





**Philosophers in the Desert:  
The Origins and Development of the Monastic Worldview  
held by Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian**

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**23 April 2015**



## **STUDENT STATEMENT**

I, Ian Christopher Michie, have not submitted this work for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

SIGNED: \_\_\_\_\_



## ABSTRACT

This thesis will trace the origins and development of the monastic worldview held by Evagrius Ponticus (c.345-c.399 CE) and John Cassian (c.360-c.435 CE), by locating this worldview within the broader context of the development of ancient Greco-Roman thought from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE up to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. We will employ the historical and methodological framework of the French historian of philosophy, Pierre Hadot (1922-2010), especially as it was articulated in his study entitled '*What is Ancient Philosophy?*'. Hadot's work will be supplemented and augmented with material drawn from various other disciplines, including philosophy of religion, sociology and theology.

In Chapters 1-5, we will pursue a critical analysis of ethical teachings and presuppositions found within the work of Homer, Hesiod, the Pre-Socratic thinkers, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the members of the Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools. Methodological insights from sociologist Joseph M. Bryant will be used to elucidate the historical, social and conceptual context within which the worldview of each thinker developed, while the work of philosopher of religion Roy A. Clouser will help to establish the role of the 'Divine', or the 'Ultimate Principle', within each system of thought.

In Chapter 6-9, we will trace the influence of earlier Greco-Roman systems of thought on the development of the early Christian monastic worldview of Evagrius and Cassian, with its central focus on the Eight Generic Thoughts, or Eight Principal Vices: gluttony; sexual immorality; avarice; sadness; anger; spiritual weariness; vainglory; and pride. This part of the analysis will demonstrate the ways in which elements derived from earlier non-Christian theological or philosophical systems were combined with Christian doctrines and assumptions in order to create an elegant and sophisticated worldview that still informs Christian monastic theory and practice up to the present day.





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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to extend heartfelt thanks to my principal supervisor,

Dr Ken Parry,

and my associate supervisor,

Dr Alanna Nobbs,

for their extraordinarily generous assistance.

I would also like to express profound appreciation to my parents,

Christopher and Lindsay,

and to all my family,

for their endless support and encouragement.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my grandfather,

Alan Colin (Dick) McMillan

(17/01/1914-19/11/2011),

who passed away before my work was completed.

## INTRODUCTION

Evagrius Ponticus (c.345-c.399 CE) and his associate John Cassian (c.360-c.435 CE) were Christian monks of the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, whose sojourn in the Egyptian desert contributed to the development of a highly influential form of Christian monastic praxis, derived from a synthesis of Greco-Roman philosophy and Christian theology. Evagrius and Cassian were also amongst the first Christian monks to produce a written rationale for this monastic worldview. Their approach was based upon the premise that every Christian monk would be assailed by eight particular demons, which were associated with what Evagrius called the ‘Eight Generic Thoughts’, and what Cassian later called the ‘Eight Principal Vices’: (1) γαστριμαργία / *gula* [gluttony]; (2) πορνεία / *fornicatio* [fornication or sexual immorality]; (3) φιλαργυρία / *filargyria* or *avaritia* [love of money, avarice or greed]; (4) λύπη / *tristitia* [sadness]; (5) ὀργή / *ira* [anger]; (6) ἀκηδία / *acedia* [spiritual weariness]; (7) κενοδοξία / *cenodoxia* [vainglory]; and (8) ὑπερφανία / *superbia* [pride]. The Eight Thoughts/Vices schema provided a framework within which Christian forms of ‘spiritual exercise’, derived largely from Greco-Roman philosophical models, could be produced.

Socrates of Constantinople (c.380-after 439 CE) had stated in *Church History* 4.23 that Evagrius, whilst in the Egyptian desert, had acquired ‘the philosophy of deeds, whereas formerly he had been a philosopher in word only.’ In this thesis, it will be argued that Evagrius and Cassian were both ‘philosophers in the desert’. However, the concept of ‘philosophy’ will be explicated with reference to a radical reappraisal of ancient Greco-Roman thought developed by the French historian of philosophy, Pierre Hadot (1922-2010). Hadot argued that ancient philosophy began with Socrates, who neither wrote philosophical texts, nor founded a formal philosophical school. Indeed, Hadot points out that in the ancient world, there were many thinkers after Socrates who were widely regarded as legitimate ‘philosophers’ or ‘lovers of wisdom’, but who produced little or no written discourse. Hadot’s research into the history, nature and purpose of ancient Greco-Roman philosophy has demonstrated that ancient philosophy was *not* primarily concerned with creating a theoretical system; rather, its main focus was practical activities, known as ‘spiritual exercises’, that were designed to enhance and transform a person’s perception and state of being. In Hadot’s estimation, therefore, philosophy was primarily a way of life; each philosophical school represented an initial ‘choice’, or orientation to life, which was subsequently articulated and promoted by means of specific forms of behaviour, speech or writing.

