifies and purifies it.⁴⁹ The incarnate Logos uses the body as an instrument (*organon*) in order to demonstrate publicly that – after having given it as a ransom for salvation – he has vanquished death itself.⁵⁰ The resurrected body of Christ is to be seen as the sign of the victory (*tropaion*) over death.⁵¹

How Athanasius assisted by Eusebius borrows from Plotinus can be observed in *On the Incarnation* 42.1–8. There he defends the incarnation of the Logos against pagan critics who argue that it is not fitting for the Divine Logos to be particular present in so small a part of the universe as is the body of Christ:

Just as the whole body is activated and illuminated by man, so that if anyone were to say that it is unfitting that the strength of man should be also in the toe, would be considered stupid because – although he admits that man penetrates through the whole and activates it – he does not admit that he is also in that part of the body, so he who admits and believes that the Logos of God is in all and that everything is illuminated and moved by him, would not think it unfitting that a human body is moved and illuminated by him.

This passage makes sense only in the light of Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.7.1ff (= Eusebius, *Preparation* 15.22.39–43): There Plotinus argues against a Stoic position according to which pain in the toe is perceived by the ruling rational faculty (*hēgemonikon*) because the soul-spirit passes the pain from that part of the body to the *hēgemonikon* which is situated in the head. According to Plotinus, the perceiving principle (*to aisthanomenon*) is incorporeal and equally and wholly present everywhere in the body. In the passage of Athanasius just quoted, ‘man’ is to be understood as essential man, that is, the soul that illuminates and activates the human body.⁵² Athanasius, conceding the Plotinian criticism of the Stoic position, tries to show that a properly (Neo-) Platonic position would have to concede the truth of the incarnation as well. *Inc.* stresses the intervention of the Logos-Son whose soteriological mission is twofold: he does not only restore the rational souls of those who follow him to the true contemplation of God, but also renews, sanctifies, divinizes and renders immortal their bodies. The Logos-Son is the true and genuine Son of God who makes those who believe in him participate in him and his sonship by the gift of the Spirit. How the incarnation, death and resurrection of the Logos achieve the divinization of the human flesh is nowhere really explained by Athanasius: On this point his language remains formulaic. Against his theological opponents whom he calls ‘Arians’, he insists on two theological key concepts: First, only a Logos Son who is eternally begotten by the Father and fully God can achieve the salvation of mankind. In the course of the Arian controversy, he more and more stressed that in order correctly to express the full divinity of Christ, one should

adopt the Nicene creed according to which the Son is of the same substance as the Father (*homoousios tōi patri*). And secondly, being *homoousios*, the Logos-Son is immutable in his divinity.

The *Life of Antony*

Athanasius' *Life of Antony* inaugurates Christian hagiography and is a literary masterpiece. Its protagonist, Antony, is propagated as a model of that ascetic Christian wisdom that is superior to Greek philosophy. In order to construct Antony as a new and superior type of Christian sage,⁵³ the *Life of Antony* probably draws on an anonymous life of Pythagoras that was used by both Porphyry and Iamblichus in their biographies of Pythagoras.⁵⁴ Athanasius stages three polemical encounters between Antony and pagan philosophers: The first two show that in spite of being unlettered, Antony is accepted as a true sage by the visiting philosophers who leave him full of admiration (72–73).⁵⁵ The third encounter gives Antony the opportunity to deliver a long exhortation to Christianity (74–80) whose central ideas are similar to *Against the Pagans* and *On the Incarnation* and whose tone is equally triumphant: the victorious Christian faith, Antony claims is about to conquer the earth. Antony addresses specific criticisms to the philosophers: Whereas the Logos incarnate has not changed, but makes human beings participate in the divine and intellectual nature, pagan philosophy does not hold out a comparable possibility of noetic salvation: it asserts that the human soul as fallen from the orbit of heaven into a human body and is subject to mutations in its erring here on earth. Since the pagan philosophers also maintain that the human soul is an image of the mind, they in fact render the mind mutable and in this way risk blaspheming against the mind of God.⁵⁶ Moreover, their theology is seriously deficient because they interpret the gods of pagan mythology such as Juno, Vulcan or Apollo as pieces of the created order such as air, fire and the sun (76). Antony proclaims Christianity's epistemic superiority: Christian faith is equated with a precise knowledge (*akribê gnosis*) of the divine reality, it results from a disposition of the soul (*apo diatheseôs psychês ginetai*).⁵⁷ The pagan philosophers, on the other hand, have to rely on the art of dialectics, on proofs and sophistical syllogisms and are unable to articulate what is contemplated by the Christian sage (Antony 77.3–6). Whereas the Christians convince and convert and in this way abolish pagan superstition and demon worship, pagan philosophy is reduced to a sophistical eloquence that convinces no one and will not halt the advance of Christianity (*Antony* 77). For all his vaunting of the advantages of unlettered Christianity over against educated paganism, on closer inspection Antony/Athanasius seems again to draw on the concepts and practices of Greek philosophy. Antony, the Christian sage is called *spoudaios* (zealous), using a technical term for the philosophical way of life.⁵⁸ Antony's soul is pure and perfectly even tempered, his body in a perfect state of equilibrium, neither fat for lack of exercise nor emaciated because of excessive asceticism, and in perfect health until the very end; Antony is governed by reason and in his natural state (14.3–4; 93.1–3). The *Life of Antony* stresses that virtue (*aretê*) resides within ourselves, and that it therefore can easily be achieved if only we want it. The soul is right if its intellective faculty (*to noeron*) remains as it was created in its natural state (*Antony* 20.3.7–9). Operating with Plato's tripartite division of the soul the Antony of the *Life* exhorts his fellow monks not to let themselves be tyrannized by desire (*thumos*) and passion (*epithymia*).⁵⁹ They only have to keep away bad and impure thoughts and save their soul for the Lord (*Antony* 20.9). They should pay attention to themselves (*prosechein heautô*);⁶⁰ negligence (*ameleia*), on the contrary, is to be avoided.⁶¹ In the first part of the great sermon to his fellow monks that is central to the *Life of Antony* (16–43), Antony proposes a number of spiritual exercises (16–20). The monks should consider the totality of both time and space: They should measure the ascetic efforts of their short life against the eternal life they will get

in exchange (*Antony* 16.5). And they should compare the small corner of earth they will have to leave to the kingdom of heaven they will acquire.⁶² They have to start every day anew, live every day as if it were the last and go to sleep expecting not to survive the night.⁶³ The second, bigger, part of the sermon is devoted to the demons (21–43). To those who keep their soul pure and transparent (*dioratikê*), the Lord will give the prophetic ability to look further ahead than the demons and thus to avoid being seduced by their promise to tell the future (*Antony* 34). If the Stoic sage is instructed actively to confront the thoughts and fantasies that assail him by rationally analysing their contents and thus divesting them of their importance, the vivid narration of the *Life of Antony* dwells with considerable relish on the experience of being repeatedly subjected to the sheer chaos and turmoil of the demons' attacks.⁶⁴ The monks are exhorted constantly to remind themselves that the demons are in fact weak and devoid of miraculous powers and that there is absolutely no reason to be afraid of them: Everything they do is impossible without God's permission. Since Christ has vanquished them, they have lost all power. With psychological skill, Athanasius suggests that although coming from outside, the demonic attacks draw their strength precisely from the inner disposition of the monk's soul: Ultimately, it is all in the mind. The monk has therefore to work on himself and, arming himself with biblical sayings, must ward off the demonic suggestions with counterproposals. The successful defeat of the demons leads to inner calm and joy.⁶⁵ Throughout the *Life of Antony*, the role of Christ is stressed: it is Christ, who performs miracles – responding to the prayers of Antony.

Notes

- 1 The main source for reconstructing the teaching of Arius is a didactic poem which Athanasius entitles 'Thalia' and whose fragments are numbered according to West 1982. The translation used is that of S.G. Hall as printed in Stevenson 1975.
- 2 "... *kath' hypostasin idiotêtos* ..." This can more precisely be translated as "according to the hypostasis of his individuality". See Porphyry, *Sentences* 33: the corporeal and incorporeal substances are totally different from one another *kat' idiotêta hypostaseôs*; their conjunction is therefore different from that of those things that are *homoousios*. See M. Chasse in Brisson 2005, vol. 2: 655; Hadot 1968: 99f.
- 3 Cf. Origen, *On First Principles* 1.2.6.
- 4 See Löhr 2006: 125–128. For the Neoplatonic triad, see Hadot 1999.
- 5 Liddell and Scott, *Greek Lexicon*, s.v. 2.
- 6 *On the Incarnation* 43.35–38; see also 2.16 (cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 30); *Against the Pagans* 10.34–37 (Plato has great renown among the Greeks but practises idolatry, cf. *Republic* 327a).
- 7 *Against the Pagans* 19.22–35; Inc. 41.17; 47, 22; 50.7–8; *Antony* 72, 80; see also Inc. 2.4–6 (Epicureans). *Letter to Maximus* is addressed to the Christian philosopher who is celebrated by Gregory of Nazianzen, Or. 23. Zeno the Eleatic is listed among other famous inventors as the first dialectician, *Against the Pagans* 18.27.
- 8 See Kehrhahn 1913; Strutwolf 1999: 391–408; Heil 2007.
- 9 See Thomson 1971. Thomson's translation is used throughout, sometimes with slight modifications. For an introduction with discussion of dating, see Heil 2011: 166–175. According to Barnes 1993: 12 the apologies are the 'specimen eruditionis' of a young career theologian and at the time of their writing already outmoded.
- 10 See Bartelink 1994. The authorship of Athanasius is assumed. But see the sceptical voices of, e.g., Barnes 1993: 240; Rubenson 2013.
- 11 Louth 1975. In the following, the references to Platonic sources should not be taken to mean that Athanasius was familiar with all or most of them. It is rather meant to demonstrate that Athanasius was attuned to a Platonic sensibility.
- 12 E.g. Louth 2007.
- 13 *Against the Pagans* 2.16–19; 8.7–9.
- 14 *Against the Pagans* 2.28–32. The soul in its original state here resembles the undescended, pure soul according to Plotinus; see *Enneads* 4.8.8.1–6 and Emilsson 2017: 236f.

- 15 *Against the Pagans* 33.16: “The movement of the soul is nothing other than its life.” See Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.1.13.4–5: “Will soul move then? Yes, we must allow it this sort of movement, which is not a movement of bodies, but its own life” (transl. Armstrong). Cf. Plato, *Laws* 895.
- 16 *Against the Pagans* 33.9–11. Cf. Porphyry, in Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.28.7–13.
- 17 *Against the Pagans* 31.1–4; 34.1–4.
- 18 Athanasius does not distinguish between *nous* and *psyche* but seems to assume that the *nous* is the rational part/aspect of *psyche*, see Thomson 1971: 4, note 1 and 5, note 1 (pp. 11, 15).
- 19 *Against the Pagans* 31.9–23; 32.12–24; 43.7–12. Cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 186–187; Eusebius, *Theophany* 1.47 (references are invariably to Gressmann’s German translation); Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.4.23.38ff.
- 20 *Against the Pagans* 3.1–10. See also 4.1–3 and compare Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.9.3.9–16. Compare the ‘historical’ account of Man’s fall in Inc. 3f.; Louth 1975.
- 21 *Against the Pagans* 6–7. This is probably an allusion to Platonists and Manicheans.
- 22 Compare also Inc. 4.23–24 and Thomson 1971: note 2.
- 23 *Against the Pagans* 4.5–7; cf. Plato, *Republic* 331c; see Meijering 1968: 10.
- 24 *Against the Pagans* 4.18–20. The contrast is between the paradeigmata (i.e. the Platonic ideas) which have extra-psychic reality and thoughts (*epinoiai*) which have not. See Meijering 1968: 11–13; Kobusch 2006: 72–83.
- 25 Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.8.14.3.
- 26 *Against the Pagans* 5.11–17; cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 253d f.; Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 1.43.2–3.
- 27 Cf. *Against the Pagans* 9.20.
- 28 Cf. *Against the Pagans* 4.16: “And knowing its own freedom (*autexousion*), it sees that it can use its bodily members in both ways – for the pursuit of that which is and that which is not.”
- 29 O’Brien 2005: 171–195.
- 30 Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.1.9.4–13; 1.8.15.13–18.
- 31 *Against the Pagans* 30.5–6.
- 32 *Against the Pagans* 30.18–19.
- 33 *Against the Pagans* 34.12–14.
- 34 The term *rhypos* plays an important role in the anthropology of Origen; see Sfameni-Gasparro 1984: 193–252
- 35 Cf. *Against the Pagans* 8.11.
- 36 Cf. Isidore in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2,112,1–114,2; see Löhr 1996: 86–87; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 12.3; Gregory Thaumaturgus, *Panegyric Oration* 11.138–144; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.10; 5.1.2.45–46. Cf. Bernard 1952: 75f.
- 37 The simile of the mirror indicates knowing consciousness; Plato, *First Alcibiades* 132 e3 is a possible inspiration, but not a precise parallel.
- 38 *Against the Pagans* 2.6; cf. Plato, *Republic* 509b; Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration* 11.11–12; 12.1. For Middle Platonic references, see Whittaker 1969. See also Origen, *Against Celsus* 6.64; 7.38; Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.7.1.8f; 1.7.1.19–20; 5.6.6.29–30; Sleeman and Pollet 1980, s.v. *epekeina*. *Against the Pagans* 41.12–14 evokes the goodness and *philanthrōpia* of God, who knows no envy; cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 29e.
- 39 Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 11.17–18.
- 40 See Strutwolf 1999: 87–194.
- 41 *Against the Pagans* 36; 37.1–2. Athanasius illustrates this harmonizing activity of the Logos with various similes: the city (38.7–16; 43.12–27; 47.21–22), the various limbs of the body (38.17–22), the strings of a lyre (31.24–31; 38.35–42; 39.32–33; 42.22–30; 47.25), a choir (43.4–7). Cf. Eusebius of Caesarea; see *Tricennial Oration* 11.9; 11.14; 12.10–11; 12.14; 12.16; *Theophany* I.28; I.37. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.4.8.55f; Porphyry, *Sentences* 18. For the comparison of the Logos to the steersman of a ship, see *Against the Pagans* 39.30–31; *On the Incarnation* 43.34–41 with reference to Plato, *Statesman* 273d–e. See Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.21.7. Cf. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical Theology* 1.13.1; *Tricennial Oration* 12.8; *Demonstration of the Gospel* 4.2; see Ricken 1967: 349; Löhr 2009: 406–409.
- 42 *On the Incarnation* 1.27–28; 8.1; 38.11; *To Epictetus* 6; *Against the Arians* 3.1. The logos is not the spoken word, composed of syllables; see *Against the Pagans* 40.27; cf. Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration* 12.4.
- 43 *Against the Pagans* 40.23–45; 41.23–24; 42.1–6. Cf. Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration* 12.4; 12.8; 12.12; 12.15.
- 44 *Against the Pagans* 41.16–26. Cf. Plotinus, arguing against the Stoics, *Enneads* 4.7.3.19–22 (= Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 15.22.14).
- 45 *Against the Pagans* 42.1–6; *On the Incarnation* 42.24–25; cf. Eusebius of Caesarea, *Tricennial Oration* 12.16. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.4.8–10 and *passim*. The Logos is present everywhere with his power

- or powers (*dynamis*), just like soul according to Plotinus, see *On the Incarnation* 17.6; *Against the Pagans* 42.9–10; cf. Eusebius, *Theophany* 1,25 (logos as soul for the *kosmos*, construed according to the hylo-morphic model). For God acting in the world by sending a power in Pseudo-Aristotle, *On the World* and Plotinus, see Caluori 2015: 114–119. For the Logos governing by command, see *Against the Pagans* 44.1–2; 44.26; Eusebius, *Theophany* 1.37 (Gressmann 55*,4); Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.8.2.16.28 with Caluori 2015: 118.
- 46 *On the Incarnation* 17.4–5; 42.30–31. Cf. Plato, *Timaeus* 36d–e; Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.3.22 with Emilsson 2017: 174.
- 47 *On the Incarnation* 17 points out the difference between the soul and the Logos in this respect: If the soul is not bound by the body because its reasoning is able to transcend it, it is nevertheless unable to act outside the body. The divine Logos, by contrast, is active in creation and only at rest in the Father and “was not enclosed in the body, nor was he in the body but nowhere else . . . being the Logos, he was not contained in anyone but rather himself contained everything. And as he is in all creation, he is according to essence (*kat’ousian*) outside the universe, but in everything by his powers (*en pasi de esti tais heautou dynamesi*), ordering everything and extending his providence over everything. . . . He contains the universe and is not contained, but only in his Father he is complete in all respects (*holos ón kata panta*).”
- 48 Athanasius, *Against the Pagans* 46.54 (see Thomson 1971: 131, note 3); *Against the Arians* 1, 9; 3.15; cf. Eusebius, *Church History* 1.3.13; *Demonstration of the Gospel* 5.4.9; 5.4.11 with Strutwolf 1999: 394; DelCogliano 2006.
- 49 *On the Incarnation* 17.24–28; cf. Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration* 14.7–11; 15.11; cf. Strutwolf 1999: 410f. Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.8.2.15–18; 4.3.20–22; 5.1.2.20f.; Porphyry, *Sentences* 27; 28 with the rich commentary of Goulet-Cazé in Brisson 2005, vol. 2: 573–586. Athanasius follows Eusebius in comparing the activity of the incarnate Logos to the sun and its light, cf. *On the Incarnation* 17.30–36; cf. Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration* 14.4.10; *Theophany* 3.39, ed. Lee 100, transl. Gressmann 142*f. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 5.1.2.20f (soul/ sun). As to the impassibility of the soul, see Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.6.5 (the soul, being essentially impassible, needs to turn away from the lower to the higher realities; see earlier).
- 50 Athanasius, *On the Incarnation* 8.24–25; 9.10–13; 37.48–49; *Against the Arians* 3.35; 3.54; cf. Eusebius, *Tricennial Oration* 14.2–3; 15.11–12; *Theophany* fr. 3, ed. Gressmann 4*,18; see Strutwolf 1999: 411. Cf. Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.1.6.22.24 (= Eusebius, *Preparation* 15.22.1–4); 4.,3.21.18 (body as an instrument).
- 51 *On the Incarnation* 22.18–19; 24.24; cf. Eusebius, *Theophany*, fr. 3, ed. Gressmann 8*,17, see Strutwolf 1999: 410.
- 52 See Plotinus, *Enneads* 4.7.1.22 = Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel*. 15.22.5.
- 53 Urbano 2013: 213–219.
- 54 This was first observed by Reitzenstein 1914. Nicomachus of Gerasa has been proposed as the possible source of both Porphyry and Iamblichus; see J. Radicke, in Jacoby 1999: 112–131. The question of the sources of Porphyry, Iamblichus and Athanasius merits a review; cf. Centrone 2005: 688–689. See also Rubenson 2006, who claims that the *Life of Antony* adapts the *Pythagorean Life* more often than not by directly contradicting it.
- 55 Urbano 2013: 219–224.
- 56 *Life of Antony* 74.5.7–9. Cf. Iamblichus, *On the Pythagorean Life* 7f at Dillon and Hershbell 1991: 34. Iamblichus, *On the Soul* fr. 29 at Finamore and Dillon 2002: 56f.
- 57 *Life of Antony* 77.3–4; 84.2. Cf. Plato, *Philebus* 11d. *Antony* 13.6 refers to visions in the intellect (*tói nói theorémata*).
- 58 Schniewind 2003: 33–47 points out that *spoudaios* designates the sage in Stoicism and Plotinus and that the Plotinian sage – just as Antony – is thinking and contemplating on a higher, non-discursive level (180–185). Antony is also an ‘athlete’ (*Antony* 12.1), just like the Cynic or Plotinian sage; see Schniewind 152–154. See also Porphyry, *On Abstinence* 1,44; 1,45.1.
- 59 *Antony* 21.1; see Munnich 1996: 100.
- 60 *Antony* 3.2; 27.4; 91.3. Deuteronomy 4.9 is the biblical reference. Cf. also *Antony* 55.7. Cf. Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 8.20. See Hadot 1995: 214–215; 246, 295. The monk should not pay attention to the demons and their suggestions; see *Antony* 25.4; 26.6; 31.2; 33.5; 35.1.
- 61 *Antony* 18.1; 55.7 (*ameleia* is prevented by daily self-examination). Cf. *On the Incarnation* 6.25; 10.3; 10.9; 12.3–5.
- 62 *Antony* 17.2–3. Philippians 3.11, This is the Christian version of the ‘view from above’, see Hadot 1995: 314–316.
- 63 *Antony* 18; 19 (with reference to 1 Cor 15.31); 91.3. See Hadot 1995: 364.

- 64 See Munnich 1996. Demons even quote the Bible, disturb the monk's sleep, or appear as monks who bring accusations and demand extreme fasting (*Antony* 25).
- 65 *Antony* 35.4.5; 36.3.4; 54.7. On the mental state induced in the Plotinian sage by the presence of the Good, see Hadot 1997: 127–163 (with ample quotations).

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Marius Victorinus

Chiara Ombretta Tommasi

1 Life and works

Marius Victorinus' life and career can be reconstructed only from the scanty details provided by a short notice in Jerome's *De viris illustribus* ("On the Illustrious Men") 101:

Victorinus, an African by birth, taught rhetoric at Rome under the emperor Constantius and in extreme old age, yielding himself to faith in Christ, wrote books against Arius, written in dialectic style and very obscure language, books which can only be understood by the learned. He also wrote *Commentaries on the Epistles*.

(transl. E. Cushing Richardson)

In addition to the information offered by Jerome (also briefly in the *Chronicon* 2370, AD 354), the renown Victorinus gained as a rhetorician and his adventurous conversion are recounted in a famous passage of the *Confessions*, which Augustine evokes as a prelude to his own conversion, fostered by Simplicianus and other adherents to the 'Neo-Platonic' circle of Milan:

But when I mentioned that I had read some books of the Platonists, which had been translated into Latin by Victorinus, at one time rhetor in the city of Rome who had, I had heard, died a Christian, he congratulated me. . . . Then . . . he recalled his memory of Victorinus himself, whom he had known intimately when he was at Rome. . . . He told me a story about him which I will not pass over in silence. For the story gives occasion for me to confess to you in great praise for your grace.

Victorinus was extremely learned and most expert in all the liberal disciplines. He had read and assessed many philosophers' ideas, and was tutor to numerous noble senators. To mark the distinguished quality of his teaching, he was offered and accepted a statue in the Roman forum, an honour which the citizens of this world think supreme. Until he was of advanced years, he was a worshipper of idols and took part in sacrilegious rites. . . . The old Victorinus had defended these cults for many years with a voice terrifying to opponents. Yet he was not ashamed to become the servant of your Christ. . . . Simplicianus said Victorinus read holy scripture, and all the Christian books he investigated with special

care. After examining them he said to Simplicianus, not openly but in the privacy of friendship, ‘Did you know that I am already a Christian?’ Simplicianus replied: ‘I shall not believe that or count you among the Christians unless I see you in the Church of Christ.’ Victorinus laughed and said: ‘Then do walls make Christians?’ He used frequently to say, ‘I am a Christian already’, and Simplicianus would give the same answer, to which he equally often repeated his joke about walls. He was afraid to offend his friends, proud devil-worshippers. . . . Suddenly and unexpectedly he said to Simplicianus (as he told me): ‘Let us go to the Church; I want to become a Christian.’ Simplicianus was unable to contain himself for joy and went with him. Not long after he had received his instructions in the first mysteries, he gave in his name for baptism that he might be reborn, to the amazement of Rome and the joy of the Church.

(8.2.3–5.10, transl. by H. Chadwick)

From these passages, it is possible to infer that he was born in Africa at the end of the third century, probably in the Eighties or the Nineties, and that he got fame as professor of rhetoric, even being honoured with the erection of a statue in Trajan’s forum and with the clarissimate. That Victorinus was a prominent rhetorician is also attested to in the sepulchral inscription of his grandchild Accia Maria Tulliana (CIL 6.31934), a text from which it can be deduced that he had been married. In consequence of his high social status, Victorinus’ conversion (in Augustine’s witticism about “the walls”, a Stoic commonplace on the soul as the abode of true religion must be seen) was much talked about among Roman elites; however, Victorinus was soon to be exempted from the official teaching in force of Julian’s edict against Christian professors in 362 (Aug., *Conf.* 8.2.4), and probably died soon after.

His works (including those unextant or fragmentarily preserved) witness to the two phases of his career: a first group includes treatises that closely follow the *trivium* arts (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic), whereas a second one, posterior to the conversion and therefore to be dated between 356 and 363, reflects his adherence to Christianity, consisting of some anti-Arian writings and of the first extant Latin commentary on the Pauline epistles (commentaries on Galatians, Philippians and Ephesians are extant, those on Romans and 1–2 Corinthians are lost). This is probably Victorinus’ last work: following the path of the traditional genre of the commentary, it sometimes offers some philosophical digressions aiming at a deeper explanation of pregnant passages such as Eph. 1.4; Phil. 2.6; Gal. 4.6 (Cooper 2005).

In addition, Victorinus produced some translations from Greek, among which the Latin version of Porphyry’s *Isagoge* (only partially surviving in Boethius’ own translation, which would have superseded that of his predecessor), the one of Aristotle’s *De Interpretatione* (mentioned by Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 2.3.13, but not extant), and a translation of “some Platonic books” (likewise unextant, whose actual extension and contents is matter of speculation, namely whether it was a translation of Plotinus’ *Enneads* or of some Porphyrian texts, possibly *On the Return of the Soul*).

Grammatical-rhetorical works include *Art of Grammar*, *On Definitions* (complete), *Notes on Cicero’s Rhetoric*, *On the Topics of Cicero*, *On Hypothetical Syllogisms* (fragmentary, quoted by Martianus Capella and Cassiodorus). In all likelihood, Victorinus had written some commentaries on Cicero’s dialogues and on Virgil, which are mentioned by Jerome and Servius respectively, but are not extant.

Far more important from the philosophical perspective are his Christian texts, in particular those edited under the comprehensive name of *Opera Theologica* (*Theological Works*), which are considered one of the few examples of Latin metaphysics and represent a consistently original Trinitarian synthesis, although not devoid of subtleties and obscurities. These texts reflect the particular circumstances of the Western Church in the Fifties, when Pope Liberius had been exiled

in force of his intransigent support of Nicene positions; the polemic against Basil of Seleucia and the homoiousians witnesses to the fact that Victorinus followed the contemporary debate and had firsthand information. To this corpus belong three letters of a correspondence between Victorinus and an Arian named Candidus (it is disputed whether this person actually existed or, as is more probable, this character is a fictitious one, introduced by Victorinus as the spokesman of ‘Arian’ tendencies); four books *Adversus Arium* (“Against Arius”), the first of which is divided into two parts. According to Cooper (2019) this traditional nomenclature (attested to since the *editio princeps*) relies on a misinterpretation of Jerome’s statement, and therefore *Adversus Arium* shouldn’t be considered a unitary work divided into five parts, but, rather, each book is a single, independent, treatise. For example, the finale of the epistolary exchange is the text conventionally titled *Against Arius* 1A, whereas *Against Arius* 1B is entirely separate work; a short treatise *De homoousio recipiendo* (“On the Acceptance of the Homoousion”), which recapitulates the arguments contained in *Against Arius* 1B and reflects the Western stance after the Council of Ariminum (359); three Trinitarian hymns in rhythmical prose, whose contents summarize a sketch of Victorinus’ theology and intertwine technical language with liturgical refrains or the insistence on mercy and conversion. All these works, and the Pauline Commentary as well, present a peculiar intermingling of Christian faith and Neoplatonism, providing an extremely original example of late Latin philosophy, exemplified also by means of new linguistic coinages. Victorinus’ Christian speculation attains exceptionally innovative results thanks to a blending of different sources, which take into account not only an idiosyncratic Platonism, but often overlap with other tenets of uncertain origin, probably influenced by heterodox Christian movements. In addition, quite often Victorinus shows a penchant for digression which makes the consistency of his discourse extremely hard to follow. Such a complexity is surely difficult to evaluate in its historical dimension, notwithstanding latest attempts at a closer exploration. Although potentially rich in fruitful suggestions, the extreme subtlety of this speculation prevented a large circulation among Christian theologians, with the invaluable exception of Boethius, whose distinction between *esse* and *id quod est* shows an undoubted influence of Victorinus (Moreschini 2003). In all likelihood, however, Victorinus exerted some influence on Augustine’s Trinitarian doctrine and influenced the Platonic revival of the Carolingian period, especially in the persons of Alcuin and John Scotus Eriugena. In particular, his role as an ‘Augustine before Augustine’ has been lately more and more appreciated and clarified in recent times. The mutual relation between the psychological components of the human being, in turn considered an image of God, in *On the Trinity* book 9 has been considered exemplified on the relation between the three divine Persons as it was explained by Victorinus (Cipriani 2002).

The manuscript tradition also credits Victorinus as the author of a book against an otherwise unknown Justin the Manichean (*Liber ad Iustinum Manichaeum*), a book on nature (*On Physics*), an exegetical explanation on the beginning of the Genesis (*On the Words in Genesis: “evening and morning were the first day”*), whose authenticity has been rejected. Likewise, the attempt by A.S. Ferguson of attributing to Victorinus the authorship of the Latin Hermetic dialogue *Asclepius* is to discard as well (*Hermetica*, 1924, I, 79 f.), as is the recent proposal by Françoise Hudry (2009) of attributing to Victorinus the Medieval Hermetic *Book of 24 Philosophers*. The now-lost commentary on Virgil’s *Aeneid* was perhaps exemplified on the model of Porphyry’s Homeric commentaries, providing therefore an allegorical and philosophical reading of the poem.

2 Early works

Although essentially dedicated to the explanation of rhetoric or dialectics, with occasional infusion of more philosophical tenets, such as God and nature, Being, soul, and time, Victorinus’ early works are to be mentioned for debating issues that have sometimes been interpreted as

allusions to Christianity, or, more in general, as an adhesion to the Porphyrian idea that regarded human discourse on the divine as mere conjecture. In particular, when discussing the ‘probable’ and ‘necessary’ argument in Aristotelian logic, Victorinus hints at the fact that Christians do not regard as ‘necessary’ the idea that “if a woman gives birth, she had intercourse with a man” and “if a man is born, he will die” (*On Cicero’s Rhetoric* 1.29), two passages that were read as referring to the virginal birth of Christ and his resurrection. Furthermore, he mentions the contest between Peter and Simon the Magician and the latter’s alleged flight, stating that it is ‘true’ but nonetheless ‘unbelievable’ (*On Invention* 1.43). Generally speaking, in these works Victorinus seems to adopt the Aristotelian division where logic was regarded as preparatory, thus rejecting the more common Platonic and Stoic tripartite classification that included logic in philosophy. Recent (or in progress) editions of these texts allowed a better understanding of them as propaedeutical for the major works: it is possible to highlight here some doctrines like the understanding of nature as immanent logos; or the discussion about the Latin rendering of the Greek term *on* (Gersh 1986; Cooper, forthcoming); the hypothesis concerning the Virgilian commentary has been inserted into the wider context of late antique exegesis upholding philosophical concepts, such as demonology or the descent of the soul (Tommasi 2012).

3 Sources

Augustine’s mention of his activity as translator of ‘Platonic’ books, together with the complex technical language that permeates his books, easily allowed scholars to assume Victorinus’ dependence on Greek philosophical sources, which are clearly identifiable either because some passages are introduced by indefinite expressions (*nonnulli, sapientes et antiqui, ut dictum est*) and didactic formulas (*audi, ut dico* or *ponamus*), or because they appear inserted as a distinct set or bulk not entirely consistent within the main argumentation. An interesting passage is the opening sentence of *Enneads* 5.2, which is quoted anonymously and slightly paraphrased in *Against Arius* 4.22.8–9, and which is clearly meant to establish the equation between the ‘One’ and God the Father (Henry 1934). In addition, it is a likely surmise that when Victorinus employs Greek terms or formulas in the text he is citing a source, some of which still remain unknown. As sharp a *Quellenforscher* as Pierre Hadot identified most of these texts as ‘Porphyrian’ passages, and found their probable source in Plotinus’ disciple or in an anonymous and fragmentary commentary on the *Parmenides* (nowadays to be read only in printed edition, after the palimpsest codex kept in Turin was destroyed by a fire in 1904), which he had previously attributed to the same Porphyry; Hadot also insisted on some similarities that Victorinus shared with the metaphysical system of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, suggesting that these derived from the Porphyrian exegesis of this work. The insistence on Porphyry was partly due to the contemporary *Zeitgeist*, which regarded the Tyrian philosopher as influential master of many philosophers in the Western part of the Roman Empire. The passages which sound more redolent of Porphyry, however, are not literal citations from any of his extant works. They are to be found especially in books 1 and 4 of the *Against Arius* and in *To Candidus*, where questions such as the four modes of being and non-being, the One and the intelligible Triad and the relation between act and form are dealt with. Victorinus employs these tenets to elaborate a new Trinitarian theology that allows him an effective defence of the Nicene position and, at the same time, is a rejection of the Sabellian modalistic tendency.

Caution should be exercised, however, in too tightly applying the *Quellenforschung* methodology, for example by taking into account a free usage of the sources, their intermingling or reworking. Moreover, in all probability he employed not only a Neo-Platonic inspired dossier, but other texts as well. The fact that Victorinus had access to a plurality of sources is also witnessed by the numerous quotations of the Gospel of John which are interspersed in the first two books of *Against Arius*, and by a free usage of contemporary Christian documents pertaining to

issues of the Arian controversy, such as the letters of Arius and Eusebius of Nicomedia, which are reported in his second letter to Candidus. Recent scholarship has highlighted how accurate was his knowledge of the Nicene doctrine, for example when dealing with the term *ousia/substantia* against the Homoeans, or when discussing the almost equivalent use of *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Interestingly enough, the formula *de una substantia tres subsistentiae* that translates *ek mias ousias treis hypostaseis* (*Against Arius* 3.4.38–39), fated to have a certain renown, seems however derived from Porphyry, in pseudo-Didymus, *On the Trinity* 2.27, *Patrologia Graeca* 39.760 (Simonetti 1975), or, as others suggest, from the Antiochene-Meletian circles (Voelker 2013).

In addition to the unquestionable influence of Middle and Neo-Platonism on Marius Victorinus, another tessera has been added to the mosaic of his sources. A seminal study published by Pierre Hadot and Michel Tardieu in 1996 showed that the doxology recorded in *Zostrianos* (a Gnostic treatise of the Nag Hammadi Library, VIII 1, 64.13–66.15, 74.8–75.24) is almost literally coincident to the description of the Father in *Against Arius* 1.49–50, with its singular intertwining of negative and positive theology. Tardieu supposed the existence of a common source between the two and tentatively identified this source in the ‘orientalizing’ figure of Numenius. The long section dealing with the four modes of being and non-being in Victorinus’ *Epistle to Candidus*, usually referred to Porphyry, has been recently related to *Zostrianos* 117 by Stephen Emmel (2017).

This discovery, which contributed to reviving the scholarly debate on Gnosticism and Platonism, also stimulated the discussion on the *Commentary on the Parmenides*. Some scholars, especially in the Anglo-Saxon milieu, have argued that the elaboration of some tenets concerning the First Principle took place before Plotinus, and that the anonymous author of the *Commentary on the Parmenides* might have been influenced by some doctrines developed among the Gnostics (Bechtle 1999; Turner and Corrigan 2010); nonetheless, other scholars still incline to consider it post-Plotinian (Saffrey 1988; Dillon 1992; Zambon 2002) or even post-Porphyrian, dating it in the fourth century (Baltes 2002). The parallels between *Zostrianos* and Victorinus, however, are not diriment in order to establish the chronology of the *Commentary*.

In the wake of this acquisition and thanks to the progress of Gnostic studies, research received further impulse. It is almost impossible to state whether Victorinus had some firsthand knowledge of Gnostic texts and doctrines, or if his information were mediated by other sources. In any case, evidence is recorded of both of the development of Valentinian doctrines throughout the third century and even of the presence of a Valentinian community in Rome at a later stage, which in all likelihood had gradually switched towards pro-Nicene positions (Abramowski 2006). Thus, as a Christian, Victorinus might have been aware of some trends in Christianity deeply inspired by philosophy, although not entirely fitting to the doctrines of the Great Church, just as he employed the *Chaldaean Oracles* to develop his metaphysical system. The Gnostic texts that come closer to Victorinus (*Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, *Three Steles of Seth*, partly *Marsanes* and the *Tripartite Tractate*) are characterized by a deep philosophical background and could have attracted him as providing an intellectualized and esoteric explanation of Christian doctrine.

Such eclectic borrowings are all the more likely when Victorinus is faced with doctrines that have only little or no Platonic element, but instead deal with Christian concepts like the perfect Spirit, Christ, or the creation of humankind. In this respect, an interesting section is the conclusion of *Against Arius* 4.17, which states that the human soul would be freed from earthly bondages by means of knowledge of itself and of divine realms.

4 Doctrine

Victorinus’ most important contribution to an original Christian philosophy is undoubtedly the superimposition of the Platonizing “intelligible triad” of being, life, intelligence, to the three

Persons, of the Christian Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, whose individuality is brought out thanks to the idea of predominance. Willy Theiler and, some years later, Pierre Hadot had supposed that this scheme, deriving in the last analysis from Plato's *Sophist*, was developed by Plotinus but most of all by Porphyry or later Platonic philosophers, who postulated an enneadic structure in which the triad is present three times and is distinguished by the predominance of one of its constituents (as stated in John Lydus, *On the Months* 4.122, 159,5 f. Wunsch). Already introduced by Victorinus in Candidus' first epistle (*To Candidus* 1 3.16–21), the idea is reasserted in various passages (*Against Arius* 3.4; 4.16.1–17.2; 1.63, which employs the metaphor of a sphere where the three elements circulate in mutual participation), the most important of which is *Against Arius* 4.25.44–26.7, where is linked to the distinction between form and act:

Indeed God lives. But he is “to be” and “to understand”, and these three which are one, produce the three powers, existence, life and knowledge, but because the three are one – I have explained how they are one: they are one so that anyone among them is the three and these three are one, but in God these three are “to be”, in the Son, “to live”, in the Holy Spirit, “to understand” – it follows, therefore, that “to be”, “to live”, “to understand”, in God are form, for they come forth from the interior and hidden act of the one who is “to be”, “to live”, “to understand.”

(transl. M.T. Clark).

Victorinus is the only Christian author who presents such an equation, which, moreover, is connected to another peculiarity, namely that the distinction between Father and Son is articulated in terms of the distinction between stasis and action, or potency and energy. Since the Father is conceived as immobile and invisible, the Son represents his visible form, or, in other words, the exteriorization of the Father's abstract dimension or his delimitation (*Against Arius* 1.31). The entire fourth book of *Against Arius* aims to demonstrating such an assumption, which had been already hinted at in *Against Arius* 1.19–20 and *Against Arius* 3.1. Besides, in order to describe the process of generation, Victorinus usually employs images drawn from the stock language of the Church Fathers and in some respects endowed with an archaizing glaze, like those explaining it in terms of splendour, ray, line, emanation, superabundance, image, motion, procession, ‘type’, sprout, and so on (see, e.g., *To Candidus* 1 4 ff.). On the other hand, the incarnation is understood as the passage from potency to act, according to metaphors that have their roots and are largely widespread in Platonic–Pythagorean philosophy and for example are attested to in the *Anonymous Commentary on the Parmenides* (e.g. 12.23–26). Victorinus often repeats this explanation, employing an exegesis of the “supreme genres” of Plato's *Sophist* (254d–255), for example when dealing with the notions of alterity and identity (*Against Arius* 4.7). The Father–Son relationship is also explained on the basis of the exegeses of Plato's *Parmenides*, namely equating the Father to the ‘One’ and the Son to the ‘One–Many’ (137a–144b); in other terms, the Father is considered as pure being, while the son is determined being (*Against Arius* 1.29), a tenet that is central also in the *Anonymous Commentary*.

Therefore, the idea of self-motion or of autoextension from Father to Son is the key to understanding Victorinus' demonstration of the *homoousion*. The question of generation, so crucial during the Arian controversy, is mainly addressed to in the letters to Candidus: whereas the latter states that, since all generation involves change, there can be no generation in God, in force of the divine immutability, and that the logos, the Son of God, exists through a working of God, Victorinus argues that the concept of generation in God does not involve any change, for the generation of the Son is the result of a movement towards the outside, whereas, at the same time, the Father, though being still, has his own motion towards the inside. In this way, motion

is actually self-motion and self-contemplation, so that the Logos is self-generated (*Against Arius* 1.32,3–4; 3.17; 4.13; *To Candidus* 22; *On the Acceptance of the Homoousion* 3, where rare terms like *autogonos* and *autodynamos* are employed). The idea of self-born motion is a Platonic tenet (Porphyry, *Fragments* 223F, 245 Smith, but already Plato, *Phaedrus* 245c–e), yet Victorinus connects it to the Gospel of John (5:26) as well and nuances it by means of some scriptural images, such as that of the radiance or the silence and the word (*Against Arius* 1.52–53). Probably Victorinus also conveys here a reminiscence of the archaizing doctrine of the ‘double logos’, which is peculiar of Clement or, more in general, of the second century, although the distinction between chronological distinction is to be understood only logically. In all likelihood, he is directly echoing Tertullian’s *Adversus Praxean*, the first Latin work about Trinitarian questions.

As many writers still in the fourth century, Victorinus does not present a very developed pneumatology: nonetheless, his speculation entails some original hints, thanks to the employment of the triadic scheme. Far more original is the idea of the ‘double dyad’, namely that, as the Son is the hidden form of the Father and constitutes a dyad with him, so the Son and the Holy Spirit embody another dyad, constituted by Life (on the basis of John’s Gospel) and Intellect (cf. *Against Arius* 1.27.10–18; 4.8.9–10.44). This latter distinction by which Victorinus distinguishes the descent of Christ on earth and the subsequent ascent to heaven allows him to explain the differences between the Persons (*Against Arius* 3.18); at the same time, it seems a foreshadowing of the late Neo-Platonic scheme of *monē* (manence), *proodos* (procession), and *epistrophē* (return).

At the same time, the idea that the Paternal Monad progressively expands into a triad is probably inspired by Chaldaean theurgy, according to the witness of John Lydus, *On the Months* 2.6, 23,9 Wünsch: “That the monad is contemplated in a triad can be understood from the hymns: Proclus, on the ‘once beyond,’ [writes] thus: For the universe, seeing you, the monad, containing three, revered [you].” Victorinus attributes this notion to the Father, who is transcendent and superior to the number (*Against Arius* 3.1), but much more to the three Persons as a whole, basing on the exegesis in the *Anonymous Commentary on the Parmenides* (9.3) where the power and intellect are co-unified in the Father’s simplicity.

Therefore, Victorinus’ doctrine of the first principle cannot be disjoined from his general Trinitarian theology and from his interpretation of the Father–Son relationship: this is clearly shown in chapters 49–50 of *Against Arius* 1, where negative and positive theology are intertwined in order to describe the transition from the First to the Second principle (i.e. from the Father to the Son).

As usually in late antique Platonism, Victorinus shows a tendency towards emphasizing God’s absolute transcendence, by means of apophatism: attributes such as unknowable, unutterable, unspeakable, incomprehensible, indistinct, bodiless, formless or colourless, preexisting, simple, and ingenerate – or, rather self-generated – etc. are frequently used and represent the development undergone by Plato’s concise description of the Good as being beyond essence (*ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας*; *Resp.* 509b8–9), relying at the same time on Pauline passages (Rom. 11:33). If in *Cand.* 1 4–6 and 13 God had been described as non-being in virtue of his transcendence, the same statement is repeated and developed in *Against Arius* 4.23.23–31:

That is why it is said that he is *anuparktos*, *anousios*, *anous*, *azōn*, without existence, without substance, without understanding, without life, certainly not by *sterēsīn* (privation), but through transcendence. For all things which words designate are after him; that is why he is not *on* (existent), but rather *Proon* (Preexistent). In the same way the realities produced in him are preexistence, the preliving, and preknowing. But all these things have been understood and named from secondary phenomena. For after knowledge had appeared,

preknowledge was both understood and named; in the same way, for preexistence and pre-vitality; certainly, they existed but were not yet recognized, not yet named.

Although these attributes strictly speaking are not negative, nonetheless they highlight the preeminence of the Father and his transcendence that is prior to every being or creature. In particular, according to the tripartite division of the three hypostases of being, life, and intellect, the Father represents a higher step. Terms such as *praeexistentia*, *praeiuentia*, *praecognoscentia* recall another image employed by Victorinus, namely, that the Father is the first cause or first principle (*Against Arius* 1.63) and is even prior to perfection and blessedness (*Against Arius* 1.3), a passage in which Hadot saw an echo of Plotinus 5.8 (31) 5.21. This leads to a further distinction, namely that the three elements of the intelligible triad are characterized as abstract nouns or verbs when referring to the Father, whereas they appear as concrete substantives with reference to the Son. Scholars have unanimously recognized as one of Victorinus' peculiarities the employment of abstract paronyms to characterize the unmixed and pure nature of the Father (*ontotēs*, *essentialitas* or existentiality, *zōotēs*, *vitalitas* or vitality, *nootēs*, *intellectualitas* or intellectuality) as distinguishable from the concrete aspects of existence life and intelligence (*on/esse*, *zōē/vita*, *nous/intellectia*). Conversely, the latter refer to the Son, who is God in action and represents movement (cf. *Against Arius* 4.5.31–41 and 6.5–7).

Many of these aspects seem to have been somewhat influenced by Gnostic writings as well: the abstract nouns employed by Victorinus to characterize the transcendence and non-substantiality of the first principle as well as the terms that describe him as prior to existence, life and intellect, recur massively and together in Gnostic writings to express the intelligible triad or its components (*Allogenes* 47.7–34; 49.26–38; *Three Steles of Seth* 122.20; 125.28–32; *Zostrianus* 15.2–12). What is more substantial is the fact that the idea of the interdependence between its constituents and their distinction by predominance, which scholarship usually related to Proclus (*Elements of Theology* 103), is clearly stated in *Allogenes* (49.26–37):

He is Vitality and Mentality and That-Which-Is. For then That-Which-Is constantly possesses its Vitality and Mentality and {Life has} Vitality possesses {non}-Being and Mentality. Mentality possesses Life and That-Which-Is. And the three are one, although individually they are three.

(transl. by J.D. Turner and O.S. Wintermute)

Furthermore, God is described as *tri-dynamos* (tri-powered), that is, one having three powers, “to be”, “to live”, “to understand” (cf. *Against Arius* 4.21.26–31; 1.50.1–5 and 56.5). Here Victorinus probably conflates an image derived from the *Chaldaean Oracles* (26.1) with a Gnostic exegesis of the second hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (145e), which distinguishes the silent and ineffable One from the three-powered One that reveals itself under the three different aspects of existence, life and mind (or blessedness).

It is precisely this wavering between life and blessedness a decisive element for postulating a direct link between Victorinus and the Gnostics, namely, the characterization of the Holy Spirit as blessedness, which Victorinus employs three times, in the aforementioned passage of *Against Arius* 1.50, then *Against Arius* 1.52.3–5, as well as in 3.10.38–42, which mentions the triad as *substantialitas*, *vitalitas*, *beatitudo*. The Spirit is therefore characterized either as mind or intelligence or as blessedness, an oscillation that is to be found in Gnostic writings as well (e.g. *Allogenes* 59.9; *Zostrianus* 14–15) (Tommasi 1996; Rasimus 2013).

More significantly, other passages suggest that Victorinus might have been inspired by the Gnostics: the aforesaid distinction in terms of word and silence is probably redolent of some

Gnostic metaphors as well, such as the one employed by Heracl., *frg.* 5 (*ap.* Origen, *Commentary on John* 6.109–112), or those in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (NHC XIII 1), a text that shares many points with the Johannine prologue and is influenced by the Stoic doctrine of language as well (Tommasi 2012).

Nevertheless, the most interesting aspect which is probably connected to connect to Gnostic imagery is the presentation of the double sexes of Christ, which Victorinus introduces in *Against Arius* 1.51 and develops later on in ch. 64. This image marks the transition between a more philosophical digression and a Christian-oriented conclusion, not devoid of Pauline reminiscences, where Victorinus deals with Christ's descent on the earth and his virginal birth: the descent of Christ is compared to life, that is to femaleness, while the subsequent ascent, as Spirit, is paralleled to return and virilization. A similar tenet also recurs in Victorinus' *Commentary to Galatians* 4.3–4, a passage whose tenor echoes the anti-feminist *logion* 114 in the *Gospel of Thomas*, or two passages in the *Excerpts from Theodotus* (21 and 68). This description of Christ, moreover, has striking similitudes with the descent of the Logos presented in the late Valentinian *Tripartite Tractate* in strong dialectical terms that underline the two aspects of maleness and femaleness (78.8–17). The closer similitude to the image employed by Victorinus is to be found in the description of Barbelo in the eponymous Gnostic systems, where, as the first born aeon, she represents the first thought or idea of the Father, the visible image of the invisible One, his *energeia*, or, in other words, his dynamic aspect. Furthermore, Barbelo's vital and feminine part is endowed with a hidden nous or intelligence, which therefore is meant to explain her androgynous nature (*Zostrianus* 66 ff.; 87.17; 97.1; 118.10; *Allogenes* 49.5–14; *Marsanes* 8.13–9.28). Barbelo forms a dyad with the Father, being at the same time herself a dyad, because she gives life and, after returning to the Father, becomes nous. She represents the self-objectivation of the paternal *ennoia*, and can be completed by means of *nous*, that is knowing the Father, an aspect that aspect is linked to the being-life-mind triad, as well as to idea of procession and return.

In this regard, it is possible to note that the identification Life-Son and Intellect-Spirit presupposes the canonical order of the triad being, life, mind, whereas in some other passages, Victorinus identifies the Son-Logos with the Intellect and the Spirit with the Life (Edwards 1990). Such an oscillation in all probability derives from the superimposition of the Plotinian scheme One-Nous-World Soul, at the same time influenced by the notion of a feminine Spirit, attested to in non-orthodox currents, on the basis of the Semitic feminine noun *ruah*. Victorinus explicitly designates the Holy Spirit as a female entity in *Against Arius* 1.57–58: because the Spirit is “the first interior movement, which is the paternal thought” (57.28–29), he can make the startling claim that “the Holy Spirit . . . is the mother of Jesus” (58.12). One must thus distinguish the idea of a masculine Spirit who is in charge of performing *teleiosis*, and that of the Spirit conceived as the Mother of the Logos, a tenet that sounds somewhat archaizing and that is exemplified in Gnosticism by means of the *ennoia* delimiting herself as *logos* (Tommasi 1998).

Finally, another passage that is susceptible of being reminiscent of some earlier (almost unidentified) sources is the final section of *Against Arius* 1, where, after having introduced the twofold distinction between Father and Son and Son and Holy Spirit, Victorinus deals with psychology and states that the soul is created as image of Trinity, and, more exactly, as image of the image, i.e. of the Logos. Therefore, man is a sort of microcosm that entails in it being, life and intellect (cf. *Against Arius* 1.19). In the first part of this digression, a probable Pythagorean theme is employed that emphasizes the stretching of a point into a line and then in a circle, to conclude that the movement of the Father and the Son is a spherical and a perfect one (*Against Arius* 1.60–1), but such philosophical tenets seem to conflate with more heterogeneous sources. Some similarities have been outlined with the Gnostic *Marsanes* (NHC X), 25–29 as well, although the passage in question is quite corrupt and fragmentary.

Subsequently, Victorinus states that the soul has an intermediate status between the intelligible and the sensible realm, and, thanks to its divinely inspired freewill, it can again ascend to its celestial birthplace, after having fallen into the material realm, and consequently having abandoned its intelligent condition and progressively acquired defectuousity. At the same time, Victorinus concludes the book (ch. 63 and 64) by explaining the verses about the creation of humankind (Genesis 1:26–27, 2:7), asserting that the two sexes represent the image of the Logos’s androgynous nature and linking the notion of a human endowment with a “double intellect and a double soul” to an exegesis of the Gospel parable of the two men working in the field and two women grinding grain (Matthew 24:39–41; Luke 17:34).

This consideration, namely the exegesis of a distinctly Christian text, allows us to infer that in all likelihood Victorinus employed also a Christian or a Gnostic source, together with doctrines currently attested to in Platonic philosophy or in Chaldaean literature, such as those hinted at in Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio* 1.12 (inspired, in turn, by Numenius). The descent of the soul described in terms that come very close to other typical images, as in the case of the wantonness of the *anima petulans*, a clear reminiscent of the Plotinian – and before that the Gnostic – *tolma*; the mention of a feeble spark in *Against Arius* 1.61 clearly hints at Gnostic doctrines, where the luminous spark represents a portion of the godhead prisoner in this world, whose reawakening enables the elect to regain the primeval unity with the divine world. In addition to this, we can further point out that there are some similarities with the doctrine of the two souls, the material and the celestial one in *Against Arius* 1.62, which is probably echoed in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (41.22), when the material soul is mentioned, and is object of the exegesis of Clement, *Excerpts from Theodotus* 27 and 50. Soteriology thus represents “the other great area where Victorinus’ Platonist learning allowed him to formulate what the educated of his time would have recognized as a scientific understanding of how souls could emerge from their prodigal erring to regain the heavenly seat” (Cooper 2016: 20).

At the very beginning of *To Candidus*, Victorinus describes the Holy Spirit as activator of souls in stirring them toward the higher realities, with a reminiscence of *Chaldaean Oracles* frg. 109: therefore, an equation with the Neoplatonic notion of the world-soul seems presupposed. Elsewhere (*Against Arius* 4.10) he deals again with the notion of a ‘soul-source’ which is endowed with self-generative capability and, on the ground of the famous passage in the *Phaedrus* (245c), is always in motion. From this world-soul individual souls derive, like a golden chain winding from godhead through the angelic hierarchies and eventually reaching and being chained to the earthly bodies (another Platonic reminiscence, *Phaedo* 67d, where it is said that the soul must become free from corporeal bondages), suffering contamination and, yet, providing them with life. It is of course the well-known notion of the Neo-Platonic *seira* or the chain of beings (a term that recurs in Macrobius, *Dream of Scipio* 1.14.15 and is probably inspired either by Porphyry or by the *Chaldaean Oracles*), but the solemn and somewhat poetical tone in which it is expressed allows recalling the parallels of the ‘Psalm’ of Valentinus (fr. 8, in [Hippolytus], *Refutation* 6.37.7); an even closer passage is the same urgency of generating and the same rush through the elements ascribed to the Sethians in [Hippolytus], *Refutation* 10.11.7–10 (Tommasi, forthcoming).

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Philosophy in Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose of Milan

Isabella Image

Introduction

Hilary of Poitiers and Ambrose of Milan may arguably be considered the two greatest Latin bishops of the fourth century, belonging to the era of Christian flourishing after the death of Constantine. They were influential for a number of reasons: for example, both contributed to the Trinitarian controversy, and Hilary went down in history as having been exiled for his adherence to orthodoxy (although in fact the reasons for his exile are unclear). Both were politically influential and known to the emperors of their day, especially Ambrose. And both were known as pastors, writing scriptural commentaries and introducing hymn-singing; Hilary's are the earliest known Latin hymns. As a result, their writings were widely read, and any philosophical influence on their works was to pass to Augustine and into the centuries beyond.

Attitudes to philosophy

Hilary's exact date of birth is unknown, but it is assumed he was born around the 310s and belonged to a family who were of sufficient social standing to give their son an education which later suited him for the episcopacy and for his writings. On similar grounds it is hypothesized that he may have attended the University of Bordeaux made famous in the poems of Ausonius; Bordeaux had professors in grammar and rhetoric, although none in philosophy (Saffrey 1968: 248–251). Hilary bursts onto the scene as a representative bishop in the Trinitarian controversy of the 350s. He was exiled from Gaul to Asia Minor for troublemaking, although the exact nature of his offence (whether theological, political or personal) is unclear. He returned home around 360 or 361,¹ and died in around 367 (Goumans 1969). Although some works date before his exile, the bulk of his writings was written during or after his stay in Asia Minor and thus are held to show some influence of so-called 'Greek' thought, both in terms of his thinking about the Trinity and in terms of his commentary work.

Hilary repeatedly rejects the specious logic of philosophical thought, which puts it on a par with heresy.²

With countless annoying barbed arguments, Philosophy attacks God's providence and his supreme eternal governance in the world he created. They grant God's name now to the waters, now to the earth, now to atoms, now to the sky.

(Treatises on the Psalms, 63.5)

In this passage, Hilary rejects a number of philosophies, including Epicureans, Thales, and the cosmic god of the Stoics (Saffrey 1968: 255–258). Elsewhere, and maybe unusually for his period, Hilary rejects the celibacy and ascetism that may be provoked by philosophy.³ Some of Hilary's comments against philosophers may derive from his source text, since he is loosely translating Origen's *Psalm Commentaries*; however, his rejection of philosophy also occurs in his Trinitarian works, as we shall see in the next section.

Ambrose was born around 339 to an aristocratic family; his father was Prefect of Gaul. He was educated in Rome, mostly under the watchful eye of his elder sister Marcellina, who was one of the earliest dedicated celibates of Rome. Although she was a fundamental influence in eventually persuading Ambrose in his own faith, his initial education was typical of that of any aristocratic boy of his age, with training in rhetoric preparing him for a career in law. Later on, when the people of Milan cried for his consecration as bishop, he tried to avoid this by engaging in three inappropriate activities: advocating torture, engaging in philosophy, and associating with prostitutes.⁴ However, the populace was not convinced that he was wholehearted in any of these, and he was consecrated in 374.

Madec's 1974 book *Saint Ambroise et la Philosophie* lists Ambrose's criticisms of philosophy and philosophers. Madec's position is extreme, but it is true that Ambrose can be scathing about philosophy; for example he points out that philosophical study is declining ("even in their schools, dialectic is heard no longer!")⁵ and critiques philosophy,⁶ to the extent that he was used as a source for arguments against dialectic in the eleventh and twelfth centuries (Courcelle 1950: 29).

Hilary and Ambrose can thus both seem negative about philosophy. However, such language had been a trope in Christian discourse ever since Tertullian tried to separate Athens from Jerusalem, and three mitigating points must be made.

Firstly, much of their anti-philosophical rhetoric arises in the context of the Trinitarian controversy; this will be discussed in the next section.

Secondly, both authors actually make extensive use of ideas derived by other philosophical schools; this may be conscious (as in the case of Ambrose's Neoplatonism) or unconscious (as in the case of both Hilary and Ambrose using ideas on human action ultimately derived from Stoicism). This will be discussed in the penultimate section.