The chief objective of this thesis is to trace the origins and development of the monastic worldview held by Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian, which will be achieved by firmly locating this worldview within the context of the broader trajectory of ancient Greco-Roman thought. Hadot's understanding of ancient philosophy, as a practical way of life, rather than as the development of an all-embracing theoretical system, has profound relevance for our investigation, especially since so much of the debate in Evagrian studies of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries has been concerned with the nature of Evagrian thought, and whether it constitutes a 'theoretical system'. Augustine Casiday has noted that:

a number of leading scholars have attributed to Evagrius a highly specific intellectual system that they have then used to reconstruct his teaching and even to infer Evagrius' positions in matters for which no direct evidence is available. In some cases, this has had a direct effect on any of a number of important questions. The most central question is how Origenist Evagrius was, but other less spectacular questions are relevant, too. For instance, whether one thinks Evagrius' theology provoked the First Origenist Controversy is in large measure a consequence of whether one thinks that his theology was exceptionally unusual in the context of late fourth-century Egypt (not to mention whether one thinks Evagrius had enough clout to stir up such an intense reaction.)<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps the clearest example of a modern tendency to attribute "a highly specific intellectual system" to Evagrius can be found in the words of Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988):

In constructing his system, Evagrius has not merely taken over the terminology and system of Origen... he has brought the loose, flowing and changing system of Origen to a final, mathematically exact precision. In doing this, he has sacrificed Origen's versatile thought to an iron-clad system to which he holds fast, come what may, to its final consequences. He is more of an Origenist than Origen himself, and... it is from this Origenism that we must begin if we are to understand the mystical theology of Evagrius.<sup>2</sup>

However, it will be argued that, when considered from the perspective of Hadot's evaluation of the practical, rather than theoretical nature of ancient Greco-Roman thought, the attribution to Evagrius of "a highly specific intellectual system", let alone "an iron-clad system", would seem to be both anachronistic and implausible.

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<sup>1</sup> Augustine Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, The Early Church Fathers Series (Oxford, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 2006), p. 25.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Urs von Balthasar, 'The Metaphysics and Mystical Theology of Evagrius,' *Monastic Studies*, Volume 3 (1965), pp. 183-184.

We will adopt a diachronic perspective that begins with an examination of the ancient Greek religious beliefs articulated by Homer and Hesiod, as well as subsequent refinements to these religious beliefs made by the Pre-Socratic thinkers and the Sophists. The starting point of this investigation has been selected in the light of Hadot's trenchant observation that:

From its origins, philosophy developed as a critique of religion: a destructive critique... or a purifying critique... It was a purifying critique in the sense that philosophy finally tends to transform religion into philosophy, either by developing a theology, albeit a purely rational theology, or by using allegory to think about the different divinities in a philosophical way...<sup>3</sup>

Hadot's magisterial study, '*What is Ancient Philosophy?*'<sup>4</sup> will provide the basic historical and methodological framework within which the latter part of our investigation will proceed. However, his work will need to be supplemented and augmented in various ways. We will begin with an extensive analysis of the thinkers from the period prior to and concurrent with Socrates. We will then show how the various literary representations of Socrates build upon concepts derived from earlier thinkers, and will also indicate the ways in which the writings of Xenophon and Plato influenced the development of the later philosophical schools. Methodological insights from sociologist Joseph M. Bryant will help to elucidate the historical, social and conceptual contexts within which the worldview of these thinkers developed, and the work of philosopher of religion Roy A. Clouser will serve as a foundation from which to explore the evolution of Greco-Roman concepts of the 'divine'. Clouser's approach will also allow us to assess the extent to which ancient Greco-Roman thought can be interpreted through the prism of the Socratic assertion that the goal of the philosophical life is to pursue 'assimilation to the divine' (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176 b). Finally, our investigation will demonstrate the strong dependence of the monastic worldview and praxis of Evagrius and Cassian upon earlier Greco-Roman philosophical practices and concepts. We will argue that the Evagrian/Cassianic monastic worldview functioned primarily as a 'philosophy of deeds', and that this intensely practical, pastoral and pedagogical focus, shaped by theological and philosophical approaches developed by earlier Christian and non-Christian thinkers, served as a foundation from which distinctively Christian spiritual exercises could be created.

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Hadot (Marc Djaballah & Michael Chase, trans.), *The Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, Cultural Memory in the Present, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stanford, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 37-38, emphasis added.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

The thesis has two main parts. Part 1, consisting of Chapters 1-5, will deal with the Greco-Roman theological and philosophical antecedents of Evagrian and Cassianic thought and practice, beginning at the roots of ancient Greek religion in the Archaic Period, and ending with the Greco-Roman philosophical schools of the early Roman Imperial period. The investigation in these early chapters will trace the course of ethical development in ancient Greco-Roman society, both prior to and parallel with the emergence of Christianity, so that we can determine the ways in which this ethical development, and the various behavioural and literary forms to which it gave rise, served as antecedents to the distinctive Evagrian-Cassianic monastic scheme. Part 2, consisting of Chapters 6-9, will outline the Christian foundations of the monastic worldview held by Evagrius and Cassian, starting with the emergence of Christian theology in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, and finishing with the writings of Evagrius and Cassian in the late 4<sup>th</sup> and early 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

In Chapter 1, we will focus upon the development of key ideas in Ancient Greece during the Archaic Period (c.1200-479 BCE). We will examine the origins of ancient Greek religious and ethical thought and will consider the ways in which ancient Greek educational practice (*paideia*) reflected an emphasis upon the importance of training (*askēsis*). Friedrich Nietzsche's penetrating insights will reveal the functional nature of ancient Greek moral terminology. Joseph M. Bryant's sociological analysis will help us to understand how and why a gradual transformation of the 'agonistic' aristocratic warrior ethos, found within Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, took place. We will conclude the chapter with an analysis of Hesiod's consolidation and reworking of traditional Greek mythology in the *Theogony*; his exploration of the origin and problem of evil, and the creation of humanity, in the *Works and Days*; and his portrait of Zeus as a guarantor of divine justice in both poems.

In Chapter 2, we turn our attention towards the so-called Pre-Socratics of the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods. The modern tendency to refer to the thinkers reviewed in this chapter as 'Pre-Socratic' and as 'philosophers' will be analysed and critiqued. Adam Drozdek's work on ancient Greek thinkers as theologians will allow us to strongly reject the modern use of anachronistic, post-European Enlightenment methodologies, in which a rigid opposition is often posited between the 'theological' nature of the works of Homer and Hesiod, and the allegedly 'cosmological' and 'scientific' focus of the Pre-Socratics. We will call into question some traditional approaches to the relative chronology of these thinkers and to the nature of the personal and conceptual relationships between them. James W. Sire's 'worldview analysis' will also serve as a powerful tool with which to assess the ethical implications of Pre-Socratic thought.

In Chapter 3, the often maligned Sophists will come into view. We will consider how the compilation of earlier Greek Pre-Socratic thought in the work of the Sophists, especially the writings of Hippias and Gorgias, contributed indirectly to the faulty methodological assumptions behind the creation of a ‘linear chronology’ of ancient Greek thought in late 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany and Britain. Biographical sketches of the most significant Sophists will be presented, and attention will be drawn towards the tendentious representation of the Sophists in the dialogues of Plato. The challenging contributions of the Sophists to theological, ethical and epistemological thought will be reviewed, so as to explain the often vehement opposition to these thinkers from their contemporaries and from later thinkers. In particular, we will focus upon the agnostic or atheistic tendencies of some Sophistic thinkers, and the ethical extremes to which such radical revision of traditional Greek theology could lead.