Lastly, there is the contemporary cultural context. These bishops were preaching at a time when the Italian upper classes (whether Christian or pagan) still viewed a proper education as one which comprised reading of the 'classics' such as Cicero, Virgil, and Horace. This explains Christian outrage when the Emperor Julian banned Christians from teaching the classics; Augustine's youthful distaste for Christian texts as below his intellectual level; and Jerome's rather extreme position that Christians should not read pagan texts, a position which even he eventually abandoned. As Davidson rightly says, referring to Ambrose:

In this context, the idea that an Ambrose . . . is carefully labouring to bridge two thought-worlds in an apologetic or proselytizing exercise actually misses the point. Ambrose's

[work] emerges from a matrix in which two cultural traditions are *already* inextricably intertwined.

(Davidson 1995: 323)

Philosophy and the Trinitarian debates

Both Hilary and Ambrose find a particular place for anti-philosophical invective in their Trinitarian works.⁷ For example both authors cite Colossians 2.8–9, a common anti-Arian verse as an example of how philosophy distracts us from good Trinitarian doctrine (“Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit . . . for in Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily”).⁸ Philosophy is seen as an excuse for heretical disputation, which should be replaced by faith. It is simply an inadequate tool for determining actual facts such as when Christ was born (Hilary, *On the Trinity* 2.12, 12.19).

Yet Hilary is capable of philosophical niceties in his own argumentation. At one point, he states that his key argument for the Trinity is Christ’s birth (origin), which encompasses four other arguments: Christ’s name, nature, power, and self-revelation (*On the Trinity* 7.16). Of course, he argues these on biblical grounds, but they all incorporate non-biblical concepts.

One example was in the issue of the ‘names’ of the Father and Son. Against the Eunomians, Hilary holds that the word ‘god’ when used of Christ must designate nature. As for the names ‘Father’ and ‘Son’, these should be taken to denote properties within the Godhead, and not individuated natures (*On the Trinity* 5 *passim*, 11.1, 12.25). This kind of argument was current for the day, deriving ultimately from Aristotle,⁹ and Hilary responds to it fluently and on its own terms. (However, *pace* some modern scholars it is taking things too far to state that Hilary has a view of the ‘universal body’ in the case of humans, as found for example in Gregory of Nyssa).

A second example is his use of the notion of infinity to explain the unity-yet-distinction of Father and Son (see particularly Book 12). This could be held to derive from Aristotle (who considers notions of infinity in relation to the Prime Mover),¹⁰ although clearly the application to the Trinity must be Christian. Hilary may be the first writer to use the infinity argument with respect to Trinitarian natures.

Hilary does not just use philosophical lines of reasoning for specific doctrinal points. Saffrey (1968: 261–263) suggests that the first book of his *On the Trinity* is an invocation of the self-revelation of God in nature. The theme is biblical, certainly, but has much in common with the arguments for the providence of the revealed God as found for example in Cicero’s *The Nature of the Gods* – and is, therefore, somewhat at odds with Hilary’s contention elsewhere that revelation cannot provide the truths of faith.

Ambrose is often held as having a less sophisticated mode of Trinitarian argument, especially in his *On the Faith* and at the Council of Aquileia.¹¹ However, it is probably stretching things a little far to say that he misunderstood the homoianism of his opponent Palladius when he called it ‘Arian’ (see e.g. Williams 1997: 145); the acts of the Council of Aquileia show Ambrose pinning down Palladius and Secundianus on exactly the same seven points that he cited right at the beginning of his *On the Faith* a couple of years earlier, which triggered the controversy with Palladius.¹² As for calling them Arian, Ambrose was using a well-established slur, with his own little gloss of sophistry as for example when he convicts Palladius using the already-condemned Letter of Arius.¹³

Still, Ambrose is forced to address arguments about nature just as Hilary is; in *On the Lord’s Incarnation*, for example, Ambrose must answer the same kind of question that we have seen in Hilary about how Unbegotten and Begotten can have the same nature/essence.¹⁴ He can

only give the somewhat glib response that the terms unbegotten and begotten do not pertain to nature, and fall back on the argument about origin that Hilary has already used. On the whole, however, it is probably fair to say that Ambrose's Trinitarian arguments tend to be more exegetical than philosophical, as for example when he refutes the very term 'unbegotten' on the grounds that it is not scriptural but comes from Arius.

Platonism

Another issue is how far these two bishops are influenced by Platonism and particularly by the school of Plotinus. Hilary may be dealt with first, to be swiftly dismissed: there is no trace of Neoplatonism in his writings.

That is not to say that scholars have not found traces of Platonism in his works. This is found predominantly in Hilary's anthropology and his articulations of the body-soul relationship: he compares the soul to a bird wishing to fly free¹⁵ and describes the body as a prison (*On the Psalms* 119.14) or 'weighing down' the body (*On Matthew* 5.4; 10.19). However, such dualism is compatible with Scripture and can be justified by reference especially to Paul.¹⁶

However, more recently scholars have seen Hilary's expressions not as 'Platonic', but as part of the eclecticism which characterized the fourth century. Rather than simple 'Platonizing' expressions of the imprisoning body, Hilary evinces a sophisticated synthesis of body and soul¹⁷ and an account of human behaviour that are more characteristic of Stoicism (see next section). Further, most examples of supposed Platonism in Hilary's corpus come from his *Psalms Commentaries*, which rely heavily on Origen; thus the notion of Platonism in Hilary collapses into the question of his use of Origen. The supposed Platonising elements are better seen as characteristic of the discourse of Hilary's period and his use of Origen, rather than a direct influence of Platonism.

The situation is entirely different in the case of Ambrose. As we have seen, his denunciation of philosophy should be seen in the context of the Trinitarian controversy, but it is immediately belied by his conscious and widespread use of Platonic texts.

Where Hilary uses Origen, Ambrose is known to have used a raft of authors and texts to inform his own work. Ambrose's eclectic handling of other scholars – without acknowledgement – includes use of Origen, Hippolytus of Rome, Athanasius, Cyril of Jerusalem, Didymus the Blind, and Basil the Great. (Indeed Ambrose scatters his entire oeuvre with allusions and citations of non-Christian writers such as Virgil, Apuleius, and Cicero.¹⁸ Ambrose's chocolate-box approach to an assortment of texts led to Jerome's notorious scathing comments which refer obliquely to the Milanese bishop: "Certain People. . . [dress themselves] in other birds' feathers, like an ugly jackdaw!"¹⁹). The following are among the works where Ambrose uses extended reworkings of the philosophers Philo, Plotinus, or Cicero:²⁰

<i>On Paradise</i>	uses Philo <i>Questions on Genesis</i> 1.8–47; <i>Allegorical Interpretation</i> 1.12–2.18
<i>Cain and Abel</i>	uses Philo <i>The Sacrifices of Cain and Abel</i> ; QG 1.64–77
<i>Noah</i>	uses Philo <i>Questions on Genesis</i> 1.87–2.82
<i>Abraham</i>	uses Philo <i>Questions on Genesis</i> 3, including a lost part
<i>Flight from the World</i>	uses Philo <i>Flight from the World</i>
<i>Isaac and the Soul; The Good of Death</i>	use Plotinus <i>Ennead</i> 1.6, 1.7, 1.8, 3.5
<i>Jacob and the Happy Life</i>	uses Plotinus <i>Ennead</i> 1.4; 4 Maccabees ²¹
<i>On Offices</i>	uses Cicero <i>On Offices</i>

(He also wrote a work “On Philosophy”, but this is lost.) This philosophical angle of Ambrose’s oeuvre, highlighted by Courcelle’s work on Platonism in Ambrose from the 1950s onwards, shows the Milanese bishop as a scholarly man seeking to integrate the ‘classics’ of his day into Christian thought. In particular, Ambrose’s extensive use of Platonic texts – even highly paraphrased and modified for his Christian audience – demonstrates that for Ambrose it can contain elements of the truth, even if not the whole truth. He frequently iterates Philo’s notion that Plato had access to Jewish scripture in forming his doctrines: “[The psalmist] repeatedly said this, so that you would know that the philosophers borrowed from him their concept of the Good – the one they call ‘Supreme’” (*The Good of Death* 12.55). For Ambrose, this anteriority of Scripture is *ipso facto* evidence of its superiority.²²

In his Platonizing sermons, Ambrose evinces an understanding of the Christian God as Good or Highest Good (*summum bonum*):²³ “The Good is self-sufficient, overflowing unto itself; it gives all things their measure, perfection and limit.”²⁴ In these texts, he describes this Good variously as illuminating light, pure virtue, true Beauty fount of all reason, source of all life and being.

One text describing the Good also demonstrates Platonizing elements in Ambrose’s theological anthropology:

So let us take up those wings which bear us to the higher regions like flames! Let everyone divest his soul of its filthy outer layer, and cleanse her of dirt just like gold in the fire. . . . The soul’s beauty . . . occurs when she has a better knowledge of things above, so that she can see that Good on which all things depend, although it depends on nothing, and from it she receives life and understanding (*intellectus*). That Highest Good (*summum bonum*) is the spring of life.

(Ambrose *Isaac and the Soul* 8.78)

In such texts, Ambrose sharply differentiates the soul and body, seeing the former as good and the latter as bad; it is the body that brings about all human sin. (However, this is mitigated by his expressions elsewhere, as will be shown in the next section on psychology and the will). The body is subject to passions and the distractions of worldly cares; the mind is the seat of reason and thus can work to liberate itself from the body’s cares. As a result of the body’s effects on the soul, the only way to achieve happiness is for the soul to escape the effects of the body, hence his constant urging for us to ‘flee from the world’.

Since he articulates the Supreme Good as the source of life and being, Ambrose consequently expresses evil as the privation of all being: “Satan will not find evil in [Christ], because evil is nothing!” (*Flight from the World* 4.24). Augustine quotes him with approval: “That is why my teacher Ambrose said in his book about Isaac and the Soul: What is wickedness, if not the absence of Good?”²⁵ This notion of evil as the absence of good is an important theme in *Isaac and the Soul* (Courcelle 1950: 31). Ambrose also uses the Platonic metaphor of beautiful soul being fertile in good works, whereas the ugly soul is sterile (*Isaac and the Soul* 7.60).

The doctrine of self-denial found in Plotinus dovetailed with the growing trend towards a Christian asceticism that was blossoming in the deserts of the East and was now growing in Rome and Milan, and with the growing fashion for celibacy. Simplicianus (see what follows) encouraged both Ambrose and Augustine in ascetic ‘withdrawal from the world’, which explains Augustine’s withdrawal to Cassiciacum with some choice friends shortly afterwards in his narrative. As for Ambrose, his advice “let us fly from here!” (*fugiamus hinc!*) is a constant motif through his writings, culminating in his work *Flight from the World*, in which he carries over motifs from Philo’s work of the same name. Ambrose himself was celibate and encourages

clergy and others to take up the celibate life, but his *Flight from the World* addresses all Christians and emphasizes the need to escape from the pressures of secular life as far as possible, even if we cannot embrace asceticism (Gerzaguët 2015: 8; Colish 2005: 38.)

All of this indicates an abiding interest in Platonic thought, but it is highly controlled and assimilated into a Christian framework. For example, when adapting the Enneads Ambrose removes the Neoplatonic triad and any reference to differentiation within the divine, applying all the relevant attributes to the one Christian God. Courcelle's approach is to compare Ambrose and Plotinus in parallel and examine differences. At *Ennead* 3.5.8, Plotinus refers to the Symposium myth of Love being the child of Poros and Penia (Resource and Need), taking Zeus and Aphrodite as the Intellect and World-Soul respectively, and Poros as the Logos. Courcelle (1950: 43) points out that Ambrose's usage of this text at *The Good of Death* 5.19 converts Zeus to God (also referred to as Intellect), and Poros becomes an intermediary between the Intellect and Soul. Courcelle (1950: 44) gives other examples of Ambrose's christianization: for example where Ambrose uses Plotinus *On Evil* (Ennead 1.8) he keeps language of Love and Desire and seeking union, but discards other Plotinian vocabulary and appeals instead to Psalms 15 and 16; notions of Beauty embellishing his lovers are interpreted as God's grace and free will.

The Quellenforschung approach used by Courcelle has been repeated and tempered in more recent times (see for example Savon 1977; Doucet 1995; Drecoll 2001 on *Isaac and the Soul*; Nauroy 2010 on *Jacob and the Happy Life*; and Davidson 1995 on *On Offices*). Scholars differ as to the degree Ambrose succumbs to his sources. For example, where Courcelle notes that we must rise on the wings of our soul to the upper regions (excerpt cited earlier, from *Isaac and the Soul* 8.78), Drecoll questions the degree of Platonic borrowing, and Gerzaguët (2015: 8) and Colish (2005: 38) emphasize that Platonic flight from the world is transformed in Ambrose to self-denial and virtue within the world. More significantly, it should be noted that this supposedly Platonic digression is prompted in the first place by the fact that Ambrose is commenting on Song of Songs and has reached 8.6 which talks of love's 'wings of fire'. The use of the Enneads is only part of a section which also cites Psalms 15 and 16 as well as other scriptural references pertaining to his theme; moreover, he is firmly in a Christian worldview when he talks of Creation and grace.

The case is similar in other instances where Ambrose uses non-Christian authors; for example, Davidson emphasizes that Ambrose's *On Offices* is not so much a synthesis or imitation of Cicero, but rather is trying to show how Christianity surpasses the classics in their own teachings. Still, all scholars agree with the general idea that Ambrose uses source texts but modifies them considerably to bring them in line with Christian thought.

In *On Offices*, Ambrose disparages the views of all the philosophers he mentions; the only one whose view he is prepared to accept, with some alterations, is Plato (Davidson 1995: 21). He is not the only late antique writer to be more accommodating of *philosophia* when it is from Plato and his intermediaries (particularly Plotinus): the pagan Macrobius calls Plotinus with Plato the 'prince of philosophers',²⁶ and Augustine famously declares that the Platonists would see God were it not for their pride in rejecting Christ.²⁷

There are a number of reasons why Plato and Plotinus in particular would have been acceptable to Ambrose. Ambrose was familiar with the contemporary attitude that Scripture was poor man's literature that could not match with the rhetorical grandeur of classical Latin and Greek authors; by contrast Plotinus was much embraced by the intellectual classes.

Further, Ambrose would have received a positive notion of Platonic doctrines through contemporaries such as his revered Christian teacher Simplicianus. This latter was an older contemporary, renowned for his learning, and noted for bringing to conversion the famous Neoplatonic teacher Marius Victorinus, as well as Ambrose and Augustine;²⁸ despite his great

age, he became bishop of Milan after the death of Ambrose (Augustine, *Retractions* 2.1). Simplicianus seems to have been well disposed towards Platonism, and indeed himself translated Plotinus. When Augustine approaches Simplicianus, the latter congratulates him on having read ‘Platonic books’ (*libri Platonici*) and tells him he has fallen upon the best philosophers: others are full of “lies and deceit” whereas those of Plotinus “in many ways lead to belief in God and His Word” (*Confessions* 8.2.3). At the same time, Ambrose mentions that Simplicianus frequently liked to prove how far philosophical works had strayed from the truth (Ambrose, Letters 65.5). Whether Simplicianus was one of a ‘Milan circle’ of Platonizing Christians or whether such a group is complete fiction,²⁹ it is certain that there were a notable number of Christians influenced by Plotinus, and Ambrose’s teaching provided an approach to Scripture that, in its Platonizing and allegory, made Christianity more conducive to intellectuals like Augustine (*Confessions* 8.1.1–8.2.5); the latter also tells us he meditated on Plotinus *Ennead* 1.8 (*On Evil*) and Ambrose’s paraphrase thereof (*Against the Academics* 1.8.23).

In all, then, there appears to be plenty of contact with Platonism in Ambrose’s works. However, caution must be urged. As in the case of Hilary, it should be recognized that many ideas originally deemed Platonic were by this point merely part of the eclecticism of philosophical thought in the fourth century. Indeed, Plotinus himself uses many Peripatetic and Stoic ideas even while rejecting others. Moreover Ambrose was familiar with Biblical commentators who were themselves used Platonic ideas, such as Origen and Philo; to this extent it is unsurprising that he would see many Platonic ideas as conducive to Christianity, since he already found them in Judaeo-Christian texts. But more importantly, Ambrose’s rejection of non-Platonic philosophies is belied by his unconscious use of them. As Colish points out,³⁰ Ambrose’s dualism is not so frequently ‘body versus soul’, but holds stronger echoes of ‘passions versus reason’ (Aristotle) or ‘appetite versus reason’ (a more Stoic articulation); for her, Aristotelianism and Stoicism condition the way Ambrose appropriates Platonic material. This is possibly a strong position for Colish to hold, but it seems particularly viable in the field of psychology, to which we now turn.

Human psychology: will (*voluntas*), thoughts and passions

It has been held that Augustine ‘invented’ the concept of the will (Dihle 1982, esp. chapter 9), but this is to misunderstand the trajectories in understandings of human psychology in the decades before him. More recently, scholars such as Frede and Sorabji have shown that Augustine’s understanding of the will holds much in common with ‘Stoic’ (or more properly, eclectic) thought. Although we have seen Hilary and Ambrose differ on their use of Neoplatonism, they converge in the area of human psychology and thus together are useful in demonstrating the fourth century Latin trends in this area.

The first-century Stoic Epictetus taught the notion of *prohairesis* (choice, Latin *arbitrium*): we cannot control events around us, but we can control our responses to them. This could be easily adapted into Christianity, which could take Stoic Fate as largely equivalent to God’s ordinance.

However, Stoics saw most humans as not truly free because we are in thrall to our false understanding of the world (the exception being Stoic sages). By the fourth century, Stoics no longer existed as a separate school, but their ideas had been adapted into mainstream ‘eclectic’ thought. Plotinus, for example, introduced the idea of non-rational desires which might also prevent the average person using our will effectively (Frede 2011: 59).

As Annas shows (in the case of the Hellenistic period), philosophy incorporated established ‘scientific’ theory on how humans act (1992: 20–26), and in this respect it could be integrated with Christian thought exactly as twenty-first-century psychology is today. But for Christians,

the Stoic theory could not be adopted wholesale because the notion of God judging us requires us to have moral responsibility. Origen held the free will as a Christian tenet and arguably inferred the free will merely to maintain our accountability.³¹ (However, Origen did discuss constraints on the will, e.g. at *First Principles* 3.2.4 although he is not normally given credit for it). In the West, on the other hand, the trend seems to have gone the other way: both Ambrose and Hilary, as we will see, stick more closely to Stoic understandings of constraints on the will and subsequent human impotence. This leads to tension in their thought.

The will. Those seeking to emphasize that Hilary and Ambrose believe in an entirely free will can point to passages such as those following:

Before each man is laid out the path to whatever he wishes (*ad id quod volet*) in life, and he is allowed freedom in desiring and acting (*appetendi et agendi libertas*).

(Hilary *Treatise on Psalm 118*, 22.4)

It is by the will's choice (*voluntate arbitra*) that we either tend towards virtue or are inclined towards sin.

(Ambrose *Jacob and the Happy Life* 1.1.1)

These statements appear to be unambiguous reiterations of the accepted Christian tradition: the will is free, and our sin is directly our fault – and so, apparently, case closed. However, for both bishops the situation is more nuanced than these isolated citations might indicate.

In the case of Hilary, there are indeed places where the will is articulated with full freedom, but these should be compared with sundry other places where he is more measured on the role he gives to the will. Indeed, Hilary explicitly describes the will as being in thrall to personified Disobedience as a direct consequence of the Fall. At *On Matthew* 10.23–24, he describes humans before the Fall as composed of Body, Soul, and Will, with the latter joining Body and Soul together “like a marriage contract” (*On Matthew* 10.23). At the Fall, Disobedience and Sin enter into the human mix, a situation which is passed down through the generations: “For all subsequent generations, due to the sin and disobedience of the first parent, Sin became our body’s father and Disobedience became our soul’s mother” (*On Matthew* 10.23; see also 7.6). Thereafter the will is in thrall to its ‘mother-in-law’ Disobedience until released from her in baptism. Hilary is conceding that, although the will may be called free (‘freedom of the will’, *libertas voluntatis*) its freedom is in fact still constrained with respect to its ability to act. As a result, we are all vulnerable to evil: “Wickedness affects everyone, because we all have a will as part of our unstable nature” (*Treatise on Psalm 118*, 15.6). This “unstable nature” will be further explained later.

The same equivocation on the will also occurs in Ambrose. At *Jacob and the Happy Life* 1.3.10–11, he discusses the will: “Our distress can only be ascribed to our own will!” His position initially seems clear, yet these few paragraphs are followed by a long analysis (1.3.12–4.16) which evokes Paul’s Epistle to the Romans: “I recognized sin, but I could not avoid it” (*Jacob* 1.4.13); “I am dragged into wrongdoing without wanting to be (*invitus*)” (*Jacob* 1.4.15). His resolution of this conundrum is to admit our inner strife and ultimate helplessness, while appealing to God’s grace and “fixing our passions to the cross” (*Jacob* 1.5.17).

Psychology and action. Such equivocation arises from a difficulty that both Hilary and Ambrose face in terms of the accepted theories of their day on the process of action, deriving originally from Stoicism. Christianity of the second and third centuries demanded a complete freedom of the will in response to questions of the origin of evil and pain, against opponents such as the Gnostics. By the fourth century, however, two things had changed: firstly, theodicy was no

longer a key concern, and secondly the Stoic theory of action had been adapted into mainstream thought.

This theory works something like this. Objects and events in the world around us cause impressions in our minds; some of these impressions may cause instinctive urges (*hormē/motus*, such as the instinctive desire for a beautiful girl). Our mind now gets involved and may choose to consent or otherwise to these impressions (for example, that it is a good idea to chase the girl); this consent drives the subsequent action (for example, chasing the girl). Different individuals may be more or less able to control their passions, and this control is partly based on our knowledge and training (for example, a Stoic sage does not need to act to avoid death because he knows that death is not actually a ‘bad’). By the fourth century, the Stoic theory is also bound up with some ideas Aristotelian in origin, stressing the balance between appetites and mental reasoning.

Both Hilary and Ambrose subscribe to much of this theory of human action, as can be seen from the language they use and the assumptions they make.

Nature controls us more through the mind’s appetites (*appetitus*) than through the inner entrails.

(Hilary *Treatises on the Psalms* 57.2)

The soul must continually watch and monitor itself, to guard itself against itself. There are motions (*motus*) which have that an urge (*appetitus*) which breaks out as if in a rush; which is why the Greek word is *hormē* [rush /impulse], because it bursts out suddenly with force. . . . The force comes in two ways: some is in the urge (*appetitus*), and some is in the reason (*ratio*) which checks the urge.

(Ambrose *On Offices* 1.47.237)³²

The citation from Ambrose here also nicely demonstrates a feature of Ambrose’s dualism. Although the Neoplatonic body-soul dichotomy certainly features,³³ Ambrose in fact uses pairs such as rational-irrational or appetite-reason which in fact are truer to Aristotelian or Stoic thought. Indeed Colish (2005: 31, 34) identifies an evolution in Ambrose’s thought, where the body-soul opposition of his early works gradually takes on a more sophisticated shine that uses this more ‘modern’ theory of action, to the extent that he can even reject body-soul opposition as simplistic: “Why do we blame the flesh for being weak? Our members are merely tools” (Ambrose, *Jacob* 1.3.10).

One aspect affecting human action is the influence of the emotions or passions. Both Hilary and Ambrose see the passions as needing to be checked by reason; indeed, both see the passions as part of our fallenness.³⁴ On the other hand, however, neither is a Stoic. Although both advise control over the passions such as anger and pride, both accept that to some degree these cannot be eliminated: this can be seen from discussion of surreptitious unwanted ‘thoughts’ in Hilary and Ambrose alike,³⁵ as well as Ambrose’s frequent citation of the verse “be angry, but do not sin” (*irascimini et nolite peccare*).³⁶ On this point, then, both bishops (usually) appear to reject Stoic *apatheia*, preferring a more peripatetic *metriopatheia*;³⁷ this is in keeping with other contemporary Christians such as Jerome and Augustine.³⁸

Instability and constraint (demutabilitas and necessitas). This constant struggle between appetites, passions and the mind arises from an instability (*mutabilitas, demutabilitas*) that continually buffets us throughout human life. This approach was conducive with Christian thought as found in the letters of Paul, and passed down through Christian writers such as Origen.³⁹

As a result of this concept of instability, the works of both bishops demonstrate a tension; on the one hand there is the doctrine of free will, but on the other are the known constraints

on idealized human action. This is expressed through the language of *necessitas naturae*, *necessitas humana* (constraint/coercion arising from our natural condition) to refer to the sundry facets of the human condition which lead to our sinning, particularly our passions and appetites. Hilary qualifies the notion, while Ambrose embraces it.

There is certainly no compulsion to sin (*necessitas peccati*) in our human nature; but because of the will's desire and seductive vices, the practice of sin takes hold.

(Hilary *Treatises on the Psalms* 68.9)

The soul lives in the body, so it has to experience both anger and fear; it necessarily has this constraint, which comes from our bodily nature (*corporeae necessitas naturae*).

(Ambrose *Noah* 23.84)

This language of our 'nature's constraint' occurs in both bishops (with more caution in Hilary), in contexts seeking to explain why we sometimes cannot quite help our actions. Indeed, both bishops make a curious distinction between sin of this sort that occurs 'naturally' and sin that occurs due to our will. Hilary makes this distinction in discussing Esau (*Treatises on the Psalms* 57.3), and Ambrose makes it in discussing Judas: "his sin was not 'natural', but willed" (*Commentary on the Psalms* 35.15).

Yet Hilary and Ambrose are aware of the unsavoury implications of a category of sin that occurs naturally and is thus, by implication, inescapable (so that being sinless "is impossible for our nature").⁴⁰ As is clear from the excerpt earlier, Hilary in particular is quick to qualify the concept of natural constraint: "The notion of nature's constraint (*necessitas naturalis*) is not an excuse for offending!"⁴¹ But he admits the constraint of the will, which is itself is 'natural'. The quick denials only serve to highlight conceptual problems; it will be left to Augustine and the adherents of Pelagius to battle out the details.

Final thoughts

It has been demonstrated how Hilary and Ambrose speak negatively of philosophy in the context of the Trinitarian controversy; yet both use philosophical concepts in their arguments (especially Hilary). What is more, Ambrose demonstrates wide usage of Platonic texts, and both assimilate contemporary understandings of psychology which will lead into Augustine's theory of the depraved will.

In this short chapter, there have necessarily been some omissions; for example beatitudinism is an unchallenged assumption of the eclectic thought of this period, partly mediated through Neoplatonism.

Possibly the greatest omission, however, has been the political philosophy (or theology) of both these bishops who made every effort to engage their emperors into orthodoxy. Hilary's powerless invective against Constantius II relied on the implicit assumption that it was the role of emperors to ensure orthodoxy. Ambrose took this a step further, not only persuading Gratian to remove the Altar of Victory but taking upon himself the authority to bar Theodosius from communion after the massacre at Thessalonica.

But the most well-known contribution in the modern day must be in the area of ethics. To Ambrose is attributed the common proverb advising Augustine's mother Monica that one may follow liturgical calendar wherever one is staying: when in Rome, do as the Romans do.⁴²

Notes

- 1 Sulpicius Severus *Life of Martin* 6.7, Jerome *Against the Luciferians* 10.
- 2 Hilary *Treatises on the Psalms* 1.7, 61.2, 63.5, 63.9, 65.7, 144.4, 148.3; *Treatise on Psalm 118* 19.8; *On the Trinity* 1.13, 8.53, 9.1, 9.8, 12.20.
- 3 Hilary *Treatises on the Psalms* 64.3: “We perceive philosophers who shiver, their bodies naked; teachers abstain from marital relations; heretics live only on the dry sustenance of bread. But ultimately who ever benefited from this pointless way of life?”
- 4 Paulinus *Life of Ambrose* 7 (cf. Courcelle 1972).
- 5 Ambrose *On the Faith* 1.13.84.
- 6 Ambrose *On the Faith* 1.5.41–42, 1.13.84–85, 4.4.47, 4.8.79; *On the Lord’s Incarnation* 9.89.
- 7 In the case of Ambrose, this is noted by Savon (1977: 175), Madec (1974: 52).
- 8 Hilary *On the Trinity* 1.15, 2.20, 3.3, 8.53, 9.1, 9.8. Ambrose *On the Faith* 1.5.41, *Abraham* 2.8.54.
- 9 Consider for example Aristotle *Metaphysics*, Books 7–9.
- 10 Aristotle *Physics* Book 8, *Metaphysics* Book 12 and *passim*.
- 11 Williams 1997: 145 “[Ambrose] betrays a lack of acquaintance with the theology of differing sects”; 147 “little theological originality”; Moorhead 1999: 114 “It must be said that *de fide* fails to engage with its opponents.” Cf Courcelle 1950: 29 “il ne passe pas pour un philosophe,” with other citations.
- 12 For a concise list, see Williams 1997: 145
- 13 See Duval 1998: 94: “[Ambroise] ne cherche pas à comprendre l’adversaire, . . . [Il] fait guère d’effort pour entrer dans les propos.”
- 14 Ambrose *On the Lord’s Incarnation* 79–116.
- 15 Hilary *Treatise on Psalm 118* 14.18, *On Matthew* 5.9, 10.19, 22.4.
- 16 For example Romans 7 (esp. 7.24), referred to in Hilary *Treatise on Psalm 118* 10.8.
- 17 See in particular Rondeau 1962.
- 18 For example, Ambrose’s Ep. 11 to Irenaeus quotes pages of Plotinus, and *On His Brother’s Death* uses Apuleius (Courcelle 1972: 155).
- 19 Jerome *Treatise on the Holy Spirit*, Preface; cf. Rufinus *Apology* 2.24–25.
- 20 On Philo, Runia 1993: 292. On Plotinus, Courcelle 1972: 154.
- 21 4 Maccabees is a Platonizing text, suggesting the need for reason to conquer the passions. Ambrose may have been aware of the tradition that it was written by Josephus (Eusebius *Church History* 3.10).
- 22 See also *The Good of Death* 5.19, 10.45; *Abraham* 1.2, 2.1, 2.2–6, 2.7, 2.10; *Treatise on Psalm 118* 2.3; *Letters* 28.1.
- 23 See Nauroy 2010: 163–164 for references to God as *sumum bonum*, with discussion.
- 24 *Isaac and the Soul* 7.60. Compare Plotinus *Ennead* 1.8.2: “[The Good] has no needs, is self-sufficient, lacks nothing; it is the measure and limit of all things.”
- 25 Augustine *Against Julian* 1.9.44. Compare Augustine *Unfinished Work against Julian’s Second Response* 4.109.
- 26 Macrobius *Dream of Scipio* 1.8.5: “Along with Plato, Plotinus is the leader among teachers of philosophy.”
- 27 Augustine *Confessions* 7.7.11, *City of God* 10.29.
- 28 Simplicianus’s role in Ambrose’s conversion is implied by Augustine calling the former Ambrose’s “father” (*Confessions* 8.2.3). His role in Augustine’s conversion occurs at *Confessions* 8.2.3f.; the description of Marius Victorinus’s conversion occurs at 8.2.4.
- 29 See for example Solignac 1988, who lists potential references and assesses potential members of this ‘circle’ but comes to the conclusion that little can really be said. More recently, see the comments of Colish 2005: 9.
- 30 Colish 2005: 31–40 (Chapter 3, on human nature). Compare Gerzaguet 2015: 22–23.
- 31 Frede 2011: 106–107, with citations.
- 32 Compare Cicero *On Offices* 1.28, on which Ambrose bases his work.
- 33 Compare Ambrose *Jacob and the Happy Life* 1.4.15: “The Law is useful for discerning sin but on the whole is useless in helping resist it, because the body’s appetite opposes it and drags the captive mind towards enticing misdeeds.”
- 34 Hilary *Treatises on the Psalms* 146.4. Ambrose *Jacob and the Happy Life* 5.19 suggests that through the cross we ‘bury the passions’.
- 35 Hilary: *Treatises on the Psalms* 62.9; further references in Image 2017: 134. Origen mentions (*dia*)logismoi in the same way: eg. Origen *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 11.4. Origen gives a more detailed analysis at

- Principles* 3.2 *passim*. Ambrose: *Commentary on Psalm 118* 3.13. For its use in other writers including Plotinus and Evagrius Ponticus, see Frede 2011: 61–63.
- 36 Ambrose *Jacob and the Happy Life* 1.1.1, *Commentary on Psalm 36*, 18, *Commentary on Luke's Gospel* 5.39, *On Offices* 1.3.13, 1.21.96, *Exhortation to Virginity* 11.77, *Letters* 63.60, *Oration on the death of Theodosius* 14. Ambrose's admonition is based on Eccl. 7.10, Ps. 4.5, Eph. 4.26.
- 37 On Hilary, see Image 2017: 135–142. On a slightly more ambiguous Ambrose, see Nauroy 2010: 155–158 (also 65–76, 83).
- 38 Jerome *Commentary on Matthew* 26.37–38. Augustine *City of God* 9.4, 14.8–9.
- 39 See discussion in Sorabji 2000: 343–356.
- 40 Ambrose *Commentary on Psalm 1*, 22; Hilary *Treatise on Psalm 118*, 15.6.
- 41 Hilary *Treatises on the Psalms* 57.3: *non excusatur quaedam necessitas naturalis in crimine*. Compare 68.9 and Ambrose *Jacob and the Happy Life* 1.1.1, both of which state that there is no *necessitas peccati*. See further Maes 1967: 85–89.
- 42 Paraphrase of Augustine *Letter* 36.32 to Casulanus.

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Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa

Andrew Radde-Gallwitz

Introduction

Bitter opponents in the fourth-century doctrinal controversies, Eunomius of Cyzicus and Gregory of Nyssa cannot be fully understood independently of each other. It makes particular sense to study them together in a volume on early Christian philosophy since scholarly literature has long associated both authors with the question of the role of philosophical speculation within Christian theology. While the two authors have typically been presented as opposites, in fact, they named the relationship of Christian faith and philosophy in surprisingly similar ways.

The comparative project is, however, rendered difficult by the nature of the evidence. The condemnation of Eunomius's Trinitarian doctrine and the endorsement of Gregory's led to incommensurate bodies of surviving literature. In 398, shortly after Eunomius's death (ca. 394), Emperor Arcadius ordered his books burnt (for Eunomius's life and works, see Vaggione 1987: xiii–xvi; Kopecek 1979; Vaggione 2000). We have only two fully extant Eunomian works and another in fragments, as well as a handful of testimonia, dicta, and fragments of varying degrees of credibility. One dictum has featured prominently, perhaps too much so, in traditional and modern interpretation of Eunomius. Socrates' *Church History* reports the saying as follows:

God does not know anything more about his own essence than we do, nor is that essence better known to him and less to us; rather, whatever we ourselves know about it is exactly what he knows, and, conversely, that which he knows is what you will find without change in us.

(Socrates, *Church History* 4.7=Eunomius, frag. 2, Vaggione 1987: 178–179)

In the magisterial edition of Eunomius's works, Richard Vaggione defends the authenticity of Socrates's report (Vaggione 1987: 167–170). The saying appears in various forms in late ancient sources, all hostile to Eunomius – never in Eunomius's own writings. While it *might* be compatible with the doctrine articulated there, one risks distorting the texts' intricate argumentative fabric if one reads them through the dictum, and thus in an overview of Eunomius's thought it is best to proceed on the basis of what the texts themselves say.

Of Eunomius's two fully extant works, the longer and more philosophically interesting is *Apology*, which most likely originated as a defense speech at a synod of bishops in Constantinople in January 360, where Eunomius and his teacher, the deacon Aetius, faced charges of heterodoxy.¹ The "Homoian" bishops assembled there under the patronage of Emperor Constantius rejected the Nicene definition of the Son's consubstantiality with the Father, affirming instead merely that the Son is "like" (*homoios*) the Father. They split their verdict, deposing Aetius while elevating Eunomius to the see of Cyzicus, where he very briefly served as bishop. From Aetius, we have only one surviving work, the *Syntagmation*, which in the version handed down to us by Epiphanius is merely a series of syllogisms aimed at clarifying the sense of the common theological epithet "Unbegotten" (ἀγέννητος) and showing that necessarily there cannot be community of essence between the begotten Son and the Unbegotten Father. Eunomius's extant works present a somewhat more pleasant face. His *Apology* responds to unspecified allegations by defending a simple creed professing belief in the one God, his one Son, and the one Spirit. Within five years of the council, a young Basil of Caesarea wrote a point-by-point refutation commonly known as *Against Eunomius*. Roughly fourteen years later, Eunomius released a work variously called in the sources *Apology for the Apology* and *Second Apology*. Eunomius's second work survives only in the portions quoted or paraphrased by Gregory in his three-book *Against Eunomius*; these fragments have been summarized, though not edited by Vaggione (1987: 99–127). Finally, we have the whole of Eunomius's *Exposition of Faith*, an amplified creed likely prepared for the so-called "Council of All Heresies" convened by Emperor Theodosius in Constantinople in 383. This work too was refuted by Gregory in *Refutation of Eunomius's "Confession"*; it was copied as a whole in some manuscripts of Gregory's text (Vaggione 1987: 134). Eunomius never convinced the Theodosian establishment of his orthodoxy. Probably in 389 he was banished from Constantinople and spent his final years on a rural estate at Dakora in Cappadocia. His story was told by his admiring historian Philostorgius, whose *Church History* was excerpted by Photius. Eunomius wrote more works than those which we have; late ancient sources mention a *Commentary on Romans* and an extensive letter collection. The extant texts are devoted exclusively to the Trinitarian controversy.

From Gregory, by contrast, we have not only anti-Eunomian texts, but also dozens of other works, including treatises, homilies, letters, and dialogues (for individual works, see the articles in Mateo-Seco and Maspero 2010). Gregory had the good fortune of not only siding with imperial orthodoxy, but also inheriting a status and a set of literary projects from his older brother Basil, the archbishop of Caesarea who made Gregory the first bishop of Nyssa in 372. Although Gregory wrote at least one work (entitled *On Virginity*) during Basil's lifetime, he put his learning and talent to work especially after Basil's death, which probably occurred in late 378. Gregory memorialized not only Basil but also his sister Macrina, whom Gregory presents in *The Life of Macrina* as a practitioner and teacher of the higher philosophy. Gregory delivered an encomium of Basil on January 1, 379, thereby fixing his feast date; he took up Basil's cause in his *Against Eunomius* and in his *Apology on the Hexaemeron*, a defense of Basil's *Homilies on the Hexaemeron*, which Gregory also expanded in his own treatise *On the Making of Humanity*. In addition, he wrote a dialogue modeled on Plato's *Phaedo*, in which the ascetic Macrina, on her deathbed, takes the role of Socrates and Gregory that of the disciple; she consoles Gregory over the loss of Basil and her own impending death. Gregory participated in ecclesiastical synods, including Antioch 379 and Constantinople 381, which would be remembered as the second ecumenical council. Gregory was heralded in an imperial edict (*Episcopis tradi*, July 30, 381) as one of eleven bishops of exemplary orthodoxy in the Eastern Roman Empire. He delivered orations at imperially sponsored synods and traveled on official missions to consolidate their work. On one of his trips to Constantinople, beyond his official business, he engaged in a disputation

with a non-Christian philosopher on the topic of fate and free will, written up as *Against Fate*. His works touch eclectically on a broad range of philosophical themes. This begins with *On Virginity* – which includes passages displaying Stoic and Platonic influence – and runs through various treatises on specific problems, including the consolatory works *On the Dead* and *On the Premature Deaths of Infants*. His homilies and treatises on biblical texts and figures, such as *The Life of Moses*, display the consonance of Christianity and the wisdom of those “outside.” The corpus is peppered with references to medical and natural philosophy. As is typical with Christian writers of his time, philosophical terminology and argumentation are enmeshed in a highly ornate rhetorical presentation; we rarely encounter philosophical dialectic in its own right. Like Eunomius, Gregory died sometime around 394.

As we compare these two unbalanced bodies of literature, we will see that both authors refer to what we might understand as philosophical content in diverse ways. On the most obvious level are direct references to specific philosophers or to “external” (i.e. non-Christian) philosophy. Such direct mentions are often, though not always negative in tone. Less obviously, both authors mention what they call “common” or “natural notions” (κοινὰ ἔννοια, φυσικὰ ἔννοια). This language, of Stoic origin, denotes beliefs formed in a way that is in principle common to all humanity and that ensures the truth of the beliefs so formed. Both authors maintain a harmony between such ideas and the data of revelation, a position which I will dub the harmonization thesis, and which is the source of both authors’ most creative interactions with philosophy.

Eunomius of Cyzicus

Eunomius’s extant works contain scant references to philosophers outside the church. *Apologetica* contains three direct mentions. One is a passing reference to Diogenes the Cynic. After mentioning an objection to his teaching on the Unbegotten and the Begotten, Eunomius says, “Our reply is not to substitute the rod for an answer in the manner of the admirer of Diogenes (for the philosophy of the Cynics is far removed from Christianity).” Instead, Eunomius says, he is obliged to “emulate the blessed Paul,” who taught us to “correct our opponents with great patience” (*Apol.* 19, Vaggione 1987: 56–57; cf. 2 Tim 2:25). Thus the line between Cynic and Christian practice lies in the willingness of the latter to accommodate its wisdom to the ignorant in imitation of the apostle. Another passage draws the common doctrinal line between Christian truth and a particular instance of “Greek error,” namely, the notion that preexisting matter is required for the creation of the world (*Apol.* 16, Vaggione 1987: 52–53). The final mention of external philosophy occurs when Eunomius is clarifying the relationship between God’s substance and activity:

Again, having carefully refined our conception of these matters, we must understand that God’s mode of action too is not human, but effortless and divine, and must by no means suppose that this kind of action is some sort of division or motion of his substance. This is in fact what those who have been led astray by Greek sophistries do have to suppose, because they have united the action to the essence and therefore present the world as coeval with God.

(*Apol.* 22, Vaggione 1987: 62–63, trans. altered)

Here the target appears to be not the Greeks themselves but rather Christians who have been misled into positing an eternal act of creation. In both the second and third passages, then, Eunomius follows a common Christian tactic of associating erroneous accounts of divine

creative activity with Greek philosophy. For Eunomius, Christian error is an offshoot of Greek thought.

The trend continues in Eunomius's *Apology for the Apology*, where, according to Gregory of Nyssa's summary, Eunomius "accused Basil of following the external philosophy" (*AA*, at Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 2.196, GNO I, 282.3–4 Jaeger; cp. 2.568, GNO I, 392.14–19). In particular, Basil has "curtailed the providence of God" by stating that while God made everything, including wheat, seed, and so forth, God did not "impose" the titles "wheat," "seed," and the like (*AA* at *Eun.* 2.196; GNO I, 282.6–7 Jaeger). For Eunomius, God is the origin not only of things but also of correct names. Without naming any philosophers whom Basil is following, he says that Basil has "allied with the atheists and taken up arms against providence" (*AA* at *Eun.* 2.196, GNO I, 282.7–9 Jaeger). Gregory makes clear that Eunomius is thinking in particular of both Aristotle – the idea that Aristotle denied sublunary providence was an old one in the doxographical tradition – and Epicurus.

In sum, Eunomius's surviving references to those outside are uniformly hostile and follow the heresiological trope that heresy descends from ancient philosophical error. But Eunomius was himself highly indebted to philosophy. "Emulating the blessed Paul," Eunomius took up the terms of Christian debate of his day – terms which were inescapably philosophical – and sought to impose order upon the confusion. Apart from the catalogue of direct references to the outside philosophy, a reader of Eunomius's *Apology* will encounter numerous terms used in a philosophically conscious manner: οὐσία, ἀπλοῦς, σύνθετος, ἀσύνθετος, συνθήκη, ὄνομα, διάνοια, στέρησις, ἔξις, κατ' ἐπίνοιαν, φύσις, κατὰ φύσικὴν ἔννοιαν, χρόνος, αἰών, τάξις, σημαίνω (and τὸ σημαιόμενον, σημασία, σημαντικός), κοινοποιέω, διαφορά, ὀρισμός, μερισμός, μέρος, ὕλη, πάθος, ἀπαθής, δύναμις, ἐνέργεια, ἀρχή (τῆς ἐπισκέψεως), νόμος φύσεως, αἴτιον, αἰτία τε καὶ ἀρχή, and κίνησις. A systematic study of the whole set would be desirable, but for present purposes, we can be selective.

Eunomius uses the language of substance (οὐσία) and activity (ἐνέργεια) as he articulates his procedure; both the terminology and the methodology it undergirds are of philosophical interest. In *Apology*, Eunomius says,

There are two roads (δυσὶν . . . ὁδῶν) marked out to us for the discovery of what we seek: one is that by which we examine the actual substances (τὰς οὐσίας αὐτάς) and with clear and unadulterated reasoning about them make a judgment on each, the other is an enquiry by means of the actions (διὰ τῶν ἐνεργειῶν), whereby we distinguish the substance on the basis of its products and completed works.

(*Apol.* 20, Vaggione 1987: 58–59, trans. altered)

The "substances" in question are the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit; for Eunomius, "substance" never refers to a shared "essence." Eunomius identifies two methods for resolving disputing questions about the three substances: (1) to reason *directly* about these entities themselves, and (2) to reason *indirectly* about the substances on the basis of the products of their respective causal activities – an etiological method.

In Book One of *Apology for the Apology*, Eunomius describes the paths more fully, focusing especially on the etiological one:

Now, again, since each of these substances both is and is understood to be purely simple and altogether unique in its own rank, and since their activities are delimited together with their effects, and the effects are the measure of the agents' activities, then surely it is entirely necessary that the activities accompanying each of the substances be lesser and greater, and

that some take the first and others the second rank – and, in sum, that the activities are discovered to have the same degree of difference as their products are discovered to have. . . . [I]f a dispute arises about the substances, [it is fitting] to make confirmation starting from both the primary and additional activities of the substances, and to resolve doubt about the activities by starting from the substances – considering the descent from primary to secondary matters more fitting and effective in all cases.

(*AA* at *Eun.* 1.152–154, GNO I, 72.10–73.15 Jaeger)

Though we do not have the book in its entirety, we can judge that Eunomius's principal interest here lay with the etiological method; hence his emphasis on "activity." Eunomius uses this term solely to denote a transitive act, one that produces some external effect (Barnes 2000: 190). The etiological path of discovery relies on a handful of premises: a cause is greater than its effect; created substances and substance-kinds are ranked in a natural, non-arbitrary order (he calls this "the order that is connatural to things"); each created substance or substance kind is a product of a creative activity; productive activities bear the same relative value as their products; and activities "accompany" or "follow" substances and thus are dependent on the substances – a point made just before the quoted paragraph. The conclusion that follows is that the substances are ranked according to the value of their products. The whole logical sequence presupposes that we can discern the agent behind each productive activity. For Eunomius, scripture is clear: the begotten Son is the agent through whom all things are created (see John 1:3, 1 Corinthians 8:6). Eunomius lists examples of the Son's creations: angels, heavens, stars, and human beings. Eunomius presumes that the Son is himself created; this point, for Eunomius, is implied in the very idea of sonship or begottenness. The Son is created by the uncreated and unbegotten God. The question of ranking, then, is simple: the Father is greater than the Son whom he creates; the Son greater than the universe he produces. Corroboration for this ranking is that the Son's creative work was a temporary act: it took only six days (See Vaggione 1987: 62; Leemans 2014: 390–396). Similarly, the Holy Spirit or Paraclete produces numerous effects in the lives of the faithful, each of which is by definition inferior to the Spirit itself and none of which is on the same ontological plane as the Son's creative products. So there is a mix here of formal premises, which employ the language of philosophical etiology, with material premises about the work of the Father, Son, and Spirit, which mostly come from Christian scripture and tradition, even though a reader might adduce parallels with Middle and Neo-Platonism (on Eunomius's etiology, see Barnes 1993, 2000).

So much for the etiological path; what of the other one, whereby one can "resolve doubt about the activities by starting from the substances"? The idea is to begin by stating in as stark a fashion as possible the characteristics of the three substances and then to flesh out the implications in such a way as to avoid confusion and ambiguity. In *Apology*, the initial statement of doctrine emphasizes two elements: the unicity of each of the three substances and their causal roles vis-à-vis the creation (*Apol.* 5, Vaggione 1987: 38–39). That causality figures so prominently in the discussion of these names shows that this path is not crisply distinguished from the etiological path. The version in *Apology for the Apology* omits the names Father, Son, and Spirit and emphasizes the causal relationships among the three:

The entire statement of our doctrines consists of the supreme and all-sovereign substance; and of the one that exists because of that substance and, after that substance, holds first rank over all other things; and of a third that is in no way ranked with these, but is subject to one of them because of causality and to the other because of the activity by which it came into being.

(*AA* at Gregory of Nyssa, *Eun.* 1.151, GNO I, 71.28–72.7 Jaeger)

Even the stark profession recited in *Apology* permits significant deductions. If the Father is single and is the one “from whom all things come” – convictions that correspond both to tradition and to the “natural notion” of God – then two propositions can be eliminated: that God came into being from himself and that he came into being from another. After all, a causal agent must preexist its product (*Apol.* 7, Vaggione 1987: 40–41; cp. *Apol.* 10, Vaggione 1987: 44–45; *AA* at *Eun.* 1.606, GNO I, 201.3 Jaeger; see Vaggione 1993: 193n74). Hence, Eunomius concludes, God is “unbegotten (ἀγέννητος)” (*Apol.* 7, Vaggione 1987: 40–41). Having derived unbegottenness from unicity and causality, Eunomius proceeds to clarify the term. He rules out several misunderstandings: “unbegotten” cannot be a mere name of human invention, since such names are transitory; its sense cannot be merely privative, for privations negate prior states and there is no prior state being denied in this case; it cannot name some part of God, since this would violate the intuition that God is non-composite; it cannot name some distinct substance in God, since this would violate divine simplicity; it cannot name some distinct substance alongside God, since God is the *sole* unbegotten (*Apol.* 8, Vaggione 1987: 40–42). Eunomius concludes that God is “unbegotten substance (οὐσία ἀγέννητος)” (*Apol.* 7, 8, Vaggione 1987: 40, 42).

This last phrase could be developed in a weak or a strong form. One might take “unbegotten” merely as a predicate of “substance”: a perfectly accurate, if only partial, description of what we mean when we speak of God’s being. Even Basil of Caesarea endorses this version. Eunomius, however, develops a strong interpretation of the claim, which couples the sentence with a semantic claim. Not only does Eunomius maintain that the first substance is unbegotten, but also that unbegottenness is its sole essential description, such that any other predicate ascribed to it must be semantically equivalent to “unbegotten.” Hence, when one speaks of it as “light” or as “truth” or “goodness,” one is merely saying “unbegotten” with different sounds (*Apol.* 19, Vaggione 1987: 58). To say, as opponents beginning with Basil have done, that Eunomius presents the divine substance as comprehensible is to refer to this encompassing of all ideas about God into the single predicate of unbegottenness. The dictum about our equality with God’s self-knowledge gains its credence from Eunomius’s understanding of the revelatory power of the term “unbegotten.”

Because Eunomius’s emphasis on the word “unbegotten” has been judged to be reductionist and hubristic, it is hard to engage in a sympathetic reconstruction of his motives. Eunomius’s opponents viewed his elevation of “Unbegotten” as a ploy aimed at denying the Son’s divinity: if unbegottenness is the essential description of God’s substance, then the begotten Son cannot be a sharer in that substance – as one finds in Aetius’s *Syntagmation*. The term “Father” implies a child, but “Unbegotten” does not carry any similar implication. Eunomius does connect the adjective “unbegotten” with other biblical descriptions, “only true God” (John 17:3) and “the one who is” (Exodus 3:14) (*Apol.* 17, Vaggione 1987: 54–55; *AA* at *Eun.* 3.8.34, GNO II, 251.19–23 Jaeger). Unlike most Greek Christians of his day, Eunomius reads Exodus 3:14 as a theophany of the Father rather than the Son, one which marks a contrast between the two substances. But while this contrast is an implication of Eunomius’s thinking, it is not clear that it was his sole aim in elevating the term “Unbegotten.” An additional reason for emphasizing unbegottenness emerges from the text of *Apology*. In that work, Eunomius draws attention to various biblical homonyms: terms used both for created realities and for God. Thus he mentions God’s “eye” as an example. Of course, “Father” is another term of this sort, and Eunomius insists that it needs careful interpretation. Its communicability across the Creator-creature divide means it is difficult to use it theologically in a way that is unambiguous. The term “Unbegotten,” by contrast, has at most one referent, and thus its unambiguous character makes it attractive (though, for a reading of the term as ambiguous,

see Athanasius, *De decretis* 28). It uniquely and at once conveys God's incomparability and ontological priority.

Naming acquired a new valence for Eunomius when he came to write *Apology for the Apology* nearly twenty years later. As noted earlier, Eunomius thought that Basil had denied providence when he ascribed to humanity the power of coining names and fixing their denotations. Eunomius followed Genesis 1's story of divine creation through speech; on his reading, God is assigning names when he says, "Let there be light" and so forth. There is an anti-speculative tenor to Eunomius's application of these verses. Eunomius asserted that the source of Basil's belief that humanity coined terms was not Adam's naming of the animals in Genesis 2, but rather Aristotelian or Epicurean philosophy. We cannot ascertain whether Eunomius had an account of creation and the natural order that went beyond this polemically driven theory of naming. As Mark DelCogliano has argued, the theory of names developed in Eunomius's later work is not present in the earlier *Apology*. It would therefore be wrongheaded to read that theory, as some scholars have done, as the foundation of Eunomius's arguments in *Apology* (DelCogliano 2010). Second, Eunomius's account of divine naming in *Apology for the Apology* is not based on Plato's *Cratylus* or on Neo-Platonic commentaries on that dialogue. The commonplace that it is Cratylean derives from misunderstanding Gregory's polemical jibe that Eunomius has dressed up his paltry ideas with the elegance of Plato's expression (*Eun.* 2.404–405, GNO I, 344.13–25 Jaeger). The reference is to style rather than substance. In fact, Gregory himself had already in *Against Eunomius* 2 used the same "Platonic" expression without attribution to express his own linguistic ideas, and he does the same in the closely parallel work *To Ablabius* (Radde-Gallwitz 2018: 133–146).

Apart from this elaboration of a theory of language's origin, Eunomius's later work evinces the same fundamental strategies we see in *Apology*. Eunomius at once distinguishes his approach from heretical compromises with those outside while maintaining that his own reasoning captures both revelation and the natural notion of God. While he says little about the nature of the consonance between revelation and natural notions, he nonetheless provides an important witness to the harmonization thesis.

Gregory of Nyssa

A complete survey of scholarly opinion on Gregory of Nyssa's relationship to philosophy is impossible here (for an overview, see Cassin 2018).² Typically the motivating question for scholars has been the influence of Hellenism generally and Platonism specifically. The classicist Harold Cherniss saw in Gregory a thin Christian veneer on a fundamentally Platonic base (Cherniss 1971 [1930]). Some have seen Gregory as revolutionary, indeed as transforming classical metaphysics (e.g. Balthasar 1995 [1942]; Balas 1966; Mühlenberg 1966). Jean Daniélou traced a development in Gregory's views away from strict Platonism to mystical, sacramental Christianity (see Cassin 2018: 538). Christopher Stead judged Gregory's philosophical labors amateurish and confused (Stead 1976). Various authors interested in reclaiming Gregory have worried over his evidently Platonic dualism (see Boersma 2013). Even his knowledge of late ancient Platonism remains a disputed question. Gregory's highly varied corpus defies simple characterization. In a recent magisterial survey of the scholarly literature on Gregory and philosophy, Matthieu Cassin emphasizes that each of Gregory's works must be judged on its own terms; each has its unique rhetorical aims, and the use of philosophy is determined to a large extent by such aims rather than by any systematic allegiance (Cassin 2018: 541–542).

Still, a consistent theme spans the various works: revealed and philosophical truth are at least harmonized and occasionally entirely identified with one another. An initial sense of the

character of the harmony can be ascertained from Gregory's use of the term *φυσιολογία* – an account of the nature of something – and its cognate verb *φυσιολογέω*. While Gregory uses the term mockingly for Eunomius's pretentiousness, typically it is positive, denoting some insight attained by experts.³ Gregory uses it, for instance, in the cases of natural philosophers (*Hex.* 37, GNO IV.1, 50.9–10 Drobner) and of doctors following Galenic medical theory (e.g. *Or. dom.* 4, SC 596, 430 Boudignon and Cassin). He also uses it for both Moses and Macrina, thereby blurring the lines between inspired and non-inspired sources, and between past and present. For instance, speaking of Exodus, Gregory says that “in riddles the text offers these points about the soul as an account of its nature” (*Ταῦτα περὶ ψυχῆς φυσιολογούντος δι' αἰνιγμάτων τοῦ λόγου*); Gregory means that Moses understood the tripartite soul as expressed in Plato's *Republic* and concealed this doctrine in the Exodus narrative (*Vit. Moys.* 2.96, GNO VII.1, 62.9–12 Musurillo). Likewise, Macrina “offered an account of the nature of humanity (*φυσιολογοῦσα τὸ ἀνθρώπινον*)” (*Vit. Macr.* 17, GNO VIII.1, 390.3 Woods Callahan). Both inspired sources such as Moses and Macrina⁴ and non-inspired experts possess and communicate knowledge of natures.

Even so, Gregory's dealing with philosophical tradition is complicated, as is evident from even a brief catalogue of Gregory's direct references to the “outside” philosophers. Of these, the mentions of Plato are the most interesting. Gregory's ear was sufficiently attuned to catch verbal echoes of Plato's *Cratylus* and *Phaedrus* in Eunomius's writing; in both cases Gregory praises Plato's literary style (*Eun.* 2.404, GNO I, 344.14–25 Jaeger, and *Eun.* 3.7.33, GNO II, 227.3–8 Jaeger, respectively). He is aware that Plato uses the term “Father” for the Demiurge in *Timaeus* (*Ref. Eun.* 48–49, GNO II, 333.4–14 Jaeger). He has Macrina dismiss “the Platonic chariot” (*Anim. et res.*, GNO III.3, 33.14 Spira and Mühlenberg). Setting up the problem of his work on the premature deaths of infants, Gregory notes that even the speech in character (that is, the myth of Er) offered by “Plato, wise among those outside,” did not touch on this difficulty (*Infant.*, GNO III.2, 70.4–10 Hörner). Again with respect to *Republic*, Gregory summarizes the story of Herodicus (*Fat.*, GNO III.2, 50.2–7 McDonough). He can make jocular reference to Plato (*Epist.* 27.1, SC 363, 302 Maraval). Plato's influence on Gregory goes beyond these explicit mentions. Yet, even from the latter we can see an admiration for Plato's wisdom and elegance and a special attention to Plato's myths and illustrations.

The case is different with Aristotle, whom Gregory usually mentions in polemical contexts. Yet the intent is to disparage Eunomius rather than the Stagirite – except in one dubious passage referring to Aetius and Eunomius following “Aristotle's false pretense” (*ἡ Ἀριστοτέλους κακοτεχνία*), a phrase missing in six manuscripts and marked as an interpolation in Jaeger's edition (*Eun.* 1.55, GNO I, 41.4–5 Jaeger; though see Cassin, “Grégoire de Nysse,” 543). In *Against Eunomius*, the parts of Aristotle Gregory mentions are the syllogistic method and the classifications of kinds (genera, species, and the like). Gregory finds Eunomius a clumsy disciple of this material, but he does not directly criticize Aristotle. In *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, Gregory narrates Macrina's praise of “the philosopher who came after” Plato for his scientific rigor, though she rebukes his doctrine of the soul's mortality (*Anim. et res.*, GNO III.3, 33.18–34.2 Spira and Mühlenberg).⁵ Gregory himself draws liberally and without attribution on various Aristotelian ideas, especially regarding the soul, the elements, and the mixture of liquids (see Barnes 1994; Radde-Gallwitz 2014: 306–308). Thus, while Gregory's notices of Aristotle are darker than those of Plato, his point is not so much to condemn Aristotle as it is to tarnish Eunomius.

In the explicit references to the Stoics and Epicureans, a clearly negative portrait emerges. For Gregory, their ideas are plainly incompatible with Christian faith. Gregory was himself influenced by the Stoics, though not, it seems, by the Epicureans. We see Stoic influence, for

instance, in his talk of “common” and “natural notions” and his understanding of the virtues and vices. But his references to the Stoics are uniformly disparaging, and in keeping with Acts 17:18, they are always paired with the Epicureans, even if Gregory is aware of the differences between the two schools’ doctrines (*Eun.* 3.2.163, GNO II, 106.3 Jaeger; *Anim. et res.*, GNO III.3, 8.14 Spira and Mühlenberg; *Deit. fil.*, GNO X.2, 120.11, 123.3–22 Rhein).⁶

Gregory never mentions any philosopher of the Roman era, whether Stoic, Platonist, or Aristotelian – unless we count Galen, who appears once together with Hippocrates (*Fat.*, GNO III.2, 49.19–24 McDonough). He does mention Philo of Alexandria and draws on his *Life of Moses* (*Eun.* 3.5.24; 3.7.8–9, GNO II, 168.17, 217.20–218.5).⁷ That Gregory knows some Platonic dialogues directly raises problems for the source critic interested in his relation to later Platonism. For instance, it is difficult to discern whether Gregory’s various imitations of Diotima’s ladder (especially in *On Virginity* and *Life of Moses*) are reprising the *Symposium* itself or Plotinus *Ennead* 1.6 or both or neither. It is likely that Gregory’s Platonism is mediated by Platonizing texts – both Christian and non-Christian – beyond the dialogues. Across Gregory’s corpus, one can draw parallels with discussions in Middle and Neo-Platonic texts ranging topically from natural philosophy, to the spiritual ascent to divine beauty, to the appropriation of Aristotelian logic and predicamental theory.⁸ Were our focus on source criticism, the question of his relation to these traditions would occupy us further, but the absence of direct engagement with imperial Platonism makes this line of inquiry unproductive if our question is how Gregory explicitly positions his work vis-à-vis philosophy.

Like Eunomius, Gregory most commonly refers not specifically to particular philosophers or distinct schools but generically to “those outside” (οἱ ἔξωθεν/ἔξω). Especially interesting examples of this language appear in *Life of Moses*, a work in which Gregory extracts lessons on virtue from Moses’s life. Moses’s dual identity, Hebrew and Egyptian, is conceptually equated with the tension of Christianity and Hellenism. Following long precedent, Gregory treats Moses’s upbringing in Pharaoh’s household as an example of general pagan education. That Moses nursed from his mother while being raised an Egyptian shows that one ought not to separate from the Church’s milk during the time of one’s education (*Vit. Moys.* 2.12, GNO VII.1, 36.22–37.7 Musurillo). Gregory reads Pharaoh’s daughter as barren, and takes her sterility as emblematic of philosophy’s endless labor pains. A passage in Philo has been cited as the source of Gregory’s imagery, but the parallel is weak. Philo uses the language of birth pangs to denote the foolish and ignorant person who pursues worldly delights; Gregory, who applies the continual travail to “external education,” appears instead to be taking up Socrates’ language in the *Theaetetus* (150c – 151a) and universalizing it to external learning as such (*Vit. Moys.* 2.10–11, GNO VII.1, 36.7–21 Musurillo; cf. Philo, *Legum Allegoriae* I.24.75–76). Gregory’s term ὑπηγνέμιοι (*Vit. Mos.* 2.11, GNO VII.1, 36.18) makes sense only as an echo of the *Theaetetus*’ ἀνεμιαῖον (151e6, 157d3, 161a1, 210b9). Read in light of Socrates, the image of barrenness is not strictly polemical. Indeed, although he says that any philosophical teaching that leads to idolatry must be rejected, Gregory asserts that a Christian leader must have continual recourse to external wisdom – to “ethical and natural philosophy”; this lifelong companionship with the philosophers Gregory takes as the symbolic meaning of Moses’s foreign wife, who accompanies Moses throughout his life (*Vit. Moys.* 2.17, 2.37, GNO VII.1, 38.15–19, 43.20–26 Musurillo). Philosophy has given birth to truth, if also to falsehood. External (Platonic) philosophy recognizes, for instance, the immortality of the soul. Reprising the birth metaphor of the *Theaetetus* and mixing it with the biblical law of circumcision, Gregory calls this doctrine a pious offspring – as opposed to the doctrine of metempsychosis, a fleshly and alien foreskin that must be removed (*Vit. Moys.* 2.40, GNO VII.1, 44.11–15 Musurillo).

As we noted in the case of Eunomius, it is inadequate to limit the inquiry into Gregory's relationship to philosophy to his references to those outside. Like Eunomius, Gregory insists on the dual authority of scripture and common notions. There is a conceptual difference between speaking of the common notions and of the outsiders' written labors, yet the two sets overlap to a significant degree. When tagging some concept as common or natural, Gregory typically describes it in language with a known philosophical pedigree without identifying pagan sources. In such cases, *we* might think of Gregory as using Middle or Neo-Platonism, but he is silent. Presumably this omission stems from an assumption that any external philosopher who expresses the same "natural" idea is merely reflecting what is commonly available to the human race and is not the author of the concept. In both Eunomius and Gregory, a natural or common notion is something like a rational intuition – for instance, that God is one, non-composite, and immutable; that the universe depends on a first cause; that nothing is self-caused (Eunomius, *Apol.* 7, Vaggione 1987: 40–41; Gregory of Nyssa, *Infant.*, GNO III.2, 77.4–8 Hörner). The truth of such intuitions is grasped immediately and without any need for proof or verification.

Across Gregory's works, the idea that such intuitions cohere with the teachings of scripture serves various ends, but it arises most often as Gregory seeks to answer objections to Christian doctrine or to provide solutions to profound philosophical problems. In the following, we can mention two illustrative works, the *Catechetical Oration* and *On the Premature Deaths of Infants*.

In the *Catechetical Oration*, Gregory responds to an objection to the doctrine of incarnation. The objection is likely generic and imagined; in particular, the attempt to trace it to Porphyry's *Against the Christians* has proven unsuccessful (Drecoll 2011). The objector holds that becoming flesh, with its attendant πᾶθος, a word denoting both physical suffering and moral disorder, is out of character for God. The implication is that Christian teaching on this point is out of line with our best rational intuitions about deity: that God is perfect, impassible, incorruptible, immortal, and the like. Gregory appeals to such intuitions to argue that the objector has misunderstood the terms at stake and has thus failed to drive home the supposed dissonance (see esp. *Or. cat.* 9, GNO III.4, 37.12–13 Mühlenberg; *Or. cat.* 16, GNO III.4, 46.3–4 Mühlenberg).

Earlier in the same work, Gregory offers an analogy aimed at showing "the Greeks" the reasonableness of believing in a "distinction of hypostases in the unity of the [divine] nature" (*Or. cat.* 1, GNO III.4, 8.10–11 Mühlenberg). The claim is not merely that an outsider's objection is unfounded, but that the Christian belief is already inchoately conceded by a pagan interlocutor. Accordingly, Gregory's role in this passage is maieutic rather than adversarial, as he leads outsiders to acknowledge the logical consequence of their preexisting commitments. He presumes that his Greek interlocutor holds the view of God outlined earlier – that God is perfect, incorruptible, and the like. He asks whether God possesses or lacks "reason" (λόγος). This term too is equivocal, since both humans and God are rational, but whereas human reason is merely a part of our being, divine perfection entails that God's λόγος must be subsistent. Gregory thereby begins the process of securing agreement in a distinction of three subsistent hypostases within the unity of the divine nature. Gregory implies his Greek interlocutor can come so far without accepting any special revelation.

The harmonization thesis underlies Gregory's daring speculative enterprises. The treatise *On the Premature Deaths of Infants* provides an illuminating and understudied example with which we can conclude. The work is addressed to Hierius, a litterateur who had asked how to resolve the work's titular problem with divine providence. Gregory notes that even Plato, who peered into the mystery of divine judgment, had left this problem aside as "too great for human conjecture" (*Infant.*, GNO III.2, 70.8–10 Hörner). And of course Gregory finds no direct answer in scripture, though he derives his mandate to handle such a profound mystery from Paul (citing 1 Cor 1:5, 2:15–16 at *Infant.*, GNO III.2, 76.2–17 Hörner). To tackle the

problem at all, Gregory had to go beyond what either philosophical tradition or scripture directly authorized him to say. His response proceeds from premises he takes to be universally acceptable. The scriptural saying that God “made all things in wisdom” (Ps 103:6–8) implies that the apparently unaccountable deaths of infants must somehow fit within a world that makes sense. But Gregory’s argument relies not on special revelation but on premises he explicitly says would be acceptable to anyone. These include the following beliefs: that everything, including the universe, must have a cause; that there can be only one unchanging nature; that reality includes both intelligible and sense-perceptible natures; that humanity unites the two; that the soul’s blessedness consists in looking upon, and thus participating in, God, its intelligible archetype (*Infant.*, GNO III.2, 76.24–81.22 Hörner). For some of these premises, Gregory cites biblical testimony in addition to his appeal to the *consensus omnium*.

The deaths of infants obviously raise problems for anyone committed to these principles. Gregory tackles various objections, including the idea that such a scheme makes nonsense of morality. If the world is set up in such a way that blessedness follows naturally upon a life of virtue, a life that is beset with countless trials, then how is it just for infants to attain blessedness with no equivalent trials? Wouldn’t such a scheme make virtuous living pointless? Gregory, who presumes that infants who die do attain blessedness, responds by saying that the blessedness of each person corresponds to the degree of his or her preparation. Hence, infants who die would not attain to the same degree of participation that a morally advanced person would; thereby, the putative injustice of their blessedness seems to be mitigated (*Infant.*, GNO III.2, 88–93 Hörner). Yet, retorts the objector, *why* would God allow such deaths at all? To this question, Gregory tentatively suggests that God, who foresees all, might be preventing evils from occurring by cutting short a life that would have been wicked. This response prompts another worry: if God intervenes preemptively in some cases, why not in others? Why, in particular, are those who will commit atrocities permitted to attain maturity? Here Gregory appeals to the logic he sees in Romans 9–11: just as Pharaoh was permitted to thrive in order to bring benefit to Israel, so too does God in general permit evil so that greater good can emerge. Not only does the punishment of the wicked enable the blessed to glorify God; following Psalm 57:11, Gregory asserts that witnessing the punishment of the wicked will enhance the joy of the blessed (*Infant.*, GNO III.2, 93–98 Hörner). In a sense, the treatise offers what would later be called a “theodicy” and thus bears the virtues and vices endemic in that type of argumentation. It reflects its author’s high confidence in the agreement between common notions and scriptural teaching, and their joint relevance for addressing a seemingly intransigent problem.

Despite their obvious differences, then, the works of Eunomius and Gregory exhibit the perennial Christian anxiety over external influence, while at the same time testifying to the creative potential of the harmonization thesis.

Notes

- 1 As we have it, the text of the *Apology* contains one chapter (number 28) not original to the work. In addition to Basil’s quotations of large portions of the work in *Against Eunomius*, the *Apology* was copied separately and as a whole in some manuscripts containing Basil’s *Against Eunomius*. See Vaggione 1987: 12–25.
- 2 I thank Prof. Cassin for sharing his chapter in advance of publication.
- 3 *Physiologia* is accepted even in the one passage wherein Gregory contrasts scriptural *theologia* (that is, biblical testimony to the Son’s divinity) with the *physiologia* of bodies in flux: *Eun.* 3.2.24 (GNO II, 60.4–5 Jaeger); both are true in their respective realms, and the latter should not be viewed as normative for the former.
- 4 For Macrina as inspired, see *Vit. Macr.* 17 (GNO VIII.1, 390.5–6 Woods Callahan).

- 5 Hubertus R. Drobner perhaps too hastily concludes from this reference that Aristotle was the inspiration for Gregory's method of *akolouthia*: Drobner 2000: 88.
- 6 In the passages from *Eun.* 3 and *Deit. fil.*, the point is that Anhomioians (that is, Eunomians) are "new Epicureans and Stoics." Likewise, in the passage from *Anim. et res*, Marcina cites Paul's words in Acts 17 to chide Gregory's (that is, the character's) initial thesis of the soul's mortality.
- 7 Gregory quotes Philo, *De migratione Abraham* 183. On the question generally, see Runia 1993: 243–260.
- 8 E.g. Charlotte Köckert's masterful study (Köckert 2009) reads Gregory's *Hex.* in light of the tradition of natural philosophy inspired by Plato's *Timaeus*.

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Didymus the Blind and Evagrius of Pontus

Mark Edwards

The legacy of Origen was manifold, and every Christian author of the fourth century had a share in it, whether or not they invoked the Nicene Creed as a standard of orthodoxy. The two theologians whom I address in this chapter, however, were set apart from the rest by the invidious label Origenist because they were suspected of inheriting his more pernicious opinions, and in particular of denying the permanent union of the inner and outer man. The modern formulation of the same judgment would be to say, without the same implication of censure, that they were Platonists: we shall see that while they might have disavowed this name, they avail themselves of philosophical terms (both Platonic and Stoic) in their discussions of the soul's origin and destiny and the nature of the God whose image and likeness it displays.

Preliminary observations

Origen was the most prolific and seminal theologian of the age before Nicaea, and even after that watershed there is scarcely a Christian thinker who was not in some sense his debtor. The consequence of a more scrupulous definition of orthodoxy in the fourth century was that certain speculations, hitherto licensed by the silence of the church, acquired a more invidious character. When Origen's name was invoked to defend these positions, he came to be seen as the father of a motley array of heresies: he had imagined the Second Person to be unbegotten, he had made him a mere emanation of the Father, he had denied his emanation in the man Jesus; he had reduced all history in the Old Testament to allegory, he had adopted Plato's fable of the transmigration of souls, he had slighted the resurrection of the body. Before Nicaea he was a Valentinian, after Nicaea an Arian, but the most persistent charge was of denying the resurrection, and indeed it is to the post-Nicene Epiphanius that we owe the preservation of a pre-Nicene paraphrase by Methodius of Origen's subtle teaching on this question. Had Origen wholly rejected the survival of the body, he would belie his own principles by contradicting the scriptures; on the other hand – as he, his apologist Pamphilus and a number of modern critics have observed – there was no clear apostolic doctrine on the origin of the soul. The tenet that all souls were created at once in the beginning (which is inferred from, rather than expressly stated in, his own writings) is advanced as a presupposition of orthodoxy by Nemesius of Emesa, whose treatise *On the Nature of Man* was composed, or rather compiled, in the late

fourth century to refute the Christology of Apollinarius. Although this work is a treasury of excerpts from philosophers who would otherwise be forgotten, his reasoning in this case is distinctively Christian rather than Platonic: God created only once according to the scriptures, and it is therefore impossible that every act of insemination should be accompanied by the creation of a new soul (*On the Nature of Man* 3.129).

Plato had deduced the immortality of the soul from its essence as the originating cause of motion, and had ensured the constant exercise of its functions by having it pass from body to body in accordance with its deserts. Soul, as one of his followers says, has a natural affinity for body (Alcinous, *Didascalicus* 25.6). Origen, although he found some warrant for this doctrine in scriptural teaching, declared that no man of the church could entertain it; Nemesius is clearly of the same mind, and he concurs again with Origen (as with almost all of his Christian predecessors) in ascribing the perpetuity of both soul and body to providence rather than nature; for all that, he is so far from professing Origenism that he accuses the great Alexandrian of holding views on the destiny of the soul which are irreconcilable with the scriptures (2.144). He asserts at the beginning of his work that Apollinarius was misled by a false anthropology, which treats body, soul and spirit as three distinct constituents of the human person; it is on this anthropology that Origen builds his hermeneutic theory and his analysis of the Saviour's human passions. Again, whereas Origen likened the assumption of Christ's humanity by the Logos to the absorption of iron by fire, ignoring the fact that the Stoics from whom he borrowed this image were arguing for the interpenetration of two bodies, Nemesius makes more apposite use of the concept of unconfused commingling, devised by the Platonist Ammonius Saccas to account for the coexistence of corporeal and incorporeal entities (2.108; see Rist 1988). Nemesius does not even remark that Ammonius was supposed, by some at least, to have taught Origen, who then became the teacher of Plotinus; for our purpose it suffices to say that the less beholden he is to Origen's teaching, the better he illustrates the diversity of opinion which prevailed among catholic churchmen of his era regarding the origin of the soul.

Corroborative evidence of this can be drawn from the celebrated letter of Augustine to Jerome, in which he implies that Christians were not forbidden to speculate on the preexistence of souls (Letter 143; see O'Connell 1982). No doubt it would be rash to cite Chalcidius as an example of the latitude permitted to the orthodox, for although this Latin commentator on Plato's *Timaeus* cites freely from the Old Testament and dedicates his work to a certain Hosius who may have been the Bishop of Cordova, it has never been universally agreed that he was a Christian (see further Reydam-Schils 2010: 498). In fact the most learned authorities have denied this (Reydam-Schils 2002), and it has also been suggested that the Origen whom he cites from time to time was the pagan philosopher of that name. Those who maintain that there was only one Origen will of course demur, but everyone will agree that the unambiguous espousal of transmigration in Chalcidius is the fruit of a literal reading of the *Timaeus* in a spirit of discipleship, even if he joins Porphyry in denying that souls can pass from a human body to that of a beast (*Commentary on the Timaeus* 197–198; cf. Edwards 2015a: 57). Chalcidius, whatever his relation to Christianity, had only pagans to guide him in the interpretation of Plato, and his chosen authority seems to have been Numenius, a recognised precursor of Plotinus, who was quoted with approval as an exegete by Origen and as a theologian by Eusebius (Edwards 2018). Numenius was an admirer of the Septuagint, the author of a cosmogony which is more Gnostic than Platonic, and (in contrast to Plotinus) a proponent of special providence; he is credited with a teaching on the survival of the body which is nearer than that of any other Platonist to the Pauline doctrine of the resurrection. His milieu thus appears to have been one in which there was no sharp differentiation of pagan and Christian thought; Chalcidius, writing almost

two centuries later, holds an equally amphibious philosophy in the teeth of an apologetic tradition which insisted that the wisdom of this world is nothing compared to the wisdom of God.

Origen is a distinguished exponent of this tradition, chiefly but not only in the eight books which he wrote in answer to Celsus. The two authors to whom the rest of this chapter is devoted were both, as he was, accredited teachers in their own day, although neither exercised authority in the church, and both were later adjudged to be heretics. As we shall see, this is heresy that takes the form, not to teaching independently of the scriptures, but of straying into unauthorised speculations in their efforts to purge the text of its obscurities and apparent contradictions.

Biographical information

We should be wary of spurious precision in dating the birth and death of Didymus, since all that is known for certain is that he was in his eighties in the last decade of the fourth century. Even before his works were condemned at the Council of Constantinople in 553, he was stigmatised by Jerome as an ardent defender of Origen (Letter 73). No doubt it would have been almost an obligation for him to defend his predecessor if it is true, as some ancient reports suggest, that he and Origen both presided over the Catechetical School in their native Alexandria (Bayliss 2015: 13–14). The very existence of this school in either man's day, however, is open to doubt. Little credence need be given to the story of his meeting with St. Antony, but his association in legend with this pillar of orthodoxy is an index of his high repute in his own time both as theologian and as exegete (see further Layton 2004: 20–21). Jerome did not question his orthodoxy when translating his treatise *On the Holy Spirit*, and the three books *On the Trinity* which are extant under his name in Greek are neglected today because they are dull and unlikely to be authentic. Although other works are ascribed to him in Migne's *Patrologia Latina*, I shall follow the practice of specialists in building this discussion chiefly on the remains of his commentaries on Genesis, Job, the Psalms and Zechariah, discovered at Tura in 1941 (Puech 1951).

Born around 345 in Pontus, Evagrius was in early life an intimate of the Cappadocian Fathers, and is said to have been ordained as a deacon by Basil of Caesarea (Palladius, *Historia Lausiaca* 38.2). In 379 he joined Gregory of Nazianzus in Constantinople, but in 382 (a year after Gregory's resignation of the episcopal office) he departed for Jerusalem, with the purpose of taking up the monastic life (Palladius, *HL* 38.3). Despite his friendship with Bishop John of Jerusalem, he elected to pursue his vocation in Lower Egypt, first in Nitria and then in Kellis (Socrates, *Church History* 4.23; Konstantinovsky 2009: 16). His death in 400 coincided with the eruption of a controversy regarding the orthodoxy of Origen, in which both John of Jerusalem and the monks of Nitria took the side of the Origen against Jerome, Epiphanius and Theophilus (see further Katos 2012). Only in 415 was the charge of Origenism laid against Evagrius himself, but in 553 he was condemned as a heretic at the Second Council of Constantinople (Guillaumont 1961). Scholars have observed that his ascetic works (the *Practicus*, *Antirrheticus* and *On Evil Thoughts*) offer little evidence to support this judgment; more warrant for it can be found, however, in his dogmatic compositions, the *Letter to Melania* and the *Kephalaia Gnostika* – particularly in the Syriac version of the latter, which Guillaumont (1962) has shown to be more faithful to the author's text than the Greek which we now possess.

Philosophical theology

The teachings of both Didymus and Evagrius on the nature of God, though seldom discussed, are distinctive enough to merit some attention from historians of early Christian thought.

Didymus may have been the first to say clearly that in calling Christ the wisdom of the Father we do not reduce him to the status of an attribute, since where there is no material substrate no distinction between the substance and its attributes can be maintained. In deducing that God is therefore identical with his own Wisdom, and indeed with all his other properties which are not relational, Didymus anticipates Augustine, who thanks to Jerome would have been able to study his work *On the Holy Spirit*. Among Greeks it was the Platonists who posited, as the prerequisite of all contingent being, a realm of incorporeal archetypes, each identical with its own essence yet more truly existent than any being on which it conferred that essence. Plotinus and his followers had been at some pains to show, against the strictures of Aristotle, that since the form of justice is that which justice is, it is not simply one more entity which happens to share the predicate of justice, and consequently the theory of forms does not oblige us to postulate a higher order of essences in which the forms themselves participate.

Among professing Christians, Eunomius had not only affirmed the identity of God with his attributes, but had drawn the inference that the Father and the Son could not share the same essence, since the Father is identical with the attribute of being ungenerated and the Son with that of being generated. The Cappadocian Fathers had replied by distinguishing the essential attributes which all three persons share from the relational attributes which entail that the Father is eternally Father and the Son eternally Son. It follows that both are equally and eternally divine, but we are not to suppose with Eunomius that human language can capture the essential attributes of divinity. The triune God is known rather through his *energeiai* or operations, and even the appellation *theos* (as Gregory of Nyssa contends in his famous letter to Ablabius) denotes not the essence but the providential cooperation of the three persons in the creation, sustenance and perfection of the mundane order. Evagrius too maintains that God is superior to all thought and speech, and he embellishes Nyssen's argument that the knowledge of God can go on increasing forever with the corollary that where our knowledge is infinite (in this Aristotelian sense), our ignorance is equally infinite (*Kephalaia Gnostica* 3.63–64; Hausherr 1936). The question how we can know God at all, however, he answers not by appeal to the energies manifested in creation but by according to the human mind a capacity to discover the *logoi*, or formative principles, of created beings, which are eternally present to the mind of the Creator (*Praktikos* 92; *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.27; Konstantinovskiy 2009: 48–52). To redefine the forms as *logoi* in the mind of God was a Platonic concession to Aristotle; the notion that we can reproduce this divine mentation would not have seemed hubristic to Themistius, a contemporary of Evagrius, whose paraphrase of Aristotle's teaching on active intellect comes close to endowing this faculty with the power of universal illumination that Plato attributes to the Good.

Nevertheless, when Richard Sorabji writes that Evagrius was not a Platonist (2000: 367), he does not mean to say that he was an Aristotelian. He means to say what all classicists know, that every philosophical school was jealous of its autonomy and claimed a superiority for its own axioms whatever it owed to others by way of unacknowledged borrowing or admitted coalescence. Evagrius was an instructor of monks, whose addiction to prayer and fasting was in pagan eyes a morbid extension of practices that were merely ancillary to contemplation. Didymus followed Origen in setting up the Bible as a sufficient and infallible canon of truth, and while he frequently resorts to allegorical reading in order to bring from the depths what does not appear on the surface, it seems that he contested the methods of Porphyry as readily as the latter contested those of Origen (Sellew 1989). Both he and Evagrius show their originality above all in their teachings on the plight of the human soul and its deliverance. Both are as willing as their master Origen to seek light from the philosophers where the Bible does not speak clearly. For all that neither, as we shall see, was minded to superimpose a Platonic narrative of perpetual transmigration on the Christian understanding of the soul as the image of God, created to tend a body

that had become its prison only because of sin, the means for escaping which had already been provided when the Creator assumed a body of his own.

The pilgrimage of souls

Most authors who have been styled Origenists have professed some belief in the fall of souls. Since the opinions of Didymus and Evagrius on this subject are neither so well attested nor so widely discussed by scholars as those of Origen himself, it will be useful to begin by noting that students of his work have found it possible in recent years to adopt at least half a dozen positions, differing not only in their appraisal of the evidence but in their judgments as to what counts as evidence and what it is evidence for:

- 1 Many scholars still credit Origen with some version of the Platonic understanding of embodiment as a fall from a supercelestial state. In a catena of Greek texts facing the Latin of *First Principles* in Koetschau's edition, we learn that all rational beings existed initially as pure minds (*noes katharoi*), which when they have become sated by the vision of God descend to a level commensurate with the gravity of their sin. Notwithstanding Marguerite Harl's demonstration that this notion of saturation by higher pleasures is not attested before Plotinus (Harl 1963), and Peter Martens' denial that any scholar could take *First Principles* 1.3.8–1.4.1 as a description of satiety in the soul before embodiment (Martens 2015: n. 73), this passage continues to be quoted as evidence – and frequently as the chief evidence – for Origen's doctrine of a fall from heaven (Lauro 2004: 101; Heine 2010: 240n; Humphries 2017: 15). We may add that if he held it, he was not a typical Platonist, since Platonists never imagined that an intellect could subsist in the presence of God for thousands of years before its first (and only) entrance into a body, or that the body of a daemon would mark the nadir of its descent.
- 2 It has been suggested, chiefly by scholars writing in French (Harl 1963; Laporte 1995) that Origen's statements on the fall of souls should not always be taken in the most literal register. In Origen's time, as in ours, the same was said of the myths of Plato, whose latter-day imitators included Plutarch, the Gnostics and Numenius. This theory implies that Origen is to be read at times as he himself read the scriptures; and of course it invites the same objection – equally valid against those who equate the preexistent soul in Plato with the noumenal self of Kant – that we have no criteria for proving it false or true.
- 3 Panayiotis Tzamalikos (2006: 45) contends that Origen does accord an eternal preexistence to the soul, not as a concrete being but as a potentiality in the mind of God. In other words, he argues that Origen grants to the soul the same status that he granted to the Platonic forms, which for him include, as he intimates in *First Principles* 1.4.5, the forms of individuals as well as all possible genera and species. While those who uphold this thesis have yet to support it by a close reading of Origen's works, Tzamalikos has at least exploded one common error by pointing out that when Origen speaks of created entities which are coeternal with God, he invariably adopts the neuter *logika*, not the masculine *logikoi*, which would have been the more natural gender had he meant to affirm the preexistence of discrete intellects.
- 4 Without formally contesting his adherence to the Platonic account of the fall of souls, some eminent scholars have noted that his *Commentary on Romans* and other texts seem to offer a countervailing narrative, in which the primordial sin is laid at the door of two embodied beings inhabiting a corporeal paradise (see e.g. Bammel 1989). It would seem, therefore (unless we surmise that Origen's thought evolved or was incoherent) that he saw

no inconsistency between his own doctrine of the fall of souls and a somatic or historical interpretation of Genesis 2–3.

- 5 In attempting to harmonise these passages, I have attributed to Origen a doctrine, or cluster of doctrines, which are eccentric enough to account for his condemnation without being so manifestly unorthodox as to put its defenders out of court (Edwards 2008, 2019). I argue that embodiment is for Origen the inevitable condition of existence as a being apart from God, although a change in the mode of embodiment may supervene on a change in the moral status of the creature. His demons are undoubtedly fallen angels, condemned to a grosser body (*Commentary on John* 32.18.233; *Against Celsus* 6.43); for this reason alone we should hesitate to believe that the angelic condition itself is also the consequence of a fall. There is certainly some evidence of a direct descent of souls from the hand of God into human bodies, and some passages imply a connection between our lot in this world and our previous merits (*Commentary on John* 20.162); these passages do not, however, speak of a long discarnate existence terminated by satiety. The bodies of Adam and Eve, our common ancestors, were of a more spiritual mould than ours, and because of their transgression our souls are doomed to inhabit bodies which are denser and already predisposed to sin (*Homilies on Leviticus* 8.3 etc.). Under the regenerative influence of Christ and the Holy Spirit, however, our bodies will acquire a texture at least as rarefied as that of the angels, and the saint for whom God is all in all at the end of his pilgrimage will not find that corporeality offers any impediment to the union of spirit, soul and matter (*First Principles* 2.11.7).
- 6 Accepting some of my caveats, Ilaria Ramelli concludes that “to metempsychosis [i.e. the passage of souls from one body to another] Origen opposed his own theory: ensômatosis, entailing that a soul does not change body, but always keeps one body, which changes according to its merits, changing for instance from spiritual to mortal” (2018: 249). The transition from a spiritual to a mortal state is only in some instances the punishment for a primordial transgression. The relation between the descent of the soul with its body and the act of insemination by the father remains obscure – which is not to say that the theory is less coherent than any other, or that it would have seemed untenable to Origen.
- 7 Peter Martens opines that Origen posits an initial preexistence of souls without bodies, and that the fall of souls from this state is symbolically represented in Genesis 2–3 by the transgression of Adam (2012). He concedes that Origen might have entertained both a literal and an allegorical reading of texts which speak of paradise as a place, but it is difficult to make sense of this concession, since if Origen himself did not believe paradise to be a physical locality he would not have expected to find any warrant for such a belief in the scriptures. In his own exegesis of Origen, he doubts the authenticity of Latin texts that imply the corporeality of paradise or the continuing necessity of a body for the individuation of souls. He appears to regard any talk of a Christian dialogue with Plato as a surreptitious attempt to show that his influence was merely superficial (2015: n. 72). Those who attempt to reconcile conflicting texts by positing degrees of corporeality are in his eyes allowing sparse and unreliable evidence to ‘overrule’ what is more plainly and more frequently stated elsewhere by Origen (Martens 2019: 200).

And yet it would be in the spirit of Platonism, as Didymus knew it, to maintain that soul has a natural affinity for body and to surmise that it retains a vestigial body between incarnations. The chariot which the soul drives in the supercelestial realm at *Phaedrus* 246 affords some warrant for later belief in an astral body (Bos 2003: 288–290), while another of Plato’s theses, that the soul retains the scars of its own wrongdoing in the afterlife, is interpreted by Porphyry to mean that it carries with it a coil of *phantasiai* or memories which act as a vestigial body and hence as

a vehicle of individuation (Schibli 1992). Didymus, while he was bound as a Christian to reject the doctrine of metempsychosis, concurs with the Platonists (and as we have seen, perhaps with Origen) in conceiving the initial fall as a shift from a more tenuous form of embodiment to a grosser condition, which he believes to be figuratively described in God's creation of coats of skin for Adam and Eve at Genesis 3.21 (*GenT* 1.107.5–7). Where Gregory of Nyssa assumes the creation of the androgynous inner man to be simultaneous with that of the outer man who is endowed with sexual organs, Didymus (once again perhaps following Origen) sees the demarcation of sexes as one of the physical corollaries of the fall.

Since Didymus, like Origen, seldom reveals more of his system than is required by his purposes as a commentator, doubt remains as to whether he believed that even the tenuous state of embodiment is the consequence of a fall. Certainly our souls existed before they inhabited our present bodies (*HiobT* 1.57.14–1.58.1), as we deduce from Jeremiah 1.5, Romans 9.13 (on Esau and Jacob) and Luke 1.44 (on the leaping of John the Baptist in the womb); while, however, Didymus speaks with apparent approbation of the tenet that souls have entered bodies both on account of their own wrongdoing and for the sake of others, he does not allude to a previous state of embodiment, either for individual souls or for the human race collectively in Adam. While there are hints that matter is always necessary for individuation, we also read that before they were implanted in bodies souls were *homoousioi* (consubstantial) with the Creator (on Romans 7, in Staab 1924, with Bayliss 2015: 110). Bayliss observes none the less that the ontological gulf between God and his creatures is reaffirmed in many other passages, and that where an unencumbered preexistence is attributed to the soul, the motive is to exempt it from all suspicion of being naturally subject to corruption and thus to ensure the priority of virtue to vice (Bayliss 2015: 116–117, citing *PsT* 4.259.16–31). He certainly holds that the soul is immortal and that after death it will continue to undergo reformatory punishment until it has been made fit for the presence of God (Bayliss 2015: 101, citing *GenT* 2.158.20–21 and *EcclT* 6.349.9–14). While immortality implies simplicity, this is consistent with a Platonic division into rational, irascible and concupiscible elements, which after the manner of Porphyry are styled both parts and powers. Didymus also seems to accept the Stoic enumeration of psychic faculties. In short, his statements regarding the nature of soul are so eclectic that we cannot derive from him a consistent theory of the soul's relation to its luminous vehicle, either before or after the present life.

Evagrius too subscribes to the threefold division of soul, and his frequent exhortations to liberate *nous*, as the highest element, from the gross sources of temptation could be taken to signify that he envisages a permanent survival after death without a body (e.g. *Kephalaia Gnostica* 2.77). His most considered formulation is that body, soul and mind will be one – a position resembling that of Origen, except that he seems to regard the body itself as a fallen mind (*Letter to Melania* 6; cf Cartwright 2018: 186) At *Kephalaia Gnostica* 1.65, he writes that the saints will be naked intellects free from satiety: this may be a clue to his understanding of Origen, or it may be that later generations read Origen through Evagrius. He might seem to annihilate the distance between the Creator and his creatures when he says that all will be gods (*Kephalaia Gnostica*, 4.51); on the other hand, he and his readers knew that Christ had said as much at John 10.35. His language is often ambiguous, in conscious acknowledgement of the ambiguity of the scriptures, and he certainly does not presume, any more than Plotinus or Origen, that it is always the corporeal that corrupts the incorporeal. On the contrary, the sins of the rational soul are more pernicious than those of its lower parts – and also more native to us, inasmuch as they are less likely to be instigated by demons. Pride is the vice of the intellect, while freedom is both the most characteristic and the most perfidious of its virtues. Naturally mobile, it finds its stability only in the contemplation of God; the misuse of its freedom (the likelihood of which

is of course inherent in the very notion of freedom) disturbs the simplicity which was grounded in God's immutability, and the ensuing descent immerses the intellect in the denser medium of soul, which ties it to a body. We are left in doubt once again as to whether Evagrius is speaking of a literal descent from an incorporeal state; his idiom being at all times hortatory rather than scientific, the passages which appear to distinguish a sensible from an intelligible body remain obscure (Corrigan 2009: 114–119). His comments on transmigration are also tentative (Corrigan 2009: 127–128), and the heresy more often imputed to him by ancient critics is a doctrine of universal restoration (*apoktastasis*) which implies a cessation of the pains of hell.

Pre-Passion (Propatheia)

It is recognised that even when we examine Origen's dealings with philosophy we cannot stop short with Plato. From the foregoing discussion, it should be evident that the Stoics offered a closer approximation than any other school to the rigid discipline of the monastery. Because their high aspirations forced them to go beyond Plato in moral casuistry and the anatomy of internal states, they could also enrich the vocabulary of the exegete who was seeking an orthodox explanation of texts that seemed to attribute weakness to Christ or to deny that the sins of other men proceed from their own free will. The efforts of Stoics to discriminate between culpable passions and the innocent motions that precede them were taken up by both Evagrius and Didymus, as one strove to answer the quibbles of his students and the other directed monks in the interrogation of their own consciences.

Propatheia is not a common term in surviving Greek philosophical texts. Although it is used by one obscure witness to the state of hope, it seems that it more usually denotes the premonitory stages of an illness. Nevertheless it is generally (and plausibly) assumed that *propatheia* is the Greek antecedent of the Latin *prepassio*, employed by Jerome to denote the stirring of illicit desire before it receives the assent of the will and thus becomes the sin condemned by Jesus at Matthew 5.28 (*Patrologia Latina* 26, 39; cf. 543). Jerome was no doubt acquainted with a passage in Aulus Gellius, also canvassed by Augustine, which appeals to Epictetus in defence of a Stoic who exhibited physical symptoms of terror during a storm at sea (*Attic Nights* 19.1.15–21; cf. Augustine, *City of God* 9.4). According to this apology it is one thing to lose one's colour and another to lend belief to the phenomenon, and when the Stoic withholds belief his equanimity remains unshaken. Though Gellius speaks only of a physiological motion, Augustine infers that there can be such a thing as a sinless passion. Perhaps, as Sorabji opines, the thoroughbred Stoic would have distinguished the foretaste of passion from passion itself; but even this tenuous difference shrinks to nothing when the more eclectic Seneca permits the wise man to suffer the prolusions of anger (*principia proludentia*) so long as he does not give way to rage (Sorabji 2000: 355; Seneca, *On Anger* 2.31. with 2.2.2, 2.4.2 etc.). As Augustine himself points out, the question for the philosopher is not so much whether to style this prolusion an incipient passion or merely (as Jerome might say) the inception of passion, but whether one is guilty of assent.

The use of *propatheia* to denote the perturbation of soul which precedes a culpable passion is first attested in a Christian text, the *Excerpts on the Psalms* attributed to Origen. In one passage, where the verse to be explicated bids us 'be angry and sin not', we read that "that which is called *propatheia*" drags us on to anger in its more definite form in the wake of certain perturbations. Elsewhere in the same excerpts it is said to be involuntary (*aprohaireton*); another commentator, Diodore of Tarsus, warns that even those proficient in virtue may be subject to assaults. Didymus, an admirer of Origen but no friend to Diodore, nonetheless agrees with both in denying that *propatheia* is culpable either in origin or in effect – as indeed he must when he employs it to designate that which enables Jesus to share our frailty while remaining exempt from sin. Thus

Psalm 34.17 – “restore my soul from their wickedness, my only-begotten” – is patently Christological; yet it cannot be said of Christ that he was redeemed from a condition of grief or fear (*PsT* 43.16–20). What is said of him is that he was tempted as we are but without sin; hence we must suppose that he felt the preliminaries to grief or fear but did not consent to them and so remained without blemish. These emotions are suggested to Didymus by the verse in Mark where Jesus begins to suffer dismay and astonishment; here the verb began indicates that his mind withheld consent (*PsT* 42.8–28). At John 12.27, we cannot deny an actual perturbation of soul, since the verb *tetarachthê* is in the perfect tense; in contrast to dismay, however, spontaneous revulsion from the prospect of death is not in itself a sin (*PsT* 221.34–222.14). Modelling his vocabulary on Origen’s discussion of Satan’s entry into Judas (*Philokalia* 23), he agrees with his predecessor that the will cannot be overpowered from without unless we choose to give place to the Tempter – that is, to nurse the *propatheia* until it becomes a passion, which will not be so easily quenched by an act of will (*ZachT* 43.6–17; *EclT* 294.8–20).

Layton (from whom these passages are taken) notes that Didymus has departed from Stoic usage in representing *propatheia* as an invariable preliminary to passion, which in those instances where it is ‘stillborn’ (i.e. where passion fails to ensue) does not give rise to any visible symptom or inward commotion (Layton 2004: 131–132). By contrast, our pagan witnesses describe phenomena which are anomalous and arrested only with conscious and sometimes perceptible difficulty. On this view, Didymus has at least avoided the ‘error,’ imputed by Sorabji to Augustine, of mistaking an inchoate passion for an actual one. But of course, as Layton also remarks (2004: 133–134), there need be no question of error when the purpose is not to explicate the philosophy of others but to create a technical idiom for the resolution of questions which are peculiar to the church. Didymus was not teaching his students how to maintain the fortitude of a Greek sage, but allaying their fears of being obliged by scripture to doubt the freedom of Judas or the impassibility of Christ.

Evagrius, whose goal is to foster a righteousness exceeding that of the Stoics, concurs with Didymus in treating the repression of ‘first movements’ as a daily exercise. The source of these commotions is the natural liability of the soul, and eight of them, if unchecked, will ripen into the deadly sins of pride, vainglory, grief, lust, gluttony, anger, avarice and sloth (*Praktikos* 6). As Sorabji observes (2000: 367), the avoidance of these requires the Stoic virtue of *eulabeia*, which is exercised, in the cell as in the school, by the ruling faculty (*hêgemonikon*) insofar as we possess the *autexousion*, or power to do as we will. The Stoic, however, employed his liberty in the endeavour to supersede the unstable emotions of fear, hilarity and desire by their stable counterparts prudence, joy and constancy. The fourth of his cardinal vices, grief, is also the only one that recurs in the Evagrius catalogue of eight: it is also the one to which the Stoics admitted no virtuous counterpart, whereas Evagrius holds, like all monks, that it is salutary to shed tears for one’s sin. Other terms on his list would have puzzled a Greek, at least when he learned that the antidote to gluttony is fasting and that every form of sexual gratification is proscribed by the rule of chastity, not only the contraction of marital ties. The pride that seeks more than its due was also rebuked in the schools, but none of them had coined a word for humility because none of them saw any merit in seeking less than one’s deserts.

Prokoptein, to progress, is another Stoic term in Evagrius, though its enemy, *akêdia* or sloth, was largely unknown to the philosophers, and even in Eastern monasteries was frequently a result of demonic activity rather than natural imperfection. Evagrius propounds a threefold itinerary of the virtues, commencing with the practical, then proceeding to the physical and culminating in the theological (*Praktikos* 1). This scheme corresponds to Origen’s correlation of the three books of Solomon (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song) with three divisions of philosophy – ethics, physics and epoptics or theotics (*Commentary on the Song*, p. 75 Baehrens).

This triad is not attested elsewhere, and Origen himself admits that logic is the term most often conjoined with physics and ethics in Greek taxonomies; by altering theoretics to theology, Evagrius makes it all the more clear that the new scheme was devised for a Christian purpose (see further Dysinger 2005: 64–66). When he affirms that the goal of the practical regimen is *apatheia*, a state devoid of passion (*Praktikos* 2, 33, 56 etc.), he is once again indebted to the Stoic lexicon. Whereas, however, the Stoic wished only to free himself from troubles that threatened his imperturbability, the monk extinguished his appetites so that he could be at all times a vessel of *agapê*, of love that seeks the good of others with no thought of its own. When he exhorts the monks who pursue *apatheia* to empty the mind of all images in their devotions, he is assuming a more assiduous habit of prayer than is inculcated in Plotinus or Iamblichus (*On Prayer* 57 and 69–70; cf. Guillaumont 1983). Porphyry, in collating love with faith, hope and truth in a tetrad of virtues, had borrowed from another group of Christian ascetics, the Valentinians; yet all Platonic precedent obliged him to substitute *erôs* for *agapê* (Edwards 2015a: 44n.8). Origen and Gregory of Nyssa regarded *erôs* as an intensification of *agapê* which kindles the soul as it grows nearer to God; in the Evagrian monastery, however, the practical virtues are exercised only on behalf of others.

Concluding observations

Evagrius and Didymus are both heretics according to the historian's definition of that term, for both were anathematised by an oecumenical council. The scholar who retorts 'What is that to me? I am no theologian' must be reminded that we are always under a duty to test the probity of our witnesses. The authors of their condemnation in 553 were properly speaking not witnesses at all but prosecutors intent on their condemnation; in Origen's case they transformed the eleven charges which were grounded, albeit tendentiously, in his writings, into fifteen tenets which were all the more easily proscribed because no one is known to have entertained them (Edwards 2015b: 102–104). The heterodoxy of Didymus regarding the fall and restoration of souls is as hard to establish as that of Origen; we can be confident that, like Origen, he intended to maintain only what was required to elicit a credible anthropology from the scriptures, and that this did not entail for him a simple repudiation of embodiment. The precepts of Evagrius too are grounded in the conviction that the soul cannot fight while the body remains effete, and it would therefore seem unlikely that he envisaged an afterlife for the soul without bodily resurrection. This, however, is one of many conjectures to which we are driven by our ignorance, and it is obvious from what survives of his work that his use of philosophy was not always chap-eroned by exegesis. This is not to say that he was more a philosopher than an exegete, but that his thought was not circumscribed by written texts, whatever their provenance: he was writing from introspection and experience for monks whose aim was not to be shrewd philosophers or even better interpreters of scripture, but to apply the hermeneutic of prayer and fasting to the tangled syntax of the inner life.

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Synesius of Cyrene

Philosophy and poetry “sharing the same temple”¹

Irini-Fotini Viltanioti

Synesius of Cyrene (c. 370–413), the “Philosopher-Bishop” of the Libyan Pentapolis, is one of the most interesting and enigmatic figures of Early Christianity.² Much ink has been split over matters concerning his religious identity and philosophical beliefs. Far from being unanimous, scholars depict him in divergent ways, as a pagan Neoplatonist assuming the “black mantle” of Christian clergy for political reasons or as a Christian by birth with solid classical education.³ In either case, more than any other figure in the history of the Church, Synesius, a Neoplatonic philosopher but also a talented rhetorician and an inspired poet of majestic metaphysical hymns, combined Hellenism and Christianity, promulgating a powerful synthesis whose legacy still bears fruits.⁴

From Cyrene to Alexandria and Constantinople

Synesius, son of Hesychios,⁵ was born to an aristocratic family tracing its origins back to the Greek founders of Cyrene in (631 BCE).⁶ He had a brother, Euoptius, to whom, judging from their correspondence, he must have been quite close and who may have succeeded him in the episcopate of Ptolemais,⁷ as well as two sisters, Stratonike, wife of Theodosius,⁸ and an unnamed one, wife of Amelius.⁹ At the end of the fourth century CE, the once flourishing city¹⁰ had become “a vast ruin”,¹¹ while traditional Graeco-Roman polytheism was declining under the pressure of the new Christian religion. In this changing world, Synesius appears proud of his illustrious Spartan ancestry and praises the bygone glory of his fatherland. Irrespectively of whether he was a late convert to Christianity (notoriously elected as bishop prior to being baptised¹²), as tradition has it,¹³ or a Christian by birth, as has recently been proposed and as is more widely accepted nowadays,¹⁴ throughout his life, Synesius remained faithful to the ideals of the Roman elites’ Hellenic *paideia*.

Synesius studied philosophy under the famous philosopher and mathematician Hypatia (c. 393–396). Hypatia (c. 360–415), daughter of Theon the Mathematician, had by that time succeeded her father as head of the Alexandrian School. None of her writings survives, but, in light of the available evidence, it has convincingly been argued that, starting from a Pythagorising Ptolemist background, she renewed philosophy in Alexandria by introducing Plotinian-Porphyrion Neoplatonism to the mathematically centred curriculum of the School.¹⁵ Both

pagans and Christians attended her lectures, an openness which is compatible with Porphyrian universalism¹⁶ and which sets the context of Synesius' own synthesis. An illustrious representative of Alexandria's long-standing scientific tradition and a true "heir of Plato and Plotinus",¹⁷ Hypatia must have been a major influence on Synesius. This is also attested by the enthusiastic way he addresses her, as "mother" and "sister" and "teacher" and "benefactor",¹⁸ describing her as "the genuine leader of the mysteries of philosophy".¹⁹

Synesius' writings also betray the influence of Plotinus and Porphyry; Iamblichus is clearly less important. Synesius' Neoplatonism is reverent of the Pythagorean tradition, which flourished in Alexandria from the first century BCE to the second century CE. His philosophical theology is indebted to the Chaldaean oracles, the Hermetic corpus and the Orphic texts, while, in his writings, the imagery of Greek mythology is entangled with echoes from Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzen and even with Gnostic hints. It is impossible to know the extent to which this material was related to Hypatia's teaching, but the fact that no other teacher is mentioned for Synesius supports this hypothesis.

Synesius' writings also testify his scientific interests following Hypatia's lead. *Letter 15* (c. 402) contains the first extant description of a hydrometer (an instrument used to measure the density of liquids), while his treatise *To Paeonius (On the Gift)* was composed on the occasion of the offering of an astrolabe to the official (*comes*) *Paeonius*. In this work, which he sends to Hypatia for feedback (*Letter 154*), Synesius acknowledges her contribution to his own innovative conception of the astrolabe.²⁰ Within this framework, he argues for astronomy as a springboard or passage to "secret theology"²¹ but also for the close relationship between philosophy and politics.²² Both ideas are reminiscent of the thesis he defends in *Dion*. The former view is a Pythagorising Platonic²³ and Ptolemaic²⁴ adaptation of Plato's legacy (*Republic*, *Timaeus*), while the latter is also relevant to the historical context as well as to Synesius' own aspirations at a time when philosophers were invited to play a much more active role in public affairs.²⁵ The passage to "secret theology" is comparable to the closing lines of *Letter 139* (to Herculian), where we find a paraphrase²⁶ of Plotinus' last words²⁷ meant as an exhortation to philosophy. This quotation shows Synesius is familiar with Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, while, in light of Synesius' *Hymn II*, 88, where *gonos ho prôtogonos* designates the Son, it is clear that the letter's expression *to prôtogonon theion* refers to Intellect. The use of the Orphic divine epithet *prôtogonos*²⁸ reveals something about the character of the "secret theology", meaning perhaps Plotinian–Porphyrian metaphysics read into authoritative texts such as the Orphic poems or the Chaldaean oracles and, possibly, harmonised with Christian doctrine. Concerning philosophy and politics, Synesius' may have seen a stronger connection between the two than the one posited by his teacher. In *Letter 81*, he reminds Hypatia she had nicknamed him "a good for others" (*allotriion agathon*), thus alluding to his tendency to engage his mighty acquaintances to the benefit of those in need. He seems proud of this designation, passing over the possible tacit implication of his being a benefit to others and not to himself as well, as would perhaps have been the case had Synesius been more of a philosopher and less of a politician.²⁹

Indeed, Synesius started his political career immediately after his studies in Alexandria. He served as a member of the council of Cyrene and, subsequently, he successfully represented his homeland in the court of the Emperor Arcadius (395–408).³⁰ Two of his prose works, *On Kingship* and *On Providence* (or *The Egyptian Tale*), are connected with his experience in Constantinople, echoing imperial rivalries and the danger represented by Gainas' complot against the throne. While being firmly anchored in the historical context, *On Kingship* should at the same time be situated within the framework of late antique kingship literature³¹ tracing its origins back to classical authors through the Neopythagorean treatises *On Kingship*.³²

On Providence, on the other hand, is more philosophically orientated. Synesius uses political allegory as an opportunity for ethical and metaphysical analysis. On the political level, the rivalry between the ministers of Arcadius, Aurelian and his brother Eutychianus is depicted as the battle between Osiris and Seth–Typhon in the Egyptian Thebes, the Goths being represented as Scythians and Synesius himself as a philosopher supporting the imperial Osiris. The *Egyptian Tale* evokes Plutarch’s *Isis and Osiris*,³³ although the scope of the two works is very different. On the philosophical level, divine providence is manifested through the activity of the lower gods, who endorse this task by necessity. Within this cosmic framework, humans are invited to choose the right orientation, avoiding the attacks of humble material demons, an idea which evokes Porphyrian views and which we also find in the *Hymns*. The emphasis on the choice of orientation is reminiscent of the central claim of Plotinus’ *Enneads* 4. 8 *On the Descent of the Soul into Bodies*, where the hypostatic Soul’s necessary descent by divine ordinance sets the framework of the individual soul’s free choice to descent, through falling prey to the traps of this world, or to ascent, through turning its gaze upwards towards Intellect. Like Origen,³⁴ Synesius, who generally avoids dualism in favour of Plotinian monism, thinks that some souls are assigned a better lot than others, the former being more similar to Osiris and the latter to Seth. The assertion that base passions are stirred by demons also recalls Evagrius, the Christian ascetic, and so does the proposed antidote, the reinforcing of the rational soul. Yet, whatever similarities may one discern between *On Providence* and Christian literature, *On Providence* remains a pagan work lacking the slightest reference to any belief peculiar to Christianity.³⁵

Does this reveal anything about the author’s religious identity? Interestingly, in one of his *Hymns*, Synesius alludes to his religious activity during his time in Byzantium. In this context, he mentions the “effective gods” (*theoi drastères*), who are subordinated to God in the same way in which sacred ministers (*hieroi propoloi*) obey a King (*anax*).³⁶ This sounds more like pagan henotheism rather than Christianity. His pilgrimage to Athens mentioned in *Letter 136* could also have had a religious motivation too, although he does not seem to appreciate the ritualistic approach of the Athenian School, which he judges as inferior to Hypatia’s wisdom.³⁷

The middle period: philosophical prose

After three “dreadful” – as he complains³⁸ – years (397–400 or 399–402) in Constantinople,³⁹ where he was even threatened by necromantic magicians (*psuchopompoi goêtes*),⁴⁰ Synesius returned to Alexandria to spouse a wealthy Christian (c. 403/4),⁴¹ and then to Cyrene (c. 404), where he organised the city’s defence against invasion. Some of his most representative writings date from that period. It has been proposed that Synesius undertook his scholarly activity at times of political disengagement,⁴² but this cannot be confirmed. Rather, he tells us that, to him, “life was books and hunting”,⁴³ as if politics were but an unpleasant duty from which he would escape as often as possible. He combined his two main interests, books and hunting, by composing – in the manner of Xenophon – a book *On Hunting (Cynegetica)*, now lost. It seems that, like some early poems which have not been preserved either, *On Hunting* was judged as too light and was not well received by the most demanding among Synesius’ readers, philosophers “babbling about inconclusive syllogisms (*asullogistoi sullogismoi*)”.⁴⁴

In another early work, *Praise of Baldness* (c. 402), Synesius humouristically defends his own hairlessness by refuting Dio Chrysostom’s *In Praise of Magnificent Hair*. The sphere is a perfect divine form, and a bald head is more reminiscent of the sphere than a hairy one. So a bald head is superior to a hairy head. For its light and playful character, which gives us a glimpse of the young Synesius’ cheerful spirit, this treatise already testifies to its author’s classical erudition and philosophical training. Porphyry’s *On Statues*, of which a few fragments survive, may have been

among Synesius' sources: the references to the portraits of the Gods, especially to the symbolism of Silenus' bald head, and to the Eleusinian mysteries, as well as the role attributed to the seminal *logoi*⁴⁵ within this context, are all reminiscent of *On Statues*,⁴⁶ where Porphyry also alludes to the Platonic⁴⁷ association of the sphere and of the spherical head with the cosmos.⁴⁸ *Praise of Baldness* became so popular as to be refuted by another *Praise of Magnificent Hair* (fifth–seventh c.), whose anonymous author – perhaps a sophist – adopted, however, a much more serious approach to the topic.⁴⁹

On Dreams (c. 404)⁵⁰ is the most prominently pagan work of Synesius, who presents its thesis as his own innovative contribution to philosophy. We are told that, like Julian's *Hymn to the Mother of Gods*, *On Dreams* was composed “in a single night or rather, at the end of a night” without interruption,⁵¹ under some kind of divine inspiration.⁵² Synesius sent it to Hypatia so that, “after himself”, she may be “the first Hellene to read it”.⁵³ The topic must therefore have been relevant to Hypatia's area of competence and philosophical interests. It is noteworthy that Synesius identifies himself as a Hellene: if the term *Hellèn* does not simply mean “pagan”, its use could imply that it was possible for someone to be Christian and at the same time Hellene in a sense transcending ethnic identity to indicate the commitment to the values of philosophical Hellenism englobing Christianity as well as other tendencies or “ways”. The treatise deals with the origin of dreams, attributing them to the power of *phantasia* (situated between intellect and sense perception), and using this assumption to explain their prophetic character as well as their role in the ascent of the soul⁵⁴ understood in a Plotinian/Porphyrion manner. The connection between *phantasia* and prophecy goes back to Middle Platonic readings of Plato's *Timaeus* 70e–72d.⁵⁵ Plutarch of Chaeroneia, for instance, associates the imaginative (*phantastikon*) faculty of the soul with dreams.⁵⁶ Synesius' *pneuma phantastikon* is indebted to Plotinus' and Porphyry's discussion of *phantasia* (as regards, for instance, the distinction between higher and lower *phantasia*)⁵⁷ and, especially, to Porphyry's theory of *pneuma* as an intermediary substance which, acting like a vehicle (*ochèma*, *skapos*) of the soul, enables the soul's association with the body, and on which the images of *phantasia* are impressed. Being the bearer of base passions and desires, the *pneuma* is, according to Porphyry, the *anima spiritalis* to which the effectiveness of theurgy is limited and which is most probably dissolved together with the irrational soul after natural death.⁵⁸ In Synesius, however, the *pneuma* (*pneumatikè psuchè* as distinct from *prôtè psuchè*), which, dwelling in the brain, has an almost Stoicising material aspect,⁵⁹ is somehow immortalised by being dragged upwards towards Intellect.⁶⁰ This happens when, through virtue, this subtle body is refined and linked with the higher soul, which, by choosing to turn and gaze upwards (*metanoia*, “repentance”),⁶¹ becomes identified with Intellect. Otherwise, the *pneuma* is dumpy and heavy, sinking together with the soul in the darkness of matter.⁶² It is not necessary to suppose an affinity with Iamblichus' ethereal *ochèma*, which is not subject to destruction or dissolution, or an influence of Plutarch of Athens⁶³ in order to explain this discrepancy, which may be Synesius' own contribution to the theory of *pneuma* enabling the connection with Christian Resurrection.

His *Dion* dates from that time as well. It was probably composed in 404, while Synesius and his wife were awaiting their first child. In *Letter 154* (to Hypatia), he mentions the two works together, attributing *On Dreams* to divine inspiration and associating *Dion* with the need to defend himself against human calumny (*loidòria anthròpôn*).⁶⁴ In this work, Synesius celebrates his humanistic ideal of combination of the active and the contemplative life,⁶⁵ while arguing for philosophy as the copingstone of *paideia* in the wake of Plato's *Republic*.⁶⁶ As an orator converted to philosophy, Dio Chrysostom becomes the model of Synesius' ideal.⁶⁷ *Paideia*, with a focus on rhetoric, is a preamble to philosophy and is related to the “love of letters” (*philologia*) and human-orientated, whereas philosophy unites us with the divine: it is described as a “sacred and secret chant” (*melos hieron kai aporrhèton*) of Apollo leading the Muses.⁶⁸ In *Letter 105*, Synesius

uses the same terms, *hieron kai aporrhèton*, to describe “what is commonly referred to as Resurrection” (*tèn kathomiloumenèn anastasin*):⁶⁹ the Christian belief is revisited in terms of philosophical ascent, through the association of the Resurrection body with the *pneuma*.⁷⁰ The connection of philosophy with Apollo displays Pythagorean overtones,⁷¹ while also recalling Plato (*Apology*, *Republic*, *Laws*) and Plutarch’s interpretation of the Muses.⁷² Together with Dio, Plutarch of Chaeronia has, indeed, a special place in Synesius’ thought.⁷³ Synesius’ definition of the philosopher is a paraphrase of the musical definition of the just man in the *Republic*,⁷⁴ while we also find in *Dion* an echo of the notion of *systema* in Hellenistic pseudo-Pythagorean literature.⁷⁵ To those who censure his interest in Homer and in rhetorical figures,⁷⁶ Synesius answers that philology and philosophy are not rivals but rather complementary, the former corresponding to our nature as living beings and the latter to our higher self identified with Intellect, an approach he may have inherited from Porphyry,⁷⁷ and which is best expressed in his composition of metaphysical hymns. Furthermore, Synesius criticises those who put their trust in “songs and sacred symbols” (*ôidai kai hiera sumbola*),⁷⁸ opting for these barbarous means instead of the Hellenic ideal of science (*epistèmè*) and of discursive reasoning (*logos*) considered as the neighbouring area and the path (*diexodos*) leading to Intellect.⁷⁹ As in *On Dreams*, here as well, Synesius is committed to Plotinian/Porphyrion ascent through turning upwards in contemplation of Intellect. In the context of divine impassibility (*apatheia*) and virtue (*aretè*) as a condition for human moderation (*metriopatheia*),⁸⁰ his words sound like a Porphyrian criticism of Iamblichus’ theurgic approach (insisting on the impassibility of the divine and on ascent through virtue only).⁸¹ But Synesius is rather seen as referring to Christian monastic practices:⁸² Christianity should also adopt the ideal of Greek *paideia*. The philosopher is not yet a bishop, but Christianity already appeals to him.

Philosophy and priesthood

Synesius was elected bishop of the Pentapolis (a group of five cities including, among others, Cyrene and Ptolemais) with the support of Patriarch Theophilus (384–412) at some point between 407 and 411.⁸³ He was ordained in 411 or in 412 CE.⁸⁴ As we learn from *Letter 105* (to Euoipius), along with other reasons (being married, the lack of leisure and of political ability, moral inaptitude), the incompatibility of Synesius’ Neoplatonic views, including the eternity of the cosmos and the preexistence of the psyche,⁸⁵ with the doctrine of the Church explains his reluctance to accept the ecclesiastical office. He finally took up the bishopric on the condition that he would remain married and that, although, in public, he would cherish myths (*philomythôn*), in private, he would pursue philosophy (*philosophôn*).⁸⁶ The association of his preaching with the love of “myths” shows that Synesius probably considered the accounts of the Old and the New Testaments as just another mythological universe which, like the Graeco-Roman one, could be interpreted allegorically. This would be a point of conflict with Porphyry, who disapproved of Christian allegoresis.⁸⁷ The distinction between, on the one hand, Synesius’ personal beliefs as a Neoplatonic philosopher and, on the other, his public speech focusing on the Christian “myths”, could be taken to support the view according to which the acceptance of the episcopate represented a politically motivated concession to the rising power of the new religion, being rather irrelevant to the true religious identity of Synesius, who, in his heart, remained a Platonist devoted to the Porphyrian *religio mentis*.⁸⁸

However, judging from his two *Homilies*, Synesius’ public speech was not limited to simply repeating the “myths” of the Church. Rather, it alluded to the philosophical Christianity of the *Hymns*. Thus, within the framework of an allegorical interpretation of a Psalm, the first *Homily* evokes the Platonic notion of *logos*, urges for moderation (which, in *On Dreams*, purifies the *pneuma*), mentions the Plotinian ascent to Intellect (*eis noun*), and even the perfection of gnosis

(*teleiôsis gnôseôs*) revealed by the Old and the New Testaments. The second *Homily*, where Jay Bregman has seen the trace of Hermetism,⁸⁹ is especially reminiscent of the Chaldaean oracles, of Plotinus' metaphysics of light and, perhaps, of the role of light in Gregory of Nyssa's mysticism as well.⁹⁰

Despite the freedom to build bridges with Platonism, Synesius was aware of the practical difficulties involved in combining philosophy with the bishopric. Nevertheless, to the extent that such enterprise was compatible with the ideal he defends in *To Paeonius* and in *Dion*, he was convinced that, although a life devoted to philosophy is always superior, the fact that virtue resides in pure intention (*prohairesis*)⁹¹ allows even for priesthood to become not "a decline from the realms of philosophy but a step upwards to them".⁹² The role of *prohairesis*, an originally Aristotelian notion, as well as the allusion to ascent through the term *epanabasis*, are reminiscent of Plotinus' ethical stance but also of Gregory of Nyssa,⁹³ whose interweaving of Plotinian-Porphyrion Platonism and Christianity anticipates Synesius'.⁹⁴

The Hymns

Synesius' amalgamation of Christianity and Platonism, considered as the highest and most comprehensive manifestation of Hellenism, is best expressed in the *Hymns*. It seems that Synesius' poetic activity antedates his embassy to Constantinople, extending to the years of the episcopate.⁹⁵ In *On Providence*, he describes himself as a philosopher-poet "singing to the lyre in the Dorian manner, which he thought was "the only one" allowing for gravity of character (*ethos*) and expression (*lexis*)".⁹⁶ Following Porphyry,⁹⁷ Synesius takes philosophy and poetry "to be sharing the same temple" (*sunnaoi*) in the sense that they aspire to the divine in different though interconnected ways. To him, the *Hymns* are a bloodless sacrifice, *thûma anaimakton*, reminiscent of the offering of Plato's *Timaeus* to Athena⁹⁸ and bridging the Platonic philosophers' *noera thusia* for the soul's liberation from passions⁹⁹ with the Christian priests' *thusias anaimaktous*.¹⁰⁰

The *Hymns* promulgate a Neoplatonic interpretation of Christian orthodoxy through classical and archaic Greek as well as Chaldaean imagery. They enclose three levels of meaning, with Christianity being the intermediary stepping-stone to philosophical truth. In other words, Synesius' nine *Hymns* invest Plotinian-Porphyrion Neoplatonism in a Christian garment woven from an eclectic variety of threads. Much ink has been split over the material that Synesius blends together in these majestic metaphysical poems, which undoubtedly constitute his *chef d'oeuvre*: classical poetry, from Homer and archaic lyric to Mesomedes, Greek philosophy, from Heraclitus and Parmenides to Plotinus and Porphyry, Orphism, Chaldaeism, Hermetism, Gnostic echoes, the Gospels, the Cappadocian Fathers (especially Gregory of Nyssa and Gregory Nazianzen) – all these are woven together into Synesius' Platonic reading of Christianity.¹⁰¹ The *Hymns*' Doric language guarantees the solemnity appropriate to the topic, which, as we learn from a 13th-century manuscript in Mount Athos (*Athus Vatopedinus 685*), concerns "the Holy Trinity and various Christological feasts".¹⁰² A liturgical use should be excluded, but God the Son and His divine hypostasis within the Holy Triad are, indeed, central to the *Hymns*, while, *Hymn VI (VII)* celebrates the Epiphany and *Hymn VIII (IX)* the Ascension.

The aspiration for ascent to God is the Platonic core theme of the *Hymns*. The metaphysical framework of Plotinian *epistrophè* (reversion to the source) is set in *Hymn IX (I)*, the earliest and "most classical" among the hymns, in which Synesius borrows not only from Plotinus, Plato, and Empedocles but also from Sappho, Anacreon, and Pindar, to elaborate a protreptic to philosophical poetry.¹⁰³ By the "three-stemmed power" (*trikorumbon alkan*), which evokes the "flowers of light" (*anthea phôtos*) of *Hymn I (III)* 140 and the "flower of fire" of the *Chaldaean Oracles*,¹⁰⁴ Hypatia's young disciple refers to the Trinity in terms (68–70) drawn from the

geometrical representation of the hypostases as homocentric circles of light from light (*phôs ek phôtos*) in Plotinus' *Enneads* 4.3.17.12–32, a passage to which the formulation of the Nicene creed is also indebted. The following lines allude to the unity and multiplicity of Intellect (*Nous*), which, according to Plotinus, is both one and many, “like faces which are many on the outside but have one head inside”,¹⁰⁵ and which Synesius identifies with the incarnate Son, mentioning also the Plotinian/Porphyrion role of *rhopè* (93: *rheponti desmô*)¹⁰⁶ in the association of soul and body. The last part is dedicated to the reverse movement of ascent (103: *anagôgios alka*) to Intellect (115: *epibas noou keleuthôn*)¹⁰⁷ as preparation for union with the Father (133: *ammigeisa patri*), Plotinus' One.

Within this framework, unlike Porphyry, who had raised specific philosophical objections,¹⁰⁸ Synesius has no difficulty with accepting the Incarnation: through the Soul's necessary descent, Intellect does in some way “assume a mortal body” (VIII 15: *broteon ferôn demas*) by being “poured” as it were on Earth “through a mortal womb” (VI 19: *broteas apo nêduos*). Jesus of Solyma (VI 4), son of the Virgin of Solyma (XIII 11–12, 29–30), becomes the archetype of Man ascending towards his higher self to be identified with the Paternal Intellect. Standing in for the single head of Plotinus' many-faced Intellect, He is “god” (*theos*) and “deceased” (*nekus*) and “king” (*basileus*) (VI 25–32), as the gifts of the Magi (incense, myrrh, gold) also indicate: “deceased” as a soul turning its gaze downwards towards matter,¹⁰⁹ a “god” and a “king” (also *anax* in VI 7; 40) as God the Son identified with divine Intellect considered as the “second King” of the pseudo-Platonic *Second Letter* 312 e–313 a.¹¹⁰ God the Father too is described as a King (*anax* or *basileus*) in the *Hymns*,¹¹¹ echoing Plotinus' and Porphyry's identification of the *Second Letter's* “first King” with the One. Thus, like Numenius, Synesius identifies the First and the Second King of the *Letter* with God the Father and God the Son.¹¹² Yet, in Synesius' case, the Christian God the Son is the incarnate *Logos*. Of course, the idea of a God having a son living among men was not unknown to pagans:¹¹³ Heracles, son of Zeus, and Pythagoras, son of Apollo, were the most prominent examples. Thus, Synesius endows the Son with Heracleian features (XIII 4–6; 13–27),¹¹⁴ while also identifying Him with *Sophia*,¹¹⁵ who is reminiscent not only of Gnosticism but also of Athena, the goddess of wisdom, born from Zeus' head.¹¹⁶ Following *Luke* 24.50–53 and *John* 20.17 – and not the *Acts* 1.9–11, which would later become the canonical version retained by the Church – in *Hymn* VIII (IX), the Ascension (through the harmonious Spheres *more pythagorico*) is seen in close connection with the Resurrection, which, as noted earlier, Synesius understands in terms of ascent to Intellect.

In *Hymn* I (III), the Father, the source of wisdom (*sophia*) and of intelligible light (*noeron fengos*), bestows His seal (*sphragis*), which is the password (*synthèma*) giving access to the sacred path (*atrapos*) that leads to God (528–539). The *patrikon synthèma* is mentioned in the Chaldaean oracles as well,¹¹⁷ while Porphyry refers to purity (*hagneia*) involving abstinence from meat as a “symbol (*symbolon*) or divine seal (*theia sphragis*)”¹¹⁸ in both ritual and “intellectual theurgy”.¹¹⁹ A parallel occurs in Clement of Alexandria (c. 150–215), where the light-bearing (*phôtogôgos*) Lord (*Kyrios*) is presented as a hierophant (*hierophantei*) who seals (*sphragizetai*) the initiate.¹²⁰ In Christian contexts, *sphragis* also refers to the baptism, so Clement and Synesius may allude to the Christian baptism. Clement borrows from the imagery of Greek mystery cults, whereas in Synesius' *Hymn* III (V) 61, *patros sphègis* denotes the Holy Spirit, which bestows the divine gifts at the Baptism. Thus, the *sphragis* in *Hymn* I (III) may be related not only to Porphyry's noetic ascent but also to the Christian sacrament seen as a ceremony purifying the *pneuma* in the same way in which, according to Porphyry, theurgic rites purify the *anima spiritalis*. The relation with *On Dreams* is clear here. By itself, the baptism would be neither necessary nor sufficient for ascent; rather, it marks by ritual the crucial moment of the soul's noetic repentance (*metanoia* or *metameleia*), which, however, can also happen without ritual, and which leads to an

“enthronement in the power of light” (600–601: *thronison phôtos en alkā*), an image for Resurrection reminiscent of Christian (Gospels, *Revelation*, Nicene creed) and Platonic (myth of Er) imagery.¹²¹ Interestingly, the enthronement evokes the *thronōsis* of pagan mysteries¹²² but also the *synthronon* in the apse of Byzantine churches, where, from the fourth century onwards, bishops were enthroned and surrounded by the clergy to symbolise the Christ and the Apostles.¹²³ In this context, the direct connection between Intellect and body (I, 567–568) fits particularly well within a Christian perspective, which, through Resurrection, posits a stronger link between corporeality and the noetic realm than Plotinus did.

Most famously, in the *Hymns*, Synesius elaborates his own version of the Trinity doctrine, which combines ideas from the *Anonymous Commentary of Plato’s Parmenides* with Chaldaean imagery, and which is reminiscent of Marius Victorinus’ more elaborate Trinitarian speculations.¹²⁴ Scholars are not unanimous on the authorship of the *Commentary*: Pierre Hadot has argued it should be attributed to Porphyry, but, for all its likelihood, this view has been put into question. Alternatively, the anonymous author has been identified as a Middle Platonist or even as a Christian or a Sethian Gnostic.¹²⁵ The *Commentary* posits a triad consisting of Existence (*Hyparxis*) as an equivalent of the One,¹²⁶ Intellect (*Nous*), and the One’s/Existence’s external Power, which is situated between Existence and Intellect, acting as an intermediate. Each of the three terms of the triad is present at each of the three levels, so that an ennead (three successive triads) results. Synesius interprets the *Commentary*’s (first) intelligible triad *Hyparxis-Dunamis-Nous* as the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son respectively, so that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father, as in the Nicene Symbolon (*ek tou patros ekporeuomenon*). Augustine understands a Porphyrian doctrine related to the interpretation of the Chaldaean Oracles and also known by Lydus¹²⁷ in a similar way, by taking Porphyry’s three gods, the Father, the Intermediate entity (*horum medium*), and the Paternal Intellect, to be the pagan equivalent of the Christian Trinity.¹²⁸

Avoiding confusion with the *pneuma-ochēma*, Synesius does not use the Nicene Creed’s term for the Holy Spirit (*Hagion pneuma*), but opts for (*Hagia*) *Pnoia*.¹²⁹ However, in *Hymn* I (III), he evokes the Father as *pneumatoergon*, “creator of the Spirit” (169). To describe the procession, he does not use the Orthodox terminology of *ekporeusis*, but rather *prothrōiskō*¹³⁰ or (*pro*)*rheō*¹³¹ or, more often, the Plotinian/Chaldaean¹³² (*pro*)*chusis* and (*pro*)*cheein*.¹³³ Echoing Porphyry’s *medium*, Synesius describes the immaculate (III 64: *achrantos*) *Hagia Pnoia*, the Father’s *boulā*,¹³⁴ as the “intermediate principle” (II 97: *mesata archa*; III 54: *messa*) sharing the throne (III 53: *sunthōkon*) of the Father and of the Son, and as the “centre” (I 99–100; III 65: *kentron*) of both the Father and the Son, thus probably alluding to its middle place in both the first and the third triads. The *Hagia Pnoia* is the Son’s “mother (*matēr*),¹³⁵ sister (*gnōta*), daughter (*thugatēr*)” (II 101–103): “mother” because Intellect/the Son is begotten through the Spirit; “sister” because the Father is the source of both the Spirit and the Son; “daughter” because the Son and the Father are united. Among others, the *Hymns* celebrate the Father as: “One prior to the One” (I 149: *hen henos proteron*); *agathōn agathon* (II 65); “Father of the *aiōnes*” (II 71) – a designation reminiscent of both the Gnostic *Aiōnes* and Plotinus’ and Porphyry’s One as *to proaiōnion*¹³⁶ – “Intellect (*Nous*) and intellectual (*noeros*) and the intelligible (*to noēton*) and before the intelligible (*pro tou noētou*)” (I 1777–1779) – a description evoking the presence of Intellect at the level of the Father, with whom the Son is united; “autopatōr”, a term which, in Porphyry,¹³⁷ characterises Intellect as self-generating in the sense that it constitutes itself by turning back in contemplation of the One, but which, in Synesius, may denote the unity of the Father and the Son. In *Hymn* II (IV) 69, the Father is the “beauty of the depth” (*buthion kallos*), while, similarly, in V (II) 27 the Chaldaean¹³⁸ expression “Paternal Depth” (*patrōios buthos*) denotes the Father within a context stressing the unity of the Trinity: “one source (*paga*), one root (*rhiza*), a thrice-resplendent form (*triphaēs morpha*)” (V 25–26). The “source” and the “root”, which occur very often – and,

sometimes, together – in the *Hymns*,¹³⁹ may pay a tribute to the Pythagorean oath,¹⁴⁰ to which Synesius alludes in the *Letters*,¹⁴¹ or to Empedocles' *rhižómata*,¹⁴² substituting the Pythagorean/Empedoclean fourness with the unity of the Trinity. Like the Son, who is begotten by the Father through the Spirit, the Spirit is “God from God” (II 111: *theos ek theou*), in accordance with the formulation of the Nicene Creed concerning the Son. Once again, Synesius underlines the autonomy and equality as well as the unity of the three hypostases within the Trinity: God is “a Monad (*monas*) albeit a Trinity (*trias*), a Monad that remains (*menei*) and a Trinity” (II 117–119), a statement remarkably close to Gregory of Nazianzus' Trinitarianism in *Oration* 39, 11.¹⁴³ Like Gregory, Synesius defends Trinitarian orthodoxy against Sabellius' reductionism (*sunhairesis*) and Arius' division (*dihairesis*), which are both, the Nazianzen notes, equally impious. Synesius' anti-Arianism in the *Hymns* is also closely connected with his opposition to Eunomius' Aristotelising views, which Gregory of Nyssa had also famously refuted in his books *Against Eunomius*.

As in *Homily II*, divine light (*pháos* or *phengos*)¹⁴⁴ as opposed to the darkness of matter has a central place in the *Hymns*. Following Plotinus, matter (*hyla*) is generally described as non-being (for instance: I 92: *eidólōcharēs*¹⁴⁵) and primary evil. It is compared to the destructive waves of a perturbed deep sea¹⁴⁶ or even, echoing Plato's *Phaedo* 90c, to the changing waters of Euripus,¹⁴⁷ which meander the furthest away possible from the “source of goodness” (*agathorhythos paga*) of IX 129. Earthly life itself to the extent that it bears the darkling mark of matter (I 550–551: *dnoferan kélidan hylas*) is depicted as a sea.¹⁴⁸ The marine imagery of the *Hymns* recalls especially Porphyry's allegorical interpretation of the Homeric sea as depicting “the material substance” (*hè ulikè sustasis*),¹⁴⁹ following Numenius.¹⁵⁰ Sometimes, Synesius' Plotinian monism slides towards an unconscious dualism reminiscent of Gnostic tendencies but also of Middle Platonic antecedents. Thus, in *Hymn I* (III), an active role of enchanting (575–576) and of offering ambiguous gifts (690–691) is attributed to matter, while *Hymn IX* (I) refers to the “voracious bark” of matter, which evokes the “soul-devouring dogs” and the “chthonian dog” mentioned elsewhere in the *Hymns*.¹⁵¹ However, this does not mean that the cosmos is evil, as the Gnostics believed; rather, the goodness and the beauty of the material universe are celebrated in the *Hymns*: the Incarnation through divine Economy purifies (*ekathèreo*) the Earth, the sea and the air in a powerful image (VI 33–39) reversing the description of the fall of Empedocles' “exile from the gods”, whom the elements and the parts of the world despise and expel to one another.¹⁵²

The cosmos is not only good but also eternal. The thesis of the eternity of the cosmos, known from *Letter 105* and *On Providence*,¹⁵³ is clearly formulated in *Hymn I* (III) 309–332, where it is combined with the Stoicising idea of eternal recurrence (*kuklos aīdios*). The formulation of *Hymn I* (II) 314–315 and 323–325 clearly evokes Plato's *Timaeus* 38d and 32c. Thus, Synesius endorses the allegorical interpretation of the dialogue, as Porphyry had done against Atticus, and Proclus and Simplicius would later do against Philoponus: the sensible universe is not created by the mythical Demiurge, but has always been, and will always be, as an eternal emanation of the Highest Principle, the One or the Father, through the hypostases of Intellect and Soul. In *Hymn IV* (VI), Intellect orders the cosmos, but in no means does He create it. Thus, as announced in *Letter 105*, Synesius makes no concession to the Christian doctrine of creation, but remains faithful to the orthodox Neoplatonic view, which traces its origin back to Aristotle. Nevertheless, Synesius' attitude may be seen in connection with his anti-Arian, orthodox stance: Porphyry's anti-creationist argument according to which the hypostases act by their mere existence¹⁵⁴ involved that, against Arius and in agreement with Athanasius, there could be no moment when the One or God existed without being the Father, that is, without Intellect or God the Son existing as well. Other Christian thinkers opted for an intermediate

solution, by accepting the eternal creation of the intelligible universe while attributing the creation of the sensible cosmos to divine will. But this was a major modification of Plotinus' system, which Synesius was not willing to endorse.

Farewell and reunion

The *Hymns* are perhaps Synesius' proudest philosophical accomplishment. Yet, his bishopric's responsibilities and the calamities of the years that followed his consecration would distract him from philosophy. Synesius' episcopate was marked by difficulties of all kinds – from disputes between bishops as well as between himself and the Roman praeses to troubles caused by the Eunomian heretics and barbarian invasions – culminating in the death of all his three sons within one year (412–413). Along with his correspondence, two reports known as *Catastases* inform us about his activity as a bishop. The second *Catastasis* depicts the dramatic military situation in Libya in 412–413: the text is filled with despair, while, in the closing lines, Synesius, lamenting the end of Cyrene and the loss of Roman glory, imagines his own blood covering God's altar.

In the midst of distress, Synesius addresses a sorrowful farewell letter to Hypatia from his deathbed in 413. He weeps for being deprived of her most divine soul and forgotten by his fellow students.¹⁵⁵ In light of *Letter 137*, Synesius probably felt excluded from the bond uniting Hypatia and her students as philosophers living “the life of Intellect” (*he kata noîn zôê*).¹⁵⁶ Here, *Enneads* 1.1 *On What Is the Living Being and What Is Man* but also *Enneads* 6.4 and 5 *On the Presence of Being, One and the Same, Everywhere as a Whole* stand on the background. It seems that union with Intellect was an actual practice taken very seriously in Hypatia's inner circle. Porphyry alludes to a similar practice when he emphasises the noetic bond uniting his true self with his wife Marcella.¹⁵⁷ This precious bond between initiates in the “Mysteries of philosophy”¹⁵⁸ had been broken in Synesius' case: his office's responsibilities and his final years' devastating misfortunes had prevented him from the good life of Intellect.

Could there also be a more literal interpretation of Synesius' chagrin involving lack of correspondence with Hypatia,¹⁵⁹ and, if yes, what could have been the reason for such distancing? Some decades later, the deal (*homologiai*) of another philosopher, Ammonius Hermeiou, with the Patriarch of Alexandria was criticised by Damascius.¹⁶⁰ The two cases are hardly comparable, but Damascius' reproach shows that a compact with the Church was likely to be negatively judged by fellow Platonists. Given the circle's commitment to Pythagorean secrecy,¹⁶¹ could Hypatia have eventually shared the opinion of those philosophers who accused Synesius of not “keeping his mouth shut”?¹⁶² Could this accusation concern the disclosure of Neoplatonic doctrine? Given the school's tolerant pluralism and Synesius' faithful commitment to Platonic principles, such scenarios seem rather unlikely. It seems much more plausible that, at the twilight of his life, Synesius hoped to reunite with his teacher in Intellect, thus finding a last shelter against misfortune and pain. Being Intellect involved a powerful communion of souls transcending the limits of space and time, as in the case of Porphyry and Marcella, but also all the restrictions of the human condition, including suffering and natural death. Thus, Synesius could be true to his promise of “remembering the beloved Hypatia even in Hades”.¹⁶³ We do not hear from him anymore.

Conclusion

At the twilight of antiquity and rise of Byzantium, Synesius bridges the two worlds: in him, the ancient Greek philosopher meets the Byzantine clergyman and student of ancient philosophy, while his work already conveys the close link that united rhetoric, theology, and philosophy in

Byzantine culture. To the extent that it is legitimate to describe Synesius as a Christian Neoplatonist or, rather, as Christian *and* Neoplatonist, the emphasis should be put on Neoplatonism rather than Christianity. Synesius' writings are eminently Platonic, especially indebted to Plotinus and Porphyry as well as to a long tradition of Platonic philosophical exegesis of authoritative texts such as the *Chaldaean Oracles* and the Orphic theogonies. While testifying to their author's Hellenic *paideia* and rich classical erudition, they hardly display any knowledge of the Scriptures. Synesius is close to Clement's defence of Hellenism and familiar with the Cappadocian Fathers' philosophical Christianity, but never does he subordinate philosophy to divine Revelation. On the other hand, like Marius Victorinus, he remains faithful to the Platonising Nicene Creed, defending Trinitarian orthodoxy against Arianism and Sabellianism. Although he is not prepared to make any concession altering the Plotinian emanation system to accommodate Biblical beliefs, such as the temporality of the cosmos, yet, by advocating Platonism under a Christian mantle, and through his Platonic allegorical interpretation of Christianity, he defends Christian orthodoxy: in his *Hymns*, the metaphysical poetry of the calibre of a Parmenides or an Empedocles meets Early Byzantine hymnody.

The discrepancies between Synesius' philosophical theology and the *dogma* of the Church, as expressed in *Letter* 105 and exemplified in his work, do not undermine his Christianity. Rather, they reshape Christian identity, by enhancing its philosophical foundations and by showing the remarkable flexibility of the boundaries set by the *Symbolon* of Nicaea in 325. As Synesius himself seems to admit, his subtle Platonic synthesis was by nature esoteric and exclusive. As such, it was hardly meant to be adopted as the official teaching of the Church. However, his enterprise reveals the universalising potential of Christian orthodoxy, which can even become "a step upwards to philosophy", while, at the same time, anticipating a long series of Byzantine thinkers, from Leon the Mathematician, Michael Psellus and Ioannes Italos to Georgios Akropolites and Georgios Gemistos Plethon, who, while being Christian, thought it was possible to philosophise in a Neoplatonic mode, "without the Christ" (*choris Christou philosophheîn*),¹⁶⁴ and yet in agreement with the Christ, as Hypatia had once taught.

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Notes

- 1 Synesius, *Letters* 1, 2: σύννατοι.
- 2 For recent overviews, see Toulouse 2016 (with exhaustive bibliography); Bregman 2015; Seng and Hoffmann 2012. I borrow the expression "Philosopher-Bishop" from Bregman 1982. Synesius of Cyrene is to be distinguished from Synesius the Alchemist, author of a commentary on Ps.-Democritus' dating before the destruction of the Serapeion in c. 390; see Lacombrade 1951: 64–71; Letrouit 1995: 47.
- 3 For a summary of the different views, see Toulouse 2016: 658–662.
- 4 See, for instance, Bregman 2016.
- 5 Synesius, *Hymns* VII (VIII) 31. All references to the *Hymns* follow Lacombrade 1978.
- 6 Synesius, *Letters* 41, 240–243; *Hymns* III (V) 36–39; *Catastases* 2, p. 291, 11 Terzaghi. On the foundation of Cyrene, see Herodotus, *Histories* 154 sq.
- 7 On this hypothesis, see Lacombrade 1978, IX.
- 8 Synesius, *Letters* 7; *Letters* 75.
- 9 Synesius, *Letters* 145; *Hymns* VIII (IX) 29–30. Cf. Lacombrade 1978: 91 and n. 2.
- 10 Pindar *Pythians* 9. 6 sq.
- 11 *On Empire* 3, 2–4.

- 12 Evagrius, *Church History* 1.15. According to Cameron and Long 1993, he was baptised in 401 (after returning from Constantinople); according to Roques 1987, in 404/3.
- 13 *Letters* 66, 365: ἀπὸ τροφῶν Ἐκκλησίας. For the traditional view, see Bregman 1982. Bregman 1992 points out the role of Hermetism and Gnosticism as links between Neoplatonism and Christianity.
- 14 Marrou 1952: 479, 1963: 141–142; Cameron and Long 1993: 16, 28–35. *Contra Hagl* 1997: 10–20. See also Tanaseanu-Doebler 2008: 176–180.
- 15 On Hypatia, see Watt's recent reconstruction (2017). Marrou 1963 insists on her scientific achievements. It is significant that both her father (Theon Math. *On Ptolemy's Almagest* 807, 4–5: τῆ φιλοσόφῳ θυγατρὶ μου Ὑπατίας) and Synesius call her a “philosopher”. Lacombrade 2001 depicts her as neo-Cynic and neo-Pythagorean Platonist. On the special place of Porphyry (as opposed to Iamblichus) in Hypatia's teaching, see already Bidez 1913: 194; Lacombrade 1951: 49; Bregman 1982: 22; Watts 2017. Cameron and Long 1993: 50–52, have proposed a possible connection with Iamblichean Neoplatonism, but without firm evidence; see also Tanaseanu-Doebler 2008: 184. Feke's recent monograph (2018) sheds light on Ptolemy's philosophy of mathematics, which may have played some role in Hypatia's version of Plotinian-Porphyrion Neoplatonism, since she had edited and commented upon Ptolemy's *Almagest* and *Handy Tables*, probably in connection with her father's projects. See Bernard 2015²: 423–424; Cameron 2016: 191; Watts 2017: 30–31.
- 16 Simmons 2015; Armstrong 1984.
- 17 Socrates, *Church History*. 7,15,1.
- 18 Synesius, *Letters* 16, 2–4: μήτηρ καὶ ἀδελφὴ καὶ διδάσκαλε καὶ διὰ πάντων τούτων ἐνεργετικὴ.
- 19 Synesius, *Letters* 137, 8–9: τῆς γνησίας καθηγεμόνος τῶν φιλοσοφίας ὀργίων.
- 20 Synesius, *To Paeonius* 4, 15–16.
- 21 Synesius, *To Paeonius* 4, 5–10.
- 22 Synesius, *To Paeonius* 2.
- 23 One would, for instance, recall Theo of Smyrna's *On Mathematics Useful for the Understanding of Plato* (c. 100 CE).
- 24 On Ptolemy (c. 100–170), see Feke 2018; Bernard 2015²: 423–424. Ptolemy is mentioned in *To Paeonius* 5, 7. Synesius' views evoke the preface to the *Almagest* and the third book of the *Harmonics*.
- 25 Hypatia herself offered her advice to the Prefect Orestes. Such connections could turn out badly, as in the case of Hypatia's politically motivated murder by an enraged Christian mob (March 415) or as of Longinus's execution by Aurelian (273) following Zenobia's revolt.
- 26 Synesius, *Letters* 139, 33–34: τὸ ἐν σαυτῷ θεῖον ἀνάγειν ἐπὶ τὸ πρωτόγονον θεῖον.
- 27 Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 2, 25–27: πειράσθε τὸν ἐν ἡμῖν θεὸν ἀνάγειν πρὸς τὸ ἐν τῷ παντὶ θεῖο. See Kalligas 2014: 24. For a different reading based on the manuscripts, see Edwards 2000: 4, n. 20.
- 28 On the Orphic Πρωτόγονος, see Fr. 12, 121, 123, 125, 126, 141, 143, 241 and Vest. 65 Bernabé. For a similar hypothesis concerning the reinterpretation of the Orphic Πρωτόγονος, see Gigli Piccardi 2009.
- 29 The Plotinian philosopher contributes to the well-being (*eudaimonia*) of fellow human beings and of the cosmos through the cultivation of his/her higher self, thus being a benefit to his/herself as much as to others. See Remes 2008.
- 30 Synesius' circle included Aurelian, the Prefect of the East (to whom S. addresses *Letters* 31 and 35 and whom he mentions as a “friend and consul” in *Letter* 61), Aurelian's brother Caesarius, and Gainas the Goth. See Dzielska 1995: 29–38; Tanaseanu-Doebler 2008: 15–59.
- 31 Swain 2013.
- 32 Thesleff 1965; Gangloff forthcoming.
- 33 Lozza 2016.
- 34 Origen, *First Principles* 2, 9.
- 35 I thank Mark Edwards for giving me access to his unpublished manuscript on the problem of evil in antiquity, which includes a discussion of *On Providence*.
- 36 Synesius, *Hymns* I (III) 449–469. The “King” evokes the pseudo-Platonic *Second Letter* 312e–313a, and its Middle and Neoplatonic (Plotinian and Porphyrian) interpretation, on which see Plotinus, *Enneads* I 8,2; V 1,8; VI 7,42; cf. also II 9,9; III 5,8; V 5,3; Porphyry, *Philosophical History* Fr. XXI Sodano = Fr. 222 Smith; *On matter* Fr. 236 Smith (mentioning Moderatus of Gades); *On the Timaeus* Fr. 51 Sodano; Anon. *Commentary on the Parmenides* XII, 22–23. Tarrant 2017; Brisson-Viltanioti forthcoming.
- 37 Synesius, *Letters* 136. See Roques in Garzya 2000: 397–398, n. 17; Kalligas forthcoming. I thank Paul Kalligas for making his text available to me prior to its publication.
- 38 Synesius, *On Dreams* 4, 4.

- 39 Synesius, *Hymns* I (III) 432. For the chronology, see Lacombrade 1978: 55, n. 1; Bregman 1982: 49–50 and nn. 30–31.
- 40 Synesius, *On Dreams* 14,3. Plotinus too had become target of magic attacks; see Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 10.
- 41 He mentions his wife in *Hymns* VII (VIII) 32–41.
- 42 Bregman 2015²: 523 and n. 13.
- 43 Synesius, *On Dreams* 4, 4: ἐμοὶ βίος βιβλία καὶ θήρα.
- 44 Synesius, *Letters* 154, 10–30. On the identity of these philosophers, see Roques in Garzya 2000, I 427, nn. 27, 30.
- 45 See Plotinus, *Enneads* IV,3,10–11.
- 46 On Silenus, see Synesius, *On Baldness* 6,3 and Porphyry, Fr. 358, 29–34 Smith. On Eleusis, see Synesius, *On Baldness* 7,3 and Porphyry, Fr. 357a, Fr. 358 Smith. *Logoi*: Synesius, *On Baldness* 7.3 and Porphyry, Fr. 358, 43 Smith. The reference to the symbolism of divine statues and their comparison to written texts in *Letters* 154, 75–83 could also echo Porphyry's *On Statues* Fr. 350 Smith; cf. Viltanioti 2017.
- 47 Porphyry, Fr. 352, 18–20 Smith.
- 48 Plato, *Timaeus* 33b; 44d.
- 49 Edited by Miller (1840). See also Aujoulat in Lamoureux 2004: 33–46.
- 50 On this work, see Russel and Nesselrath 2014.
- 51 Plotinus also composes his works in a similar way, “continuously as if he were reading from a book”; see Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 8, 4–12.
- 52 Synesius, *Letters* 154, 105–106. Only early morning dreams could have a divine provenance; see already Philostratus, *Life of Apollonius* 2,37.
- 53 Synesius, *Letters* 154, 113–114: σὺ γὰρ δὴ μετ’ ἐμὲ πρώτη τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐντεύξῃ.
- 54 On this aspect, see Gertz 2014.
- 55 See Sheppard 2014: 87.
- 56 Plutarch, *On Isis and Osiris* 383 F–384 A.
- 57 Plotinus, *Enneads* IV 3, 31. On *phantasia* in Plotinus: Warren 1966; Blumenthal 1971: 88–95; Watson 1988: 97–103; Dillon 1990; in Porphyry: Sheppard 2007; Viltanioti 2017a: 35–36; in Synesius' *On Dreams*: Sheppard 2014: 83–86, 2014a; Gertz 2014: 111–114.
- 58 Synesius, *On Dreams* 6, 2–4; Porphyry, *Sentences* 28, 29, 40; *Cave of the Nymphs* 11; Fr. 349, 185, 185a, 287, 290, 292, 293 Smith; also Plotinus, *Enneads* III 6, 5, 22–29 and 5, 6, 37; IV 3, 15. Porphyry's notion of *pneuma* combines Platonic, Aristotelian, and Stoic doctrine. See Bidez 1913: 89; Kissling 1922; Lang 1926: 57–80; Doerrie 1959: 167 sq.; Dodds 1963²: Appendix II, 318–319; Hadot 1968, *passim*; Smith 1974: 65 sq., 152–158; Aujoulat 1983–84; Tanaseanu-Doebler 2014. On the legacy of Synesius' theory, see Aujoulat 1991; Moerschini 2016. For a detailed treatment of *pneuma* and *phantasia* in Neoplatonism, see Di Pasquale Barbanti 1998. For a collection of source texts, see Sorabji 2004: vol. I, 221–241. On *pneuma* in Iamblichus, see Finamore 1985.
- 59 Sheppard 2014: 97 n. 26. See also Aujoulat in Lamoureux 2004: 264; Verbeke 1945: 540.
- 60 Synesius, *On Dreams* 9,3. His view is presented as an exegesis of a Chaldean Oracle quoted in 9,1: *Chaldaean Oracles*, Fr. 158 Des Places. See Aujoulat 1984: 39.
- 61 Synesius, *On Dreams* 8, 1: ἀναγωγὸν ἢ μετάνοια.
- 62 In Synesius, *On Dreams* 7, 3, this view is presented as an exegesis of Heraclitus' 22 B 118 Diels-Kranz. See also 22 B 77 and B 117. Compare with the interpretation of B 77 (and B 62) in Porphyry, *Antr.* 10.
- 63 For a similar hypothesis, see Deuse 1983: 218–230. *Contra* Deuse: Chase 2005, who also draws attention to St. Augustine's parallels (the Resurrection body as “corpus spiritale”). Watson 1983–1984 sees a Porphyrian origin of St. Augustine's Resurrection doctrine. This seems to be the case for Synesius too, although Synesius and St. Augustine ignored each other's existence. Tanaseanu-Doebler 2014 supposes an Iamblichian influence on Synesius' views on divine divination.
- 64 Synesius, *Letters* 154, 1–2.
- 65 See Garzya 1972; Desideri 1973.
- 66 On the role of *paideia*, see Op de Coul 2012.
- 67 On Dio in Synesius, see Seng 2006.
- 68 Synesius, *Dion* 4.5; 5.1.
- 69 Synesius, *Letters* 105, 88–90.
- 70 For a comparison between Synesius' and Gregory Nyssen's “intellectual” approach to Resurrection as “restoration of our initial status” (*apokatastasis*) within the framework of the fourth century, see Dimitrov 2014: 535–537.

- 71 On Apollo and Pythagoras, see Viltanioti 2015: 82–84, 181–189.
- 72 Plutarch, *Symposiastic Questions* 9.14, 745 D–F.
- 73 Cameron and Long 1993: 256–262, 265–271; Lozza 2016 (earlier n. 33).
- 74 Compare Synesius, *Dion* 5, 1 with Plato, *Republic* IV 443c–e, on which see Viltanioti 2015: 145 sq.
- 75 See Centrone 2014: 320–321.
- 76 Synesius, *Letters* 154, 2–8.
- 77 See Viltanioti 2019.
- 78 Synesius, *Dion* 7.1.
- 79 Synesius, *Dion* 8, 1–2.
- 80 Synesius, *Dion* 6, 7. As opposed to Stoic *apatheia*. Yet, in Plotinus and Porphyry, *apatheia* acquires the meaning of “liberation from *pathos*”.
- 81 See Viltanioti 2017b.
- 82 Aujoulat in Lamoureux 2004: 157, n. 58.
- 83 Barnes 1986: 407; Roques 1987: 411.
- 84 Roques 1987: 411; Bregman 2015²: 411.
- 85 On the eternity of the cosmos, see also *On Providence* 127c–d, 128 Terzaghi. The official Christian view according to which the soul is created by God and immortalised by God’s grace had not been crystallised yet. For instance, Origen supposed a preexistence of the soul within a prior intelligible creation, whereas Methodius of Olympus argued for the soul’s creation after the body. So Synesius’ view was not opposed to any official doctrine of the Church. See Marrou 1963: 146; Bregman 2015²: 532.
- 86 Synesius, *Letters* 105, 99–100: τὰ μὲν οἰκοὶ φιλοσόφων τὰ δὲ ἔξω φιλόμυθος εἰμι διδάσκων. On the love of myths, see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* A 2, 982 b 18 sq.
- 87 See Viltanioti 2019.
- 88 See also Tanaseanu-Doebler 2008: 286.
- 89 Bregman 1992.
- 90 Puech 1978: 136–139; Laird 1999.
- 91 Synesius, *Letters* 147, 12–18.
- 92 Synesius, *Letters* 11, 23–24: γνώσομαι τὴν ἱερωσύνην οὐκ ἀπόβασιν οὐσαν φιλοσοφίας, ἀλλ’ εἰς αὐτὴν ἐπανάβασιν.
- 93 See Rist 1975; Dal Toso 1998; Roth 1992; Peroli 1997; Coakley 2018.
- 94 Cherniss 1930; Daniélou 1944; Rist 2000. On Gregory’s Porphyrianism (with a focus on logic), see Edwards 2019: 105–108.
- 95 Lacombrade 1978: 14.
- 96 Synesius, *On Dreams* 18, 113b–c, p. 105 Terzaghi. See also *Hymns* VIII (IX) 1; IX (I) 5.
- 97 On Porphyry’s reconciliation of philosophy and poetry, see Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 15; Viltanioti 2019.
- 98 Synesius, *Hymn* I (III) 10; Plato, *Timaeus* 21a; 26e.
- 99 Porphyry, *On Abstinence* II 45, 4.
- 100 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Patrologia Graeca* 37, c. 1027, 1227.
- 101 Hadot 1968: vol. I, 461–478; Lozza 2007; Lanna 2009; Gigli Piccardi 2009; Criscuolo 2010, 2012; Vollenweider 2012.
- 102 Συνεσίου ἐπισκόπου ὕμνοι ἔμμετροι εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν τριάδα καὶ εἰς διαφόρους ἑορτὰς δεσποτικὰς. On the manuscript, see Lacombrade 1978: 11, 29–31.
- 103 See Lacombrade 1978: 98–99.
- 104 *Chaldaean Oracles*, Fr. 34, 2; 37, 14 Des Places.
- 105 Plotinus, *Enneads* VI 5, 7, 10–11.
- 106 Plotinus, *Enneads* II 1, 3, 22; III 2, 4, 7; III 2, 4, 38–39; III 3, 4, 37; IV 3, 17, 25; IV 8, 5, 26; VI 7, 3, 29. Porphyry, *Sentences* 3, 3; 4, 3; 4, 4; 28, 5; 30, 12; 32, 140; 37, 42; 37, 45. See Plato, *Phaedrus* 247b.
- 107 *Hymns* IX (I), 17–18 echoes Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 30 = Empedocles, Fr. 31 B 129 Diels–Kranz.
- 108 Viltanioti 2017b. Porphyry believed the Christ to have been most pious and thus immortalised: Porphyry, *Philosophy from Oracles* Fr. 345; 345 a; 345b; 345c; 346 Smith.
- 109 On these kinds of death see Porphyry, *Sentences* 7;8;9;23;28; Viltanioti 2018.
- 110 See earlier, n. 36.
- 111 Synesius, *Hymns* I (III) 8, 24, 144, 271, 375, 450, 467, 479, 493, 514, 548, 568, 593, 698, 723; II (IV) 265; V (II) 67; VII (VIII) 33.
- 112 Numenius, Fr. 21 Des Places = Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* I 303, 7–304, 7 Diehl.
- 113 See also Bregman 2015²: 529 n. 24.
- 114 Lacombrade 1978: 21; Bregman 2015²: 530. On Heracles and the Christ, see also Simon 1955: chs. 2, 3.

- 115 Synesius, *Hymns* I (III) 157, 205, 403, 529, 535; II (IV) 10; IV 11; V (II) 30; VI 15.
 116 See especially *Hymns* IV (VI) 5–12.
 117 *Chaldaean Oracles*, Fr. 109, 3 Des Places. See also Fr. 2,3 Des Places; Synesius, *Hymns* I 620; 628.
 118 Porphyry, *On Abstinence* II 44,3.
 119 I borrow the term from Bregman 2015²: 534, n. 36.
 120 Clement of Alexandria, *Protrepticus* XII 120, 1.
 121 Plato, *Republic* X 617b–c: Necessity and the Fates as the enthroned virtuous soul. See Viltanioti 2015: chs. 5; 6.
 122 On *thronōsis*, see Edmonds 2006.
 123 According to Germanus I of Constantinople (c. 650–733), the bishop’s ascent to the *synthronon* symbolises the Son fulfilling Divine Economy and blessing the Disciples. See Germ. I. *On the Mysteries* 26, 1–6. This is close to Synesius.
 124 Hadot 1968; Cooper 2015², esp. 544–549; Edwards 2019: 81–83.
 125 Hadot 1965, 1968; Edwards 1990, 2010; Dillon 1992, 2007; Bechtle 1999; Rasimus 2010; Drecoll 2010; Clark 2018.
 126 The equation of the One with *Hyperxis* is hardly reconcilable with the One’s transcendence, but this is precisely the charge raised against Porphyry by Damascius criticising his predecessor’s interpretation of the *Chaldaean Oracles* (Damascius, *First Principles* I 86, 3–15 = Porphyry, Fr. 367 Smith). As Andrew Smith notes, the discrepancy may be due to the fact that Porphyry is doing his best to accommodate the pre-Plotinian material of the *Oracles* with Plotinus’ metaphysics; see Smith 2015²: 333. Yet, Porphyry attributes *hyperxis* to the One in his *History of Philosophy* as well: see Cyril, *Against Julian* I 32 c–d, 552 B 1 – C8 = Porphyry, Fr. 223, 17 Smith. The implication may be that the One possesses existence in an absolute manner and more fully than anything else. On this problem, see also Edwards 2019: 79; 83.
 127 John Lydus, *On the Months* 159, 5–8 = Porphyry Fr. 366 Smith: Θεῖος ὁ τῆς ἐννάδος ἀριθμὸς ἐκ τριῶν τριάδων πληρούμενος καὶ τὰς ἀκρότητας τῆς θεολογίας κατὰ τὴν Χαλδαϊκὴν φιλοσοφίαν, ὡς φησιν Πορφύριος, ἀποσφύζων.
 128 Augustine, *City of God* 10. 29, 1–3 = Porphyry, Fr. 284 a Smith: “Praedicas patrem et eius filium, quem vocas paternum intellectum seu mentem, et horum medium quem putamus te dicere spiritum sanctum, et more vestro appelas tres deos”.
 129 Synesius, *Hymns* II (IV) 75; 98; III (V) 53; 64; V (II) 32.
 130 Synesius, *Hymns* II (IV) 123; 137; IX (I) 63.
 131 Sen. *Hymns* I (III) 713; II (IV) 203; 295; IX (I) 70.
 132 Plotinus, *Enneads* V 2, 1, 15–16; *Chaldaean Oracles*, Fr. 56, 3; 218, 2 Des Places.
 133 Synesius, *Hymns* I (III) 207, 217, 290, 405, 715; II (IV) 106, 108, 115, IV (VI) 10; VI (VII) 18; IX (I) 65.
 134 Synesius, *Hymns* II (IV) 96: γόνιμον βουλάν; 163, 225; III (V) 4–5: ἄρρηται πατρός βουλαὶ ἐσπειραν Χριστοῦ γένναν (the Christ as *Logos spermatikos*); IV (VI) 6: βουλὰς πατρικῆς ἀφραστος ὁδός; V (II) 59. If βουλὰ is translated as “will”, then Synesius would appear to distance himself both from Plotinus’ non-deliberative procession due to the One’s superabundance of power and from Athanasius’ Nicene position according to which the Son is the product of the Father’s nature and not of His will (θέλημα). It would therefore be preferable to avoid confusion by translating βουλὰ as “decree”, in accordance with God’s royal status in the *Hymns* (above nn. 36, 106) and with Plotinus’ *Enneads* IV 8, 5, 10–17, where the procession is described as a law of nature (φύσεως νόμος) or as a divine order (θεὸν καταπέμψαι). Synesius is borrowing (πατρὸς) βουλή from the *Chaldaean Oracles*. See Fr. 37, 1; Fr. 37, 3 Des Places: πατρόθεν γὰρ ἦν βουλή τε τέλος τε (intermediate between the Father and the *telos*); Fr. 77, 2; 81, 2; 107, 4 Des Places. Βουλεὺς is also an epithet of Zeus (*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum* 124.,7).
 135 Cf. Marius Victorinus, *Against the Arians* 1, 50–51.
 136 Porphyry, Fr. 232 Smith = Proclus, *Platonic Theology* I 11, pp. 51, 4–11; See also Porphyry, Fr. 223, 7 Smith.
 137 Porphyry, Fr. 223, 8–9 Smith.
 138 *Chaldaean Oracles*, Fr. 18, 1 Des Places.
 139 Παγὰ: I (II) 157, 171, 529, 713, 716; II (IV) 63, 295; III (V) 21, 26, 47, 58; IV (VI) 1, 10, 22; V (II) 25, 33; VII (VIII) 11; VIII (IX) 60; IX (I) 67, 129. Ρίξα: I (III) 153, 173, 184; II (IV) 21, 64, 105, 137; III (V) 11, 51, 54; V (II) 25, 33, 60, 69.
 140 Aet. I 3, 8 (281, 10–282, 6 Diels) = 58 B 15 Diels-Kranz:
 οὐ μὰ τὸν ἀμετέρα κεφαλᾶ παραδόντα τετρακτύν,
 παγὰν ἀενάου φύσεως ριζώματ’ ἔχουσαν.
 141 Synesius, *Letters* 140, 36; 143, 51 (later, n. 161).

- 142 Empedocles, Fr. 31 B 6, 1 Diels-Kranz: τέσσαρα γὰρ πάντων ριζώματα πρῶτον ἄκουε.
- 143 Gregory of Nazianzus, *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 345 c. On Arius, Athanasius, and the Nicene Creed see Edwards 2015: 273–286; 2019: 77–81.
- 144 Synesius, *Hymns* I (III) 140, 155, 197, 260, 376, 532, 594, 601, 634, 699, 720, 727; II (IV) 162, 216, 239; III (V) 9, 12, 30, 43; V (VII) 1, 6, 31, 38, 77; IX (I) 100. Often described as νοερόν, ἀναγωγόν, associated with Intellect and Wisdom.
- 145 See also *Chaldaean oracles*, Fr. 163, 3 Des Places.
- 146 Synesius, *Hymns* V (II) 9: πολυκύμονος ὕλας; VIII (IX) 66: βαθυκύμονος ὕλας.
- 147 Synesius, *Hymns* IV (VI) 26–27.
- 148 Synesius, *Hymns* IV (VI) 25; IX (I) 104–105.
- 149 Porphyry, *Cave of the Nymphs* 34.
- 150 Numenius, Fr. 33 Des Places. The material body is called ῥευστόν in *Chaldaean Oracles*, Fr. 128, 2 Des Places. See also Plotinus, *Enneads* II 1, 1, 8; IV, 7, 8, 45–46; Orig. *Commentary on John* 13, 33; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromateis* 2.20.118. 5; 3.12.86. 4; Alcinous, *Didascalicus*. 1.2; 11.2.
- 151 Synesius, *Hymns* I (III) 96–97; II (IV) 246. See Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospels* IV 23, 6 (I 215, 2–6) = Porphyry, *Philosophy from Oracles* Fr. 327 Smith (ὁ τρίκρανος κύων as πονηρὸς δαίμων); Eusebius, *Preparation* IV 23, 7–9 (I 215, 7–21) = Porphyry, *Philosophy from Oracles*, Fr. 328 Smith.
- 152 Empedocles, Fr. 31 B 115, 9–12 Diels-Kranz. In *Hymns* I (III) 718, φυγάς ἀλήτης echoes B 115, 13: φυγάς θεόθεν καὶ ἀλήτης. Synesius may be taking into account Plutarch's and Plotinus' interpretation of Empedocles' fragment: Plutarch, *On Exile* 17, 607 C; *On Isis and Osiris* 361 C; Plotinus, *Enneads* IV, 8, 1, 18–23; Empedocles, fr. 31 B 115a; b; c.
- 153 Synesius, *On Providence* 127 c–d, 128 Terzaghi.
- 154 Porphyry, *On the Timaeus*, Fr. 51, p. 36, 3–10 Sodano = Proclus, *Commentary on the Timaeus* 119 E, p. 393, 1–8 I Diehl. See Viltanioti 2017a.
- 155 Synesius, *Letters* 10, 3: παρεωραμένος ὑφ' ἀπάντων ὑμῶν; 11–13: ἀπεστέρημα, . . . τὸ μέγιστον, τῆς θειοτάτης σου ψυχῆς.
- 156 Synesius, *Letters* 137, 8–17, 59. The expression occurs in Porphyry's *On Abstinence* I 28, 3; 29, 3–4; 37, 4; 38, 3.
- 157 Porphyry, *Letter to Marcella* 10.
- 158 Synesius, *Letters* 137, 8–9 (earlier, n. 19).
- 159 *Letters* 16, 16–18 could give such an impression: Τῶν ἐμῶν εἴ τί σοι μέλει, καλῶς ποιεῖς· καὶ εἰ μὴ μέλει, οὐδὲν ἐμοὶ τοῦτου μέλει.
- 160 Damascius, *Life of Isidore*, Fr. 316 = Phot. *Bibl.* 242, 352a 11–14. Blank 2015²: 657–659; Sorabji 2016: 47.
- 161 For Pythagorean secrecy in Hypatia's circle, see Synesius *Letters* 143, esp. 2: μὴ ἔκπυστα ποι τὰ ἄξια κρύπτεσθαι; 9–10 (referring Lysis' letter to Hipparchus); 32–33: φύλαξ τῶν φιλοσοφίας ὀργίων; 50–51: εὐφημείσθω τῆς ἐν ἀρχαῖς ὁμονόμου τετρακτύος ἡ φύσις; *Letters* 154, 75–83, esp. 80–81: τὰ ἀβέβηλα δόγματα.
- 162 Synesius, *Letters* 154, 51–52: ὅτι μὴ τὸ στόμα συγκλείσας ἔχω καὶ τὸν βούν τὸν ἐκείνων ἐπὶ τῆς γλῶττης τίθεμαι.
- 163 Synesius, *Letters* 124, 1–2: “Εἰ δὲ θανόντων περ καταλήθοντ' εἰν Αἴδαο”, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κάκει τῆς φίλης Ὑπατίας μεμνήσομαι.
- 164 George Monachos, *Chronicle* 1.345; Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *On Virtue* 1, 129. See Ierodiakonou and Zografidis 2015²: 847.

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Augustine of Hippo

John Peter Kenney

Prefatory observations

As readers of the past, we are often hostage to the ideas of the present. Through the prism of our conceptions, we read ancient texts and believe we are in dialogue with thinkers from a distant age. But our principal interlocutors are often ourselves, neglectful, as we can sometimes be, of the reflexive power of our own categories of interpretation. It is difficult to do otherwise. Nonetheless, if we wish to understand the thought of the ancient Christians, we need to set aside our contemporary perspective and enter into their modes of reflection by tracing the logic of their ideas. This hermeneutic of humility harbors some hope of avoiding the recitation of our own concerns in the guise of doing history.

Reading early Christian philosophy is a particular challenge in this regard. The very phrase can be jarring to those whose definition of philosophy excludes philosophical reflection conducted within a religious tradition. That stricture, while seemingly unremarkable within the contemporary West, excludes much serious philosophical reflection as practiced throughout human history, and as it is often pursued throughout the world today. Moreover, this exclusion, if seriously enforced, would foreshorten the scope of what counted as philosophy even in ancient Greece and Rome, for philosophy was a practice that nested in the Mediterranean religious culture of antiquity, giving both constructive and critical shape to classical religious thought. Indeed, this contemporary separation of religion and philosophy trades on embedded cultural preoccupations intrinsic to the West, and is, for that reason, tacitly prescriptive. If we are alert to the genealogies and limitations of the terms we use, such as 'religion,' 'philosophy,' and 'theology,' we can come to a more inclusive recognition of the scope of philosophical reflection in antiquity, one that encompasses the contributions of early Christian thinkers.¹

Augustine and 'philosophy'

That would include, without question, Augustine of Hippo, one of late antiquity's most inquisitive thinkers, whose intellectual curiosity was remarkable for its depth and range. He fits the description of 'early Christian philosopher' more so than almost any other Christian author does. Yet he was, in fact, not a trained philosopher in the ancient sense of the term. He was a

rhetorician who never studied under a philosopher nor joined one of the philosophical schools that dotted the urban landscape of the late Roman Empire. He was, as well, a provincial from North Africa, whose education in the liberal arts was conducted within the still-extant classical academies found in outposts of Roman culture like Madaura or Carthage, far from the great academic centers of Athens or Alexandria. But he was a man of letters whose ambition led him to imitate the intellectual style of that paragon among Latin rhetoricians, Cicero. From him he discerned the importance of acquaintance with the doctrines of the philosophical schools and the usefulness of dialectical skill for someone who planned to make his way as a public rhetorician.

This is the first sense of philosophy found in Augustine: philosophy as an item in the toolbox of the rhetorician, a resource for argumentative tropes and discursive strategies. No reader of Augustine's polemical works would doubt his thorough absorption of these lessons from philosophy. This knowledge of philosophy also offered Augustine the chance to exhibit early in his career the intellectual depth of his education. A strong grasp of the teachings of the philosophers was a cultural token for a provincial rhetorician, emblematic of his status as a man of letters. This comes through clearly at *Confessions* IV.16.28, where Augustine expresses his pride at having mastered the *Categories* of Aristotle, renowned, he tells us, for their difficulty. This intellectual style, of the rhetorician as lover of wisdom, is especially apparent in Augustine's earliest works, written both immediately before his baptism and in the first few years afterwards.² There we find him producing dialogues in a style reminiscent of Cicero, as well treatises of dense argumentation. He had learned well how to display his learning, now in the service of his new religion. These treatises are recognizable as 'philosophy' in our contemporary sense of the term, and have been an important focus for modern students of 'Augustinian philosophy.' Yet, while these are the most conventional and accessible treatises, they are also the least interesting examples of Augustine's engagement with philosophy. Indeed, he abandoned this type of dialectical writing in the aftermath of his unexpected ordination to the Catholic clergy in 391. Thereafter, he would take a different approach.

Yet with this mastery of discursive philosophy came another, somewhat disquieting element: the demands that philosophy might make upon its adherents. At *Confessions* III.4.7–8, Augustine relates his reading during his student days of the *Hortensius* by Cicero. It contained an exhortation to philosophy not as a conceptual discipline but as the pursuit of wisdom understood to be the purpose of life. He admits that he found himself reading Cicero's protreptic not to refine his own literary style but because of its conversionary force. Here we come up against the first fissure between contemporary approaches to philosophy and that of antiquity. What fixed the attention of the young Augustine in reading that lost treatise of Cicero was the claim of philosophy to serve as a guide to human happiness. It could provide an ethical manual for the mastery of the self and directions for human flourishing. It might thus teach a way of life that was grounded in truth, in the real patterns of order and value. To these the human self must attend in order to find its proper end and to avoid the self-inflicted ethical abrasions that cause misfortune and unnecessary pain in our lives. The efforts of philosophers to understand the world had, it might thus be said, an ultimate purpose in ethics. Metaphysics, cosmology, epistemology were all leveraged to that search for true happiness.

That ancient philosophy was "a way of life" has come to be more firmly recognized in recent scholarship through the efforts of Pierre Hadot (1995). It is one important point of separation from the current practice of academic philosophy. What Hadot emphasized was the role which philosophy played in moral formation throughout antiquity. A philosopher was understood to be someone who adopted a way of life under the direction of a teacher who offered instruction according to the traditions of a school. Those ethical principles and practices had their epicenter

in the philosophical school itself and were not regarded as original to any specific teacher. To take up philosophy could even be described as a conversion of life. That is evident in the account of Plotinus' adoption of philosophy at the age of 28 in the *Life of Plotinus* by his student Porphyry (*Life of Plotinus* 3, in Armstrong 1966). This point should not be overstated, however, since the story of Plotinus' conversion also includes an account of the young Plotinus' unsuccessful search for a true philosophical teacher among the pedantic lecturers of Alexandria. Most of these philosophical lecturers were interested in doxography, not in the practice of wisdom itself (Porphyry, *Life of Plotinus* 3). Indeed, the story of Augustine's own reading of Cicero's *Hortensius* is instructive in this regard. He notes that Cicero recommended against commitment to the teachings of a particular school, preferring instead an open search for wisdom, wherever it might be found. That advice proved to undercut a serious conversion of life for the young Augustine. It left him in a state of suspended commitment and moderate skepticism. That conversion would have to wait, he tells us, until he rediscovered the true philosophy of Catholic Christianity. As we think about what 'philosophy' meant to Augustine, we need therefore to remain alert to this wider ethical dimension. Real philosophy was for him never just conceptual reflection or theoretical analysis. Moreover, his account in the *Confessions* of that initial encounter with philosophy underscores two further aspects of his attitude towards its practice (*Confessions* 3.4.8). He makes plain that true philosophy must not only be the love of earthly wisdom, but must also direct the soul towards a higher life beyond our earthly one. It must not just orient the soul, but supply a means to empower the soul in its search for an eternal happiness. In this characterization, he was evincing the influence of Platonism, the school of philosophy which became for him a crucial foundation for his intellectual and spiritual development.

Truest philosophy

Any serious engagement with philosophy beyond rhetorical utility had to wait until Augustine had burned through the gnostic theology of the Manichees, whose sect he joined when he was around 19 and in which he persisted for about a decade. In both the earliest works that he wrote in the years immediately after his conversion as well as in his autobiographical narrative, the *Confessions*, he recounts a largely consistent story about the transformative effect that reading Platonism had on him. To understand its appeal, we need to look closely at Platonism as Augustine saw it, rather than as it appears to us, given our culturally received understanding of 'philosophy.'

Some of the reasons why Platonism captured Augustine's attention were the same ones that attracted earlier Christian thinkers such as Justin, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, or Marius Victorinus. Platonism offered him conceptual leverage against the skepticism into which he had fallen in the wake of his break with Manichaeism. It was also a culturally prestigious intellectual tradition which served as a tacit ally and resource as he articulated his reasons for rejecting his former sect. Closely related too was the new way it offered him to read the Old Testament whose meaning he had often seen to be opaque or absurd when read literally. It was from Catholic Christians in Milan that he learned how to discern patterns of symbolic meaning beneath the surface of the text and to find ethical and theological significance beyond its literal meaning. Those Christian readers were evidently informed by the Platonism of the Roman school of Plotinus, some of whose treatises had been translated into Latin by the aristocratic convert of Catholic Christianity, Marius Victorinus.

Yet there was a much deeper reason for Augustine's attraction to Platonism, one that underscores the broader cultural scope of the practice of 'philosophy' among Platonists.³ What Platonism promised its adherents was not just a way of life but a path to eternal life. When Augustine

discussed Platonism, he is consistent in seeing in it a philosophy that directed the soul beyond our earthly life to something higher. This was the source of the fervent enthusiasm that he says swept over him when he first looked into the “books of the Platonists” (*Confessions* 7.9.13). But what captured Augustine’s imagination and transformed his life was not simply the notion that the human soul might persist beyond death and enjoy postmortem life in an invisible world, perhaps before returning to earthly existence. He had long been familiar with that sense of ‘spiritual’ survival, one that traded off a subtle materiality and regarded the soul as an occult substance journeying through space and time to a better place in the cosmos. That sort of thinking was, as it were, the sort of popular Platonism found, for example, in Virgil’s account of Aeneas’ journey into the underworld in *Aeneid* VI. What Augustine discovered by actually reading the treatises of late ancient Platonism was something much more arresting, something that henceforth became the center of his spiritual life.

That discovery was transcendence: the existence of a level of reality outside the material cosmos. Platonism was committed to the existence of a higher world beyond the manifest image of the physical cosmos. This ‘two-world’ theory articulated a conception of a divine level of reality entirely free from spatiality and consequently from the material cosmos. Moreover, that higher world was understood to be free from temporal succession and thus not just everlasting, but truly eternal. The higher life of true philosophy must involve, in consequence, a radical reorientation of the inner self. It required a shift of the moral focus of attention from the material to the transcendent, a re-direction of the soul away from the flux and confusion of the earthly life towards what is more perfect and real. The wisdom that true philosophy sought was not a way of life directed towards human flourishing as such, but rather one centered on the soul’s access to that higher world.

Transcendence thus understood transformed human thinking about the divine, changing – as it were – the place of the divine and the relationship of the human soul to it. By the time of Augustine, the pagan Platonists had come to accept an ultimate first principle, the One, which transcended all finite reality entirely and was thus understood to be infinite. Because the One transcended all finite beings, it was seen to be present to them in a non-spatial fashion. Moreover, it was the source of all finite reality and the sustaining cause of the cosmos. Beyond finite being, the One was the eternal root of all beings, yet intimately present to them by their very existence. Because the One was understood to be infinite, it was intimately present to all its ontological products, including the human soul. And because it was not to be found spatially within the material cosmos, it was never distant from us, but present in every moment of our finite existence. This understanding of divine transcendence began to change the way late antique thinkers understood the relationship between the soul and the divine. Platonism revised the spiritual vector, as it were, from ‘up and out’ to a God spatially beyond the visible heavens, to ‘down and into’ the spiritual presence of the One within the soul. The path to the transcendent One ran through the innermost self. Thus true philosophy for Platonists centered on the practice of interior contemplation. That was an inner journey catalyzed by dialectic and an ethical life, but concentrated on the One’s presence within the deepest recesses of the soul itself.

Platonism had come by late antiquity to regard philosophy as a path to transcendence. Estimates varied on how much could be accomplished by the soul while still embodied and whether spiritual assistance from divine powers was needed. However these questions were answered, it is clear that Platonism regarded the practice of philosophy as soteriological, designed to effect the soul’s ultimate release both from the body and from the annoyance of reincarnation. It was this powerful and capacious understanding of philosophy, as the practice of transcendence, which warranted the special status Augustine accorded to Platonism. It was, he says, the

philosophy not of this world but of the intelligible world. Indeed, it was “the one discipline of truest philosophy” (*Against the Sceptics* 3.17.37).

This understanding came to define his own articulation of Christian philosophy. Platonism and Christianity were, in his estimation, closely allied. This is how he makes the point in Book VIII of his mature work *The City of God*:

If therefore Plato said that the wise person imitates and knows and loves this God, and that whoever participates in him is happy, what use is there to examine other philosophies? None come closer to us than these.

(City of God 8.5. All translations of Augustine mine)

By their rejection of materialism Platonists stood apart from other philosophers:

Therefore we see that these philosophers have been justly preferred to the others since they discerned that nothing material is God and for that reason they transcended everything material in searching for God.

(City of God 8.6.)

The great promise of Platonism was eternal life achieved through the contemplation of the transcendent One, as described in the phrase of Plotinus: “the flight of the alone to the alone” (Plotinus, *Enneads* 6.9.11.51 in Armstrong 1988).

The presumption of philosophy

The value of Platonism for Augustine lay, therefore, in its focus on transcendence. He reports tellingly at *Confessions* V.10.19 that he had previously no capacity to imagine existence except in material terms. This is a rather arresting claim for a well-educated and highly successful rhetorician in his mid-30s to make. Yet it offers several insights that help to explain the nature and significance of Platonist philosophy for Augustine. Materialistic modes of reflection were, in fact, the default position in antiquity, standard and ingrained throughout ancient culture. This was true both of the philosophical materialism of schools like the Stoics or Epicureans as well as that of the Manichees. No doubt popular thought was consistent in this regard, making materialism the norm from which the Platonists deviated. They were the innovators who had, by late antiquity, come to expand the range of acceptance of transcendence among intellectuals. That is the reason for the extraordinary impact of Platonism upon Augustine. The very idea of transcendence came as a radical and novel insight. Notice that this means that Augustine did not turn to Platonic philosophy to answer specific conceptual problems or to find a philosophical foundation for his emerging Catholicism. It was transcendence, both of God and potentially of the soul, that revolutionized his thought. Platonism’s appeal was not, therefore, as a philosophical theory, but as the cultivation of transcendence in the inner soul. This observation may help to explain Augustine’s understanding of the relation of Christianity to Platonism. From the first of his writings, Platonism is presented by Augustine as the best philosophy of the pagan tradition. Its value lay in the opportunity it offered him to reconsider Christianity through the lens of what he regarded as the most advanced understanding of reality. Christianity could subsume the best of Platonism, especially its central insights regarding intelligible reality and the soul’s contemplative access to the eternal divine One. All these were open to Christians.

Yet Christianity was not Platonism. Augustine regarded Christianity as more than a philosophy, even in the broad understanding of that practice found among Platonists. Augustine is quite

clear on this from the first of his writings produced contemporaneously with his conversion. Christianity could indeed be seen to be a philosophy directed towards eternal life, but it held a different estimation of the human soul and its spiritual capacity from that of the Platonists. While Platonic philosophy could sketch a path to transcendence for the soul, its practice of dialectic and interior contemplation was insufficient to sustain the presence of the divine within the soul. In Augustine's view, Platonism was right about transcendence, but wrong about the soul's innate capacity to achieve it by the philosophical life alone.

Augustine's excitement in first looking into those books of the Platonists can be seen at *Against the Sceptics* 2.2.5, written in the autumn of 386. There he describes Platonism as a precious perfume being dropped on the little flame of his soul and igniting a conflagration. But that has led him to return, he says, to his true self, sending him back to reconsider his childhood religion and to read the letters of St. Paul from a new perspective. That same return to interpretation of the Christian scriptures after reading Plotinus is described at *On the Happy Life* 1.4 in a prologue addressed to the Christian philosopher Manlius Theodorus. It is important to underscore that, even in these early works, Augustine's reading of Platonism was interwoven with his parallel study of scripture. We also find a consistent focus on the soul's contemplative ascension to God in the treatises written in the aftermath of his conversion. These texts describe the interior stages by which the soul can intensify its connection with the transcendent level of reality. These early ascension schemes can be found at: *On the Greatness of the Soul* 33.70 ff., *On Genesis, against the Manichees* 25.43, *On True Religion* xxvi.49, *On the Sermon on the Mount* 1.3.10–11, and *On Christian Doctrine* 2.vii.9–11.⁴ Throughout these works the soul is described as able to advance towards the divine. It is not fixed in place within the hierarchy of being, but can seek to restore its connection to a higher level of reality (cf. *Against the Sceptics* 3.19.42). Yet this mobility is deceptive. Augustine regards this deepening of the soul's spiritual condition and its renewed association with the divine to be outside the soul's own power. He attributes to Platonism the more robust theory that the soul can save itself. It bears mention that this interpretation was correct about the doctrines of the Roman school of Plotinus, whose treatises he was evidently reading, but not about other contemporary Platonic schools. At least from his restricted vantage point, the truest philosophy, Platonism, attributed more spiritual power to the soul than it in fact possessed. That meant that philosophy was destined to fail at its essential purpose: restoring eternal life to the soul through its immediate presence to the One. Transcendence was thus a false promise of pagan philosophy. That is because transcendence is possible for the soul only through divine aid in Augustine's estimation. That is purpose of the Incarnation, the exercise of clemency to fallen souls by Christ. Even throughout the works written before the *Confessions*, Augustine portrays the soul as succeeding in immediate contemplation of the transcendent only through the assistance of Christ the divine mediator. This impoverished state of the human soul is due to the fall described in Genesis but now understood by Augustine as figurative of the metaphysical declension of the soul. The exact nature of this ontological fall remained unclear to Augustine, although the main outlines of its effects seemed evident in the quotidian hold of moral evil within the soul (see Rombs 2006).

It is here that we see the emergence of Christian philosophy as Augustine understood it. Philosophy must be humble in its claims, recognizing that transcendence is a gift of God and not within the natural powers of the soul. Because of its fallen state, transcendence cannot be self-catalyzed by the soul. The reversal of the fall is beyond the impaired moral capacity of human beings. To claim otherwise is an act of pride and a recapitulation of the fall itself. This theme is hammered out by Augustine in the concluding paragraphs of *Confessions* 7 (20.26–21.27). There the Platonists are taken to task for their overestimation of the soul's spiritual power and their consequent presumption. They can see the goal of the transcendent world but know not

the true means to achieve it. Though aware of the visionary value of philosophical contemplation, Christianity nonetheless recognizes the limitations of that knowledge. Though the soul can grasp its true home, it must turn elsewhere to secure the power to return from the temporal to the eternal. That is beyond the scope of philosophy alone.

This is not to say that philosophy does not have a crucial role to play in the Christianity of Augustine. Quite the contrary is the case. While philosophy is not sufficient in achieving its professed goal of securing eternal life for the soul, it is nonetheless cognitively successful. Augustine holds Platonism in the highest regard for its metaphysical insight of transcendence. While he criticizes Platonism's overestimation of the soteriological value of philosophy, he also recognizes its vital significance for his own spiritual development. For it was Platonism that catalyzed his rejection of materialism and opened to him an entirely different understanding of reality in general and of God in particular. Moreover, as the philosophical advocates of transcendence, Platonism had come to perceive the existence of the divine One. In *City of God*, he praises the Platonists because of their grasp of the soul's capacity to find the one, true, transcendent God:

They have so understood God that they have discovered him to be the cause of being, the principle of understanding, the rule of life. These three might be thought to pertain: first to what is natural, second to what is rational, and third to what is moral. For if man was thus created, then through that which is superior within him he might touch that which exceeds all, that is, the one, true, supremely good God, without which no nature exists, no teaching instructs, no experience gains. God should be sought, where for us all things are connected. He should be discerned, where for us all things are discerned. He should be loved, where for us all things are morally right.

(City of God 8.4)

Platonism has, therefore, been able to secure these key insights into the nature of the one, true and supremely good God. God is the ontological cause of all reality, the foundation of knowledge, and the ground of ethics. All this was disclosed to the Platonists, making it the supreme expression of philosophical knowledge of God.

Contemplation and Christianity

What Platonism did for Augustine it could do for others. Because it offers access to genuine knowledge of God, it had an integral place within the Christianity of Augustine. For him, its impact had been conversionary, opening up a vista onto a previously unsuspected level of reality, a transcendent world beyond space and time. In that sense, philosophy could be propaedeutic for the Christian soul. He insists that this was the case for him. God had intended that he encounter the books of the Platonists to prepare him for reading the scriptures (*Confessions* 7.20.26). But beyond that preparatory function, Platonism had a role to play in framing the foundational representation of reality upon which any reading of scripture must be based. In this sense it supported, in his view, a richer reading of those revealed texts. Granted that philosophy was not sufficient for the soul's salvation, as we have seen. Neither was it necessary, as the long biographical account of Augustine's mother Monica, an unlearned but saintly woman, clearly emphasizes (*Confessions* 8.17–9.22). But it did offer a deeper level of understanding to those Christians who could recover the larger meanings to be found there. It did so because all wisdom is rooted in the self-revelation of the infinite One in finite terms.

When Augustine first introduces his readers to Platonism in the *Confessions*, he offers a detailed account of its concordance with Christianity, relying primarily on the prologue to

the Gospel of John supplemented with texts from St. Paul's Letter to the Philippians (*Confessions* 7.9.13). Augustine says that he has found many elements in Platonism that are much the same as those found in Christianity. His analysis relies loosely on the Plotinian theory of divine hypostases, specifically of a divine Intellect that emerges from the One and serves as the intermediary in the production of the cosmos. Here is a sketch of Augustine's account:

- 1 Platonism holds that God generates the cosmos and does so through a power known to Christians as the divine Word. This is the divine light that made all things and shines into human souls. Both Platonism and Christianity thus recognize one ultimate God.
- 2 Platonism and Christianity also distinguish this divine light from the human soul. God and the divine Word are separate from the things generated. God can thus be discovered as the generating power of the cosmos and as the source for the illumination of souls.
- 3 Platonists and Christianity recognize that, though he made the world through his Word, the world is ignorant of that creative light. However, Platonists do not go on to teach the specifically Christian doctrine that the Word came into the world so that humans may become sons of God.
- 4 Platonists understand that the generative power of God, described by Christians as the Word, is divine. But Platonists have no notion of the Word made flesh.
- 5 Moreover, the Platonist books express in a variety of different ways that the Word is equal to the Father and has the same nature as the Father. Augustine then references Philippians 2:6–11, claiming that Platonists too regard the Word or Intellect as equal to God. But most of Paul's characterization of the Word cannot be found in Platonism. That includes the self-emptying of the Word in order to descend to a lower level of reality, the incarnation of the Word, the actual voluntary death of the incarnate Word, and the exaltation of the Son by the Father.
- 6 Platonists maintain that the Son/Intellect abides before and above all time with the Father. It is by participation in the fullness of the Son that souls are renewed by his wisdom within them. Platonism does not recognize that the incarnate Son died for us.

This is a generous assessment of pagan Platonism, one that underscores its capacity to achieve true knowledge of God through philosophical contemplation. It also supports Augustine's representation of Platonism as propaedeutic to Christianity, serving as a hermeneutical resource. We can see that Platonic philosophy was capable, in Augustine's estimation, of discovering that there is one God, transcendent of the finite cosmos, who generates that cosmos through the extension of his inner nature, the divine Word or Intellect. Platonism can thus be seen to endorse monotheism, at least in its metaphysics if not in its cultic life, and to reject dualism, pantheism, and materialism. It could do so because its central practice of philosophical contemplation was indeed cognitively efficacious, even though Platonists were unaware that this immediate access to wisdom was a gift of Wisdom itself. Moreover, this account of the relative status of Platonism and Christianity intimates as well the limits of philosophy. It is more than a doxographical inventory. Rather, it begins to sketch the reasons for the failure of philosophical contemplation, recognizing that Platonism's ignorance of the Incarnation is to blame. That lack leads both to an inability to sustain the soul's immediate presence to God and also to a nescience about the active role of the Word/Intellect in the practice of transcendence. These points come through clearly in the two ascension narratives that follow in *Confessions* 7.

It is quite exceptional to find such autobiographical accounts of spiritual enlightenment in world religious literature, particularly from antiquity. Augustine innovates by using his own story to articulate the nature of Christian philosophy and the limitations of Platonism. The two

accounts found in *Confessions* 7 fall prior to his baptism, while a third in book IX is subsequent to it. It bears noting that those texts mentioned previously relating his first encounter with the books of the Platonists were written – if we can trust the autobiographical narrative – in the interval between the episodes described in those books and before his baptism. In consequence, it is commonly thought that the first two pre-baptismal accounts are free from Christian influence and the immediate product of his Platonist reading. But that is a mistake. As we have seen, the earliest works of Augustine relate his reading Platonism in conjunction with the letters of St. Paul. The comparative inventory just considered from *Confessions* 7 seems to be a mature reiteration of those explorations. That means that the ascension narratives of that book are actually describing incipient Christian contemplation which Augustine explores in his retrospective account. As we turn to them, we need to be alert to Augustine's complex interweaving of Platonic and Pauline elements.

The first account of Augustine's discovery of transcendence is in found at *Confessions* 7.10.16. In the first section of the passage, his reading of the Platonism reorients him away from the material world and down into the interior self:

Thus admonished to return to myself, I entered into my innermost depths with you as my guide, and I was able to do so because you had become my helper. I entered and with the eye of my soul, such as it was, saw above that eye of the soul an immutable light higher than my mind – not the everyday light visible to all bodies, nor a greater light of the same type that might shine more clearly and fill everything with its magnitude. It was not that light but another, entirely different from all others. Nor was it above my mind in the way that oil is on top of water or the sky is above the earth. Rather it was superior because it made me, and I was inferior because I was made by it.

The passage begins by underscoring an interior vector away from materiality and towards the inner self. This is possible because of the guidance of the divine Word, not the native powers of the soul. There the eye of the soul perceives the creative light of reason upon which its existence depends. That light transcends the physical world but shines within the interior self. That insight is then developed further:

Whoever knows the truth knows it, and whoever knows it knows eternity. Love knows it. O eternal truth and true love and beloved eternity, you are my God. To you I sigh day and night. When I first knew you, you raised me up so that I might see that what I saw was being, and that I who saw it was not yet being. And you repelled the weakness of my gaze by shining ardently upon me and I shuddered with love and awe. And I discovered myself far from you in a region of dissimilarity and heard, as it were, a voice from on high: I am the bread of the fully grown; grow and you will feed on me. And you will not change me into yourself, as with food for your body, but you will be changed into me.

(Confessions 7.10.16)

The soul has been raised up to higher level of reality beyond the material world. This is disclosed within the depths of the soul, where eternal truth itself is to be found. That is true and immutable being. But it is divine love that lifted the soul to this knowledge of being and truth. The passage ends with explicit eucharistic imagery, foreshadowing the practice of Christianity which Augustine will need to follow in order to purify his soul. Transcendent reality is only known by a soul that has been morally transformed and given the power to sustain its participation in divine being itself.

This insight is reiterated at 7.17.23:

And I marveled that at last I loved you, not a phantom in place of you. Yet I was not stable enough to enjoy my God, but was swept up to you by your beauty and then torn away from you by my weight. I collapsed with a groan into inferior things. That weight was my sexual habit. Yet the memory of you remained with me and I had no sort of doubt that to whom I should cling, though I was not yet able to do that.

Because of his impoverished moral state, Augustine's soul collapses back down to the material level on which it is principally focused. He describes once again an ascent to God, articulating how his soul passed through five levels of interior cognition. These include the body, the soul that perceives through the body, the inward force of the soul itself, the power of discursive reasoning, and lastly, intellect itself. But the ascent is at once a momentary cognitive success and a spiritual failure, as the soul loses its grip on transcendence:

And so in the flash of a trembling glance it reached that which is. Then I clearly saw your invisible things understood through the things that are made. But I did not have the strength to keep my gaze fixed. My weakness rebounded and I returned to my customary state. I bore with me only a cherished memory and a desire, as it were, for something I had smelled but could not yet eat.

(*Confessions* 7.17.23)

The soul achieves transcendence in a moment out of time, but the fallen nature of the soul causes it to lose its focus. Platonism is, therefore, right about its ontological claims of transcendence. But the soul's fallen nature is insufficient to effect its purification of materiality. If epistemology and ethics are intertwined, as in Platonism, then the soul's conversion to Christianity is necessary for sustained participation in God. The fall has restricted the soul's capacity for moral transformation.

Platonic philosophy can thus be seen to be crucial for Augustine because of its fundamental insight into divine transcendence. Yet it offered no stable access to that level of reality. The paradox of Augustine's view of Platonic philosophy is therefore evident. He has succeeded, if only momentarily, in achieving the transcendence that the books of the Platonists promised, but only because the Christian God had lifted up his soul.

Christian philosophy

But what can now be said about Christian philosophy? To answer that we need to look at the third ascension narrative of the *Confessions*, the 'vision at Ostia.' In doing so, we must first recall that Augustine's reading of Platonism convinced him that philosophy was a way to eternal life, whereas his experiences of contemplation left him both elated by the cognitive certainty disclosed and desolated by his return to an impoverished spiritual state. He frames the narrative such that the final instance of contemplation comes after his baptism, but it is different from the earlier accounts in many unexpected ways. It is, first of all, not the depiction of an individual interior ascent of the soul, but paradoxically it is a joint ascent with Monica. Together they are engaged in discourse about the eternal lives of the saints, conducted, he tells us, "in the presence of truth" (*Confessions* 9.10.23). That divine truth then draws their souls more deeply into its presence. From the narrative of this extraordinary event, we can discern quite clearly how he had come to nest philosophical contemplation into Catholic Christianity and in doing so expand the understanding of the practice of philosophy.

As we saw in the ascension narratives of *Confessions* VII, it was the moral condition of the soul that precluded the soul's remaining in the presence of divine Wisdom. This moral insufficiency, rooted in the fall, had preoccupied Augustine over the decade from his conversion to the time he wrote the *Confessions*. The works he wrote show him grappling with this issue. There we find the emerging theme of the necessity for divine assistance to cure the fallen soul. Christ the Physician of souls becomes a prominent image, one that is associated with the scriptures (e.g. *On True Religion* 24.45). The prescriptions of this physician are found there, specific texts being like ointments for the moral ailments of individual souls. When heard they can empower the soul to break free from the fever of the fall. There is no better example of this notion than Augustine's depiction of the adventitious reading of Roman 13:13–14 that spoke so powerfully to his soul that it catalyzed his conversion of life (*Confessions* 8.12.29).

Scripture is, therefore, an essential means for the Christian soul to find the moral balm needed for its spiritual advancement. Its admonitions are a conduit of divine grace to the soul, while its texts offer great disclosures of wisdom when read spiritually and not just literally (*Confessions* 6.4.6). Scriptural contemplation is thus a necessary element in the life of the Christian philosopher, the lover of divine Wisdom seeking conversion and return of the soul. That meditative reading can also lead to scriptural dialectic, as the sacred texts are explored and their many possible meanings debated.⁵ The church thus emerges for Augustine as a school grounded in scriptural dialectic, where a philosophy of scripture can be conducted. When conjoined with the ethical life prescribed in those texts, a new style of philosophy can be seen to emerge, one that promises the medicinal power of Wisdom to the fallen soul. And that promise is available not just to the tiny elite who could afford a life of leisure and the expensive education that pagan philosophy required. It was available even to the unlearned like Monica, who could memorize and reflect on Biblical passages, making them formative for their own lives.

All these themes come together in the narrative of the vision at Ostia because of Monica. Her active participation in this joint ascension to divine Wisdom signals a revised and egalitarian model of Christian philosophy. She attains the same unmediated knowledge of the divine Wisdom through contemplation as does her learned but prodigal son. The Ostian narrative is framed intertextually with scriptural passages whose meanings resonant for the Christian reader. Philippians 3:13, a resurrection text, and 1 Corinthians 2:9, referring to the unknown wisdom of God, are both quoted. Augustine informs the reader that the day of Monica's unexpected death was imminent. They are together looking into a garden discussing the eternal life of the saints. Their minds, he says, were lifted up by affection towards the eternal and beyond the material world. The text then describes their joint union with eternal Wisdom (*Confessions* 9.10.24):

and we came into our minds and we transcended them so as to reach the region of inexhaustible abundance where you feed Israel eternally with truth for food. And there life is the wisdom through which all things come to be, both those that were and those that will be. But wisdom is not made but is as it was and always will be. Indeed in wisdom there can be no 'has been' or 'will be' but only 'being,' since wisdom is eternal and 'has been' and 'will be' do not pertain to the eternal. And while we were talking and gazing at it, we just barely touched it by the total force of the heart. And we sighed and left behind the firstfruits of the spirit bound there, and we returned to the noise of our speech where a word begins and ends. But what is like your word, o Lord, which remains within itself, never becoming old and yet making all things new.

"First fruits of the spirit" from Romans 8:23 gives an eschatological resonance to the passage, suggesting the final station of their soul's in eternity. But both finite nature of the soul and its fallen status allow only a moment of association with eternal wisdom.

Augustine then describes this mutual ascension again (*Confessions* 9.10.25):

Therefore we said: If to anyone the tumult of the flesh became silent, if the images of earth and water and air became silent, if the heavens became silent, and the very soul became silent to itself and surpassed itself by not thinking of itself, if all dreams and visions in the imagination became silent, and all speech and every sign and whatever is transitory became silent – for if anyone could hear them, they would all say: “We did not make ourselves, but he made us who abides in eternity” – if, having said this and directed our ears to him who made them, they were to be silent, then he alone would speak not through them but through himself. We would hear his word not through the tongue of the flesh, nor through the voice of an angel, nor through the sound of thunder, nor through the obscurity of a likeness. Instead we would hear him, whom we love in these things, alone and without them. It was thus when we extended ourselves and in a flash of thought touched the eternal wisdom that abides beyond all things. If this could continue, and all other visions of a much lesser sort could be withdrawn, then this alone would ravish and absorb and enfold the beholder in inward joy. Eternal life is of the quality of that moment of understanding for which we sighed. Is this not the meaning of “enter into the joy of your lord”? And when will that be? When we all rise again but are not all changed.

This “moment of understanding” is conferred on their souls by wisdom itself, lifting them out of time and into the immediate presence of the divine. It is a moment of immediacy which surpasses both discursive philosophy and scriptural reflection, for the separation between the soul from divine Wisdom has been closed. In consequence, all symbolic representation has been superseded, even scriptural revelation. Moreover, each soul returns to Wisdom in silence, no longer thinking of itself, free from the pride and the self-orientation that caused the fall. Then these contemplative souls can recognize their place in the heavenly Jerusalem to which they are meant to return (*Confessions* 12.16.23).

It should be noted that those voices of transitory things are confessing their created nature in a phrase drawn from Psalm 79. Augustine’s text goes on to conclude with quotations from Matthew 25:21 and 1 Corinthians 15:51. All these scriptural references are related to resurrection. Their cumulative effect is to remind the Christian reader of the true status of contemplation. Despite its success at achieving immediate knowledge of God, Augustine points to its limitation. Contemplation, whether philosophically or scripturally based, offers only cognitive access to the divine, however certain and compelling that may be. But that ascent of the soul is not the resurrection of the body, nor it is truly salvific. Only when we all rise again and are changed will that come about.

The significance of Christian philosophy

Philosophy can therefore be seen to have been ambivalent in its value to Augustine. This is true even of Christian philosophy, rooted in the dialectic of scripture. For Augustine, achieving the pinnacle of unitive contemplation only throws into relief the soul’s existence in the fallen world and its need for continuing grace to complete its return. There is no philosophical path to salvation. On the other hand, immediate knowledge of divine Wisdom, however fleeting, is of immense value, freeing the soul from cognitive confusion while offering the joy of perfect certitude. That too is a gift a grace. In Augustine’s narrative, such certainty sets the stage for Monica’s admission into the life of beatitude and her son’s to the continuing struggles of embodied life.⁶ In the soul’s distension into temporal life, Christian philosophy can promise

advancement towards the *beata vita*, the life at once happy and blessed, even if philosophy alone cannot secure the soul's return to its eternal home.

Notes

- 1 Lewis 2015: ch. 5.
- 2 Kenney 2013: chs. 1–4.
- 3 Cf. the recent study of Remes 2008.
- 4 Kenney 2013: ch. 4.
- 5 Something that Augustine models (though not without rancor against his opponents) in *Confessions* XII. Cf. Kenney 2013: ch. 5.
- 6 *Confessions* 10.30.41ff. sets out the moral parameters of that struggle in surprisingly candid detail.

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Cyril of Alexandria

Christoph Riedweg

1 Life

Cyril was born around 378 in Theodosiou (Mahalla), an area in the Nile delta.¹ He was son of the sister (who was from Memphis) of Theophilus, the famous Bishop of Alexandria (385–412) who, amongst other things, vigorously pursued the destruction of pagan temples, cast himself as enemy of the teachings of Origen and succeeded in having John Chrysostom deposed in 403 at the so called Synod of the Oak.

Scarcely anything is known about Cyril's youth. Reports of prolonged stays in the monasteries of Nitria and Kellia are late and may rather form legendary elements² (cause for scepticism on this point is raised by, amongst other things, the fact that Cyril never mentions any such stay in his letters to the monks).³ Whether Isidore of Pelusium ever was his teacher in the desert, is likewise unclear.⁴ From his early period, it is certainly testified only that in 403 Cyril accompanied his uncle to the Synod of the Oak in Constantinople.⁵

In 412, after hard fought election, Cyril succeeded the deceased Theophilus to the bishopric of Alexandria.⁶ The first years of his episcopate were marked by rowdy confrontations with Novatianists and with the Jews of Alexandria, as well as with the 'praefectus Augustalis' Orestes.⁷ It seems that a certain culpability quickly attached to Cyril in the murder of the pagan philosopher Hypatia by a Christian gang under the instigation of a reader (*ἀναγνώστης*) by the name of Petrus.⁸

At the centre of the second half of his episcopate (428–444) stands his confrontation with Nestorius the Bishop of Constantinople who, in contrast to Cyril, came of the Antiochene school. The matter of the dispute arose out of Nestorius' rejection of the title "begetter of god" (*θεοτόκος*) for Jesus' mother – he considered more appropriate the designation "begetter of Christ" (*χριστοτόκος*), as also excluding "begetter of man" (*ἀνθρωποτόκος*) – at the same time, there was a strong dimension of church politics about it (in the tussle for primacy between Constantinople and Alexandria). Cyril, who had received assurance of support from the bishop of Rome Celestine I, managed to achieve the deposing of Nestorius at the turbulent Council of Ephesus in 431. He himself, however, came under considerable political pressure, with the result that he consented to a compromise christological formulation, which the eastern members of the church at the council had originally suggested.⁹

Christological controversies remained characteristic of Cyril's activity up to his death on the 27th of June 444.

No confirmed evidence is available concerning the education of Cyril.¹⁰ The only autobiographical clue is found in an intervention of his at the Council of Ephesus, in which Cyril firmly distances himself from the teachings of Apollinarius, Arius and Eunomius and emphasises that he has studied Holy Scripture since earliest childhood and been raised by true-believing, holy fathers.¹¹ Cyril may in fact have been chiefly influenced in his thinking by the Alexandrian theologians, especially Athanasius. It is an oft repeated and plausible assumption that his uncle Theophilus undertook general responsibility for the education of his nephew.¹²

We may certainly presume a comprehensive schooling.¹³ Rhetoric will have been part of the curriculum (cf. his, albeit mostly critical, dealing with rhetoric in *Against Julian* 5.37f.; 7.21–23).¹⁴ Cyril writes in a style characterised by neologism and elaborate periods, striving in part after the poetic and tending to pronounced emphasis.¹⁵ Any profound study of pagan philosophy, on the other hand, can be ruled out. The fundamentals of the Platonic and Aristotelian philosophical *Koine* (enriched by the addition of Stoic elements) might not have been unknown to Cyril, not least through the writings of Christian thinkers and doxographical handbooks. Through quotation and references in Eusebius and other Church Fathers, he was encouraged to read for himself the works of Alexander of Aphrodisias, Plotinus, Porphyry and the *Corpus Hermeticum* as well as Philostratus' *Life of Apollonius*.¹⁶ He was also clearly familiar with Aristotelian logic and Porphyry's discussion of that.¹⁷ From among Plato's works, the argument against the Emperor Julian's attack on Christianity brought him to, at the least, the dialogue *Timaeus*.¹⁸

2 Works

1 Exegetical Writings

Along with the "Easter Missives" (CPG 5240), "Sermons" (CPG 5245–5295) and further "Letters" (CPG 5301–5411), his exegetical writings on the Old and New Testament form one focus of Cyril's extensive oeuvre. Of these, the following are preserved in the original in their entirety:

"*De adoratione in spiritu et veritate*" Περὶ τῆς ἐν πνεύματι καὶ ἀληθείᾳ Προσκυήσεως καὶ λατρείας – "*On the adoration and worship in spirit and truth*" (*Adoration*; CPG 5200)

Seventeen dialogues between Cyril and a certain Palladius on the relationship of Christian and Mosaic law; allegorical and typological exegeses of individual passages from the Pentateuch.

"*Glaphyra in Genesim, Exodum, Leviticum, Numeros, Deuteronomium*" Γλαφυρὰ εἰς Γένεσιν (7 books), τὴν Ἑξοδὸν (3), τὸ Λευιτικόν (1), τοὺς Ἀριθμούς (1), τὸ Δευτερονόμιον (1) – "*Refined [sc. Commentaries] on 'Genesis' (7 books), 'Exodus' (3), 'Leviticum' (1), 'Numeri' (1), 'Deuteronomium' (1)*" (*Glaphyra*; CPG 5201)

"*Commentarius in Isaiaam prophetam*" Ἐξηγήσεις ὑπομνηματικὴ εἰς τὸν προφήτην Ἡσαΐαν (5 books) – "*Exegetical Commentary on the Prophet Jesaia*" (*Is.*; CPG 5203)

"*Commentarius in xii prophetas minores*" Ἐξηγήσεις ὑπομνηματικαί – "*Exegetical Commentaries*" on the 12 Minor Prophets Hoseas, Joel, Amos etc. (quoted by the name of the prophet; CPG 5204)

"*Commentarius in Iohannem*" Ἑρμηνεῖα ἤτοι ὑπόμνημα εἰς τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγέλιον (12 books) – "*Interpretation or Commentary in the 'Gospel according to John'*" (*Jo.*; CPG 5208)

In addition, 156 “Homilies on Luke” have been transmitted in a Syriac version (of which three are preserved also in Greek; *Lc.*; *CPG* 5207). The “Commentaries” on further books of the Old Testament, on the “Gospel of Matthew”, the letters to the Romans, Hebrews, both epistles to the Corinthians as well as on the “Acts of the Apostles” and the catholic epistles have been lost, except for a few fragments (*CPG* 5202; 5205–5207; 5209f.).

2 Dogma and Polemic

The dogmatic and polemical works against the Arians and Nestorius and the monumental refutation of the Emperor Julian’s *Κατὰ Γαλιλαίων* (“Against the Galileans”) stand out as the second focus.

Works preserved in their entirety or in most part in the original Greek are:

“*Thesaurus de trinitate*” Ἡ βίβλος τῶν θησαυρῶν Περί τῆς ἁγίας καὶ ὁμοουσίου Τριάδος – “*The Book of Treasures concerning the Holy and Consubstantial Trinity*” (*Thesaurus*; *CPG* 5215)

Thirty-five treatises on disputed aspects of the Trinity, against Arian and Eunomius and relying strongly on Athanasius, addressed to “Brother” Nemesinus.

“*De trinitate dialogi*” Περί ἁγίας τε καὶ ὁμοουσίου Τριάδος – “*About the holy and consubstantial Trinity*” (*Dialogue on the Trinity*; *CPG* 5216)

Seven dialogues on questions of the Trinity between Cyril and his friend Hermias, likewise addressed to Nemesinus.

“*Contra Nestorium*” Κατὰ τῶν Νεστορίου δυσφημιῶν πεντάβιβλος ἀντίρρησις – “*Refutation of the Nestorian Blasphemies in Five Books*” (*Nest.*; *CPG* 5217)

Critical examination of a collection of Nestorius’ sermons.

“*De recta fide*” Περί τῆς ὀρθῆς πίστεως – “*On the True Faith*”

Three writings to the Emperor Theodosius, to both Empresses Arcadia and Marina, as well as to Pulcheria and Eudocia (*Thds.*, *Ad dominas* and *Ad augustas*; *CPG* 5218–5220).

“*Apologia xii capitulorum contra orientales episcopos*” Ἀπολογητικὸς ὑπὲρ τῶν δώδεκα κεφαλαίων πρὸς τοὺς τῆς ἀνατολῆς ἐπισκόπους – “*Defence of the Twelve Chief Points against the Bishops of the East*” (*Apol. orient.*; *CPG* 5221)

“*Epistula ad Euoptium*” Ἐπιστολὴ πρὸς Εὐόπτιον πρὸς τὴν παρὰ Θεοδορήτου κατὰ τῶν δώδεκα κεφαλαίων ἀντίρρησιν – “*Letter to Euoptius Countering Theodoret’s Rejection of the Twelve Chief Points*” (*Ep. Euopt.*; *CPG* 5384)

“*Apologia xii anathematismorum contra Theodoretum*” Ἀπολογία τῶν δώδεκα κεφαλαίων πρὸς τὴν παρὰ Θεοδορήτου ἀντίρρησιν – “*Defence of the Twelve Chief Points against Theodoret’s Rejection*” (*Apol. Thdt.*; *CPG* 5222)

“*Explanatio xii capitulorum*” Ἐπίλυσις τῶν δώδεκα κεφαλαίων ῥηθεῖσα ἐν Ἐφέσῳ ὑπὸ Κυρίλλου ἀρχιεπισκόπου Ἀλεξανδρείας – “*Explanation of the Twelve Chief Points, Delivered by Cyril, the Archbishop of Alexandria, in Ephesus*” (*Expl. xii cap.*; *CPG* 5223)

“*Apologeticus ad imperatorem Theodosium*” Λόγος ἀπολογητικὸς πρὸς τὸν εὐσεβέστατον βασιλέα Θεοδοσίον – “*Defence Addressed to the Most Pious Emperor Theodosius*” (*Apol. Thds.*; *CPG* 5224)

“*Quod unus sit Christus*” Ὅτι εἷς ὁ Χριστός – “*That Christ is one*” (*Chr. un.*; *CPG* 5228)

Dialogues against Nestorian Christology.

“*De dogmatum solutione*” Ἐνδεκα κεφάλαια ἐπιλύσεως δογματικῶν ζητημάτων προτεθέντων τῷ ἁγιωτάτῳ Κυρίλλῳ – “*Eleven Chapters of Solutions of Problems of Dogma, Proposed by the Most Holy Cyril*” (*Dogm. sol. Elucidations of Dogmas: CPG 5231*)
 “*Contra Iulianum*” Κατὰ Ἰουλιανοῦ – “*Against Julian*” (*CI; CPG 5233*)

Originally making up a full thirty books, only ten are preserved, with also Greek and Syriac fragments of books 11–19. The work is addressed to Theodosius II. After a general defence of Christianity in the first book, successive extracts from Julian’s denunciation “Against the Galileans” are quoted and refuted point by point; cf. Kyrill von Alexandrien 2016, 2017.

3 Further Fragmentarily Preserved Works

The λόγοι against the Antiochians Diodorus of Tarsus and Theodore of Mopsuestia, seen as spiritual fathers of Nestorianism, are preserved only in a few Greek and Syriac excerpts (*CPG 5229*). In addition, there are Greek fragments of Περὶ τῆς ἐνανθρωπήσεως τοῦ μονογενοῦς (*On the Becoming Human of the Only Begotten; CPG 5225*) and various other writings (*CPG 5230; 5232; 5234*). On the Syriac transmission of Cyril generally, see King 2008 and Kaufhold in Kyrill von Alexandrien 2017, 821–834.

3 Doctrine

1 Philosophical Theology – 2 Cosmology and Physics – 3 Anthropology and Ethics – 4 Christology – 5 Philological Fundamentals of Biblical Exegesis

Preliminary remarks: Here is not the place to describe Cyril’s theological thinking as such, which together with his Christology has exercised enormous, subsequent influence. Much rather should it be attempted to demonstrate the philosophical principles of his exegetic and dogmatic reflections. In this regard, the focus of attention will be the *Contra Iulianum* (*CI*), the work that stands as the central document in the confrontation between Pagan and Christian, and in which most of the quotations by Cyril of pagan philosophers are to be found too.¹⁹

1 Philosophical Theology

With his pagan contemporaries Cyril shares the premises of a Platonist religious philosophy, which presupposes the existence of a highest being to which it ascribes particular characteristics: it is uncreated, immaterial and incorporeal;²⁰ simple and not composite;²¹ enduring, eternal and utterly immutable;²² completely free of emotions and above all forms of suffering;²³ omniscient and omnipotent;²⁴ it is absolutely perfect unto itself and in need of nothing;²⁵ and intrinsically good.²⁶

In line with Hellenistic Jewish and Early Christian intellectual tradition, this highest Being is identified with the Creator God of the Old Testament, who is described by Cyril, emphatically setting apart his own from Neoplatonist models, as the single and highest point of the metaphysical pyramid (“the Being far surpassing all others”, ἡ ἀνωτάτω πασῶν οὐσίᾳ) above and beyond which (ἐπέκεινα) there exists nothing at all.²⁷

The application of the principles of philosophical theology to the Judaeo-Christian God entails the familiar problems, which have beset interpreters of the Bible since Aristobulus and Philo of Alexandria.²⁸ It is no easy task to reconcile the doctrine of the impassibility and immutability of divinity with the, in part, anthropomorphically coloured traits of the jealous God of the Bible. The anti-Christian polemicists long pointed to this. Amongst other things, Cyril must respond to Julian's accusation that Moses implies of God human emotions like envy and anger.²⁹ Against such reproaches Cyril opposes the categorical difference of the Godhead: such behaviour in humans is tied to passions on account of the weakness and sinfulness of human nature, the divine, however, is free of passions and emotions. With the term "be jealous" (ζηλοῦν) – one consciously matched by the composers of Holy Scripture to our horizon of understanding – is meant, therefore, only that it is a matter of anything but indifference to God if humans should fall from the good and come to their ruin (*Against Julian* 3.54; 5.6–11, 30).

2 Cosmology and Physics

Cyril's views on the cosmos and its coming into being, are marked by the Platonising explanation of the creation account, widespread since the time of Philo, in which are blended together the first chapters of *Genesis* and Plato's dialogue *Timaeus*. In agreement, he notes that for Plato too the world has come into being, and that, indeed, in accordance with the maker's providence.³⁰ All things in this world, without any exception, have been made by God (*Against Julian* 3.38). Among his outstanding qualities one, clearly evident in *Genesis*, is that unlike human beings he is capable of creating *ex nihilo* (*Against Julian* 2.26; 3.36; 7.18). Matter too is of his making and not without beginning, eternal and enduring along with the divinity, as some Middle Platonists supposed (*Against Julian* 2.26). Cyril accordingly denied Julian's view³¹ that in Moses the Demiurge is described merely as organiser of preexisting matter (*Against Julian* 2.26).

Along with other Christian authors, but against Plato,³² the impermanence of the world is inferred from its having come into being, for everything that has become is subject to movement and change (*Against Julian* 2.53). There is at the same time no doubt for Cyril that from the order and beauty of the cosmos there can and must be inferred the one creator of this artwork (*Against Julian* 2.53; 3.13 etc.). In the opinion that this highest Being shows providence for everything on earth (προνοεῖ) and is especially concerned with human affairs, he finds himself in agreement with Pagan thinkers like Plato, the Stoics and Alexander of Aphrodisias (*Against Julian* 2.38f).

3 Anthropology and Ethics

Humankind for Cyril is "bestowed with mind and reason and [is] the most godlike of living creatures on Earth" (τὸ ἔννοον τε καὶ λογικὸν καὶ θεοειδέστατον τῶν ἐπὶ γῆς ζώων), the summit of creation (*Against Julian* 2.34). Made "in the image and likeness" of God (*Genesis* 1.26), humans could even be described as "gods" at *Psalms* 82[81].6, which Cyril explains as homonym – comparable with the use of 'human' for the representation of a human being – which underlines the exceptional position of humanity,³³ without however eliding the categorical difference between human nature and the immeasurably superior divine Being. It is in the limits on understanding, as Cyril emphasises again and again, that the gap between God and human is most clearly revealed: our minds are not in a position to grasp God's action in

his creation and in his governance of the world appropriately, for it far exceeds our powers of understanding. The result of this for humankind is that it is to piously content itself and deliberately relinquish all excessive investigation into the realm of the transcendent. It is much more correct to believe with complete faith and always and in all things to ascribe *a priori* to God only the best ends and most perfect realisations.³⁴

From the beginning, according to Cyril, body and soul form a unit. Strongly rejected is the notion of the preexistence of souls, which would initially “pass a very great span of time in disembodied beatitude in Heaven and enjoy more purely the truly Good”,³⁵ then however would have turned away from it, be sent into the world as punishment and encumbered with a body. For Cyril, the “Resurrection of the flesh”, which is grounded in the confession of faith, diametrically opposes such a Platonising doctrine as proposed by several Christian exegetes – Origenes is expressly mentioned in Cyril’s letter to the Monks at Phua –³⁶ and is not at all reconcilable with Biblical teaching.³⁷

The existence of humanity before the Fall is distinguished by the fact that although made of earth, the body was not subject to death and decay, because “God it so wished”³⁸ – a reasoning reminiscent of Plat. *Tim.* 41b4f. The soul, in turn, was furnished from the very beginning with knowledge of good and evil (Cyril emphasises this against Julian’s interpretation of *Genesis* 2.17 in *Against the Galilaeans* fr. 16 Masaracchia),³⁹ yet it knew evil not out of its own experience, since “the law of sin”⁴⁰ had not yet crept into the body and the soul thereby remained free and unsullied. It was, therefore, of itself capable of looking purely upon God and his creation and was focussed in all its striving on the Good, even if conditioned by the limitations of human nature.⁴¹ It is the task of one who has been emancipated through Christ to return to this early state.⁴²

Among the basic anthropological features Cyril counts not only the capacity for “apprehending God” (θεογνωσία)⁴³ and a natural inclination to good and virtue,⁴⁴ but also and above all, free will, which is a distinguishing mark of the creature endowed with reason and which is made a forceful and constant theme of Cyril’s writings.⁴⁵ Only on the condition that humans are possessed of free will (as Cyril proves with quotations from Porphyry and Alexander of Aphrodisias), can responsibility for action be assigned to the individual, as well as praise for morally good deeds.⁴⁶ Cyril thus turns repeatedly and emphatically against the Stoic or astrological concept of an immovable “fate” (εἰμαρμένη or γένησις), for it robs humankind precisely of that “which most becomes it: namely that it may live in freedom”.⁴⁷

4 Christology

The “only begotten” son of God, in continuation of Stoic ideas (transmitted by Christian forerunners of Cyril) is understood as the demiurgic Logos immanent in the cosmos, who “accomplishes all things with the inexpressible power of the Godhead and sits with the angels in Heaven, as well as with the inhabitants of Earth and does not leave even Hades bereft of his own Godhead”.⁴⁸ Central to Cyril’s Christology is the question of how the categorically different natures of God and human could be joined in Christ and in what relation they stand to one another. The account of the Passion, in particular, had long posed Christian intellectuals considerable difficulties, if indeed it belonged among their self-evident philosophical presuppositions that the divine is intrinsically “free from suffering/passions” (ἀπαθής).⁴⁹ In his solution to the problem, one marked by the Alexandrian school and exercising strong effect on later theology, Cyril seems to have been influenced by conceptual models like the grammatical relationship of substantive and attribute and the philosophical one of substance and accident.⁵⁰ To

him Jesus is without question God, first and foremost and in the actual sense, yet nonetheless Cyril does not doubt the reality of the human in Christ as incarnate Logos uniting in himself God and Human. The paradox of the binding together of both modes of being, which is regularly compared with the conjoining in one human person of body and soul,⁵¹ is to Cyril's mind necessarily also mirrored in respect to language, in "Speaking about God" (θεολογία): in order to make it plainly recognisable that Jesus, although God and Logos has indeed become entirely human, the essentially "non-suffering" had, in his abasement, to be depicted as suffering.⁵² He remains in this intrinsically "free of suffering" (ἀπαθής), qua Logos, and yet "adapts himself" (οἰκειοῦσθαι) to the sufferings of his own body, without this having harmed his divine nature.⁵³ In a certain sense, suffering is much rather merely 'ascribed' to that nature:⁵⁴ "For even as suffering one he remained without suffering".⁵⁵ At his disposal Cyril had philosophical psychology as analogue for this: in the view of the Platonists of the Imperial age, the part of the soul which stands free unto itself above the emotions is "free from suffering" (ἀπαθής); "sufferings without suffering" (ἀπαθῆ πάθη) can, however, likewise be ascribed to it in its union with the affective part and with the body.⁵⁶

5 Philological Fundamentals of Biblical Exegesis

Cyril's hermeneutics is largely traditional, and he is well aware of that (generally for what follows, see the prologue to the *Isaiah commentary*, *Patrologia Graeca* 70, 9A–13B, where Cyril even refers to the intense preoccupation of various predecessors with this theme, whilst at the same time expressing his hope that through thorough study, he himself may be able occasionally to contribute something "new and extraordinary"). It is manifest to Cyril that as a text Holy Scripture is always opaque (ἀσυμφανής). Just as doubtless to him is it, however, that beneath its surface lie concealed countless "hidden thoughts" (κεκρυμμένα ἔννοιαι) and "divine secrets" (θεῖα μυστήρια) which long precisely to be brought into light.⁵⁷ In order that this comes to pass, interpreters must with the greatest intellectual effort strive after both the exact "literal wording of the story" (τῆς ἱστορίας τὸ ἀκριβές, its factual contents, that is) and the explication of its intellectual or spiritual meaning (τῆς πνευματικῆς θεωρίας τὴν ἀπόδοσιν). Cyril discovers the latter predominantly through typological interpretation of Old Testament passages as predictions of Jesus Christ who, in agreement with Paul, is described as "consummation of the law".⁵⁸

To the suite of philological tools which Cyril uses (in his often not very Alexandrian seeming exegeses) belong:⁵⁹ 1) observations on the specific use of language in the Bible (ἔθος γὰρ τῆ θεῖα γραφῆ κτλ.);⁶⁰ 2) Analysis from rhetorical perspectives (hyperbole, *prosopopoeia*, metaphor, parable etc.);⁶¹ 3) establishment of the main, intended point of a text, its "objective" (σκοπός),⁶² to which are subordinated details that are "troublesome" from a philosophical or theological point of view (it is necessary to take into account the feebleness of human language particularly in statements about the divine);⁶³ 4) historical contextualisation (vagueness and a lack of philosophical differentiation in the Pentateuch are explained away by the fact that Moses had to take into consideration the level of understanding of his people, which had only recently escaped the polytheism of Egypt).⁶⁴

As was widespread in the Imperial age and in Late Antiquity, exegesis served Cyril not least also as a weapon, of which he made virtuoso use as much in the repelling of Pagan accusations as in disputes amongst Christians (see generally Riedweg 2012).

4 Influence

By sheer strength of intellect and through the occasional practice of ruthless power politics, Cyril succeeded in decisively influencing the course of Christological discussions during his

own lifetime and far beyond. His significance and popularity are discernible in the transmission of his extensive works as well as in his presence in anthologies, catenas and glosses. For centuries, Cyril through his writings and contributions to the Council of Ephesus, stood largely as benchmark in the definition of that which was to be considered orthodox Christology (especially important in this respect his second letter to Nestorius).⁶⁵ Despite all the nuances, little has changed in this regard up to the present day. Cyril is, thus, repeatedly described in modern ecumenical documents as “our common father”,⁶⁶ while, obversely, Alejandro Amenábar in his 2009 film *Agora* portrays him as an ayatollah-like religious leader.⁶⁷

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Notes

- 1 Cf. John of Nikiou *Chron.* 79.11f., p. 76 Charles; Munier 1947; Guinot 1987: 121f.
- 2 Cf. Severus Ibn al Moqaffa *Hist.* 427f. Evetts (*Patrologia Orientalis* 1.4).
- 3 Cf. Jouassard 1957: 502f.; Wickham 1983: xiif. with n. 3; affirmative Évieux 1991: I 14–17.
- 4 Évieux 1991: I 17f.
- 5 Cf. *Letter* 33, *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* I.1.7, p. 148.31–37.
- 6 Socr. *Church History* 7.7.
- 7 Socr. *Church History* 7.13f. 16; Russell 2000: 6–9.
- 8 Socr. *Church History* 7.15; John of Nikiou *Chron.* 84.87–103, p. 100–102 Charles; Suda 4.644.1–646.5 Adler; Rougé 1990; Boulnois 1994: 187f.; Dzielska 1995; Wessel 2004: 46–57; Harich-Schwarzbauer 2011: 183–185, 277–280; Watts 2017: 113–120.
- 9 Cf. for the Nestorian dispute inter al. Wickham 1983: xix–xxx; Ritter 2011: 249–257; Russell 2000: 31–56; Wessel 2004: 146–161; Krismanek 2010: 85–126; Lange 2012: 52–68.
- 10 See also Jouassard 1957: 500–504; Wickham 1983: xii–xix; McKinion 2000: 16–19.
- 11 *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* I.1.3, p. 22, 7–10.
- 12 Cf. indeed Severus Ibn al Moqaffa loc. cit.; Boulnois 1994: 187f. thinks it conceivable even that, through his uncle, Cyril may have come into contact with Hypatia and the “Alexandrian philosophical milieu.”
- 13 See also Cyril, *On First Corinthians* 1.20, p. 94 Zawadzki; on Cyril’s knowledge of Homer Bartelink 1983; Kinzig, in Kyrill von Alexandrien 2016, CLXf.
- 14 According to the legendary representation of the anonymous author of the Coptic *Hist. eccl. Alex.* II.77.326–340 Orlandi, Cyril’s eloquence was admired in Alexandria well beyond only the circle of the “Friends of God” (φιλῶθεοι).
- 15 Cf. already Photius, *Bibliotheca*, cod. 49, 12a; Vaccari 1937; Hardy 1993: 118, who also underlines Cyril’s ability to skilfully adapt himself “to varying audiences”; Russell 2000: 5 with n. 11; Kyrill von Alexandrien 2016, CLXXV–CLXXVI.
- 16 Grant 1964: 269–275.
- 17 Cf. inter al. *Thesaurus*, *Patrologia Graeca* 75.145B–149C and *Paschal Homily* 12.6.1–28 Burns; Siddals 1987; Boulnois 1994: 181–227, 593; van Loon 2009: 61–122; but also already Jouassard 1957: 514f. and Labelle 1978: 146–148, as well as Labelle 1979.
- 18 Cf. for the educational range to be deduced from Cyril’s *Against Julian* Kinzig in Kyrill von Alexandrien 2016, CLVII–CLXXV.
- 19 See Kinzig in Kyrill von Alexandrien 2016, CIX–CLXXV; Schramm 2017.
- 20 *Responses to Tiberius* 2, p. 140.25–28 Wickham, with reference to the pious opinions of the wise amongst the Greeks, *Thesaurus*, *Patrologia Graeca* 75.220D.
- 21 *Dialogue on the Trinity* 1, 393.42 Aubert = I.154 Durand.
- 22 *Dialogue on the Trinity* 7, 635.14f. Aubert = III.152 Durand; *Unity of Christ* 718.1–9 Aubert = 314 Durand; *On the Incarnation of the Only-Begotten* 683.12–684.8 Aubert = 204–206 Durand.
- 23 *Against Julian* 3.54 and 5.6; *Commentary on John* 2.1, III.190.24 and 11.9, IV.695.23 Pusey; *Genesis Glaphyra*, *Patrologia Graeca* 69.144A.

- 24 *Against Julian* 2.29 following LXX *Susanna* [Daniel 13] 42; *Against Julian* 3.18f.; 4.3, 30; *παναλικής* is a well-favoured designation for the divine in Cyril.
- 25 *Commentary on John* 5.5, IV.40.5 and 10.2, IV.566.12 Pusey; *Against Julian* 2.54; 3.49; 4.7; 7.24.
- 26 *Against Julian* 2.37, 42; 3.28, 55; 4.7.
- 27 *Against Julian* 2.74f.; God over Nature seen and unseen; *Against Julian* 7.18.
- 28 See in general Pohlenz 1909; Dreyer 1970; Maas 1974; Frohnhofen 1987.
- 29 *Contra Gal.* fr. 30 Masaracchia; adduced as an especially offensive example is God's explicit approval of the cruel murder by Phineas of an Israelite who has turned to the worship of Baal and of his non-Jewish wife at *Num.* 25.11: fr. 33–36 Masaracchia; cf. Riedweg 1999: 75–77; Boulnois 2008b; Boulnois 2011: 263–270.
- 30 *Against Julian* 2.32, following Julian's citation of Plat. *Tim.* 28b2–c1 and 30b6–c2 in *Contra Gal.* fr. 8 Masaracchia.
- 31 *Contra Gal.* fr. 6.33–37 Masaracchia.
- 32 Cf. Plat. *Tim.* 41b1–6.
- 33 *Against Julian* 2.35; on likeness to God in Cyril, in general Burghardt 1957.
- 34 *Against Julian* 2.27; 3.18f., with citation from Porphyry *To Nemertianus* fr. ?281F Smith; 3.50; 3.54; 6, *Patrologia Graeca* 76.825D–828A; *Commentary on John* 5.2, III.691.12–692.29 and 3.4, III.411.30–412.24 and 9, IV.362.26–363.17 Pusey; *Dialogue on the Trinity* praef. 383.1–10 Aubert = I.126 Durand and *Genesis Glaphyra*, *Patrologia Graeca* 69.17B and 21BC, further *Elucidations of Dogmas* 2, V.551.19–552.13 Pusey = 188.6–20 Wickham etc.; Boulnois 1994: 37–54.
- 35 *Commentary on John* 1.9, III.115 Pusey.
- 36 *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* III p. 201.20–202.17.
- 37 *Commentary on John* 1.9, III.115–126 Pusey.
- 38 *Against Julian* 3.24; cf. *Paschal Homily* 15.4.1–10 Burns.
- 39 See also *Against Julian* 4.35.
- 40 Cf. *Romans* 7.23, 25; 8.2.
- 41 See also *Commentary on John* 10.2, IV.565.16–21 Pusey.
- 42 *Against Julian* 3.24–28; *Elucidations of Dogmas* 2, V.552.5–553.8 Pusey = 188.13–190.4 Wickham; see generally on Cyril's interpretation of *Genesis* 2f. Boulnois 2008a: 123–125, and Riedweg 2008: 201–206.
- 43 *Against Julian* 3.38.
- 44 *Paschal Homily* 15.4.6–10 Burns; *Elucidations of Dogmas* 3, V.555.7–556.2 Pusey = 192.19–194.4 Wickham etc.
- 45 *Against Julian* 3.5, 7; 4.5, 25, 35; 5.11; 6.45; 8.35; *On Isaiah* 1.1, *Patrologia Graeca* 70.48D etc.; Burghardt 1957: 40–50; Boulnois 2000.
- 46 *Against Julian* 3.8f.; cf. 4.5; *Adoration* 6, *Patrologia Graeca* 68.449B–456B, referring to Homer, *Odyssey* 1.32–34 and Euripides *Hippolytus* 373–384.
- 47 *Romans* V.202–204 Pusey; *Paschal Homily* 6.4.48–152 Burns.
- 48 *Commentary on John* 1.9, III.113.5–23 Pusey.
- 49 See above 3.1; McCoy 1977: 384f., 390f.
- 50 Siddals 1987; with which cf. Meunier 1997: 276–279.
- 51 Young 1971: 105–114; McCoy 1977: 381f., 386; Meunier 1997: 235–242; Grillmeier 1989: 34–40; Boulnois 2005: 459–469, 2008–2009; van Loon 2009: 387–391.
- 52 *Commentary on John* 2.4, III.266.12–19 Pusey.
- 53 See Meunier 1997: 264–275.
- 54 *Sermon to the Alexandrians* V.460.21–461.20 Pusey; cf. *Unity of Christ* 766.2–4 and 772.37–39 Aubert = 472 and 496 Duran.
- 55 *Commentary on John* 12, V.91.23 Pusey.
- 56 Plotinus, *Enneads* 3.6 [26] 1.33; Porphyry, *Sentences* 18; Chadwick 1951: 162; Meunier 1997: 243–253.
- 57 See also *On Habakkuk* 1, II.68.11f. Pusey; *Adoration* 1, *Patrologia Graeca* 68.197A–B etc.; on the traditional background of these two textual levels cf. inter al. Riedweg 2012: 448f.; on its prehistory in Patristic Literature Kerrigan 1952: 26–32.
- 58 *Romans* 10.4; see in general *Genesis Glaphyra* 1 prol., PG 69.13A–16B; McKinion 2000: 21–32; Cassel 2001; Schurig 2005: 41–52; on the importance of the literal sense for Cyril Guinot 1998: 49–51; on the double sense in the interpretation of the Old and New Testaments Kerrigan 1952 and Kerrigan 1957.
- 59 On which see also Kerrigan 1952: 61–110, specifically on Cyril's contacts with the Antiochene tradition 443f.; further Boulnois 1994: 55–102, and O'Keefe 1996: 138–141.
- 60 See also Guinot 1998: 59f.

- 61 See *Against Julian* 4.32; *On Isaiah* 2.2, *Patrologia Graeca* 70.372D etc.
 62 See *Exodus Glaphyra* 1.1, *Patrologia Graeca* 69.385B; *Against Julian* 9.12 etc.
 63 Cf. *Commentary on John* 7 fr., IV.258.7–259.18 Pusey; cf. *On the Psalms* 10.3, *Patrologia Graeca* 69.792D–793A; *Against Julian* 5.6–11; Boulnois 1994: 38–44.
 64 Cf. *Against Julian* 2.20–24, on the rules concerning sacrifice 4.16f.; *Adoration* 1, *Patrologia Graeca* 68.141D–144C and elsewhere.
 65 Cf. Grillmeier 1989: 690f.; for Cyril's role in the Council of Chalcedon Wessel 2004: 287–295; Lange 2012: 128–139; on the “monophysite” groups Ritter 2011: 276–279; specifically on Severus of Antioch see also Grillmeier 1989: 20–185, and Allen, Hayward 2004: 10f., 41f.
 66 Cf. Hainthaler 2004: 300.
 67 The German original of this chapter was published as §134. “Kyrill von Alexandrien” in: Ch. Riedweg, Ch. Horn, D. Wyrwa (eds.), *Die Philosophie der Antike 5: Philosophie der Kaiserzeit und der Spätantike* (Grundriss der Geschichte der Philosophie, begründet von Friedrich Ueberweg, völlig neu bearbeitete Ausgabe), Basel 2018: 1586–1596, with 1795–1799 (Bibliography).

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Theodoret of Cyrrhus

Mark Edwards

Introduction

Theodoret, Bishop of Cyrrhus, is not the most copious or the most elegant writer among the clerics of late antiquity, but he is the one least likely to inspire discomfort or repugnance in the modern reader. The ancients prized his lucid and informative style so highly that even after his condemnation in 553 his works escaped the neglect and mutilation that overtook those of Apollinarius, Theodore and Origen. We may add that his condemnation was not so secure as theirs, having been resisted by the bishop of Rome on the grounds that his deposition in 449 by extreme partisans of Cyril had been annulled by the Council of Chalcedon in 451. The loss of his *Church History* would have robbed us of precious documents from the century that followed the accession of Constantine; his commentaries on Daniel and the Song of Songs, while recognising the enigmatic character of these works, do not handle them with the speculative licence that offends modern readers of Origen, Hippolytus or Gregory of Nyssa (Hill 2001). His comments on Paul are concise and pertinent, seldom inviting the charge so easily laid against other fathers, that they are more intent on teaching through the text than on learning from it. While he does not shrink from repaying polemic with polemic in his tract against Cyril on the 12 anathemas (Clayton 2007: 141–166), the case for two natures in Christ is made with a show of deference to the Cyrilline interlocutor in his *Eranistes*. If he never affirmed expressly that the man who died on the Cross is also God, he refrained from open contradiction of this tenet once it became a prerequisite of orthodox (Fairbairn 2003: 220–221).

It must be said with regret that the present chapter does not deal with the works that show him at his best. The *Cure for Greek Afflictions* is too often merely a philippic which assumes that if the Greeks can shown to differ they are refuted, and that when they also differ from the Bible they are self-evidently depraved. But for a few unverified quotations from Plato, almost all his specimens of philosophy are taken from Aetius and Eusebius, and he has nothing to add to the scant remains of Presocratic thought that have trickled down to us through Hippolytus. It is not a work of scholarship or philosophy but a vehement retorsion of the calumnies that had been thrown at the church in the age of persecution. The treatise *On Providence* has the merit of being one of the first endeavours of this kind by a Christian; modern readers too may find in it something that is new to them, even if they judge it frigid and useless for the amelioration of

real suffering. This no doubt is a measure of the distance between our palliative and his curative approach to consolation: for him the root of suffering was not so much in the world as in the soul, or rather in the soul's failure to look beyond the scars of temporal existence to the inviolate throne of God.

The Cure for All Greek Afflictions

The *Cure for All Greek Afflictions* is a polemical defence of Christian teachings on the chief topics of philosophy, elicited (so the author claims) by the satires and aspersions which the faith continues to suffer in the day of its manifest triumph. The therapeutic metaphor is borrowed from Epiphanius; much of the matter is lifted from Eusebius and Clement, though Theodoret inverts the practice of both by reserving his salvoes against idolatry and the cult of oracles for the later books. Just as many modern books on the philosophy of religion would commence with an inquiry into the foundations of belief, so Theodoret undertakes in his first book to defend the appeal to *pistis* or faith against those who profess to accept no authority but that of reason grounded in observation. He is not ashamed to answer a jibe as old as the second century with the argument of Clement of Alexandria that all reasoning, in geometry no less than in philosophy, must begin from premises that cannot be proved. He mines both Clement and Eusebius for evidence that the Greeks owe all their intellectual disciplines to barbarians, and thus have no right to belittle the tales of Galilean fishermen (1.17–24; cf. Eusebius, *Preparation* 10.8.4; Clement, *Stromateis* 1.16, 75–75, 1.14.62 etc.). He wrings an admission from Porphyry that philosophers who put more trust in themselves than in the gods are doomed to wrangling over mere conjectures (cf. Eusebius, *Preparation* 14.10), of which he draws further specimens from Aetius (1.96). He ends with a eulogy on the apostles and Abraham (1.120–123), having shown that Plato at *Laws* 730c had ordained severe punishment for those who do not believe what they have been told about the gods (1.117–118).

The second book draws liberally on Clement and Eusebius to illustrate the discord into which the philosophers fell by commencing a search for origins without the lamp of scriptural revelation. Plato himself had granted in the *Timaeus* that we learn of creation only by report, and the difficulty of searching out the Creator, let alone of proclaiming him once found, had become a byword in his school (2.42, citing *Timaeus* 28c = Clement, *Stromateis* 5.12.78). Since every school receives its creed from its founder, we cannot do better than believe the oldest of all our teachers, Moses the Hebrew, who testifies not only that his own God is the creator but he acted in conjunction with the other two persons of the Trinity when he said 'let us make man in our image' (2.60–62, citing Genesis 1.26–27). Thus revelation teaches that our capacity for reason is grounded in our creation by and resemblance to the Son of God who works in us through the Holy Spirit (2.65, 110–111). In the third book he contrasts the angelic orders who minister to this triune deity (3.87–94) with the idols of pagan worship, some of whom are merely deified humans (3.25–33) while others personify the least worthy of our passions (3.48–53). Porphyry (as quoted by Eusebius) deride the efforts of sorcerers to browbeat the sun and moon (3.67; cf. Eusebius, *Preparation* 5.10), but the mass of humans have no such difficulty in reproducing the vices and follies of Homer's gods. Even Plato surrenders to polytheism at *Laws* 896, where he endows the world with two souls, one beneficent and one malign (3.103; cf. Clement, *Stromateis* 5.14.92).

Just as these books mark a natural transition from the first principles of knowledge to those of being, so we proceed in book 4 from the efficient to the material, from the agent to the substrate of creation. Relying as ever on Clement, Aetius and Euripides, Theodoret scoffs at those who, like Xenophanes and Parmenides, held the world to be eternal, and no

less at those who followed Metrodorus, Democritus and Epicurus in imagining a fortuitous concourse of atoms in the void (4.7–9). The logomachy continues as Plato postulates four elements and Aristotle five (4.11); for Plato matter is *sômatoeides*, for Aristotle somatic and for the Stoics merely *sôma* (4.13). Some posit cones where others posit spheres; Plato himself, though he celebrates the beauty of the cosmos, also opines that matter is evil and that God himself periodically destroys his handwork (4.41–47). The questions “whence?” and “by whom?” cannot in fact be distinguished, for as Socrates says in Xenophon, speculation concerning natural phenomena is neither profitable nor germane to our condition (4.26). The ordering of the elements is revealed to us by scripture: it suffices to know that all is as God willed it and that he willed it, as Plato says, because he is good (4.33, citing *Timaeus* 29d–e; cf. Eusebius, *Preparation* 11.21.2).

Turning from the world to its resident master, book 5 asserts that the soul is the work of God and in need of his healing, though free to refuse it (5.4). Theodoret’s sources are less easy to trace than usual when he declares that the Milesians and Anaxagoras derive its substance from air, Critias from blood and Epicurus from all four elements, while Pythagoras makes it a number and Aristotle an entelechy (5.16–19). Again he seems to be his own doxographer when he writes that doctors place the hegemonic soul the brain, Epicurus and Parmenides in the thorax and Aristotle, with Empedocles and some of the Stoics, in the heart (5.22–23). Deducing from our common creation that humans are all of one species (5.50), he repeats that the prophets are not to be despised for their want of elegance in Greek (5.64): after all, the Greeks themselves have celebrated the wisdom of Egypt, Persia and Thrace (5.58–59).

It is a measure of the importance to Christians of the doctrine of providence that even in Theodoret’s preliminary synopsis of book 6 he points out his adversaries by name (proem 9). Diagoras the atheist denies that the gods exist, while Epicurus makes them idle and Aristotle yields everything below the moon to fate (6.7–9). Plato has a higher doctrine of reward and punishment according to merit, evidently purloined (as Justin and Clement had alleged) from the Hebrew prophets (6.31). The popular mind, however, is apt to blame all on fate, as do Heraclitus and Chrysippus (6.13–14), and Theodoret makes common cause with Oenomaus the Cynic against the oracles which reinforce this delusion (6.8–10). While he owes his knowledge of this philosopher to Eusebius (*Preparation* 6.8.8–10), he seems to have made his own excerpts from Plotinus, who concurs with Jesus himself in asseverating that whatever exists in this world has its own function and that we suffer evil, or the appearance of it, only because of the unruly predisposition of our own souls (6.62ff).

Philosophers become temporary allies in book 7, where Porphyry, as cited by Eusebius, passes judgment on a catalogue of sanguinary rites (7.36–43). If Homer lends his authority to them so much the worse for Homer (7.5–15). Theodoret does not spare the rites of the Temple, which in his view were enjoined on the Israelites only to wean them from the habit of worshipping beasts which they had acquired in Egypt (7.16). The Psalms and the prophets inculcate the invisible, yet loftier and more costly, immolation of every thought and desire that turns the heart from God (7.22–35). Book 8 replies to pagan ridicule of the cult of martyrs by repeating the charge that the objects of pagan cult are not gods but mortals, famous only for the enormity of their crimes (8.12–28). Plato, although he often yields to popular tradition, has also drawn an appealing portrait of a philosopher going defiantly to his death (8.53–55). Yet Socrates has no cult (8.56), and the most renowned of the Greeks are so neglected by their beneficiaries that the tomb of Alexander is as unknown as those of Xerxes and Darius (8.61).

In book 9 Theodoret gloats that, whereas the Empire has rendered obsolete the constitutions drawn up by philosophers for one city or another, together with the laws that once governed many barbarian peoples, the precepts of a few Galilean fishermen are winning adherents even

where Rome has yet to plant her heel (9.16–17). Vespasian and Hadrian have avenged the murder of Christ (9.21–22), but it is thanks to Christianity that Persians are no longer mating with their mothers (9.33). The dissolute customs of the Homeric age are now repugnant to all, and so is the chimerical legislation of Plato, who stipulates in his *Laws* that women should ride and exercise naked (9.38–39; *Laws* 804d–e), provides in his *Republic* that all men should have all women in common (944; *Republic* 458c–d) and sets aside in his *Phaedrus* a special place in heaven for homosexual lovers (9.53; *Phaedrus* 256d–e). The citations from Plato in this book come from Eusebius, who is also the source of the passages in book 10 from Plutarch (10.5, 10.42), Oenomaus (10.25–39) and Porphyry (10.11–23), all stigmatising the vanity and duplicity of pagan oracles.

True oracles can be copiously illustrated from Theodoret's knowledge of the scriptures (10.42–103). The truth regarding the final judgment is documented chiefly from the gospels in book 11, but only after a collation of Greek definitions of the proper end of life. Heraclitus, though obscurely, agrees with Epicurus in making pleasure the goal (11.6–7), while Aristotle adds external goods to those of the body and the soul without looking beyond the present life (11.13). Socrates is to be commended for holding that there is no good other than virtue (11.11), while his student Plato not only understands that the goal is likeness to God (11.9; *Theaetetus* 176b) but anticipates the dispensation of justice in the next world, albeit with some infusion of myth (11.17–44). In book 12, he can be heard again acknowledging from time to time the necessity of acquiring the likeness of God, and of preserving a righteous disposition even in the face of torture and universal obloquy (12.30–31; *Republic* 361b–d); child of an effete culture though he may be, he is conscious that virtue flourishes most at a distance from cities (12.28; *Theaetetus* 174d–e), just as other Greeks extol the instinctive virtue of the Hyperboreans (12.44). Having once again vindicated the barbarian, Theodoret reminds his readers that Porphyry, so often a friend to Christian reasoning, testifies in his writings against the church that Christ was stronger than Asclepius (12.96–7; cf. Eusebius, *Preparation* 5.1.10). Plotinus knew that every herb has its virtue, and the Christian doctor has now laid out a whole garden for the relief of Greek distempers. The philosophers have no right to despise the apostles, who made up in veracity what they lacked in Platonic eloquence. Theodoret has already quoted the dictum of Aristotle that, where our friend and truth are in conflict, truth is the greater friend (9.49); all that remains therefore is to embrace the Saviour who says to Jew and Gentile, "I am the way, the truth and the life" (10.77).

On providence

The *Cure for Greek Afflictions* makes systematic use against Greek philosophers of the medical metaphors which they were apt to invoke (though less elaborately) in praise of their own ministrations to the soul (Papadogiannakis 2012: 30–39). Theodoret's treatise *On Providence* is another attempt to outdo them in their own profession, longer and more compendious than any exercise on this topic that had yet emerged from the schools or from the church. There is little to suggest that it either influenced or was influenced by the longest pagan treatment of the same subject, the *Three Treatises on Providence* by Proclus, but it may not be accident that the Athenian philosopher was his younger contemporary. Augustine's reply to the Manichaean Faustus had already countered many of the objections which are raised by the nameless opponents of Theodoret, and Theodoret shares his assumption that the greatest peril to faith is not atheism but a false concept of the divinity, whether this belies the omnipotence, the benevolence or the unity of the Creator. His reasoning is more often from the known character of God to the necessity of design than from the evidence of design to the necessity of God.

Thus the first book commences with a resonant assertion of the claim that we might think most in need of proof. God is the everlasting and eternal creator, more worthy of love and gratitude than any other being and hence to be vindicated with more zeal than we would bring even to the defence of our parents (1.3). Above all, we must defend him against the pagans who imagine that there are many warring gods who either neglect the world or enter it only to sow misfortune and corruption. The ranks of our adversaries include the philosophers whenever they disguise the immorality of these gods by reducing myth to allegory (1.7). Many of them, moreover, entertain doctrines as false and pernicious as those of the poets. Some deny providence, some abandon works to chance and others to fate; some trust only the senses and, some imagine a plurality of worlds (1.8). Having thus reproached in turn the Aristotelians, the Epicureans, the Stoics and any latter-day dupes of Democritus (among whom one might number Plutarch), he proceeds to denounce the heretics who have severed the power of God from his grace by denying the common nature of the three persons. Some proclaim Marcion's three gods and others the two principles of Mani (1.9). Arians make the Son a creature, Macedonians deny divinity of Spirit, Apollinarians rob his body of a soul (1.10). All are confounded, he declares in the peroration to the first book, by the spectacle of the imperishable heavens and their eternal rotation, together with all the benefits that accrue from the change of seasons and the alternation of night and day (1.14).

Purloining an image from Aristotle's exoteric treatise *On Philosophy*, he argues at the beginning of book 2 that to imagine such regularity in the world without a designer would be as irrational as to imagine that a ship could hold a straight course without a pilot (2.1–2). Once the dependence of the natural order on God is established, we can hardly doubt that he who raises water to the mountains for our sake (2.12) might be as jealous or niggardly as the Gnostics suppose in his other dealings with us (2.13). It is no less absurd to maintain that he lacks not the will but the power to preserve his creatures (2.14): tacitly following Plato and his Christian imitators, Theodoret reminds his interlocutors that God is infinite and in need of nothing (2.16); the equally trite corollary that he was under no obligation to create would be acceptable only to Platonists who read the *Timaeus* as literally as Christians read the opening chapter of *Genesis* (2.15). The diversity of phenomena and the juxtaposition of contrasting elements are not signs of deficiency in him but of his solicitude for us, as we shall see by meditation on the advantages of travelling by sea rather than by land (20).

At 3.1, echoing other works on providence and his own *Cure for Greek Afflictions*, Theodoret recommends the study of human anatomy as a third cure for the malady of doubt. Who cannot be amazed by the delicate fashioning of our instruments of speech (3.10), the versatility of the alimentary system (3.12–13), the uninterrupted functioning of the respiratory organs (3.17) and the artful design of the ear (3.36)? We are all the more to blame if we do not exercise the reasoning faculty who has speech as its handmaid (3.23) and do not listen to the voice of God in scripture and Christian sermons (3.38).

Against those who argue, with Seneca (Letter 90), that the plastic and mechanical arts have been fatal to human innocence, Theodoret contends that it is good for us to imitate the creativity of the divine artificer (4.3–5). No organ is given in vain, and Theodoret agrees with Augustine that only the fall has taught us to be ashamed of our genital organs (4.10). The uselessness of the hand as a means of defence is compensated by its agility in digging, climbing, building or steering a ship (4.16–20). Nevertheless it is not from ourselves but from God that we have received these skills, together with those of mining, cooking and weaving (4.23–24); if, as Pliny says, the worms surpass us in weaving, God has permitted us to gather the produce of the worms (4.26–27). Pliny and many Christians had already noted that grammar sets us apart from the brute creation (4.31); Theodoret, a copious writer of letters, adds that we

alone are able to speak with those who are far away because of the fitness of the hand to hold a pen (4.31–33).

The fifth book refutes the objection that a God who cared for humans would not have forced us to learn our crafts by long apprenticeships yet given bees the power of making honey and constructing hives by instinct (5.4–5). We must remember that bees make honey for us (5.6), and that they provide us with an example of modesty and harmonious intercourse (5.7–13). Our shortcomings in strength and speed are supplied by the horse, the ox and the ass, whom we dominate by reason (5.20–30). The wild beasts whom we cannot tame are a chastisement to our evil disposition, and are no more a proof of the weakness or malevolence of God (as the Manichaeans opined) than surgical cautery or a flogging at school are evidence of a moral defect in the doctor or the teacher (5.40–41).

The exordium to book 6, deploring the obstinacy of the wicked, takes up the objection that wealth and poverty are unequally distributed and not in accordance with virtue. So much the better for the poor, says Theodoret, for that virtue which is the true end of life (6.5) often flourishes in poverty, as experience testifies (6.11–12), and as the Stoics, Socratic and Cynics confess by their exhortations to live in accordance with nature (6.13–14). Wealth is not of itself an evil (15), and every class of society has its function, like the members of a body (6.17–21): the poor, without whom no one would be rich, enjoy better health and are more inured to adversity (6.35–41). If the wicked are often rich, it is not God's policy to anticipate in this world the judgment that awaits us all (6.29, 36–37).

Theodoret turns wearily in book 7 to the argument that a benign creator might tolerate poverty but not slavery. Equality, he avers, was indeed the original dispensation (7.8–9): slavery is a consequence of the fall, which has made it impossible for humans to survive except in societies where the majority submits to the few who rule (7.9–19). The fall has doomed us all to labour (25–26), and scripture gives many examples – Noah, Abraham, Rebecca, Jacob and Moses – of masters who worked harder than their servants (7.28–33). A slave is free from many of the anxieties of his master (7.22), and the wise ruler performs the duties of teacher and guardian to his subjects. Hence God requires the angel to submit to the archangel, the wife to the husband, the laity to its priests (7.36). God in his justice cannot curb the freedom of rulers and masters who abuse their charge (7.37–38), but the remedy is to pray with confidence in his boundless mercy (7.39–41).

The presence of slaves in a church that made no difference between the bond and the free (Galatians 3.28) had troubled Christian prelates before Theodoret, who is not so ready as Gregory of Nyssa or John Chrysostom to denounce the institution (Ramelli 2016). In book 8, he compiles a list of Biblical figures who had profited by a season of unmerited servitude or humiliation, concluding that those who allege that the good fare worse than the wicked do not know the inscrutable ways of God (8.57). In book 9, he argues that even those who belittle providence exhort us to practise virtue (9.13) and that even wrongdoers pay homage to it by their dissimulation (9.18). Anticipating Joseph Butler's arguments from analogy, he argues that just as prudence and thrift are visibly rewarded in the present world (9.15), so there must be a reward for virtue, in a future life if not in this (9.19–20). Many of the poets and philosophers say as much (9.24), though we cannot follow them in supposing that only the soul is immortal, for the body would then protest that it has been the soul's partner in fortitude, just as the soul has often been its confederate in sin (9.27–33).

In this book, as in the earlier tracts attributed to Justin and Athenagoras, the certainty of a resurrection is argued from the constant resurgence of life from death in nature (9.36–37, citing 1 Corinthians 15.36–38). In book 10, however, Theodoret bases his reasoning entirely on the manifestation in Jesus Christ of the Word who judges all. This revelation exposes the limits of

philosophical reasoning, extinguishes vain curiosity and teaches us to revere the inscrutability of God (10.1–4). Yet we know that Christ came to make us by adoption what he is by nature (10.13), that his divinity was attested by his incomparable works (10.19–32), that on the Cross he paid our debt to the devil and made the devil in turn his captive (10.33–37), and that his conquest of death was the earnest of a general resurrection (10.38–43). Cavillers who ask why he did not come sooner must learn that the Incarnation was eternally ordained (10.44) and prepared by many acts of providence in Old Testament times (10.45–57). Even the apostasy of the Jews was employed by God to create opportunities of witness for the saints (10.58–62). The doctrine of the incarnation propounded here is generally agreed to betoken Theodoret's acceptance of the council of Ephesus (431–433), and since his own statement to Pope Leo I in 449 implies that he wrote the treatise 12 years before, the likeliest date for its composition would seem to be 437 (Bardy 1946; cited by Burghardt and Lawlor 1998: 2–3).

Further thoughts on the divine economy

Problems regarding God's design in creation and that of Moses in recounting it as he did are also raised in Theodoret's *Questions on the Octateuch* (that is, on the first eight books of the Old Testament from Genesis to Ruth). Why, he inquires in Question 1, does Moses commence with a narrative of creation rather than with an exposition of the true nature of God? The reply is that the eternity of God was known to the Israelites ever since he proclaimed to Moses "I am that I am," whereas they had yet to be weaned from the Egyptian error of reckoning God (or rather the gods) among the visible objects of creation. The argument that God, as He who is, must be eternal presupposes the antithesis in Plato's *Timaeus* between the realms of essence and becoming, while the premises that Moses adapted his text to the needs and capacities of his original audience is typical of Antiochene exegesis. On the same principle, Moses elected not to mention the angels in his cosmogony for fear that the Israelites would be tempted to worship them. This reticence is sanctioned by God himself, who never spoke to anyone through an angel before he sent one as a comforter to Hagar, who as Paul says is a type of the old covenant which Moses received from the angels (q.2). It was only in Abraham's time that human understanding had matured sufficiently to distinguish between two classes of incorporeal being, one infinite and eternal, the other created and therefore circumscribed (3). Angels receive an exaggerated dignity even from Christian commentaries who contend that they must have existed before the creation of the physical world. If they allege that otherwise there would be no one to render eternal worship to God, we may reply that God has no need of anyone's worship (4.1); if they quote Job 38.7 to show that the sons of God were already present to join their hymns to those of the stars, that will prove that they had been created by the fourth day (4.2). The lamps of the visible firmament are not the light which God called into being before he placed that firmament in the midst of the waters, and the primordial heaven which contains this light is an intellectual realm, whose origin is recorded in the opening sentence, "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (11 and 14).

The same pedantry of inferring temporal sequence from lexical sequence had led Origen to posit successive creations of the inner and outer man. For Theodoret, on the contrary, the man whose body was first created and then ensouled in paradise at the beginning of Genesis 2 is the one whom God created in his image and likeness at the end of Genesis 1 (39). This is not to say that God resembles us in possessing a body, and Theodoret insists no less than Origen that locution which imply that God is tasted, heard or seen must not be construed in the literal sense (20.1). He shows his independence of his Antiochene predecessors in rejecting the doctrine of Theodore (and later of Mohammed) that God intended the sentient creation to pay its

homage to him by the veneration of his likeness in Adam. On the other hand, he appears to countenance the theories that man is the image of God inasmuch as he imitates him, rules as his viceroy or exercises judgment over God's subjects, human, bestial or angelic (20.2). Yet he himself, with the majority of Christians, finds our true resemblance to God in the rationality and vitality of our souls. Two caveats must be added: it is only in imagination that our finite intellects mirror the omnipresence of God, and the Word of God is not, as our speech is, an insubstantial epiphenomenon of his reason. Even when he created Adam, God spoke of himself in the plural – let us make man in our image – to foreshadow the revelation of his triune nature in the Incarnation of the Word as perfect man (19).

But if man is the crown of creation, why is he prey to the enmity and violence of wild beasts? Not so much, it seems, because of the fall as because adversity is a stimulus to the cultivation of virtue and a reminder of our dependence on the Creator (18). The devil too is created to try us, for if there were no such test there would be neither opportunity nor reward for the righteous exercise of freedom (26). Having thus disposed of Faustus the Manichee, Theodoret turns to Marcion, who denies that the benignity of the new covenant and the severity of the old can be united in the same deity. Theodore's first response is that, but for the penalty, we should not be aware of the holiness of the Law and of the glory to be attained by observing its precepts (37.1). Even if this will not satisfy them, the heretics must confess, when they read Christ's saying that the mere thought of adultery is equivalent to the crime, that there is no diminution of the Law's severity in the new covenant. Once we perceive how great an honour has been accorded to human beings by the gift of stewardship, we shall not opine that God inflicted a disproportionate punishment for a trivial offence in the Garden of Eden (37.1, 3). If the Marcionites impute to him a reckless burst of anger, they overlook the proof of his foreknowledge in the provision of genital organs, which would not have found a use had Adam not forfeited immortality (37.2). This is also the teaching of Gregory of Nyssa, but Theodoret adds an observation more reminiscent of Origen: the incorporeal God has decreed that corporeal beings should multiply by sexual reproduction, but since there is no such dispensation for incorporeal beings, their number has been complete from the outset (37.2). The difference between the two authors is that Theodoret is manifestly speaking only of angels, whereas Origen's conjecture that God created only as many rational beings as he deemed needful (*First Principles* 2.9) is almost always understood with reference both to angelic intellects and to human souls.

The ordering of all things for the best can be taken for granted in the *Questions on the Octateuch*; in the treatise *On Providence*, it may seem that Theodoret has begged the question by his prefatory appeals to the power and justice of the Creator. Yet it is hardly possible to argue otherwise, for if there is an almighty, benign and omniscient God who created the world, we could no more understand the world without positing his existence than we could understand breath without positing the air. If we could prove by observation alone that the world is perfect, we should have no need, as Laplace said, of the hypothesis of a God; once we grant the hypothesis, our theodicy is complete, for it will follow from his attributes that all evil is merely apparent. Such casuistry, we may say, offers solace only to those who have not yet suffered or those who have become inured to suffering; can we say more of the arguments laboured before Theodoret by Platonists, Peripatetics and Stoics? Most of his readers were seeking only an antidote for intellectual doubt, and will have been happy enough to agree that, just as the pagan in the *Cure for Greek Affections* can be judged by his failure to reason like a Christian, so the scoffer refutes himself at the outset by his failure to believe.

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Boethius

The first Christian philosopher in the Latin West?

Thomas Jürgasch

Between heaven and earth

Around the year 525, the former Roman consul, “Master of the Offices”, celebrated theologian and philosopher Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius was captured, sentenced to death and executed for high treason on behalf of the Goth king Theoderic. Tradition has it that after the execution Boethius’s remains were transferred to Pavia and buried in the Church of St. Pietro in Ciel d’Oro. Remarkably, the church also serves as the resting place for Augustine’s relics that have been buried in a sarcophagus that forms the base of the church’s main altar (Stone 1999: 256–259). The sarcophagus containing Boethius’s remains rests in the church’s crypt and is located exactly under Augustine’s shrine on the altar. From a historical perspective, it is of course rather uncertain whether the relics venerated in St. Pietro in Ciel d’Oro are authentic. Yet, what is interesting for our present context is the position of the two tombs, regardless of the authenticity of the relics the shrines allegedly contain. For, as I will argue in the following, the position of the tombs – with Augustine in the sanctuary and Boethius in the crypt – can be interpreted in a symbolic way that hints at some central aspects of both Augustine’s and Boethius’s thought, not least expressing important differences between the approaches the authors chose when investigating the divine. As will become evident in the course of this chapter, the way these tombs are arranged can be taken to reflect a differentiation between a theological approach (associated with Augustine) and a philosophical approach (represented by Boethius). Why exactly this is reflected in the positioning of the shrines will be explained at the end of this chapter after providing some insights into the peculiarities of Boethius’s concept of Christian philosophy and the differences between his philosophical and his theological method. Since this chapter gives an introduction to Boethius’s philosophy, it will focus on his thought and only touch on some minor aspects of Augustine’s theology. Nevertheless, the exposition of the differences between Boethius’s philosophy and his theology will provide the background against which the aforementioned interpretation of the arrangement of the tombs will become comprehensible, especially since Boethius’s theology shares some important structural commonalities with Augustine’s theological thought. To begin with, however, I will give some introductory information on Boethius’s intellectual projects as a theologian and as a philosopher, on his biographical background and on the main lines of reasoning I intend to follow in this chapter.

Introductory remarks

For quite some time, modern scholarship has considered Boethius as a mere compiler of classical, ancient, and late ancient ideas and concepts and appreciated him only as a mediator of these materials into the middle ages. It is certainly true that Boethius drew heavily on concepts and approaches first introduced by classical philosophers and theologians. As an analysis of his works shows, Boethius clearly adopted notions from Plato and Aristotle, from Neo-Platonic philosophers such as Porphyry and Iamblichus, and from Christian theologians such as Augustine (Marenbon 2003: 10–14; Gruber 2006: 38; Moreschini 2014: 9–11). However, a closer examination gives a much different impression of Boethius's reception of these authors. For, although he is clearly indebted to the aforementioned thinkers and traditions, he nevertheless took up and applied their concepts in a thoroughly creative manner and developed them further in significant ways. Boethius was thus able to make important contributions in the fields of theology and philosophy and to show how these disciplines can be connected and intertwined in a fruitful and productive way.

As I will argue in the following, his integration of theological and philosophical thought ultimately resulted in Boethius's attempt to develop a form of *genuine Christian philosophy* that in some important respects differed from his approach as a theologian. For Boethius, this kind of philosophy went well beyond a mere application of philosophical methods and concepts to religious and theological issues. Such a methodological procedure can, for example, already be observed Augustine who aimed at demonstrating that, from a rational point of view, the propositions of Christian faith are logically *possibly* true (Jürgasch 2013: 287–289). Instead, the Christian philosophy Boethius had in mind aimed at providing insights into the realm of the divine that were not only *possibly*, but *necessarily* true and, as far as we can tell, Boethius was the first Christian author in the Latin West who undertook establishing such a form of Christian philosophy. What exactly Boethius's project of a Christian philosophy consists in, in what sense he tried to gain necessarily true insights regarding the divine and how this project proved to be an important contribution to the development of Christian thought, especially in the Latin West, will be delineated subsequently. In this context, the peculiarity of Boethius's Christian philosophical approach will become particularly evident in comparison with his theological method and the aims of his theological argumentation.

For this comparison, I will focus mainly on Boethius's *Theological Tractates* and on his *Consolatio Philosophiae*, the latter being a book of philosophical consolation Boethius produced in anticipation of his own death sentence. While the *Tractates* demonstrate how philosophical logic could be applied to approach theological questions, a procedure that *mutatis mutandis* can already be found for example in Augustine's theology, we will see that the *Consolatio Philosophiae* presents the main lines of reasoning that lie at the heart of Boethius's aforementioned project of developing a form of Christian philosophy. Not least because of the conceptual productiveness and innovativeness the work displays, the *Consolatio* is one of the texts Boethius has been most famous for – besides, that is, his translations of and commentaries on classical works of philosophical logic (esp. Aristotle). Already in the Middle Ages, the *Consolatio* was widely received and became one of the most translated and discussed texts of this time. As such for various reasons the text proved to be highly inspiring to thinkers such as Thomas Aquinas and Dante and influenced authors such as Boccaccio and Petrarca. In the present context, I will use some of the arguments developed in the *Consolatio* to depict the main features of Boethius's Christian philosophy.

Boethius's thought shows a close link with his biography. In the following passage, I will therefore provide some biographical information and relevant context to prepare the ground for discussing Boethius's philosophical and theological projects and contributions. By taking

into account the sources and origins of Boethius's thought, some light will be shed on the peculiarities of both his theological and his philosophical methods, especially with regard to the characteristics of his Christian philosophy.

Boethius's biographical background

The exact date of Boethius's birth is still under debate, but most scholars agree that he was born between 475 and 485 (Marenbon 2003: 8; Obertello 1974: 17–20; Gruber 1997: 327–328). Regarding his birthplace, there is even less certainty. While traditionally it has often been assumed that Boethius was born in Rome, Joachim Gruber (1997: 328) has argued convincingly that there is no evidence whatsoever in favour of this hypothesis. Boethius's *praenomen* (Anicius) indicates that he was a member of the noble Roman *gens* of the Anicii, who counted a number of famous emperors and consuls in their ranks and who were one of the first Roman aristocratic families to convert to Christianity. After the early death of his father, Boethius was adopted by senator Symmachus, thus becoming a member of the even nobler family of the Symmachi. His bond with his lifelong mentor and friend Symmachus was further intensified when Boethius married the senator's daughter Rusticiana, with whom he had two sons.

Being a member of the Roman high nobility, Boethius committed himself to politics at the highest level. In 510, he was appointed “consul without colleague” (*consul sine collega*), and in 522 the Ostrogoth king Theoderic, who ruled the Italian peninsula by the grace of the Eastern Roman Emperor since 493, made Boethius his “Master of the Offices” (*magister officiorum*). Appointed to the “Master of the Offices”, Boethius became one of the king's highest-ranking senior officials and assumed responsibility for some major aspects of imperial government. His appointment to “Master of the Offices” marked not only the zenith of Boethius's political rise, but also the start of his spectacular downfall. After a (probably false) accusation of participating in a pro-Byzantine conspiracy against the king, Boethius's political career came to an abrupt end in about 523. As has already been mentioned at the beginning of this text, in the course of the subsequent events, Boethius was captured, sentenced to death, and, presumably between 524 and 526, executed in Calventia, at that time a fortified site located in the northwest of Pavia (Troncarelli 2011). Afterwards his remains were transferred to Pavia and buried in the aforementioned way in the Church of St. Pietro in Ciel d'Oro. As the text of the *Consolatio Philosophiae* suggests, Boethius wrote the book during his time in captivity waiting for his execution. This does not only give the work a particular lifeworld relevance, but it also hints at a close connection between Boethius's intellectual work, in particular as a Christian philosopher, with his biography.

We can tell from his works that Boethius had excellent command of Greek and extensive acquaintance with classical Greek and Neo-Platonic philosophy. Moreover, he had immense knowledge in the fields of Latin philosophy, Greek Christian literature, and the Latin Church Fathers, especially Augustine (Marenbon 2003: 11). The combination of his excellent language skills with his in-depth knowledge of the aforementioned philosophical and theological traditions formed the basis of his intellectual endeavours and projects and shaped his philosophical and theological thought.

It is very likely that Boethius received his excellent education in the household of Symmachus. There, it appears, he was taught Greek by a native speaker and, from early on, was given the opportunity to study the sciences belonging to the educational syllabus of the so-called *Quadrivium*. These “four ways” consisted of the sciences of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, and it was Boethius himself who, by commenting on all four of the aforementioned subjects, made an important contribution regarding the systematization and the labelling of this syllabus as the “*Quadrivium*”. Like other Neo-Platonic philosophers, such as Porphyry, Proclus, Ammonius,

and Simplicius, Boethius developed and expounded his own philosophical ideas mainly, although not exclusively, by commenting on works from the Platonic and Aristotelian traditions (Moreschini 2014: 10). In accordance with this Neo-Platonic program, he planned to comment and translate into Latin all of Plato's dialogues and all of Aristotle's works, and to show, in a separate treatise, that Plato and Aristotle did not contradict each other with regard to the most important philosophical issues. Due to his political obligations and at least partly because of his early death Boethius, was not able to successfully complete his project. Making the topic of philosophical logic his main focus, he only commented on and translated Aristotle's logical works (e.g. the *Topics*), Porphyry's *Isagoge*, and Cicero's *Topica*, a work which itself discusses Aristotle's *Topics*. In addition to his translations and commentaries, Boethius produced several treatises which deal with logical questions, for example, taking into account the different forms of syllogism.

Boethius's attempt to harmonize Plato and Aristotle was an aim he shared with other Neo-Platonic commentators. However, the attempt to make the results of his work as a Neo-Platonic commentator, in particular on logical issues, fruitful for issues of Christian theology and philosophy can be considered a peculiarity of Boethius's project. This is particularly evident with regard to his *Theological Tractates* and the *Consolatio Philosophiae*, as both works clearly show the influence of Aristotelian and (Neo-)Platonic concepts of logic, physics, and metaphysics on Boethius's theological and (Christian) philosophical thought. In this context, his discussions of how the divine Trinity can be considered one God and not three Gods (*De sancta Trinitate*) or of the identification of God with the "highest good" (*Cons.* III) serve as telling examples. Before taking into consideration the influence of Aristotelian and Neo-Platonic thought that can be traced in the *Consolatio* and in Boethius's concept of a Christian philosophy, I will examine in more detail the methodological procedure Boethius applies in the *Theological Tractates*. By focussing on Boethius's theological method first, I will prepare the ground for expounding the peculiarities of Boethius's Christian philosophical method that are especially evident in contrast to his theological approach.

Boethius's theology – the theological tractates

While for quite some time the authenticity of the *Theological Tractates* has been disputed, nowadays most scholars assume that, with the exception of the so-called *De fide catholica*, these works were indeed written by Boethius. From the point of view of a rational form of theology, the *Tractates* are particularly interesting because of the methodological principles Boethius applies throughout the texts (Moreschini 2014: 9–11, 25–28, 35–91; Jürgasch 2014). In the prologue to his *De sancta trinitate*, Boethius encourages us in a somewhat programmatic statement to carry our theological research as far as the "view of human reason" (*humanae rationis intuitus*) is able to ascend to the "heights of the divinity" (*celsa divinitatis*) (Boethius *De sancta trinitate*, Prol. 21–23). The same optimistic view on the applicability of reason in the sphere of theological discourse and on the reconcilability of reason and faith can also be found in other places in the *Tractates*. So, for example, at the end of the treatise *Utrum pater et filius*, Boethius makes the following request to John the Deacon to whom he has dedicated his tractate:

If it [i.e. what Boethius has argued, T.J.] is right and in accordance with faith, I ask you to let me know. But if you are in any point of another opinion, examine carefully what I have said, and if possible, join together faith and reason.

Adhering to this principle of the reconcilability of faith and reason, Boethius consistently addresses the theological issues he takes into account in his *Tractates* by means of reason (*qua*

ratione). By applying reason to theological questions, Boethius presents an alternative and innovative way of practising theology. This holds in particular for the Latin West where, with some exceptions such as Marius Victorinus or Augustine, up to Boethius's period the consultation and exegesis of Holy Scripture in principle marked the essence of theological method (Moreschini 2014: 10–11). Boethius's high appreciation of reason does not, however, entail a dismissal of Holy Scripture as the main source of our insights regarding the divine. In this context John Marenbon contends: "Christianity, as Boethius presents it, is a revealed religion, built around a particular sacred history, and with precise doctrines that it is heretical to infringe" (Marenbon 2003: 67). Consequently, for Boethius revelation remains both the starting point for all of our theological investigations and the main criterion for evaluating the insights we claim to have regarding the divine. Yet, at the same time, Boethius was clearly convinced that there was still plenty of room for him as a philosopher "to exercise his intelligence in discussing and defending such a faith" (Marenbon 2003: 67), and he was obviously determined to occupy as much of this room as possible. As Giulio D'Onofrio has set forth, Boethius's determination to apply reason to theological issues was not only *not* limited by his subordination of reason to faith, it even encouraged this application. According to D'Onofrio,

[for Boethius] Theology, which is human speech about God and His Truth, is ultimately made possible by the absolute subordination of rational procedures to the revelation of Faith; but this is not necessarily a limitation. In fact, if man is allowed to apply his logical skill to a subject which is proved true by an act of Faith, he is therefore authorized to consider equally true his own intellectual conclusions.

(D'Onofrio 1986: 46)

Now, the question arising at this point is, of course, what kind of reason Boethius uses in his *Theological Tractates* and what this implies for his theological method. According to John Marenbon, the form of "reason" (*ratio*) Boethius applies in the context of his theological investigations is mainly guided by principles our author found in Aristotelian logic and physics and in Neoplatonic metaphysics (Marenbon 2003: 67–68). Hence, "reason", as Boethius understands it, is very much shaped by philosophical concepts and ideas, so that we can conclude with Claudio Moreschini that, in this context, for Boethius "*ratio* signifies philosophy" (Moreschini 2014: 10).

The influence of Aristotelian logic on Boethius's theological method can, for example, be traced in the way Boethius formally structured his theological arguments. In his thorough analysis of *De sancta trinitate*, which subsequently will serve as an example for Boethius's general theological method, Alain Galonnier has argued in a convincing manner that Boethius proceeds by following the classical rules of the *Topics* (Galonnier 2013: 29). Applying these rules, Boethius makes use of a method of argumentation that has originally been developed by Aristotle in his *Topics* and that much later has been commented on and further differentiated by Cicero in his *Topica*. Arguing according to the rules of the *Topics*, Boethius structures his investigation of the Trinity in the technical sense of an *investigatio*, which is important inasmuch as he is thus adopting and implementing principles of Aristotelian science in a Christian theological inquiry. Making use of the structure of an *investigatio*, Boethius begins his investigation in *De sancta trinitate* by posing a "question" (*quaestio*) that can be answered in two contradicting and mutually exclusive ways. In the case of *De sancta trinitate*, this *quaestio* is the following one: is the divine Trinity *one* God or *three* Gods? (*De sancta trinitate* 39–42). As Boethius implies at the beginning of the first chapter, one might conclude that the Trinity is *three* Gods from the fact that not only the Father is considered to be God, but also the Son and the Holy Spirit. What is being challenged here and, from a rational point of view, legitimately called into doubt is nothing less

than a “proposition” (*propositio*) or “sentence” (*sententia*) (*De sancta trinitate* 1, 40) that lies at the centre of Christian faith. According to this *propositio* or *sententia*, there is only *one* God who, at the same time, is believed to be *trinitarian*. This apparently seems to entail a self-contradiction, as the Christian *sententia* holds that God is one *and* not one, i.e. trinitarian, at the same time (Jürgasch 2014: 110–111). Consequently, or so it appears, this *sententia* of Christian faith seems untenable as it obviously claims something that is logically impossible, and it is exactly this problem that Boethius seeks to solve in *De sancta trinitate*.

Remarkably, Boethius does not pursue the question of how the Trinity can possibly be one God by simply adducing biblical references to assert the truth of the proposition. Rather, complying with his aforementioned methodological principle to address theological issues *qua ratione*, he develops “arguments” (*argumenta*) in favour of his position. As Boethius explains in *De topicis differentiis*, to develop arguments basically means to give “reasons” (*rationes*) that will help to decide how to answer a *quaestio* and that will thus provide “credibility” or “reliance” (*fides*) to a doubtful proposition such as the aforementioned one regarding the divine Trinity (*De topicis differentiis* I, 2, 7–8).

On closer consideration, it becomes evident that the “credibility” which Boethius’s argumentation in *De sancta trinitate* seeks to provide does not amount to “proving” that the proposition, according to which the Trinity is one God (and not three Gods), is *necessarily true*. Instead, Boethius merely tries to demonstrate that the proposition in question is “cogitable” or “thinkable” in the sense of *logical possibility*. In the present context, this means that Boethius aims at showing that the proposition, according to which the Trinity is *one* God, does not necessarily entail a self-contradiction, as it first had appeared, and that it therefore is *not* necessarily logically impossible. By demonstrating that we *can* think of the Trinity as one God Boethius does not, however, claim to prove that we *have to* consider it as one God, that in this sense the *sententia* in question would be necessarily true (Jürgasch 2014: 114–121). We will see in due course that the difference between these two argumentative aims plays an important role when it comes to distinguishing between Boethius’s theological and his philosophical method.

Without getting into the details of the argumentation in *De sancta trinitate*, Boethius’s main point is that the self-contradicting and false assumption stating that the Trinity, i.e. the *one* trinitarian God, is *three* Gods arises from a misconception of how we can predicate something of God (Moreschini 2014: 66–71; Marenbon 2003: 82–87). Since God is “beyond substance” (*ultra substantiam*) (*De sancta trinitate* 4, 183–184, 189–190), Boethius holds that we cannot predicate anything of Him that would indicate what He is substantially in and as Himself (Tisserand 2008: 191–200). Nevertheless, so Boethius argues starting from a differentiation regarding Aristotle’s categories, it is still possible to predicate something of God if we keep the aforementioned restriction in mind. According to Boethius, this holds true in particular with regard to the so-called “extrinsic” predications which in contrast to the “intrinsic” ones do not claim to state anything about a thing (*praedicationes secundum rem*), but only about the “circumstances of a thing” (*circumstantiae rei*) (*De sancta trinitate* 4, 269–278; Marenbon 2003: 84–87). For Boethius, the category of “relatives” (*relativa, ad aliquid*) clearly belongs to the class of extrinsic predications, as it does not state anything about a thing, but only about the relationship a thing has with other things (*De sancta trinitate* 5, 276–279, 365). It is precisely this category that we apply, when we claim that God is trinitarian in the sense that the Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Spirit is God. Thus, we make use of an extrinsic form of predication, as we are stating something about the relationships between the three divine persons and not about the persons as they are in themselves, just as if we were talking about three different things. Rather, the statement that “God is Father” is a “relative predication” (*relativa praedicatio*) that expresses something about the relationship between the Father and the Son and not about God’s substance in

the sense of a *praedicatio secundum rem* (*De sancta trinitate* 5, 319–321; see also *Utrum pater et filius* 4, 55–61). In Boethius’s view, we can therefore conclude that

[t]here is number, threefoldness, in God, because relation entails there being more than one thing to be related, but there is unity also, because the terms of the relation do not differ with regard to anything that can be predicated intrinsically (*secundum se*).

(Marenbon 2003: 86, with a reference to *De sancta trinitate* 6, 333–339)

Without assessing the soundness of Boethius’s argumentation that some scholars have doubted (Bradshaw 2009: 11–13), Boethius’s conclusion is obviously very interesting with regard to the aforementioned argumentative aim he pursues in *De sancta trinitate*. As the analysis of his argumentation has shown and as Boethius’s conclusion underlines, his aim consists in demonstrating that there is a way in which we *can* conceive of the Trinity as one God. Hence, according to Boethius the *sententia* in question is logically possible, since it does not necessarily entail a self-contradiction. At no point in *De sancta trinitate*, however, does Boethius argue that *we have* to consider the one God as trinitarian, that in this sense the *sententia* is necessarily true.

We find this argumentative aim and the corresponding methodological procedure, a precursor of which can be found in Augustine’s works, in all of Boethius’s *Theological Tractates* except for *De fide catholica*. Similar to *De sancta trinitate*, Boethius’s other *Tractates* try to show that the theological *sententiae* or *propositiones* in question are cogitable and thinkable in the sense of *logical possibility* (Jürgasch 2014: 123–126): for example, in *Tractate III*, he considers how the created *substantiae* can be good while not being substantially good, and he also investigates how Christ can be *one* person consisting in *two* natures, one human and one divine (*Tractate V*).

It has been mentioned before and discussed in more detail with regard to *De sancta trinitate* that in his theological works Boethius makes extensive use of philosophical concepts and ideas. Structuring his theological investigations according to Aristotelian scientific principles, Boethius was one of the first Christian authors, at least in the Latin West, who worked at shaping Christian theology into a kind of Aristotelian science. In this way, he set some important standards for a rational form of theology that had a lasting influence on medieval theological thought and that prefigured a couple of central aspects of what was later labelled “Scholasticism” (Jürgasch 2013: 376–377).

Although we can find a lot of philosophy in Boethius’s theology, a closer analysis of his proceeding as a philosopher shows that there are some very important differences between his theological and his philosophical method. In this context, Boethius’s *Consolatio Philosophiae* proves to be the best object to study this difference and to expound some of the central aspects of what I have called Boethius’s Christian philosophy. In the following chapter, I will analyze Boethius’s philosophical argumentation in the *Consolatio* and take into account the peculiarities of Boethius’s philosophical method. I will then delineate how Boethius’s philosophical method differs from the theological method I have expounded with regard to the *Theological Tractates*; I will subsequently spell out the main features of Boethius’s Christian philosophy as displayed in the *Consolatio*.

Boethius’s Christian Philosophy – the *Consolatio Philosophiae*

I mentioned earlier that there is some evidence that Boethius wrote his *Consolatio* in rather dramatic circumstances. After the (probably false) accusation of participating in a pro-Byzantine conspiracy against Theodoric, Boethius had been sentenced to death and was waiting for the sentence to be executed. It was around this time that he decided to produce a work of

philosophical consolation. Boethius thus inscribed himself into a tradition of philosophical consolation literature, following the examples of authors as famous as Cicero and Seneca. In Boethius's *Consolatio Philosophiae*, the first-person narrator, ostensibly the imprisoned Boethius himself, enters into a dialogue with Lady *Philosophia*, who pays a visit to the desperate prisoner. As the subsequent description of this Lady makes evident, she is a personification of philosophical knowledge and wisdom which will provide the consolation the imprisoned Boethius so desperately needs (Varvis 1991: 32–36; Enders 1999: 11–15; Jürgasch 2004). If we interpret Boethius's depiction of Lady *Philosophia* as a personification of a certain kind of philosophical knowledge, it is possible to consider *Philosophia* as an allegorization of the philosophical knowledge which Boethius recalls and contemplates by “conversing” with this figure. This emphasis on philosophical knowledge and the way Boethius sets the stage in the *Consolatio* gives rise to several questions. For one, it is rather surprising that an author who publicly confessed to Christianity, as Boethius certainly did (Gruber 2006: 39), and who even produced the earlier-mentioned *Theological Tractates* turns to *philosophical* knowledge for consolation and not to (Christian) *theological* knowledge. Beyond that, one could generally call into doubt whether it actually makes sense to oppose theological and philosophical knowledge with regard to Boethius's oeuvre. For Boethius's earlier-discussed commitment to the importance of human “reason” (*ratio*) for theological investigation actually calls into question the upholding of “a divergence between *fides* and philosophy . . . for Boethius's works” (Moreschini 2014: 11). Consequently, Claudio Moreschini agrees with Robert Crouse, who contends that “according to his [i.e. Boethius's] classification of sciences, both the *Tractates* and the *Consolatio* must belong to *theologia*, and seek to penetrate divine mysteries *intellectualiter*” (Crouse 1982: 418; Moreschini 2014: 11). In light of this, one wonders once again why Boethius so explicitly states that he converses with Lady *Philosophia* in order to find consolation and not with Lady *Theologia*. To put this point more generally: does it make sense at all to distinguish between Boethius's theological and his philosophical method if the aim of both the *Tractates* and the *Consolatio* “to penetrate divine mysteries *intellectualiter*”?

On closer inspection, however, it turns out that there is an important difference between Boethius's proceeding as a theologian on the one hand and his proceeding as a philosopher on the other hand. This is particularly evident with regard to an argument developed in *Consolatio Philosophiae* III, 10 that Boethius designs to demonstrate that the “perfect” (*perfectum*) and “highest good” (*summum bonum*) is in God (Jürgasch 2013: 366–378). Since Boethius's argument obviously concerns a possible predication of God, it seems at first sight that in this passage we have a *theological* discussion that bears some similarity to the discussion regarding the divine Trinity in *De sancta trinitate*. Interestingly enough, however, the first-person narrator of the *Consolatio* is not being instructed by Lady *Theologia*. Instead it is Lady *Philosophia* who converses with Boethius regarding the question whether the highest good is in God.

Developing her argument, which will prove central for the consolation Boethius seeks in this text, *Philosophia* contends that it is “reason” (*ratio*) that “demonstrates” (*demonstrat*) in such a way that God is good, that it also convinces (*convincat*) that the “perfect good” and, as she explains later, therefore the “highest good” too must be in God. For, Boethius's interlocutor continues, if it was not the case that the “perfect good” is in God, He could not be the “principle of all things” (*principium omnium rerum*) (*Consolatio* III, 10, 8–9). Since, so *Philosophia*'s argumentation runs, it is impossible to assume that God is not the “principle of all things”, it is also *impossible* to assume that the “perfect good” is *not* in God. Here Lady *Philosophia* puts forward an argument that has the form of a “hypothetical syllogism” using the logical inference of *modus tollens*. According to this figure of argumentation, on which Boethius had previously written a whole treatise (*De hypotheticis syllogismis*), the denying of the *consequent* entails the denying of the

antecedent. In the case of the argument advanced by Lady *Philosophia*, this translates as follows: “If the perfect good was not in God, he could not be the principle of all things. God is the principle of all things. Therefore the perfect good is in God.”

By making use of a hypothetical syllogism, Boethius once again, just as before in his *Theological Tractates*, applies Aristotelian logic to develop an argument regarding God. Yet, as a closer scrutiny demonstrates, the kind of argumentation Boethius presents in *Consolatio* III, 10 shows some considerable differences when compared with the arguments put forward in the *Theological Tractates*. While in the *Tractates* Boethius’s aim is to demonstrate that a proposition is “cogitable” in terms of logical *possibility*, in the *Consolatio* he is far more ambitious. In this work, he formulates propositions about God that he holds to be true in the sense of logical *necessity*, thus going far beyond the results he has strived for in his theological inquiries. Hence, Boethius holds that we can actually demonstrate that it is not only cogitable that God is the perfect and highest good, but that this proposition is necessarily true. In terms of the terminology Boethius deploys to express this necessity, we find many examples in the *Consolatio* where Lady *Philosophia* uses phrases such as “necesse est” (*Consolatio* III, 10, 10;17), “manifestum est” (*Consolatio* III, 10, 19). or, and this is particularly significant in the present context, “*nec est quod contra dici ullo modo queat*” (*Consolatio* III, 10, 19).

On closer inspection, it becomes evident that the logical necessity that Boethius claims for his proposition consists in the fact that the *antithesis*, according to which the “perfect good” is *not* in God, leads to a self-contradiction and is therefore untenable (Jürgasch 2014: 130–132). As has been explained, the antithesis is impossibly true, as it entails the following self-contradiction: God who is the principle of all things is, at the same time, considered not to be the principle of all things. Consequently, so Boethius holds, since this antithesis is untenable as its *reductio ad absurdum* has shown, the proposition that states the thesis must be necessarily true and not only “cogitable” in the aforementioned sense. This is precisely why according to Boethius it is “reason” that “convincens” (*ratio convincat*) that the perfect good must be in God.

The notion of “necessity” implied in Boethius’s argumentation demonstrates once more how much our author is indebted to Aristotelian concepts, as our author adopts the definition of “necessity” that Aristotle gives in *Metaphysics* V, 5 (1015a: 33–35) where he defines “the necessary” as that which cannot be otherwise. Not only is this Aristotelian notion of necessity of central significance in the context of Boethius’s discussion of divine providence in book V of the *Consolatio*. What is more, by introducing this notion of necessity into his (Christian) philosophical investigations of the divine, Boethius adopts Aristotle’s concept of scientific (epistemic) knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*), the object of which is that which cannot be otherwise (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1139b: 19–23). In this way, Boethius presents his Christian philosophy as a version of Aristotle’s “First Philosophy” (*πρώτη φιλοσοφία*) that as such considers the principles of all things and that Aristotle himself associated with the divine (*Metaphysics* 1026a: 10–24).

It has been mentioned earlier that *Philosophia*’s argument in *Consolatio* III, 10 proves to be of central importance for providing the consolation the first-person narrator seeks. As the remaining of book III and books IV and V of the *Consolatio* show, the demonstration that the perfect and highest good must necessarily be in God leads Boethius to realize that no matter what the circumstances are that he finds himself in, he will be able to attain true happiness (*beatitudo*). Even a prisoner in anticipation of his death sentence can be happy, so Lady *Philosophia*’s argument runs, if he aligns his aspiration to the true aim of all striving: God, the perfect and highest good. This holds since the aspiration of this goal is independent of the external circumstances and a question of our inner attitude. What is more, as Lady *Philosophia* explains to Boethius at greater length in book IV, *only* those who strive for God as their highest good will attain happiness. Therefore, although from a worldly perspective this might seem counterintuitive,

Philosophia concludes that those who are good, as they aim at the highest good, are always powerful, while those who are evil are always weak (*Consolatio* IV, 2, 3–6). From this insight arises a consolation that according to Boethius guarantees a form of happiness and power no one can take away from him.

Generalizing these observations on Boethius's *Consolatio*, we can draw the conclusion that this way of arguing marks the essence of Boethius's method, when he intends to “penetrate divine mysteries *intellectualiter*” as a *philosopher* and not as a theologian. Thus, it is not the object that for Boethius sets apart theology and philosophy, as in both his theological and his philosophical investigations the object is the same, i.e. the “divine mysteries”. Rather, it is the difference between the methodological procedures and the corresponding aims of argumentation that separates Boethius's theology from his philosophy, the latter being an approach to the divine that is far more ambitious and optimistic than Boethius's theological approach. This ambitiousness and the corresponding method lie at the heart of Boethius's concept of a Christian philosophy that promotes a way of accessing the divine that up to Boethius's period, at least in the Latin West, had been unheard of. Hence, Boethius's way of arguing philosophically regarding questions concerning the divine marked a significant innovation in the field of western theological and philosophical thought that brought a new quality to human investigations of the divine.

The limits of our access to the divine and the role of revelation

The optimism regarding the capacities of human reason that is displayed both in Boethius's *Tractates* and in particular in his *Consolatio* does not mean that Boethius naively assumes that we can actually grasp the essence of the divine reality and access God's substance (Tisserand 2008: 191–200; Jürgasch 2014: 133–141). As we have seen before, in the *De sancta trinitate* (4,183–184) Boethius explicitly states that God is “beyond substance” (*ultra substantiam*) and therefore beyond our grasp. The same principle applies to the *Consolatio* that clearly shows how well Boethius is aware of the limits of human reason. For example, we find explicit statements about these limitations in *Consolatio* V, 5, 11–12; V, 5, 4. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the argument regarding God's goodness is conclusive only if we grant several key premises. For one, God has to be identified with the “principle of all things”, since otherwise the argument put forward by Lady *Philosophia* will not work. Of course, the assumption of this identification is well founded in the philosophical traditions of Platonism and Aristotelianism so that Boethius resorts to a principle that nobody really questioned at his time and that his educated audience certainly agreed with. Nevertheless, the identification is still a premise that Boethius needs to introduce to make his argument sound. Moreover, the demonstration is convincing only with regard to God inasmuch as he is considered to be the *principium omnium rerum* and not in view of what He is in and as Himself. Consequently, the argument presupposes a certain human perspective on God and does not consider God *per se*. Hence, *Philosophia*'s argumentation is not independent of our limited human perspective and takes into account God only as he is for us (Jürgasch 2014). Further premises that Boethius's argument makes use of without introducing them explicitly are, for example, the logical principles of *tertium non datur* and the impossibility of a *regressus in infinitum* regarding the causes of goodness. Both of these logical principles, which Boethius once again took from Aristotle's logic, were so commonly acknowledged that he did not have to make them explicit or even discuss their legitimation.

What is more, although Boethius's philosophy is very much shaped by his optimism regarding human reason, our author is at the same time very much aware of his dependence on revelation even for his philosophical argumentations regarding the divine. As has been explained before, one of the main sources of Boethius's intellectual optimism was the insight that “if

man is allowed to apply his logical skill to a subject which is proved true by an act of Faith, he is therefore authorized to consider equally true his own intellectual conclusions” (D’Onofrio 1986: 46). In his argumentation regarding the “perfect good” being in God in *Consolatio* III, 10, Boethius takes up this principle while applying reason in order to prove a proposition about God to be necessarily true which has already been revealed by Holy Scripture (e.g. Ps. 25.8; Ps. 52.11; 2 Chron. 30.18; Mark 10.18; Luke 18.19) and expounded by the theological and philosophical traditions Boethius bases his own thought on. In this context, for example, Augustine plays a very important role, as Boethius’s famous notion of God as that “than which nothing better can be thought” (*quo nihil melius excogitari queat*) (*Consolatio* III, 10, 7) can already be found – albeit with slight variants – in several of Augustine’s works (e.g. *Confessiones* VII, 4, 6; *De moribus ecclesiae* II, XI, 24; *De libero arbitrio* II, 6, 14).

When proving *qua ratione* that the perfect good is in God, Boethius thus in fact takes up a divinely revealed concept and tries to demonstrate that by means of reason we can reach a conclusion that expresses the same content as the revealed concept regarding God’s goodness. Hence, for his philosophical arguments, too, Boethius resorts to revelation in the sense that he takes the starting points and endpoints of his arguments from Holy Scripture and from the theological and philosophical traditions that have explicitly (e.g. Augustine) or implicitly (e.g. Plato, Aristotle, or Proclus) discussed concepts that have been revealed in Scripture. On the literary level, Boethius expresses this necessity to resort to a received form of knowledge as the starting point of his philosophical investigations in poem III, 9 of the *Consolatio* that directly precedes his argumentation in III, 10. Referring to a passage from Plato’s *Timaios* (27c), Lady *Philosophia* and Boethius agree on the need to invoke the assistance of God as the “father of all things” (*pater omnium rerum*) since without him no beginning will be well founded (*quo praetermisso nullum rite fundatur exordium*) (*Consolatio* III, 9, 32–33). As this passage and the subsequent poem show, in Boethius’s view divine assistance is absolutely necessary even for philosophical considerations of the divine that proceed by means of human reason.

Consequently, Boethius does not start his philosophical argumentations from scratch, from a “speculative nowhere”. Rather, his investigations are firmly rooted in the context of Christian religious thought that provides the principles and both the starting and endpoints of his philosophical research into the divine. Thus, we can conceive of Boethius’s philosophy as a *Christian* form of philosophy although at no point in the *Consolatio* Lady *Philosophia* makes any explicit references to Christianity or to specifically Christian concepts.

Concluding remarks

I have started this chapter with a description of the arrangement of Boethius’s and Augustine’s tombs in St. Pietro in Ciel D’Oro in Pavia, and I hope that, by now, I have sufficiently prepared the ground for my interpretation of this arrangement. To be sure, I am not implying that those who created and arranged the shrines in Ciel D’Oro actually had in mind the interpretation of this arrangement that I am going to propose. Against the historical background, it is even quite unlikely that this was the case (Stone 1999: 258–259). Yet, the interpretation I am about to present will prove to be useful inasmuch as it takes the aforementioned arrangement as a symbolic representation of some central aspects of Boethius’s philosophy, especially in contrast to his own and to Augustine’s theology.

It has been mentioned at the beginning of this text that the arrangement of the tombs can be taken to reflect a differentiation between a theological and a philosophical approach to the divine – with Augustine as the representative of theology and Boethius as the representative of philosophy. To interpret the positioning of the tombs in this way is possible against the

background of what has been discussed so far regarding the peculiarities of Boethius's philosophical method and its differences in view of his theological method. Based on Boethius's own conception of philosophy, we could infer that his tomb is in the crypt because he has been buried *as a philosopher*. As we have seen, when arguing as a philosopher Boethius puts special emphasis on the fact that by the mere application of reason we can reach conclusions that correspond (despite the aforementioned restrictions) to the insights gained from studying God's revelation in Holy Scripture. This "down-to-earthness", so to speak, of Boethius's philosophical method is nicely represented by the greater closeness to earth in a rather literal sense that his somewhat hidden burial place in the crypt displays.

In contrast to this, Augustine's shrine on the main altar can be taken as a symbol for a *theological* approach to the divine. As has been explained with regard to Boethius's theological method, this way of investigating the divine takes up concepts that explicitly or implicitly have been revealed in Holy Scripture and aims at demonstrating that they are cogitable in the sense of logical possibility. Of course, this methodological procedure, the basic elements of which we already find in Augustine, ascribes an important role to our *ratio*. Yet, this way of explicating the contents of revelation in view of their logical possibility is obviously closer to the conception of a revealed form of knowledge that merely has to be explicated. In this sense, the insights that we gain from our theological investigations are, so to speak, more dependent on revelation and stay closer to revelation. This defining feature becomes particularly apparent in comparison to a philosophical procedure as Boethius has developed it. In Ciel D'Oro, this theological approach is figuratively expressed by the fact that Augustine's tomb forms the basis of the main altar. Thus, the tomb is located at the place that like no other place in the church symbolizes an encounter between the realms of the human and the divine made possible by God's grace, just as the theological way of accessing the divine mainly depends on the grace of revelation.

As a philosopher, Boethius developed an alternative way of encountering the divine, drawing our attention to capabilities of human reason that until then had passed unnoticed in the context of Western Christian thought. He thus inspired generations of philosophers and theologians to seek out the limits of human reason and, if possible, to "be lifted to the summit of the highest intelligence" where "reason will see what in itself it cannot look at" (*Consolatio* V, 5, 12). Although Boethius's tomb is somewhat hidden in the crypt of St. Pietro in Ciel D'Oro, it is worth a visit, as it contains the remains of a thinker who might not just have been the "last of the Romans" and the "first of the scholastics", but also the first Christian philosopher in the Latin West.

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John Philoponus

Orna Harari

Introduction

John Philoponus was a Neoplatonic philosopher, a commentator on Aristotle, the author of polemical treatises that question the eternity of the world, and a theologian who contributed to the Christological and Trinitarian debates of his time. The question of the theoretical relation among the views found in these different works has received little attention primarily because the following considerations suggest that there was none: first, Philoponus wrote his polemical treatises and theological works at a later stage of his career; secondly, in his commentaries on Aristotle he rarely gives voice to his Christian views; and thirdly, the views found in his commentaries and in his Christian writings seem incompatible. In light of these considerations, discussions of the relation between Philoponus' philosophical and Christian views attempt to reconcile the apparent discrepancies by distinguishing two phases of his life and career, or by distinguishing his exegetical from his theoretical activities. By one approach, Philoponus converted to Christianity about 520 CE and wrote his commentaries on Aristotle as a pagan and his Christian writings after his conversion (Gudeman and Kroll 1916). Another approach holds that he was a Christian from birth but in the course of his career developed two diametrically opposed philosophical systems: that of Philoponus 1, found in works written before 529 CE when he still adhered to Alexandrian Neoplatonism, and that of Philoponus 2, who in keeping with the Christian faith assumes a personal god and rejects the eternity of the world (Verrycken 1990: 236–237). By the more widely accepted approach, the apparent discrepancies between Philoponus' philosophical and Christian views do not attest to the dates of the composition of his writings but reflect his dual activities as a commentator who expounds Aristotle's views and as a philosopher who presents his own views (e.g. Évrard 1953: 355; Golitsis 2008: 26–37; Osborn 2006: 11–16; Scholten 1996: 138–139). Besides these approaches which see Philoponus as a philosopher *and* as a theologian, one-sided approaches are found that see him as *either* a theologian *or* a philosopher. By the former approach, Philoponus was a theologian who used philosophical terms, modes of argumentation, and method as rhetorical tools in the cause of the miaphysite movement (MacCoull 1995: 56–59).¹ By the latter approach, he addressed the question of the eternity of the world from an exclusively philosophical standpoint and wrote his polemical treatise *On the Eternity of the World against Proclus* [henceforth *Against Proclus*] in the

context of pagan Neoplatonic debates over the interpretation of Plato's *Timaeus* and not in the context of Christian–pagan debates over the eternity of the world (Lang and Macro 2001: 4, 7).²

The significant differences between these approaches notwithstanding, they share the assumption that philosophy and Christian creed do not go hand in hand. However, this is not how Philoponus himself understands the relation between the two. In the introduction to his commentary on the hexaemeron, *De opificio mundi*, he says:

The aim of the present treatise is to prove insofar as it is possible the very claim that nothing in the prophet's cosmogony is at variance with the order of the cosmos but on the contrary that many of the later causal accounts [given] by natural philosophers take their cue from what was written by Moses.³

(6.19–24 Reichardt)

This passage shows that the previously given approaches fail to capture Philoponus' understanding of the relation between his Christian faith and philosophy. It shows that in Philoponus' view, pagan natural philosophy and the biblical creation story are compatible, but also that he does not regard them as two distinct cosmologies because, in his view, the biblical creation story is the source of pagan natural philosophy. Thus this passage casts doubt on the previous approaches, in implying, first, that for Philoponus philosophy and theology are not unrelated matters that he pursues side by side, and second, that unlike many scholastic theologians of his time he does not merely borrow from philosophy its rigorous argumentative method but integrates philosophical ideas with Christian doctrine. In adopting this approach, he does not accommodate the biblical creation story with natural philosophy, but as Clemens Scholten (1996: 54) has convincingly argued he prefers the former when natural philosophy fails to give a decisive account or when it disagrees with the Bible. The priority of the Bible notwithstanding, Philoponus' description of *De opificio mundi's* aim indicates that in his view the principal criterion for assessing cosmological ideas is the order of the cosmos rather than agreement with the Bible or with pagan natural philosophy. The picture emerging from this description is not of a theologian who merely uses philosophical method or of a philosopher who also writes on Christian subjects, but of a thinker who integrates Christian and philosophical ideas that agree with the facts into one coherent worldview.

In the following I argue that this integrative picture aptly captures the relation between Philoponus' philosophy and theology. I open with a discussion of Philoponus' methodological approach to theology and its use in his major Christological work the *Arbiter*, showing that the role of philosophy therein is not only methodological. Then I examine the role that philosophy plays in Philoponus' theology through two case studies: his account of the unity of Christ's activities in the *Arbiter*, and his account of creation *ex nihilo* in *Against Proclus*. These examinations show that Philoponus' philosophical and theological views form one coherent worldview; and that there is more continuity among his Christian views, his exegetical stances, and the Neoplatonic tradition than the previous approaches suggest.

Philoponus' methodological approach to theology

In his commentary on *Physics* I.1, Philoponus describes Plato's *Timaeus* and Aristotle's *Metaphysics* as follows:

It is possible to study nature theologically (φυσιολογεῖν θεολογικῶς), as Plato does in the *Timaeus* when he discusses the transcendent causes of natural objects, and to study theology

naturally (θεολογεῖν φυσικῶς), like Aristotle who in the *Metaphysics* infers his teaching on divine matters from natural objects.

(5.16–25 Vitelli)

Philoponus' description of Aristotle's study of theology reflects his interpretation of the *Metaphysics*, but also his own understanding of the method which theology, as a discipline that studies the highest principle of being, can employ. Later in his commentary on *Physics* I.1, Philoponus distinguishes two methods of acquiring scientific knowledge: the demonstrative and the didactic. The former corresponds to Plato's theological study of nature, which grounds natural phenomena in transcendent causes and proves propositions about secondary entities from premises about things that are prior and more principal by nature. The latter method corresponds to Aristotle's natural study of theology which proceeds from natural phenomena to divine matters and proves propositions about prior entities from premises about posterior entities (9.11–19 Vitelli). This correspondence is not accidental. According to Philoponus, the didactic method is indispensable for the study of the most fundamental principles that lack any higher principles through which they can be demonstratively proven (9.19–22 Vitelli). In the commentary on Aristotle's *Physics*, Philoponus illustrates this point through the notion of matter, which being one of the fundamental principles of natural objects cannot be grounded in a more fundamental principle (10.6–8 Vitelli), but clearly the same account holds also for other fundamental principles, especially for the first cause of all beings i.e., god.⁴

Indeed, Philoponus employs this method in the *Arbiter*, where he defends the miaphysite stance, namely that as a result of the union between the divine Logos and humanity, Christ has one composite nature and not two, as the Chalcedonians hold.⁵ In so doing, he understands the relation between Christ's divinity and humanity as analogous to the relation between the human rational soul and the body, and argues that just as human beings have one nature composed of the rational soul and the body, so Christ has one nature composed of divinity and humanity (3, 175).⁶ This analogy secures the unity of Christ's two natures, by implying that his activities are predicated not of each nature separately but of the composite of divinity and humanity and that he retains his superiority to human beings. In human beings, there are natural activities that belong to the body alone because the human soul has no control over activities that results from the body's material constitution (e.g., heating); but in Christ, Philoponus stresses, such activities are not natural but subject to the divine will (4, 175–176). Apart from explaining the incarnation, this account enables Philoponus to use the didactic method in his Christology. By viewing the union of Christ's divinity with humanity as stronger than the union of the human rational soul with the body, this account facilitates valid inferences from the natural realm to the supernatural realm because it implies that characteristics that hold for human beings *a fortiori* hold for Christ.

In *Arbiter* 30, Philoponus challenges the Chalcedonian stance through an inference of this form. He argues that the Chalcedonians' attempt to avoid the confusion of Christ's divinity and humanity by assuming two natures entails that Christ has in effect three natures, namely body, soul, and divinity. Resting on the assumption that the union of Christ's divinity with humanity is stronger than the union of the rational soul with the body, this argument forces Philoponus' opponents to endorse his miaphysite stance or to draw the unwelcome conclusion of their assumption that Christ has two natures and deny that his soul and body and our soul and body form one nature (30, 197).

In *Arbiter* 37, Philoponus appeals to the relation between the human rational soul and body, but also to natural phenomena, such as illuminated air and glowing iron, in showing that the miaphysite position does not entail a confusion of Christ's divinity and humanity. Here these phenomena

play two argumentative roles. First, they serve as counterexamples that undermine the contention that a union of natures necessarily entails confusion, in being cases of two natures that retain their defining characteristics when they form one composite entity. For example, light totally pervades air, but neither its definition nor air's definition changes as a result of this union (37, 202–204). Secondly, these phenomena serve as premises in an argument that establishes the view that the components of Christ's composite nature remain unconfused. By this argument, air, body, and Christ's ensouled body are actualized by light, the soul, and God the Logos respectively; therefore, they retain their defining characteristics. That is, just as air remains air regardless of whether its potentiality of being illuminated is actualized, and organic bodies remain bodies regardless of whether their potentiality of being animated is actualized, so Christ's human nature retains its defining characteristics when it actualizes its potentiality of being united with God the Logos.

This argument shows that when Christ's natures form one composite nature the inferior element, i.e., his humanity retains its defining characteristics, but it is open to the charge that Christ's divinity loses its superiority or undergoes change. Philoponus addresses two arguments to this effect through inferences from the natural realm. In *Arbiter* 43, he rejects the contention that if divinity and humanity are parts of Christ's nature, the former is incomplete and less than the composite of divinity and humanity. He argues that since 'part' and 'whole' are relative terms, the former is incomplete not in its own right but in relation to something. He clarifies this claim through the examples of a pilot, a charioteer, and the human soul, arguing that they are incomplete in relation to the ship, the chariot, and the body that they move and govern, but complete in their own right: the pilot and the charioteer as human beings, and the soul as a rational and incorporeal entity. Like these examples, Philoponus concludes, divinity is incomplete in one respect and complete in another: as a part of Christ's composite nature it is incomplete, but it is complete in its own right and surpasses all beings in perfection (43, 211–212). In *Arbiter* 44, he offers a similar argument against the contention that divinity undergoes change as a result of its union with humanity. Here he appeals again to the analogy between the human rational soul and Christ's divinity: if the rational soul undergoes change only in respect of activities that relate it to the body, thereby retaining its defining characteristic as an immortal entity, Christ's divinity necessarily remains unaltered when joined to humanity because it is invariable and immutable by definition (44, 213).

From the survey of these arguments, we see that Philoponus' description of *De opificio mundi's* aim characterizes his approach to Christology. Just as his interpretation of the hexaemeron aims to show that the biblical creation story accords with the order of the cosmos, so his account of the incarnation offers a natural explanation of the union of divinity with humanity in Christ that holds for the union of the rational soul with the body and other natural phenomena. Further, we see that this natural explanation enables Philoponus to employ the didactic method and base his understating of Christ's nature on inferences from natural phenomena. As Uwe Lang shows (2001: 158), this approach distinguishes Philoponus' Christology from his contemporaries' accounts: his starting point is the Christian creed, but he leaves little room if any for faith and relies on reason rather than on the authority of the Scripture and the ecumenical synods. In adopting this approach, however, Philoponus does not merely import philosophical methodology into theology; he shapes his Christological stance in light of his philosophical understanding of the phenomena on which his account of the incarnation is modeled. Closer examination of Philoponus' explanation of the unity of Christ's activities clarifies this point.

Causal agency and the unity of Christ's activities

Philoponus' arguments in the *Arbiter* are based on a specific understanding of the soul-body relation that focuses on the rational soul's role as the cause of bodily movements and regards

the body as its instrument. This understanding reflects Philoponus' interpretation of Aristotle's definition of the soul as the actuality of a natural body having life in potentiality (412a27–412a28), found in his commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul*. In his introductory discussion of *On the Soul* II.1 he argues that this characterization is neither a definition nor one description (μία ὑπογραφή) strictly speaking because the term 'actuality' is homonymous; it holds for inseparable forms, i.e., the vegetative and irrational soul, and also for separable forms such as the rational soul (206.15–19 Hayduck). The distinction between these types of form does not feature in *On the Soul*, but in Philoponus' view Aristotle refers to separable forms in *On the Soul* II.1 413a8–9, where he states that it is unclear whether the soul is the actuality of the body in the way in which the pilot is the actuality of the ship (159.23–29 Hayduck). In keeping with this interpretation, Philoponus offers different explanations of how inseparable and separable forms actualize the body. In his discussion of *On the Soul* II.1, he argues that inseparable forms perfect the body by their essence (τῆ οὐσίᾳ), whereas separable forms do so only through their activities, like a pilot who moves the ship by will (τῆ βουλήσει) and uses it as an instrument. This interpretation entails that the rational soul and the body are distinct entities for two related reasons. First, being a form and a perfection of the body is not the rational soul's essence or definition; and secondly not all its activities are related to the body (246.28–30 Hayduck). That is, just as the pilot is a human being in his essence, and has activities that follow from his essence as well as activities that follow from his being a pilot, so the rational soul has activities that follow from its essence, i.e., reasoning and thinking, and activities that follow from its relation to the body, i.e., moving it and endowing it with life (47.26–48.22 Hayduck).

This interpretation is useful for Philoponus' Christology, in implying that Christ's natures do not alter or become confused when they form one composite nature but it is less useful for securing his contention that Christ's activities are of the composite of divinity and humanity rather than of each nature separately. Specifically, assuming that Christ's divinity is analogous to the rational soul and that the rational soul is a separable form, Philoponus cannot explain the unity of Christ's activities through Aristotle's claim that it is the human being, as a composite of body and soul, who pities, learns, or thinks, and not the soul (408b13–15). As a result, his miaphysite Christology is open to the charge that just as the pilot and the ship have two related but distinct activities, i.e., steering and sailing, so the rational soul and the body have two related but distinct activities, i.e., willing something and attaining it. Philoponus is aware of this difficulty. In the *Arbiter*, he does not simply state that it is Christ as a composite of divinity and humanity who acts, but argues that his activities are of the composite nature because they originate from the divinity and are completed in the body through the mediation of the soul (3, 175; 4, 176).

This account of the unity of Christ's activities calls to mind Philoponus' understanding of the relation between agents and patients. In *Physics* III.3, Aristotle argues that an agent and patient have one actuality, which is the motion or change of the patient (202a13–21), and rejects the view that the activity of two things that differ in kind cannot be one on the grounds that the activity 'is not cut off (ἀποτεταμημένη) but is of one thing in another' (202b7–8). In his commentary on this chapter, Philoponus interprets the unity of the agent's and patient's activity in the way in which he explains the unity of Christ's activities in the *Arbiter*. Instead of Aristotle's expression 'activity of one thing in another', he says that the activity is one and not cut off because it originates from the agent and subsists (ὑφίστησι) or ends (ἔχει τὸ τέλος) in the patient (372.30–32; 374.22–23; 381.19; 384.35–385.2 Vitelli). The similarity between this interpretation and Philoponus' account of the unity of Christ's activities is not only terminological. Although this interpretation explains how two distinct entities have one activity whereas Philoponus' Christology explains how a composite entity has one activity, they are based on the same assumptions. In his commentary on *Physics* III.3, Philoponus argues that Aristotle's

claim that the actuality of agents and patients is one holds for all relative terms (372.27; 373.10 Vitelli), and accordingly distinguishes the agent's activities as an agent from the activities that it exercises independently of the patient. He stresses that a teacher exercises his activity as a teacher when he acts (*δράσει*) on the student and convinces him, and not when he thinks theorems in the student's presence (381.10–21 Vitelli). These views do not feature in *Physics* III.3 but play a central role in the *Arbiter*. As we saw, in *Arbiter* 43 Philoponus argues that Christ's divinity as a part of one composite nature is relative to the whole, and in *Arbiter* 44 he appeals to the distinction between the rational soul's activities in relation to the body and its independent activities in showing that Christ's divinity does not lose its superiority as a result of the union with the body.

This examination confirms the suggestion that Philoponus' philosophical and Christian ideas are parts of one worldview. His account of the relation between agents and patients features in his philosophical and theological writings and serves in addressing unrelated matters. In the commentary on Aristotle's *On the Soul*, this account secures the immortality of the rational soul without compromising its role as the cause of bodily activities, through the distinction between the rational soul's substance and its activities in relation to the body (e.g. 46.26–28; 159.18–29; 193.32–35 Hayduck). In the commentary on the *Physics*, it underlies Philoponus' notable contribution to pre-classical dynamics, i.e., his view that agents transmit an active power (*δραστήριος δύναμις*) to patients, in implying that the former's independent activities do not suffice to produce an effect in the latter (384.29–385.11 Vitelli).⁷ And in the *Arbiter*, as we saw, it explains how Christ's divinity and humanity remain unconfused, even though they form one composite nature. This examination also casts doubt on the view that the role of philosophy in Philoponus' theology is merely methodological, and more significantly it suggests that when we examine Philoponus' Christian stances in the context of the arguments that support them, we find more continuity than rupture between his philosophical and Christian ideas. To examine this suggestion, I turn to Philoponus' account of creation *ex nihilo*, which unlike the notion of the incarnation is in conflict with pagan philosophy. I show that in arguing that creation *ex nihilo* is possible, Philoponus does not radically depart from the Neoplatonic tradition but adopts Proclus' view, and that in his argument for the temporal beginning of the world, where he does depart from the Neoplatonic tradition, he does not radically change his views but appeals to the conception of rational agency found in his commentary on the *Categories*.

Philoponus' account of creation *ex nihilo*

In *Against Proclus* IX 8–17 Philoponus counters Proclus' argument that if there is nothing from which the cosmos could be generated it is not generated, by rejecting the assumption that 'any generated thing must be generated from something and it is impossible that something is generated from nothing' (314.13–15 Rabe).⁸ His first argument has its origins in the Christian theological tradition.⁹ It rests on the assumption that god's mode of creation should be superior to nature's mode of creation and concludes that if nature brings into being forms that did not previously exist but needs a preexistent substrate, god necessarily surpasses nature in this respect and brings into being forms, but also the previously nonexistent substrate (IX.9, 339.25–341.21 Rabe). In keeping with his view found in *De opificio mundi* II.13 that it is unknown how, in what order, and when god brought to existence the beginning of the cosmos (80.15–17 Reichardt), Philoponus does not elaborate on this argument. He does not explain how god created the substrate or matter of the cosmos but devotes the subsequent sections to a refutation of the assumption that generated things are generated from existent things.

Philoponus' argument is lengthy and complex but its main line of reasoning has four stages. In the first stage, Philoponus argues that only forms are strictly speaking generated because the

first substrate (i.e., a three-dimensional unqualified body) persists and does not undergo change when it receives different forms (IX.11, 345–347.26 Rabe). In the second stage he argues by elimination that forms do not exist before the individual object comes into being and after it perishes, therefore they are generated from nothing and perish into nothing, on the grounds that they do not turn into matter, or migrate to another substrate, or are resolved into simpler elements, or return to a totality of their own, or turn into another form, or exist on their own (347.28–359.14 Rabe).

Through these assumptions, Philoponus establishes the thesis that all generated things, *insofar as* they are generated, are generated from absolute non-being, and all perished things, *insofar as* they perish, resolve into absolute non-being (IX.11, 363.20–22 Rabe).¹⁰ But this conclusion does not entail creation *ex nihilo*. The qualifications ‘insofar as they are generated’ and ‘insofar as they perish’ indicate that natural objects are not generated and perish as wholes, i.e., as composites of matter and form, but that generation and corruption are predicated of them only because one of their parts, namely their form, is generated and perishes (346.26–347.2 Rabe).¹¹ Indeed, in his commentary on *Physics* I.3, Philoponus stresses that the view that forms are generated from nothing merely shows that creation *ex nihilo* is possible, by suggesting that the creative cause can bring forth matter that did not previously exist, just as it brings forth forms that did not previously exist (55.2–3 Vitelli).¹² Here he also shows how the notion of creation *ex nihilo* can be defended, saying that it depends on whether matter preexists or is generated together with the form (55.22–24 Vitelli).

The third stage of Philoponus’ argument turns on this question. In *Against Proclus* IX.16, he shows that matter is generated together with the form because the generation of proximate matter is nothing but a generation of a form. When a mason dresses a stone, he does not make matter but a form because the dressed stone can serve not only as the proximate matter of a house, but being shaped it can also stand on its own and serve as a seat. Consequently, since in both cases the mason produces the same object, in making the proximate matter of a house he makes a form, just as he makes a form when the stone that he has dressed serves as a seat (373.24–374.11 Rabe). In Philoponus’ view, the same account holds for natural production. Here too, the production of matter is nothing but the production of a form that serves as the proximate matter of another form. Thus the process whereby nature turns sperm into blood and blood into flesh and bones, and eventually endows them with life and sensation, is nothing but the gradual coming into existence of a form (374.19–24 Rabe).

This argument shows that proximate matter is generated from nothing because its generation is a generation of the form, but it does not entail that it is generated from nothing without qualification. As Philoponus says, proximate matter is composed of form and prime matter (i.e., three-dimensional extension), which remains unchanged through the process of generation, hence preexists the generation of the proximate matter (376.19 Rabe). The fourth stage of Philoponus’ argument conditionally addresses this problem. In *Against Proclus* XI.12, he argues that the fact that three-dimensional extension remains unchanged through the generation and corruption of particular objects does not necessarily entail that it is absolutely unchanged (457.16–23 Rabe) and concludes that if the creation of the world has a beginning, matter is not necessarily eternal but has a temporal beginning (458.5–7 Rabe).¹³

The views that Philoponus expresses in the course of this argument are not far removed from Proclus’ views.¹⁴ These thinkers address different opponents, but both are motivated by an attempt to avoid the dualistic view that matter is an independent principle that eternally preexists the generation of the cosmos. Proclus aims to reject Plutarch’s and Atticus’ interpretation of the *Timaeus* which ascribes to Plato the view that disorderly matter preexisted the generation of the ordered cosmos (*In Tim.* I.384.4ff. Diehl); Philoponus aims to reject the Manichean

view that god and matter are two independent principles (XII.2 470.16–19 Rabe; cf. *In Phys.* 54.25.27 Vitelli). Accordingly, they share the view that matter is generated by god, and more significantly draw the conclusion that matter does not preexist on the same assumption, i.e., that matter and form are simultaneously generated.¹⁵ Philoponus departs from Proclus' view only in the fourth stage of his argument. He assumes that the world has a temporal beginning and infers from the simultaneous generation of matter and form that matter too has a temporal beginning. But Proclus assumes that matter is eternal and infers from the simultaneous generation of matter and form that matter does not preexist but is everlastingly generated (404.1–14 Rabe). This departure from the Neoplatonic tradition is not just an expression of Philoponus' Christian faith. It hinges on his understanding of the causal relation between agents and patients and therefore does not attest to a radical change of view. The following discussion of Proclus' argument clarifies this claim.

Proclus' view that matter is eternally generated is grounded in the Neoplatonic conception of causality whereby causes produce their effects in virtue of their being, analogously to fire which heats in virtue of being hot. This conception entails that effects coexist with their causes because the mere presence of the cause suffices to produce them, just as the mere presence of fire suffices to heat nearby objects. Applied to the causal relation between god and matter, the coexistence of effects and causes entails that matter is everlastingly generated because, as Proclus says in his fourth argument for the eternity of the world, being eternal and immutable, god is always productive and does not undergo change from not producing to producing or vice versa (55.26–56.3 Rabe). As we saw earlier, Philoponus' understanding of the causal relation between agents and patients is significantly different; it denies that the mere presence of the agent suffices to bring about an effect, thereby implying, as Philoponus says in *Against Proclus* II.5, that effects do not necessarily coexist with their causes (37.4–8 Rabe).

Further, Proclus' conception of causality guarantees the eternal generation of the world at a price. In his commentary on the *Timaeus* he claims that the assumption that god produces in virtue of being is necessary for securing his immutability, because it prevents us from ascribing to him choice and wavering inclination (I 390.9–11 Diehl). This claim highlights the implication of Proclus' conception of causality for his understanding of god's mode of production. It shows that to establish the eternal generation of matter, Proclus has to compromise god's rational agency by regarding his mode of production as mechanistic rather than teleological. As a result, it is difficult for him to accommodate Plato's references to the demiurge's will with his conception of causality; therefore, in his sixteenth argument for the eternity of the world he argues that god produces what he wills but identifies production by will with production in virtue of being (560.22–24 Rabe). This difficulty is the main target of Philoponus' argument against Proclus' contention that effects coexist with their causes. This argument is based on a specific conception of rational agency that Philoponus presents in his commentary on Aristotle's *Categories*.

In *Against Proclus* XII.6, Philoponus argues that Proclus' assumption that matter is eternal does not entail that the world is eternal because:

If the efficient cause and matter are not the only causes of generation but if in addition to the other [causes] there is also and above all the final cause (namely, the advantageous and the good for the generated thing for the sake of which it is generated), then generated things fail to come into being not only because matter is unsuitable, or only because the maker is deficient in respect of making, or because of both, but also because of the good for the generated thing, i.e. if coming to be now is not good for it but [coming to be] later is; and the good is in accordance with each thing's nature.

(476.25–477.6 Rabe)

In the first part of this passage, Philoponus argues that the presence of an efficient cause and of a suitable matter does not suffice to produce an effect because the causal efficacy of the efficient cause depends on the final cause, i.e., the good for the sake of which it produces. Through this argument, Philoponus counters Proclus' contention that effects coexist with their causes on the grounds that god's production is teleological in being aimed at a certain end, and not mechanistic as Proclus holds. But this argument does not necessarily entail that effects do not coexist with their causes. One may argue that if god is immutable and always wills the good, the effects resulting from his teleological production always exist. In the second part of this passage Philoponus addresses this contention through the claims that the good determines when each thing exists and that is in accordance with each thing's nature. In *Against Proclus* XVI.1, he shows how these claims block the inference from god's eternal will to the eternal existence of the things that he wills. Here he follows Plato's claim in the *Timaeus* that god wills everything to be good and nothing to be bad insofar as it is possible (30A2–3) and argues that god does not will everything to be coexistent with him (566.21–22 Rabe), but wills that each thing exists when it is necessary and natural for it to exist (567.21–23 Rabe). For example, although god always wills that Socrates will exist, Socrates does not always exist because god wills that he exists when it is possible for him to exist, i.e., not always and not before his father exists (567.23–27 Rabe).

This conception of god's will is not an ad hoc assumption, devised to refute Proclus' argument for the coexistence of effects and causes, but an expression of Philoponus' understanding of the relation between god's capacity and his will, found in his commentary on *Categories* 8. There he explains why god is capable of doing the good but is incapable of not doing the good through the distinction between human unreasoned (ἀνοητός) will and god's will. He argues that since human beings' capacity does not concur with their will, they will things they are incapable of doing and do not will all the things they are capable of doing. By contrast, god's capacity coincides with his will; hence he is capable of doing all the things that he wills and wills all the things that he is capable of doing (145.10–24 Busse).¹⁶ This conception underlies Philoponus' argument in *Against Proclus* XVI.1–2. It implies that Proclus' inference from god's eternal will to the eternity of the world is unwarranted because god's will is not boundless but concurs with his capacity, therefore god wills that things exist when it is necessary and natural for them to exist.

This examination of Philoponus' account of creation *ex nihilo* brings to light the limitations of the distinctions between Neoplatonism and Christianity, and between Philoponus' exegetical and theoretical activities for understanding the relation between his philosophical and theological ideas. Admittedly, the views that the world is eternal and that it is generated and corrupted are diametrically opposed, but the debate between Proclus and Philoponus does not turn on this issue but on the more subtle question whether the world is eternally generated or has a temporal beginning. Accordingly, their different views notwithstanding, Proclus and Philoponus share the assumption that matter is generated by god and base their conclusion that matter does not eternally preexist on the same conception of generation, whereby matter comes to be together with the form. In this respect, then, Philoponus does not depart from the Neoplatonic tradition; hence his account of creation *ex nihilo* defies the distinction between Neoplatonism and Christianity. Further, this examination shows that Philoponus does not counter Proclus' argument for the eternal generation of matter from a specifically Christian standpoint. His contention that the world has a temporal beginning is not a matter of faith but follows from his teleological conceptions of causality and rational agency. These conceptions are not particularly Christian and feature in the expository parts of Philoponus' commentaries on Aristotle in philosophical contexts. Consequently, their central role in Philoponus' account of creation *ex nihilo*

indicates that his exegetical and theological interests are theoretically related, thereby defying the distinction between Philoponus the commentator and Philoponus the Christian theologian.

Conclusion

My examination of Philoponus' accounts of the incarnation and creation *ex nihilo* is far from exhausting the variety of subjects he discusses in his Christian writings, therefore it does not venture to establish the general conclusion that he did not change his philosophical views when he addressed theological questions. Rather, the general moral that I draw from this examination concerns the way of addressing the question of the relation between Philoponus' philosophical and Christian views. First, this examination shows that Philoponus' methodological approach to theology does not allow for a clear distinction between philosophical method and theological content. His arguments in support of his Christological view are philosophical because they ground his theological account in natural phenomena, but also because his philosophical understanding of these phenomena, i.e., the relations between the rational soul and between agents and patients, shapes his theological account. Secondly, it encourages us to abandon abstract labels, such as Neoplatonism, paganism, and Christianity, and to pay attention to the specific theological views that Philoponus advocates. These labels give rise to dichotomist understandings that obscure the common ground between pagan Neoplatonism and Christianity, for example, Proclus' and Philoponus' shared assumption that the world is generated. Finally, we see that a focus on Philoponus' arguments and not only on the stances that they establish leads to a more nuanced understanding of the relation between his philosophical views, exegetical activity, and Christian commitments, by showing that these aspects of his thought can be parts of one coherent worldview and do not necessarily attest to rupture and radical change of view. Examining other aspects of Philoponus' theology along these lines may show that being a Christian philosopher at the close of antiquity is less enigmatic than it seems to us.

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Notes

- 1 This use of philosophy in theological debates was widespread in Philoponus' time, especially in the Greek East. On this method, see (Grabmann 1909: 55–116; Grillmeier 1975; Daley 1984: 163–176). I show later that the role of philosophy in Philoponus' theology goes beyond this use.
- 2 As Share 2005: 1–6 shows, in this work Philoponus frequently identifies himself as a Christian and his opponents as pagans. Further, contrary to Lang's and Macro's view, the introduction to Philoponus' *De opificio mundi* clearly indicates that he wrote his treatises against the eternity of the world in the context of Christian-pagan debates (1.6–14 Reichardt).
- 3 All the translations from Greek are mine.
- 4 On this method, see Harari 2012: 366–368.
- 5 The references are to Uwe Michael Lang's translation (Lang 2001: 173–217).
- 6 On the use of this analogy in patristic thought, see Lang 2001: 101–134). The other line of argument is found in *Arbiter* 21–29, where Philoponus argues that one hypostasis necessarily implies one nature.
- 7 On this contribution, see Wolff 1984; De Groot 1991: 76–79; Wildberg 1999.
- 8 On this assumption, see Sorabji 1983: esp. 245–252. For a general overview of Philoponus' arguments in *Against Proclus*, see Feldman 1998, and for his arguments in *Contra Aristotelem*, see Konkle 1992. For the debate between Simplicius and Philoponus on the eternity of the world, see Chase 2011.

- 9 May 1978: 75.
- 10 Cf. 368.23–25 Rabe and *Contra Aristotelem, apud Simplicius In cael.* 136.19–25 Heiberg (= fragment 73 Wildberg 1987: 87).
- 11 From this explanation, we see that this qualification does not indicate that the conditions which make generation possible are brought into existence, as Wildberg 1988: 198 argues.
- 12 Cf. *In Phys.* 191.30–33 Vitelli.
- 13 In *On the Eternity of the World* XI.11, he also removes the main obstacle that stands in the way of establishing this contention. He argues that the generation of matter does not require another matter because unlike forms that exist in a substrate and need an underlying matter for their existence, the substrate itself does not exist in a substrate, hence needs no other substrate for its generation 456.17–23 Rabe.
- 14 Frans de Haas 1997 draws a similar conclusion regarding Philoponus' definition of prime matter as three-dimensional extension.
- 15 For Proclus see *In Tim* I 386.16–21 Diehl; and *apud Philoponus Against Proclus* 403.22–404.14.
- 16 In Philoponus' view, this conception does not constrain god's power. In *On the Eternity of the World* I.3, he argues that god's infinite power finds expression in his capacity to bring things into existence by will alone (6.10–12 Rabe) and that the inferiority of his creatures is due to their nature and not to god's weak power.

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Dionysius the Areopagite

Mark Edwards

What is the Dionysian corpus?

The Dionysian corpus is a collection of five treatises, which have profoundly influenced Christian reflection on the nature of God and the soul's capacity for knowledge of him. The *Celestial Hierarchy* divides the nine orders of angels into three triads, the lowest of which exercises the purgative virtues in its contemplation of natural creatures, the next the illuminative virtues in self-contemplation, and the highest the telestic virtues in contemplating God. The *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* gives precepts for the elevation of the soul to God through the use of sacraments and obedience to the clergy whom he appoints as his mediators. The *Divine Names* teaches readers of scripture how to strip the imagery of scripture of its anthropomorphic elements, thus dispelling any notion of weakness, change or evil in God. The *Mystical Theology* sets these 'cataphatic' elements against the 'apophatic' understanding of the divine as that which is known only through unknowing, and expressible only by shunning all expression. The letters are written to various correspondents: the longest enjoins an insubordinate monk to obey his bishop, but there is more food for theological meditation in the fourth, which coins the term 'theandric energy' for the cooperation of the two natures in Christ (Letter 4, 161.9 Heil and Ritter). This neologism may betray his Platonic schooling, for our one attestation of the divine name Theandrites occurs in the life of Proclus by Marinus, whose headship of the Academy in Athens will have been almost contemporaneous with the writing of the Dionysian Corpus (Saffrey 1982: 64).

Who was the author, and did he compose the *Elements of Theology*, the *Symbolic Theology* and the work *On the Soul*, to which he alludes in his extant writings (*Divine Names* 145.17, 149.11 Suchla)? There is room for doubt because it has been agreed by all scholars for more than a century that he is not that Dionysius the Areopagite, who is said at Acts 17.34 to have been converted by Paul's sermon to the wise men of Athens. His affinities with Proclus, extending at times to minute verbal coincidence, are no longer ascribed to plagiarism by the Athenian Platonist (Stiglmayr 1895; Koch 1895). Not only are such locutions unimaginable in a writer of the first century, pagan or Christian: the Dionysian corpus is cited first some decades after the death of Proclus, in the course of a Christological debate to which his fourth letter would appear to be a deliberate contribution (Rorem and Lamoureaux 1998: 10–22; Perczel 2004). This is one of only a handful of texts in the corpus referring to the incarnation; evidence of belief in the

resurrection, the atonement, creation *ex nihilo* and even the divine Trinity is equally elusive, and Protestants have denounced him for half a millennium not only as an impostor but as a pagan who cloaks his true allegiance under a merely cosmetic use of scripture (Nygren 1930). Even if he is a Christian in his own mind, it is argued, he belongs to that mystical type which tries to build its own ladder to God by the cultivation of mental esurience, spurning the charter of salvation which is spelt out once for all in the blood of Christ.

Orthodox scholars in recent years have been the strongest critics of this position, pointing out that it is based largely on the *Mystical Theology* and the *Divine Names*, taking little or no account of the liturgical activity which the author of *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* clearly regards as the proper milieu of communion with the divine (Louth 1989; Golitzin 2014). We may add that the *Celestial Hierarchy* – a favourite text of the middle ages, for all the neglect that it suffers today – has little in common with the Platonic catalogues of angels, heroes and daemons who people the space between earth and heaven. Even those who hold that the believer with a Bible is the only true theologian will be impressed by Stang's demonstration (2012) that the corpus is shot through with echoes of Paul's encounter with Christ in dazzling blindness and his subsequent preaching of the unknown God (Acts 9.9, 17.23). The majority of scholars now agree that Dionysius was a Christian, although this does not preclude his being a graduate, or even a continuing member of the school of Athens, whose purpose may have been either to commend the gospel to his pagan colleagues or to persuade his fellow Christians, in defiance of Justinian's fulminations, that philosophy was no obstacle to faith.

Once his Christianity is granted, it can no longer be assumed that where he fails to follow Proclus he has simply misunderstood him. In this chapter, we shall examine first his teaching on the causes of evil, which is generally held to show the clearest marks of his indebtedness to the Athenian school, and next his use of the prefixes *auto-* and *hyper-* which has exposed him to the charge of conflating the attributes of the One with those of nous as these were expounded in Proclus' commentary on the first two antinomies of the *Parmenides*. I shall end with a brief comparison to Damascius, which, while it may help to acquit him of the charge of misreading Proclus, should not be thought to imply that Dionysius was either a servile follower of Damascius or Damascius himself.

Evil and providence

Nowhere are the fruits of Dionysius' study of Proclus and other Platonists more conspicuous than in his chapters on the origin of evil. He begins with the axiom that the defining attribute of God is his goodness (*Divine Names* 4.1, 143.11 Suchla) – a Biblical truth no doubt, but one that Plato too had invoked to account for creation and thus banish evil from the realm of being (*Timaeus* 29d–e). Dionysius borrows from *Republic* 509b a preposition and a simile when he likens the sun in our world to the God who is *epekeina*, superior to all of which we can know or speak (4.4, 147.2–15). As the sun is known by the light which renders all other objects visible, so we know God, without being able to look on him directly, by the goodness that he disseminates to every order of being, from the most glorious of the angels to the most corrupt of demons and the most ignorant of beasts. This is Plato's doctrine of the natural superabundance of the Good – or, as Dionysius says in an echo of Plotinus, of the power of God to communicate goodness, and therefore being, by his mere existence (4.1, 144.2–5). From God no evil can emanate, for that would imply that the good is not of his essence (4.21, 169.13–16); once we confess that everything is a product of his bounty, we must infer that even that which is evil partakes of the good insofar as it comes from his hand (4.7, 152.10–12; 4.20, 167.11–168.6). This is certainly a position held by Christians before Dionysius – by Augustine, for one, in his

tract *On the Nature of Evil* – but it sits a little uneasily with Biblical texts which imply that God is the author of evil no less than of good (Amos 3.6; Isaiah 45.7). On the other hand, it is perfectly consonant with the teaching of Proclus and Plotinus that, although every being has fallen away from unity in some degree, it owes whatever existence it has to the presence of the One.

Dionysius therefore reasons that even a depraved soul or a demon, so long as it has the power to do evil, participates in the good of being alive and of having the power to exercise its essential functions (4.23, 171.16–21). Insofar as a body is necessary for the sustenance of life and its operations, the possession of a body is not an evil (4.27, 173.17–174.3). The same may be said of matter inasmuch as it is constitutive of bodies; if it be objected that evil is the privation of good and that matter in itself is nothing but privation, it will not follow that matter is the cause of evil, for privation in itself cannot be a cause of any kind (4.28, 174.4–7; 4.29, 175.5–9). Privation is always parasitic on being, as a consequence of some weakness in the agent; while the misuse of his agency must be blamed on his weakness, the agency itself is the proper and natural corollary of his place in the order of being, and in that respect is good. If Dionysius here contradicts the teaching of Plotinus in some passages of the *Enneads*, he is all the closer to Platonists of his own day, who no longer regarded matter as the prime evil. Again he concurs for the most part with Augustine, except that the latter explains our falling away as a consequence of our being created from nothing, whereas Dionysius never clearly enunciated this doctrine (Louth 1989: 85). His argument that the attraction of the soul to matter cannot be the cause of evil, as some resist the attraction (4.28, 174.21), would perhaps have seemed to Augustine to exaggerate our capacity to remain innocent after the fall. Greek Christians would be more apt to take the Dionysian view, and all the more readily because it struck at a universal tenet of Platonism that, whether or not the soul sins in descending to the body, embodiment will invariably beget the temptation to sin. For Dionysius, sin is a corollary of freedom, and he seems once again to differ from Augustine, in common with all Greek Christians and Platonists, when he denies that providence ever converts an agent to the good against his will.

On the other hand, he does not embrace the Platonic doctrine of transmigration, and he attributes to his God a greater propensity to intervene in the world than any Platonist since Numenius would accord to providence (4.33, 178.3–17). Throughout his discussion of evil, he reminds us that it is not because God neglects the world that the world has neglected God (4.35, 179.5–13). To such a privileged saint as Moses, he shows himself as the light that transcends all form and hence can impart all forms to his creatures; the nations have been permitted to infer his invisible sovereignty from the inexhaustible glory of his visible creation. They fail to discern him because of their weakness, not through any parsimony on his part, just as they fail to apprehend his love because the everyday syllables which spell the word *erôs* suggest to them only carnal gratification (4.12, 157.18–158.6). The scriptures substitute *agapê* for *erôs* (4.7, 150.16), although the Platonists will recognise their own vocabulary when they read of the synagogic and teleiotic operations by which he retires the unity of the cosmos (4.6.150.10). Sometimes the inspired commentators on scriptures call God love, sometimes the object of love – the first insofar as he draws all things towards him, the second insofar as he is the good and the beautiful, and therefore worthy of their desire (4.14, 160.1–11).

Of evil Dionysius says, in Aristotelian terms, that it is an accident to the being of the agent who performs it (4.37, 177.3). Of God, by contrast, he says in the words of Plato (*Symposium* 211a), that his beauty is not perishable, nor subject to growth or decay, nor present in one respect but wanting in another (4.7, 151.10–17). Yet neither is he to be credited with the indifference or inactivity of a mere object: on the contrary, divine love is ‘ecstatic’ in that it seeks no good of its own but only the good of its inferiors (4.13, 158.19–159.2). That *erôs* should be a property of the divine, and hence a mark of plenitude rather than of deficiency, is nonetheless

inconceivable to all Platonists but Proclus, and even he says nothing of this downward-tending *erôs* except in his *Commentary on the First Alcibiades*, where he has to explain why Socrates approaches Alcibiades instead of allowing the pupil to come to him in accordance with the more usual practice. No Platonist could have made sense of the saying “my *erôs* is crucified”, quoted from Ignatius (Romans 7.2) at *Divine Names* 4.12, 157.11 and applied by Dionysius to Christ himself; and when he construes the jealousy of God at Exodus 20.5 as the outpouring of his love upon those who seek him (4.13, 159.14–18), he cannot have forgotten that jealousy is a trait that Plato jealousy denies to the Creator (*Timaeus* 29e). And while Dionysius makes no explicit reference to the Trinity, the Pauline motto “from whom, through whom and in whom” (Romans 11.36) is an intermittent refrain to his panegyric on the ubiquity of divine love (4.4, 148.12–15; 4.10, 154.11 and 155.5–7; 4.14, 160.12).

The oneness of God

One obvious point of affinity between Platonists and Christians – though it is also the ground of all their disagreements – is their strong asseveration of the unity of the first principle. Christ himself quotes the Shema from Deuteronomy – “Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deuteronomy 6.4; Mark 12.29) – while the *Parmenides* and *Philebus* were understood to teach that unity is not simply a concomitant, but the logical premiss and metaphysical ground, of all existence. For this very reason, the incommensurability of the two systems will be all the more evident when we compare the use that is made by Christians and Platonists of the same Platonic text.

The most famous, and perhaps the most novel, element in the ontology of Proclus is the henad. Plato’s formula *henas kai monas* at *Philebus* 16a had escaped quotation even in Plotinus, although Origen had adopted it to illustrate biblical teaching on the uniqueness and simplicity of God. Proclus himself does not treat the words as synonyms. A monad for him is the generative principle of an ontological order, and the name can be applied both to the unparticipated One in relation to all that succeeds it, or to the participated henads (*Commentary on Parmenides* 1043.16–20 and 1044.24–1045.2 Steel). The latter are the deities of the classical poets, each at the head of its own chain as the primordial source and guarantor of unity for subjects, such as soul or nous, which can occupy successive planes of being. The capacity for holistic intellection is weaker in humans than in daemons, weaker in humans than in angels, but the nous in each order of being owes such integrity as it has to its partaking, in a greater or lesser degree, of the henad at the origin of the series (*Commentary on Parmenides* 712.23–714.24). By contrast, the plural of the term henad is absent from Dionysius, notwithstanding his studious concatenation of hierarchies in both the higher and the lower realms. For him, as for any Christian, the fountainhead of unity and being is the one God, whose triune nature admits no gradation of rank or attributes; this God stands to his creatures not as the first in an ontological continuum but as the I AM, the One who Is, who has summoned his creatures out of nonexistence by a sovereign act of will. In antiquity, it was the Christians, not the Platonists, who asserted that the ontological gulf between the Creator and his creatures was insurmountable except by his own miraculous coupling of the height and depth.

One of the strongest indices of his Christian allegiance – all too often cited to prove the contrary – is his predilection for epithets with the prefix *hyper-*, many of which appear to be his own neologisms. In all, forty-one such compounds are recorded in the index to the edition of Ritter and Suchla, from *hyperagathos* to *hyperönumos*. The former term was coined, so far as our evidence goes, by Plotinus and passed into the richer vocabulary of Proclus; neither, however, had any use for *hyperönumos* (*Divine Names* 116.5; 120.5; 229.8). The Athenian Platonist’s

favourite word of this kind is *hyperousios*, but its incidence is never so high in his works as in the Dionysian corpus, where it occurs over eighty times. Again it seems unlikely that any pagan text of comparable dimensions matches the fifty occurrences of *hyperkosmios* in Dionysius, though the precedent had been set two centuries earlier by Iamblichus (*De Mysteriis* 5.20; cf. Proclus, *Commentary on Parmenides* 927; Damascius, *First Principles* 43). No pagan author supplied an antecedent for the bombastic *hyperarrhêton* (*Divine Names* 115.11) or the cacophonously daring *hyperhyparxis* (117.6.). Not before Dionysius do we find the verbs corresponding to the adjectives *hyperdunamos* (201.6) and *hyperousios* (184.4); the noun *hypertheotês* (229.13) is unattested, and even the adjective *hypertheos* (*Mystical Theology* 141.2) occurs only in a poetic admonition, dubiously attributed to Menander, that we should not think thoughts above God (*Sententiae Menandreae* 243).

We must, then, be prepared to recognise not only imitation but emulation in the linguistic fecundity of Dionysius. For him, as for any Christian, God stands not at the head of a chain but at the other pole of an antithesis between the created and the uncreated. In the *Elements of Theology*, Proclus applies the epithet *hyperousios* to all gods, that is, to all henads, stating expressly that all gods but the One admit of participation (*Elements of Theology* 115, 116, 123). To be superessential is therefore not exclusively, and not even typically, the attribute of the first principle. All forty-one of the Dionysian predicates beginning with *hyper* pertain in his work to God – that is, the first principle – so that they function as a cataphatic complement to the apophatic terms which deny him a share in any property that he imparts to his creation. It is not that Dionysius lowers the Trinity to the level of the Neoplatonic henad, but that he raises both the superlative and the henad to the plane which God alone can occupy:

But as we have said, when we published the *Outlines of Theology*, the One, the Unknowable, the Superessential, that which the Good itself is – I mean the triadic henad, uniform God and uniform goodness – cannot be expressed in speech or thought. But indeed the unions of the holy powers which befit the angels, which must be called either projections or receptacles of the superunknowable and supereffulgent goodness, are also ineffable and unknowable, and reside only in those angels who have been honoured with this more than angelic knowledge of them.

(*Divine Names* 1.5, 116.7–13 Suchla)

The same transformation is visible in the adoption and multiplication of terms which carry the prefix *auto*, abundantly used by writers in the Pythagorean tradition to signify the presence in the noetic realm of archetypal predicates which were decanted to the lower realms of being by serial participation. In Proclus, these pertain exclusively to the noetic realm: even the *autoen*, the one-itself, is the henad, not the imparticipable One (*Elements of Theology* 114 and 128). In Dionysius, compounds of *auto-*, no less than compounds of *hyper-*, are a monopoly of God as first principle. Some twenty-four of these are enumerated in the index to Heil and Ritter, of which one, *autotheos*, appears to be Origen's neologism, while *autoaiôn* may be a Dionysian addition to the language (*Divine Names* 189.17). Yet even the most frequent, *autokinêtos*, appears only seven times, and more than half (thirteen) are represented only by a single instance. In Proclus the compounds of *auto-* exceed the compounds of *hyper-* in frequency and variety; in Dionysius the reverse is true because it is *hyper-* which best conveys the strict alterity – that is, the absolute rather than paradigmatic status – of the Creator. At least two of his inventions – *autohyperousios* and *autohyperagathotês* – attach the prefix *auto-* to terms which signify transcendence, and of which there can therefore be no paradigm.

Participation

We see then that the attributes which Proclus assigns to different orders of supernal being meet on one plane in the God of Dionysius. At the same time, it is easy enough to demonstrate that his own works – and above all the *Celestial* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchies* – depict a stratified universe in which higher or lower orders of being participate to a greater or lesser degree in the divine attributes. Were it not for the superessential, the superanimate and the supergood, nothing else would exist or live or exhibit even the common measure of goodness. For many theologians, a notion of participation belies the Christian doctrine of creation out of nothing, with its corollary that everything is perfect, or at least capable of perfection, in its own kind. A closer inspection of Dionysius and his antecedents will show, however, that neither he nor his orthodox mentors countenanced any gradation of being within the Godhead or any contraction of the infinite gulf that divides the Creator from that which he creates.

For Proclus, it is self-evident that objects in this world which possess an attribute participate in the form or idea of that attribute. Since it is equally clear that to be an object is to be one of a kind, participation in unity is an invariable concomitant of being. Everything thus participates in unity: this very fact, however, entails that the unity in which we participate cannot be primordial, for that which is present in many things at once cannot be absolutely one. Hence we must postulate a transcendent principle which is able to confer unity without being participated. This is the unparticipated One, which he believes to have been acknowledged in the *Philebus* and the *Parmenides* as the necessary capstone to Plato's theory of ideas. The ideas themselves reside, for Proclus as for all Neoplatonists, in the demiurgic intellect, which is manifold insofar as it is coterminous with all the eternal objects of contemplation, and at the same time one insofar as it comprehends them in a single act. To participate in a Platonic form or idea is thus to participate in the Demiurge who is styled both nous and *theos* in the *Timaeus*. Since all transcendent principles in Neoplatonism are reckoned divine, it would be possible to argue – though this is not his own nomenclature – that Proclus believes in both a participated and an unparticipated God.

Dionysius is more liberal than the majority of his Christian predecessors in his use of terms that connote participation. There are instances of the verb *metekhō* and its cognates in the *Divine Names* which, when taken alone, might seem to betray a reversion from Christianity to a form of Platonism. At *Divine Names* 129.1–3, he speaks as Proclus might, of a highest principle which is imparticipable (*amethektos*), of an intermediary which is participated (*metekhomēnon*), and of a multitude of participants (*metekhontes*). Other passages borrow the Plotinian term *ellampsis* (illumination) to characterise the diffusion of properties from the higher to the lower (e.g. *Divine Names* 110.13); the lower receives according to its capacity, but even that which is evil in the most extreme degree cannot fail to participate in the good, since to exist at all is good, or indeed in beauty, since whatever exists must be a thing of a certain kind and hence possess some form. All this we might read in Proclus, yet the following text does away with the Platonic apparatus of mediation and endorses the Athanasian view that a creature can be saved only by partaking directly of the uncreated. The Good – by which scripture means God – is not completely incommunicable to any being, but, like the solar orb, dispenses its bounty in rays with no diminution of its own inexpressible splendour (*Divine Names* 1.2, 110.11–111.2; 4.1, 144.1–5). In our present state, this is occluded not by any defect on the part of God but by wilful sin on ours; for the saints, however, a time will come when the obstacles to vision have been removed and God reveals as much of himself as a creature is capable of knowing:

Then, when we become incorruptible and immortal, and attain the Christiform and most blessed respite, we shall always, as scripture says, be with the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4.17).

On the one hand we shall be surfeited by the all-holy contemplation of his visible apparition, shining around us with its dazzling beams as it did for the disciples in that all-divine transfiguration; on the other hand, through the impassible and immaterial intellect, we shall partake, of his gift of intelligible light and of the union above intellect in the unknowable and blessed projections of his supereffulgent rays.

Dionysius is phrasing here in his own terms the distinction between the essence and the energies of God which the Cappadocians and Evagrius had inherited from Philo of Alexandria. This distinction enables him to give theological rigour to the promise of *theōsis* or deification (*Divine Names* 131.12; cf. Ivanovic 2017), which can be received not only because we have the capacity for it but because God elects to impart it, at a price to himself which, as the Gospel says, was inestimable:

The beneficent divine work (*theourgia*) that is directed to us is distinguished, however, from the superessential Word's complete and true coming into existence from us and as we are, and from his doing and suffering all the eminent and exceptional feats of his divine work (*theourgia*) in human form. For in these the Father and the Holy Spirit had no share in any way, unless one speaks with respect to their beneficent and philanthropic unity of will and to the superordinate and ineffable divine work (*theourgia*) which the unchangeable God and Word of God accomplished when he became as we are.

(*Divine Names* 2.6, 130.5–13 Suchla)

Dionysius also affirms in opposition to Proclus that it is possible for denizens of the lower realm to participate in the first principle. This is all the more paradoxical because the recipients of the divine largesse are created from nothing and do not share an ontological continuum with God. In a purposeful echo of the impassible passion ascribed to Christ in the works of Cyril of Alexandria, Dionysius speaks of participation in the imparticipable, resolving this antinomy, insofar as it admits of resolution, in a late chapter of the *Divine Names*:

Now we say that being-itself and life-itself and deity-itself are originally, divinely and causally the one origin and cause of all, superoriginal and superessential. Participably, however, they are the providential powers that come as gifts from the imparticipable God – essentialisation-itself, animation-itself and deification-itself, of which existent things have the share that is proper to them. Thus they both are and are said to be existent, alive and godly, and so with all the other properties.

(*Divine Names* 11.6, 222.13–223.1 Suchla)

The domain of nous or essence

Dionysius undeniably falls into a paradox that the Platonists had avoided by coupling the scriptural proclamation of God as the one who is with the philosophical notion of superessentiality. This, of course, is a measure of his allegiance to the Christian understanding of revelation; it was also an impediment to his borrowing any Platonic analysis of the realm of intellect or essence which implied that this realm was inferior to the first principle whom he calls God. Although I have just quoted a passage in which he concatenates being-itself with life-itself and with deity-itself, I do not believe that he can be credited with the wholesale adoption of the noetic triad which undergirds the intelligible universe of Neoplatonism (Wear and Dillon 2007: 24–27).

The noetic realm in Proclus is one *nous* comprehending a multitude of forms. The perfect coinherence of the unified subject with its manifold content entails, in the language of Plotinus, that it is not so much one and many as one-many. The knower is coterminous with the known, and yet, while intellect is one the forms are many: therefore the knower and the known are not identical. This paradox had been encapsulated by Iamblichus (and perhaps by his master Porphyry) in the noetic triad of being, life and intellect, in which intellect is the knowing subject, being is that which unifies the content, and life would seem to be the potentiality of being to become an object of knowledge (Hadot 1960 and 1966). Variants of the triad are attested in the *Chaldean Oracles* and in Gnostic texts which may have been current before Iamblichus (Edwards 1997; Rasimus 2010), though some adduce an anonymous commentary on the *Parmenides* as evidence that it originated in the Platonic school (Bechtle 1999).

The noetic triad permeates the commentary of Proclus on the *Timaeus*, while in the *Elements of Theology* the subordination of life to being and intellect to life is explained by the argument that all that exists participate in being, whereas not all beings participate in life, and of those that do only a minority participates in reason (*Elements of Theology* 101). Dionysius, however, is not such a close disciple of Proclus as some presentations of his thought imply. In chapters 5–7 of the *Divine Names*, he propounds a tetrad rather than a triad:

The use of the divine name ‘good’ indicates all the processions from the cause of all things, extending both to those that exist and to those that do not, and transcending both those that exist and those that do not. That of ‘the one who is’ extends to all things that exist and transcends the things that exist. That of ‘life’ extends to all things that live and transcends all things that live. That of ‘wisdom’ extends to all things intellectual and rational and sentient, and transcends all these.

(*Divine Names* 5.1, 181.1–6 Suchla).

For Proclus, the Good is of a different order from the three constituents of the noetic triad; for Dionysius the same God is both First Principle and Creator, and hence the architect of providence. Sophia must replace *nous* because the latter is not a biblical designation of God, but the more profound departure from the Neoplatonic school is to make the Creator lord not only of that which is but of that which is not, since it lay wholly within his will to create another world, or not to create at all.

Epilogue, with a thought on Damascius

From all that has been said, it should be evident that if Dionysius studied with Proclus in Athens, he will not have been his most compliant pupil. Proclus had carried the exorcistic methods of Plotinus to the point where language itself is laid to rest, forbidding us not only to predicate anything of the One, but even to dwell on our negations as though they were predicates of a higher category. His numerous compounds with the prefix *hyper-* do not characterise the One but exemplify the superiority of noetic entities to all common predicates. Since that which is participated by other things is not in all respects one, he follows Iamblichus in setting an imparticipable One above the One which Plotinus had posited as the source of Unity in all things that exist. The realm of the truly existent, for the Athenian school as for Plotinus, is the primordial intellect (*nous*), the seat of those archetypal essences to which Platonists attach the prefix *auto-*. It is also the seat of the henads, each a perfect unity in its own kind and the head of an ontological chain. For those who are not philosophers or enthusiasts the means of ascent to this firmament of pure essence will be theurgy,

the use of rites and symbols which because they stand in no obvious relation to the immaterial realm, must be accepted at first on faith. As faith is superseded, however, by intellectual vision, all material aids will be left behind.

Dionysius asserts the absolute transcendence of God with all the vigour of Proclus, finding a number of new companions for the prefix *hyper-*. At the same time, he is bound to hold, on the evidences of the scriptures, that the same God who transcends both being and unity is the God who says of himself both that he is and that he is one. Moreover, since one cannot deny the veracity of the scriptures, one must hold that it is not only true that God is love or that God is light, but that these assertions are preeminently true of him. His solution to this antinomy is to argue that the apophatic tenets of philosophy must be balanced by the cataphatic testimonies of the Holy Spirit, including those that liken God to a stone or a drunken man. Since God is He who is, nothing less than God is the proper subject of the non-*henad* or of epithets which begin with the prefix *auto-*. The imparticipability of the first principle is not to be surrendered, yet the love with which this principle regards his own creation out of nothing permits even to transcend his own absoluteness and to be imparticipably participated. The capital instance of this love is of course the incarnation, which enabled a local body to contain the fulness of the unlimited Godhead. In contrast to the dispensable implements of pagan theurgy, the eucharist is the presence of God himself, and the faith that receives him under this guides receives him also in the ancillary sacraments of baptism and unction. To perceive the visible in and beyond the visible is not to move beyond faith to truth or love, as a pagan might have opined, but to grasp by faith the God who descends to us under both these names.

Dionysius cannot be said to reject outright the Platonism of Proclus; he differs from him in holding that we approximate most closely to the truth about God, not by negation alone, but by the paradox of affirming in faith what we have denied by logic. The superessential God-who-is, the impassible God-who-suffers, is a stranger to those who identify the first principle with the subject of the first antinomy in the *Parmenides* of Plato. Anders Nygren (1930) is right to maintain that the imparticipable One is incapable of *agapè*, the love which enables a personal being to overcome its own logical otherness for the sake of the other. Does this imply that the paradox to which I have alluded is no more than a euphemism for the illicit fusion of two incompatible systems (Corsini 1962; contrast Radde-Gallwitz 2010)? To vindicate Dionysius from this charge would be matter for a second paper, but I can at least point out, by way of a coda, that it would not have been impossible for a graduate of the Academy to answer the criticisms of the Platonists from the same dialogue which informs their own teaching on the first principle.

While the first antinomy of Parmenides states that if the One is, nothing is, the second affirms the contrary, that if the One is, everything is. Proclus inferred that the subject of the first antinomy is the imparticipable One, of which nothing can be predicated. His pupil Damascius argued that it is in the strict sense nothing, since that which is truly ineffable can receive no appellation (*First Principles* 1.16.16–18.5). The first principle which is properly to be styled the One is therefore the subject of the second antinomy, transcending all duality, and therefore comprehending at the same time all that is predicable of the One and all that is not (*First Principles* 1.5.2–17; 2.39.825; Van Riel 2010: 679). He does not maintain that the One becomes its other by an act of renunciation – he has no theological concept of *agapè* – but he does at least grant that the One can be the subject of predications which appear to be mutually exclusive. Dionysius, on the other hand, does not affirm that God is logically all that he is not, but he says in his own way what Damascius says in his, that once the limits of thought and being have been surpassed, we can no longer decree that everything must be false whose contrary has been shown to be true.

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Christian philosophy in Severus of Antioch and Leontius of Byzantium

Benjamin Gleede

Introduction

The Council of Chalcedon and its aftermath, the endless Christological discussions between Chalcedonians and Antichalcedonians about the adequacy of the council's definition, fundamentally changed also the attitude of Christian theologians towards philosophy. Theology became "scholastic" in that its primary focus was no longer scripture or liturgy, but abstract concepts, φύσις/οὐσία and ὑπόστασις, the basic conceptual tools of the Chalcedonian definition. As already a century earlier the Cappadocian fathers had defined those terms by drawing rather implicitly on Porphyry's famous introduction to Aristotle's *Categories* and correlating them with εἶδος and ἄτομον, species and individual respectively, Christian theologians, especially of Chalcedonian provenance, now saw the chance to explicitly employ Aristotelian logic as a methodical tool for clarifying and argumentatively defending their religious tenets. As Matthias Perkams' forthcoming monograph on the conception of philosophy in especially late antiquity will show, this was part of a major transformation process in the Christian attitude towards philosophy from seeing it primarily as an alternative way of life in many ways opposed to the Christian one to conceiving of it as a scientific discipline among others, which, if properly cultivated, maybe just as helpful for understanding scripture and the cosmos as medicine or astronomy. In this course, the philosophical interest is shifting away from Plato to Aristotle and concentrates especially on the logical writings, which apparently received particular attention in the Alexandrian philosophical curriculum during the late fifth and sixth century and were for the first time translated into several "vernacular" languages (Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Pahlavi) at the exact same time.¹ In the sixth century, we also find the only thorough ancient Christian critics of Aristotle, Ps-Justin² and John Philoponus, who attack Aristotle for his belief in the eternity of the world, yet all in accord with the argumentative guidelines laid down in Aristotle's own logical *Organon*, and the first collections of philosophical (logical) definitions for theological purposes, a tradition which was to culminate in John's of Damascus *Dialectics*. A fragment of such a collection by Ephraem of Amid, Chalcedonian patriarch of Antioch (527–545), contains definitions of ὄρος, οὐσία, μορφή, ὑπόστασις, προσώπον, ἰδίωμα, ἐνέργεια, ὁμοούσιος and ἐνυπόστατος. It combines popular etymology with Porphyry's *Introduction* in order to provide definitions of the terms crucial for the Christological debate which would be likely to suit

Chalcedonian purposes.³ This exploitation of logic for Christological purposes is typical also for Leontius' approach to philosophy, whereas Severus still seems more in line with fourth- and fifth-century Christological debates. In their course, the most important philosophical borrowings were anthropological conceptions of the relationship between soul and body, the standard model for the relationship between the divine and human element in Christ, and the underlying theories of element mixture.⁴ The following presentation will thus concentrate on the role Aristotelian logic and philosophical anthropology plays in the Christological conceptions of our two authors and assess their contribution to a Christian philosophy on this basis.

1 Severus of Antioch

In contrast to Leontius, Severus is not exactly known for his philosophical learning or acumen. His philosophical background and sources were, as far as I can see, never comprehensively discussed,⁵ and the relatively detailed account of his education provided by his fellow student in Alexandria and Beirut, Zachary the Rhetorician, can also provide us with a clue why that is. Zachary is very eager to depict the great Patriarch as master of the philosophical lifestyle both in theory and practice,⁶ but for him, philosophy has almost nothing to do with pagan learning and almost everything with Christian monastic lifestyle. According to Zachary's report, they both studied rhetoric in Alexandria, before Severus left for Beirut to take up law, while Zachary was staying for another year in order to study philosophy with Ammonius, son of Hermias, probably the most important interpreter of Aristotle at the time (PO 2/3, 46f.). After they had rejoined in Beirut, Zachary and Severus started their own private reading group in Christian philosophy which promised "a preparation for rhetoric, philosophy, and a knowledge of the divine words and of doctrine" (Brock 2013: 61) directly from the writings of the fathers (the Cappadocians, Gregory Thaumaturgos, Chrysostom and Cyril of Alexandria are mentioned) without preparatory reading in pagan science (PO 2/3, 52–54).

In a climate of strong intellectual rivalry between Christianity and the (mostly upper class) remnants of paganism, Zachary is obviously eager to demonstrate that the Christian fathers had not only appropriated the core achievements of pagan culture, but had already surpassed their non-Christian masters in every important respect, be it rhetorically, scientifically or philosophically. In doing so, he was of course concealing the fact that the most important prerequisite for extracting philosophical (logical) principles and methods from the fathers was a thorough independent training in philosophy itself, which at that time the Church did not have to offer, whereas the Neoplatonic schools did. Undoubtedly, the fathers had some training in logic and metaphysics, but they never made it a subject for its own sake. A proper sensitivity for the philosophical problems and judgements implied in their statements had to come from elsewhere, in Zachary's case from his studies with Ammonius, the fruits of which he obviously could convey to his fellow student Severus only to a quite limited degree.

In the course of the latter's career as probably the most important anti-Chalcedonian theologian and church official of the time, he would in fact have had some good chances to exercise and develop such a knowledge: during the last years of his (active) patriarchate in Antioch (512–518), Severus is confronted with two "Aristotelianizing" readings of Christology proposed by two "Grammarians", a Monophysite one in letters sent to him by a certain Sergius and a Chalcedonian one in John of Caesarea's rather influential apology for the fourth council, which also engaged with arguments from Severus' own earlier writings. Whereas we do not find really explicit references to Aristotle or Porphyry in the fragments preserved from John's apology,⁷ his dedication to a technical, dialectical procedure in theological arguments becomes clear from his other preserved writings, mostly series of arguments preferably based on definitions and

sylogistic in structure.⁸ In his apology for the council, the patristic arguments seem to have played a more important role, and also the logical ones mainly consist in the mere application of the terminology defined by the Neonicene fathers for Trinitarian theology to Christology: Christ's twofold consubstantiality presupposes a twofold substance or nature in Christ, understood in Neonicene terms as Aristotelian second substance or species. This makes Christ a representative of two species which are united in a single individual or hypostasis, as the particular characteristics which mark off the individual from his species members (Porphyry's "bundle-theory" of the individual)⁹ are all constituted by Christ's individual biography, i.e. appropriated by the divine Logos.¹⁰ Sergius the Monophysite, on the other hand, makes repeated explicit reference to Aristotle and Porphyry and accordingly also shares his fellow grammarian's presuppositions to a certain degree: to the great displeasure of Severus, they both equate nature and substance in Christology, and they both conceive of individuation as conglomeration of properties. Sergius, however, obviously has a different starting point. He wants to understand the Cyrillian "one incarnate nature of the God logos" and the underlying concept of appropriation (ἰδιοποίησις),¹¹ which was to explain how the Logos could remain divine and unchangeable all in referring to himself and appropriating the attributes and sufferings of the passible flesh. In Aristotelian terms, as Sergius understands them, Christ thus represents one substance (οὐσία) differentiated by a unique property (ἴδιον) from any other,¹² the kind of god-manliness or analogous humanity which was already characteristic for Apollinaris' thought (cf. Gleede 2015: 121f.). Christ appropriates all the human deeds and sufferings, yet always in a divine way: he was born, but from a virgin, he walks, but on water, he suffers affections, but purely voluntarily, he dies, but only for the sake of conquering death. Although the idea behind this is more or less in line with widespread Monophysite ideas, especially the ones advocated by Severus' most important anti-Chalcedonian opponent, Julian of Halicarnassus,¹³ his attempt to spell it out in Aristotelian terms suffers from at least two confusions: Firstly, despite quoting the relevant passage in the *Categories*,¹⁴ he does not tell us whether he wants to have his οὐσία understood as first or second substance. His quotation seems to suggest the former, yet a 'property' in the Porphyrian sense ('able to laugh' for mankind) can only be assigned to a species, i.e. secondary substances. Secondly, he seems to lump together property and specific difference, as only the latter constitute a species and divide it against any other in the same genus, i.e. make a different thing, not only a thing different.¹⁵ To underpin this conception, he makes an equally vague appeal to the theory of mixture, which also touches upon the Porphyrian "bundle theory" of the individual: for Sergius, the real union of a proper individual can only be safeguarded, if the properties not just coincide in an individual according to an accidental juxtaposition, as in his opinion the tome of Leo wants to have it,¹⁶ but enter a kind of mixture in order to create some kind of essential unity, i.e. the god-manly property described earlier.

In Severus' lengthy answer to John, the issue of philosophy does not explicitly come up: on the one hand, he fiercely rejects the equation of (second, general) substance and nature for Christology, as this would allegedly entail an incarnation of the entire Trinity into the entirety of human beings (Severus confuses meaning and reference of the general term);¹⁷ on the other hand, he is prepared to go along with the grammarian's Porphyrian concept of individuation, insofar as it is sanctioned by the Cappadocians¹⁸ and as such explicitly endorsed by Severus also in his homilies.¹⁹ It is, however, Sergius who confronts him with a more detailed application of the Porphyrian conceptual framework to Christology and forces him to deal with this. In corresponding with him, Severus at first significantly ignores his opponent's actual point, i.e. the attempt to philosophically conceptualize the Monophysite doctrine in finding the special property defining the one nature or substance of Christ, and merely restates the Cyrillian concept of appropriation.²⁰ He already envisages however, that he does not want to

conceive his unique nature of Christ as a bundle of properties, but rather as a composition of two natural qualities (a term he borrows from Cyril),²¹ which are both accompanied by two distinct sets of properties. This point is elaborated further in the second letter, where he at first sets straight Sergius' vague ideas about mixture. Following Aristotle's analysis in *On Generation and Corruption* (esp. I,10), the Stoics had developed a typology of mixture: mere juxtaposition, mixture with properties of the elements remaining, total confusion without properties of the elements remaining.²² Taking up this typology, Cyril dismisses all three of those mixture types both for the relationship between soul and body and for the one between divine and human element in Christ and declares the appropriation constituting their community as unity (ἕνωσις) transgressing any kind of human understanding.²³ In quoting this passage to his opponent, Severus also declares the philosophical concepts of mixture as useless for understanding the mystery of Christ.²⁴ Facing the heresy of Apollinaris and Eutyches, he claims, mixture terminology in general can no longer be used in the same innocent way many fathers were using it, but should generally be replaced by the Cyrillian terms "composition" and "unity". This leads him again to an extensive restatement of the Cyrillian "appropriation", which, in his opinion, perfectly accounts for the Christological property sought by Sergius: only a composition of two natural qualities communicating their distinct properties to each other safeguards the true natural unity of Christ, not a bundling or intermingling of those properties to a single defining one. At this point, Severus also shows that he actually knows Porphyry, when he corrects Sergius complaints against Severus' criticism of his bundle theory: qualities like whiteness or blackness are not just random accidents of a body, but inseparable ones, as the Porphyrian example of the Ethiopian's blackness demonstrates.²⁵ More importantly, he makes clear that by "property" in the Christological context no divisive difference between the natural qualities is implied, but only a comparative one: visibility etc. is regarded as a property of the flesh only, when compared to the divinity, whereas both sets of properties are actually proper to the Logos, when his work of dispensation in its entirety is considered.²⁶ As the Grammarian keeps on insisting, he has, to take his attack one step further and dismiss the equation between substance and nature and thus the applicability of the Aristotelio-Porphyrian logic of genus-species division to Christology as a whole. If Sergius wants to talk about Christ as "one substance or quality", this would yield a conception of "Christness" as abstract essence,²⁷ which Severus cannot allow for: in the context of Christology, "nature" must be something concrete, a natural individual, a unique being made up of diverse essential components which retain their distinct natural quality.²⁸ At this point, he even takes recourse to his philosophical knowledge against the Grammarian's conception, but again mediated through the fathers: as Aristotle defines the soul as "perfection" of the body (which Severus obviously knows, but feels the need to confirm by a quotation from Gregory of Nazianzen), he must have considered the soul just as the entire human being as mortal and can only thus subsume it under the genus "rational animal", divided by the specific difference "(im-)mortal" between gods and men (*Isag.* 3 = CAG IV/1, 10). According to a Platonist anthropology, however, soul and body could for the patriarch neither constitute a unique substance nor be for that reason subsumed under the same genus in their composite state. This is probably rather an ad hominem argument in order to finally discourage the Grammarian in his philosophical attempts.²⁹

More importantly, however, Severus uses this occasion to elaborate his view on the relationship between philosophy and theology in general: after his slightly exaggerated dismissal of the usefulness of philosophical methods and definitions in theological context in the letter before,³⁰ he had been asked by Sergius to "endure a little" the latter's "presumption with regard to the

precision of the philosophers”, as “even if they are outside our fold”, their definitions might help to “greatly clarify the explanation”.³¹ This forces Severus to set things straight:

None of the doctors of true religion said, “We make pagan philosophy a leader in our studies of terms and words”, but they say they accept it subsequently, as a handmaid, insofar as it agrees with the teachings and considerations of the truth.³²

According to the clear testimony of Amphilochius, Basil and Cyril, which Severus adduces subsequently, philosophy is never to be allowed to dictate its definitions to theology, but – as an “ancilla” (ἄμθῆ) – can only offer subsequent clarification and confirmation.³³ Severus thus proves in fact highly conservative and reluctant to adopt the “philosophizing” style of his contemporary theologians. At closer inspection, this conservatism is, however, based on a deep religious skepticism regarding the adequacy of every category of human language in talking about the divine, which is probably inspired by Ps-Dionysius and Evagrius: whereas Sergius feels confident in attempting an analogous application of the Aristotelio-Porphyrion scheme of categories to the divine,³⁴ Severus urgently advises both Grammarians against such a confidence. Applied to the mystery of the holy Trinity, even the terminological *formulae* approved by the fathers are only rough approximations which have to be handled with great care and cannot be arbitrarily transferred to other fields like Christology.³⁵

2 Leontius of Byzantium

If Severus is to be called the most important Monophysite theologian of the sixth century, the most promising candidate on the Chalcedonian side is certainly Leontius of Byzantium, at least if we judge according to the reception of his works: from the late sixth century collection of *Erotapokriseis* ascribed to a certain Pamphilus up to Maximus the Confessor and John of Damascus especially his *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* was apparently the most important reference work in defense of Chalcedonian Christology.³⁶ Unfortunately, almost everything we know about his life is based on a conjecture, yet a quite well-founded one: if we follow the generally accepted identification between the author of the four (or six, if the three parts of *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* are counted separately) Christological treatises with the Origenist monk from the Holy Land who served as an “ambassador” (τοποτηρητής) of the Palestinian monasteries in the capital, we can in fact contextualize the aforesaid works in a way perfectly befitting their content.³⁷ What we find in the works themselves is a highly educated dialectician and theological polemicist, who turns his wit first of all against the Severian Monophysites (and “Neochalcedonians” seeking compromise with them), but also against Chalcedonian “Nestorians”, i.e. followers of Theodore of Mopsuestia and Diodore of Tarsus, to which group he himself once belonged, but now wants to distance himself from them all the more sharply.³⁸ We are thus dealing with a monk brought up in a climate of intellectual curiosity and free-ranging theological inquiry,³⁹ who pretends – in a topical understatement – to have never received any “philosophical education” (ἐξὼ παιδεία), but nevertheless extolls “the peak of philosophical learning” to be found in the writings of the fathers.⁴⁰ This affinity to philosophy, which clearly distinguishes the Chalcedonian polemicist from his opponent Severus, was also recognized and analyzed by scholarly literature: already Johann Peter Junglas (1908: 46–48, 66–85) presented a quite comprehensive analysis of Leontius’ philosophical sources and borrowings, and Stephan Otto (1968, esp. 78–85) devoted an entire monograph to his philosophical anthropology. According to Otto, Leontius was among the first thinkers to discover the difference between

individuality and personality in restricting the latter to the formal independence of a hypostasis, whereas the former primarily applies to materially fully determined individual natures. This in fact addresses probably the most important theoretical issue to be resolved in defending the Chalcedonian definition of Christ as two natures in one hypostasis: if according to Porphyry's definition an individual is constituted by a unique conglomeration of accidents, how can Christ have shown especially human individual characteristics without falling apart into two concretely determined individuals, a human and a divine one? Or, to put it a little simpler, how can two general natures instantiate itself in one single individual, if their only way of existence is that of individual instantiation?⁴¹ In the (both in antiquity and modern reception) most famous passage of his oeuvre, he tried to overcome this problem by a complicated dialectical operation involving a distinction between *ὑπόστασις* and the *ἐνυπόστατον*, the individualized nature and its individuality – a passage which via its reception by John of Damascus gave rise to the conception of *En-* or *Anhypostasia* of the human nature in Christ regularly to be found in the dogmaticians of seventeenth-century confessional orthodoxy (cf. Gleede 2012: 1–6). In modern research, a lot of ink has been spilt to determine or refute possible philosophical innovations or borrowings implicit in this conception.⁴²

Yet, before we come back to this question, we should devote some attention to the general role played by philosophy, especially logic, but partly also metaphysics and psychology, in Leontius' works. As indicated in the general outline philosophical anthropology, especially psychology, plays surprisingly small a role considering the fact how important the anthropological analogy still is for Leontius' Christological conception: as can be expected from an Origenist monk, the basic outline of his psychology is thoroughly Platonic. The soul is an incorporeal and self-moving substance, immortal and separable from the body,⁴³ yet still capable of affection, even without the body.⁴⁴ His definition of the body as "natural and organic, potentially in possession of life" clearly shows awareness of the Aristotelian definition of the soul as perfection of the potentially living body, which Leontius obviously rejects, as body and soul are (like divinity and humanity and Christ) two perfect substances for him which are united only by divine power.⁴⁵ Apart from that, he shows awareness of some standard issues discussed in philosophical psychology, like whether we have to speak of parts or powers of the soul and how those exactly have to be distinguished.⁴⁶ Basically, he accepts the well-known Platonic tripartition of the soul into authoritative, spirited and desiring part,⁴⁷ yet adds a subdivision⁴⁸ drawn mostly from theological sources, probably Nemesius and Evagrius.⁴⁹ All in all, especially *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* 4 makes it rather clear that Leontius does not really rely on some preconceived anthropological theory in order to elucidate his Christology, but rather designs both of them symmetrically according to a dialectical conception suitable to his polemical needs.

Accordingly, his main philosophical interest is in fact with dialectics and logic. Especially in his refutations of the Severians, he continuously focuses on definitions, conceptual clarifications and syllogistic arguments. Judging from the climax of his *Epilysis*, his final exposition of the Christological "mode of union", he favors Chalcedonian Christology precisely because it is the only way to uphold the principle of contradiction: paradoxical Christological statements, the communication of idioms, can only be reasonably explained in distinguishing between the unique person and the two natures.⁵⁰ Thus, he repeatedly makes appeal to "experts in logic"⁵¹ or "logical handbooks".⁵² That he actually used at least Porphyry's *Isagoge*, Aristotle's *Categoriae* and some commentary literature along with it cannot be reasonably doubted.⁵³ When the Severian interlocutor in the *Epilysis* tries to launch an attack on the univocal usage of terminology in Christology and Trinitarian theology and thus alludes the typically Severian distrust regarding the human capacities of conceptualization,⁵⁴ Leontius feels the need to counter with a basic introduction to the Aristotelio-Porphyrian theory of predication: if proper predication is

synonymous predication, i.e. communication of name and definition (cf. *Cat.* 1), and this works the very same way throughout the entire Porphyrian tree, from the highest genus “substance” down to the *infimae species* (cf. *Isag.* 2), there is no way of talking scientifically about the Trinity or the incarnation, if we dispose of this principle in the case of “substance” and “hypostasis”.⁵⁵ His commitment to logic is thus not only rooted in his conviction concerning the internal coherence of Chalcedonian Christology, but has a probably more fundamental, methodical basis: a dogmatician is supposed to work on carefully clarified concepts and rely on proper definitions thereby avoiding any kind of equivocation.⁵⁶

As can be expected, the examples for this are always closely linked to the Christological issues he discusses, and his display of logical knowledge is constantly tailored to the respective purpose of his argument. In that sense, the Aristotelian principle ἅμα τῇ φύσει τὰ πρὸς τι (relative entities are simultaneous by nature; *Cat.* 7 7b15), which played an eminent role during the time also in the debates about the eternity of the world,⁵⁷ is ingeniously applied to the relationship between unity and duality in Christ: if relative entities are simultaneous by nature, the Christological unity has to be simultaneous with its unified parts, i.e. the natures have to remain intact, especially when hypostatically unified.⁵⁸ A good opportunity to explore the nature of quantity is provided by the Monophysite claim that number, especially the dyad, always has to be divisive. Leontius refutes this on two occasions and each time draws on various subdivisions of the category “quantity” which he found in Aristotle or possibly his commentators: in the *Epilysis*, he refers to the two basic distinctions of quantities well known from *Cat.* 6 (4a20–4a22), the one between continuous and discrete quantities, and the one between orderly and disorderly quantities.⁵⁹ In *Epaporema* 29, he adduces a more fundamental distinction comprising also those phenomena which Aristotle had labeled as merely accidental quantities (*Cat.* 6 5a32–b10) or in fact relative entities (5b11–5b29). According to this passage, the practice of counting and measuring not only proceeds according to finite numbers, but also according to undefined expressions of measurement, comparison, demonstration or order.⁶⁰ His argument is one and the same in both passages: as counting is just one of many ways of determining quantity, it cannot be singled out as entailing *per se* ontological separation. As a quantity, number not only has a divisive force in setting apart the counted elements, but also a unifying one in presenting them as a unity. We also find repeated appeal to Aristotle’s conception of the four basic oppositions laid out in *Cat.* 10. When discussing the conceptual distinction of Christ’s natures, he reminds his Monophysite opponent that the union of the natures has to be the starting point of the consideration, as there can be no privation of unity before its possession. Following Aristotle (*Cat.* 10 12a25–34), Leontius wants to allow for privation only in cases where the respective habitus is expected to be present.⁶¹ In *Epaporema* 19 he reminds his opponents that the Cyrillian “one nature” formula and the Chalcedonian “two nature” formula cannot be a contradictory opposition in the sense of *Cat.* 10 13a36–b35: the Cyrillian formula does not simply deny the duality of natures, but adds something to its one nature, the attribute “incarnate”, for Leontius – as for Cyril in his first letter to Succensus⁶² – nothing but the definition of the second nature.⁶³

By far the most important issue for Leontius is, however, the relationship between species and individual and between the essential and accidental traits of the latter as outlined by Porphyry especially in *Isag.* 3. Accordingly, the basic orientation of his conception is thoroughly Porphyrian: each species comprises constitutive elements, difference and property (which of course renders the Severian postulate of a duality of properties without duality of nature utterly absurd⁶⁴), and each individual is marked off from its species by a unique bundle of accidents like different qualities, birthplace or way of conduct.⁶⁵ Obviously, the problem is now how all this works, when two species come together in one individual: How is the reality of a second nature to be maintained, if it cannot instantiate itself in its own individual? Would it have to

be void of all individual characteristics in order to maintain hypostatic community with the respective other one.⁶⁶ A first, rather formal reply to this is given in the aforesaid famous passage from the beginning of *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos*, which also gave rise to the doctrine of *enhyposiasis*:

Hypostasis, gentlemen, and the enhyposstatic are not the same thing. For “hypostasis” signifies the individual, but “enhyposstatic” the essence; and hypostasis marks off a person by means of its characteristic properties, enhyposstatic, however, makes clear that that which has its being in something else and is not perceived in itself is not an accident. Of this kind are the qualities, the so-called substantial and adsubstantial ones, none of which is a substance, i.e. an existing thing, but is always perceived “around” the substance, like colour in a body and like knowledge in a soul. Whoever claims then that there is no anhyposstatic nature, is admittedly right; but he does not draw the correct conclusion if he infers that everything not anhyposstatic has to be a hypostasis. Analogously, one could correctly claim that there is no unshaped body, but would incorrectly infer that the shape is the body itself and not rather something perceived in the body. . . . And to put it concisely: What is consubstantial and has the same definition is said to be of one nature. Yet, the definition of hypostasis is either “what is identical according to its nature, but numerically different”, or “what consists of different natures and possesses a common existence simultaneously and in each other”. They are sharing an existence not as if they would complete each other’s substance (as to be seen in substances and their substantial predicates, which are called qualities), but on the grounds that neither of the two natures or substances is perceived by itself, but (only) accompanied by the other it is composed and grown together with.⁶⁷

As I have discussed this passage and various possibilities of interpretation at length elsewhere,⁶⁸ I can restrict myself here to repeating the results. Leontius starts by parallelizing the relation between *ὑπόστασις* and *ἐνυπόστατον* with the one between *οὐσία* and *ἐνούσιον*, clearly on the basis of the Neonicene trinitarian terminology: just as only a hypostasis, i.e. an individual, can be *ἐνούσιος*, i.e. possessing substance or belonging to a species, only a substance or species can be *ἐνυπόστατος*, i.e. realized in a concrete individual. There are, however, different kinds of realizations in a concrete individual, the determination of which constitutes the second step of Leontius’ argument: if we speak of an *ἐνυπόστατον*, the inexistent reality is a substantially constituent factor of an individual, i.e. not an accident, but nevertheless does not subsist in itself. Such a kind of inexistence characterizes the substantial and adsubstantial qualities⁶⁹ which are always concomitant with a substance, but none of which is itself a substance, at least in the sense of “subsisting entity” (Aristotelian primary substance). If, however, those substantial qualities are never without substances, but by no means substances themselves, the hypostasized nature is also by no means liable to be itself hypostasis, even though it is always concomitant with a hypostasis. At this point, Leontius reveals his inspiration for his so widely influential solution of the opponents’ objection concerning the possibility of a nature without proper hypostasis: he conceives of the phrase *οὐκ ἔστι φύσις ἀνυπόστατος* analogously to the philosophical axiom *οὐκ ἔστι σῶμα ἀσχημάτιστον*.⁷⁰ Just as a body cannot be imagined or exist without shape, but nevertheless is not its shape itself, a nature cannot be imagined or exist without at least one hypostasis, but is nevertheless not identical with it. Leontius thus clearly conceives of the hypostatical realization of a nature in a certain analogy with the relation between a nature and its necessary qualities:⁷¹ just as no (physical) body can exist without shape or colour of some kind, the soul will also be necessarily accompanied by some kind of knowledge.

After a differentiation of minor relevance between φύσις and οὐσία which intends to restrict the validity of the objection to the former (skipped in the quotation), he summarizes his solution in resuming Gregory of Nazianzen's famous coordination of Christology and trinitarian theology⁷²: to put it shortly, the things properly said to be of one nature are the consubstantial hypostases, whereas co-hypostatical things would only be imaginable in the case of a composite hypostasis combining in itself different natures. That such a composite hypostasis exists e.g. in the case of human beings made up of body and soul, Leontius infers from a twofold definition of "hypostasis" he obviously regards as traditional. This definition, however, additionally provides him with the opportunity also to clarify the dissimilarity moment in the analogy he had stated between the inexistence of natures and substantial qualities: in contrast to genus and specific difference, the two natures united in the composite hypostasis do not complete each other's essence like "animal" and "rational". In fact, they are complete, fully determined essences in themselves, which are nevertheless not perceived in themselves, but always μετὰ τῆς συγκεκριμένης καὶ συμπεφυκυίας. This amounts more or less to the claim that the natures subsist in the hypostasis as substantial parts from which it is constituted, not as accidents which might mark off different individuals. It also shows Leontius' awareness of the complicated debate about different kinds of inherence entertained in the commentators concerning mainly two Aristotelian passages, *Cat.* 2 (1a20–b9) and *Physics* IV.2 (210a5–9). As the former advocates a restricted conception of inherence excluding substantial parts and only including inseparable, nonessential properties, the latter also acknowledges (reciprocal) inherence of genera in species and parts in wholes. The discussion of those passages in various contexts finally led the commentators to postulating similar subtle differentiations between substantial, accidental and "partial" inherence as did Leontius in the aforesaid passage⁷³ and thus probably served as his inspiration.

Yet, how does all this solve the problem of individual determination of the two natures? What Leontius has in mind here is a two-stage individuation process: If we distinguish the "enhypostatic", i.e. to be hypostasized or individualized nature from the actual hypostasis, the concrete individual, there is room for entities of individual character which are not actually independent individuals themselves. The question of individualizing characteristics can then be settled rather quickly: they only work within a single species, i.e. Jesus' human individual characteristics only constitute human individuality with respect to other human individuals, not with respect to members of the divine species, which has an entirely different mode of individuation.⁷⁴

With this thoroughly "Aristotelio-Porphyrion" presentation of his Christological argument, Leontius certainly met the expectations of his time. He became an instant classic of Chalcedonian theology and paved the way for thinkers like Maximus Confessor and John of Damascus for further technical refinement of the Chalcedonian Christological model and its logical conceptualization. Even if his reflections on nature and personhood are far from being as groundbreaking as Otto and others supposed, his style and method of theological argumentation in a way was. In that respect, he did in fact serve as a starting point for a tradition of dogmatic treatises, especially of polemical nature, which is almost exclusively concerned with defending the conceptual framework of a theological theory without paying much attention to its exegetical basis.

Notes

- 1 The importance of the fourth council for the history of philosophy is, from a different perspective, also stressed by Zachhuber 2015.
- 2 For the "Einleitungsfragen" on this author, cf. now Gleede 2020. For the extraordinary character of this *Confutatio Aristotelis* within the patristic tradition, see Runia 1989: 14 and 17.

- 3 The text is edited in Helmer (1962), 271f.
- 4 Cf. Norris 1963: 67–78; Abramowski 1981.
- 5 After the pioneering study of Lebon 1909, the most comprehensive analysis of Severus' thought is still Grillmeier 1989: 20–183. For a more recent and quite sympathetic evaluation of Severus' concept of personhood, cf. Zachhuber 2018: 35–38.
- 6 *Vita Severi* (PO 2/3, 56f.90). Cf. the English translation by Brock 2013: 63f and 83f.
- 7 Collected by Marcel Richard in CCG 1, 6–58.
- 8 Cf. e.g. his *Chapters against the Monophysites* (CCG 1, 61–66).
- 9 Cf. *Isag.* 2 (CAG IV/1, 7) and Gleede 2012: 98–100.
- 10 Cf. esp. *Apol. Conc.* IV, 2f (CCG 1, 53–55).
- 11 For Cyril's own attempt of philosophically interpreting this, cf. Siddals 1987.
- 12 Cf. *Ep. ad Severum* 1 (CSCO 119, 71f), English translation in Torrance 1988: 144.
- 13 Cf. now Moss 2016: 31–38.
- 14 Cf. *Ep. ad Severum* 3 (CSCO 119, 151f; Torrance 1988: 207f).
- 15 *Isag.* 3 (CAG IV/1, 8): τῶν γὰρ διαφορῶν αἱ μὲν ἀλλοῖον ποιοῦσιν, αἱ δὲ ἄλλο. αἱ μὲν οὖν ποιῶσαι ἄλλο εἰδοποιοὶ κέκληνται, αἱ δὲ ἀλλοῖον ἀπλῶς διαφοραί.
- 16 He rejects a Chalcedonian “union according to foundation” (ἔνωσις καθ' ὑποκείμενον?) and defends his own conception of property composition against its downgrading to a mere accidental level (*Ep. ad Sergium* 2; CSCO 119, 99f.101f), possibly both in facing the (Neo-)Chalcedonian definition of hypostasis as a bundle of accidents (cf. ab. n. 12).
- 17 Cf. esp. *Contra impium Grammaticum* II,17f (CSCO 111, 144–72; 112, 112–134).
- 18 *Contra impium Grammaticum* II,17 (CSCO 111, 154–56; 112, 120–122). In his introductory exposition of the correct usage of hypostasis (II,4 [111,76f.80f; 112,60.63f]); however, he makes no appeal to the bundle theory, but rather has individuality constituted by independent existence only.
- 19 *Homilia* 125 (PO 29/1, 236), a passage in fact compiled from Basil and Gregory (cf. Zachhuber 2018: 37).
- 20 *Ep. ad Sergium* 1 (CSCO 119, 79.86; Torrance, *Christology*, 151.155).
- 21 Cf. *Ep. ad Acacium* (ACO I/1/4, 26f).
- 22 Vgl. D. Sedley/A. Long, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, Cambridge 1987, §48C.
- 23 *Scholia de inc. Unig.* 2 (ACO I/1/5, 220).
- 24 *Ep. ad Sergium* 2 (CSCO 119, 105f; Torrance 1988: 172f).
- 25 *Ibid.* (CSCO 119, 136; Torrance 1988: 192) cf. *Isag.* 5 (CAG IV/1, 12).
- 26 *Ibid.* (CSCO 119, 139; Torrance 1988: 194).
- 27 Grillmeier 1989: 126 n. 313 understandably points to the Apollinarian fragment, where the mixture of properties in Christ is compared to the bastardization of donkey and horse in a mule (frg. 113 Lietzmann) – a text which is, in my opinion, a rather clear forgery.
- 28 *Ep. ad Sergium* 3 (CSCO 119, 163–67; Torrance 1988: 217–219).
- 29 *Ep. ad Sergium* 3 (CSCO 119, 167f; Torrance 1988: 219f). On the same problem cf. John the Grammarian, *Capita adversus Monophysitas* 7 (CCG 1, 63).
- 30 *Ep. ad Sergium* 2 (CSCO 119, 136; Torrance 1988: 192: “But be sure that we are not seeking to define what a property is according to the definitions of pagan philosophy. For those things are set at naught and are outside our court”).
- 31 *Ep. ad Severum* 3 (CSCO 119, 151; Torrance 1988: 207).
- 32 *Ep. ad Sergium* 3 (CSCO 119, 169; Torrance 1988: 220f).
- 33 *Ibid.* (CSCO 119, 169–71; Torrance 1988: 220–222).
- 34 *Ep. ad Severum* 3 (CSCO 119, 155; Torrance 1988: 210).
- 35 *Ep. ad Severum* 2 (CSCO 119, 137–39; Torrance 1988: 193f); *Ep. ad Severum* 3 (CSCO 119, 172–75; Torrance 1988: 223f); *Contra impium Grammaticum* II,17 (CSCO 111, 157–61; 112, 122–125).
- 36 Cf. Gleede 2012: 105–109.139f.172–174.
- 37 The latest discussion of these prosopographical problems can be found in the recent edition and translation of the texts by Daley 2017: 3–25.
- 38 *Deprehensio et Triumphus* pr. (ed. Daley 2017: 412f).
- 39 One of the hallmarks of sixth-century “Origenism” (cf. Hombergen 2001: 206–254).
- 40 *Contra Nestorianos et Eutychianos* pr. (ed. Daley 2017: 116).
- 41 The famous “no nature without hypostasis” objection regularly launched against the Chalcedonian definition from Nestorius' *Liber Heraclidis* onwards (cf. Gleede 2012: 49–56, esp. 53 Anm. 149).
- 42 Cf. e.g. Stickelberger 1980; Moutafakis 1993; Krausmüller 2011.
- 43 *Ctr. Nest.* 2 (ed. Daley 2017: 138).

- 44 *Ctr. Nest.* 2 (ed. Daley 2017: 140). The phrase τὸ μᾶλλον καὶ ἤττον κατ' ἀρετὴν ἐπιδεχόμεναι was interpreted as a reference to *Cat.* 8 (10b26–29) by Junglas 1908: 76.
- 45 *Epilysis* 8 (ed. Daley 2017: 300).
- 46 *Ctr. Nest.* 6 (ed. Daley 2017: 160).
- 47 *Ctr. Nest.* 2 (ed. Daley 2017: 142).
- 48 *Ctr. Nest.* 6 (ed. Daley 2017: 160).
- 49 The distinction between attractive, retentive and transformative power of the vegetative soul might be taken from Nemesius, *De natura hominis* 22. For a discussion of the relevant Evagrian borrowings cf. B. Daley, “The Origenism of Leontius of Byzantium”, in: *JThS* 27 (1976), 352–354. In *Epil.* 7, he utilizes a subdivision of the noetic faculty taken over from Basil (cf. Junglas 1908: 82).
- 50 *Epilysis* 8 (ed. Daley, 302–310). Cf. the explicit appeals to the principle of contradiction on p. 306, 4f (and already *Epilysis* [ed. Daley, 294,28]).
- 51 *Epilysis* 3 (ed. Daley, 276).
- 52 *Epilysis* 3 (ed. Daley, 278). Daley’s interpretation of παρὰ τοῖς ἀποδεικτικοῖς λόγοις is, however, questionable. It might just mean “on the occasion of scientific demonstration”. The term for “circular demonstration” (διάλληλος ἀποδειξις) used here is technical only in the contemporary Aristotelian commentaries (cf. the similar statement in Ammonius, *In Isag.*; CAG IV/3, 74: ἡ δὲ διάλληλος δεῖξις διαβέβληται παρὰ τοῖς φιλοσόφοις).
- 53 Cf. Junglas 1908: 46–48.
- 54 Cf. earlier, nn. 30–32.
- 55 *Epilysis* 3 (ed. Daley 2017: 276f). The fragments even contain short expositions of the Porphyrian “five voices” (ed. Daley 2017: 574,583). Those originate, however, most probably from a conflation between excerpts from Leontius and Ammonius in the manuscript tradition (cf. Daley’s introduction, 53f).
- 56 *Epilysis* 3 (ed. Daley, 280f).
- 57 Cf. 84–86.
- 58 *Eparpor.* 9 (ed. Daley 2017: 316).
- 59 *Epilysis* 2 (ed. Daley 2017: 274f).
- 60 Ed. Daley, 330. For possible Porphyrian inspirations in this passage, cf. Junglas 1908: 46–48.
- 61 *Epilysis* 8 (ed. Daley 2017: 298).
- 62 ACO I/1/6, 153f.
- 63 Ed. Daley 2017: 322.
- 64 *Eparpor.* 22f (ed. Daley 2017: 324f). Cf. ab. n. 25f.
- 65 *Epilysis* 8 (ed. Daley 2017: 308f); cf. also *ibid.* 5 (284f). The first passage contains an explicit reference to *Cat.* 5 4a10f, the definition of substance as being capable of receiving opposites (for the wording, cf. Porphyry, *In Cat.*; CAG IV/1, 99f; Ps-Justin, *Conf. Arist.* Ap. 8 [Otto 1880: 218]) – a reference which is concealed by Daley’s incorrect decision to take αὐτοῦ into the text.
- 66 On this problem in Leontius cf. Cross 2002; on the problem in general cf. Zachhuber 2016.
- 67 *Ctr. Nest.* 1 (ed. Daley 2017: 132f).
- 68 Cf. my ἐνυπόστατος, 61–67.
- 69 In the commentary tradition, the term ἐπουσιώδης basically meant non-substantial, yet was closely linked to the inseparable accidents. In Leontius, it clearly signifies some “adsubstantial” or quasi-substantial medium stage between substantial and accidental (cf. my ἐνυπόστατος, 64 n. 186, 66 n. 192 and 106).
- 70 Cf. e.g. Dexippus, *In Cat.*; CAG IV/2, 23,20 (οὐδὲν γὰρ ἄχρουν ἢ ἀσχημάτιστον ἢ ἄποσον σῶμα) / Hermeias, *In Phaedrum*, ed. Couvreur, 112,1f (σῶμα ἐνυλον ἀδύνατον σε λαβεῖν ἀχρώματον καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον) / Simplicius, *In Cael.*; CAG VII, 599,9f (οὔτε δὲ ἀχρώματον πάντη οὔτε ἀσχημάτιστον εἶναι σῶμα δύνατον πεπερασμένον) and *In Cat.*; CAG VIII, 48,5 (ἄχρουν γὰρ καὶ ἀσχημάτιστον οὐκ ἂν εἶη σῶμα).
- 71 His use of the term ποιότης finally goes back to the Stoic, not to the Aristotelian tradition. Cf. Anastasius Sinaites, *Hodegos* II, 7,47–51 (CCG 8, 62): Ποιότης ἐστὶν ἐνούσιος δύναμις, ὡς τοῦ ὕδατος ἢ ψυχρότης, καὶ τοῦ πυρὸς ἢ θερμότης, καὶ τοῦ λίθου ἢ σκληρότης, καὶ τῆς γῆς ἢ ξηρότης. Ποιότης καὶ ἰδιότης καὶ διαφορά καὶ ἰδίωμα ἐν καὶ τὸ αὐτὸ σημαίνει (and the parallels in Uthemann’s apparatus).
- 72 *Ep.* 102,20f (SC 208, 44f) states the “inverted” relationship of both doctrines, as the Trinitarian persons are ἄλλο καὶ ἄλλο, not ἄλλος καὶ ἄλλος, whereas in Christ it is the other way round. The passage is probably one of the most quoted within the entire Christological debate, especially for the Chalcedonians a very convenient tool to defend their stance (cf. Leontius, *Eparpor.* 11f).
- 73 Cf. my extensive discussion in Gleede 2012: 69–100.
- 74 *Epilysis* 1 (ed. Daley 2017: 272); *Eparpor.* 25 (ed. Daley, 326f).

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