In Chapter 4, the figure of Socrates emerges onto centre stage. We will argue that ‘philosophy’ proper begins with Socrates, whom Nietzsche described as “the turning point and vortex of so-called world history”. Socrates functioned as a moral exemplar for many subsequent thinkers in the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods, but the ‘Socrates’ who was revered by members of one philosophical school was often at odds with the ‘Socrates’ of other schools. In the light of such ambiguities, we will consider what can be known about the historical Socrates and his teaching (i.e. the so-called Socratic Problem). A detailed examination of early literary representations of Socrates in the works of Aristophanes, Xenophon and Plato, including an analysis and critique of modern interpretative approaches to these authors, will help us to identify the main elements of Socratic ethical teaching. This analysis will also help us to discern the similarities, as well as the many significant differences, that emerge from a comparison of the various sources.

In Chapter 5, we will examine the post-Socratic inheritance in the philosophical schools of the late Classical, Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods. We will trace the ways in which literary depictions of Socrates, especially those of Xenophon and Plato, served as philosophical and moral exemplars for various subsequent philosophers and for their respective philosophical schools. We will consider the Platonic Academy, the Aristotelian Lyceum, the Cynics, Skeptics, Stoics and Epicureans, so as to determine the basic features of each school, as well as any conceptual elements that might have been held in common. In particular, we will determine how philosophy was actually practiced by members of each school, and assess to what extent the *télos*, or goal that they were pursuing can be understood in terms of the concept of ‘assimilation to the divine’.

In Chapter 6, we begin an assessment of the Christian antecedents of the monastic worldview of Evagrius and Cassian. In the light of Pierre Hadot's insight that philosophy and theology emerged as a critique of religion, we will consider how Christian theology incorporated a creative revision of earlier concepts of the divine. We will also examine the subtle adaptation of Socratic teaching concerning 'assimilation to the divine' which resulted in the Christian soteriological doctrine of *théōsis*. We will trace the influence of Greco-Roman philosophy on early Christian thought and practice, and demonstrate how Christianity came to function as a philosophy, i.e. as a way of life, with associated oral or written discourse. Our investigation will assess how Christian use of Greco-Roman philosophical concepts, as well as intense reflection upon the meaning of the Christian Scriptures, resulted in the creation of a distinctly Christian theological discourse, in areas such as Trinitarian theology, Christology, Theological Anthropology, and especially Soteriology.

In Chapter 7, the phenomenon of Christian martyrdom becomes the centre of interest. Analysis of the etymology and Biblical usage of the Greek word μάρτυς (*mártus*) will establish that its most basic Christian sense refers to persons who functioned as a prophetic witness to a belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the cosmic king. We will demonstrate that Greco-Roman emphasis upon the concepts of 'honour' and 'the unconquered will', when combined with a philosophical emphasis upon ascetic training for virtue, contributed profoundly towards a radical re-conceptualisation of the experience of martyric death. We will also show that Christian Martyr Acts, which often incorporated and adapted spiritual exercises from the Stoic and Epicurean philosophical schools, provided a valuable guide to the 'normalisation' of suffering.

In Chapter 8, we will investigate the nature of the relationship between martyrdom and Christian monasticism, with special reference to the *Vita Antonii* (*Life of Antony*). An examination of several recent examples of the frequently-made claim that "monasticism replaced martyrdom" will reveal that this claim is best understood in a strictly chronological sense, rather than a conceptual or functional sense. It will be argued that Christian monastic practice grew out of earlier Christian training for martyrdom, and that both ways of life served a similar theological function, insofar as they both involved a form of prophetic witness to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and were both a 'training for virtue' and 'practice for death.' With this 'functional equivalence' in mind, the *Vita Antonii* will be interpreted as a Martyr Act (designed to inspire people to adopt and persevere in the monastic life) and as a form of Christian spiritual exercise that was equally suited to monastics and non-monastics.



In Chapter 9, we will provide a detailed overview of the life and teaching of Evagrius Ponticus and his associate John Cassian. We will outline the academic and spiritual education of each individual, and will identify the main philosophical and theological figures and influences that contributed towards the monastic worldview that is represented in their extant writings. We will review differing modern assessments of the significance of ‘Origenism’ for an accurate understanding of the thought and practice of Evagrius and Cassian, and will argue that, despite the ancient condemnations, Evagrius ought *not* to be considered an ‘Origenist’ heretic.

We will consider Origen’s threefold scheme of spiritual progress that was later transformed by Evagrius into his distinctive monastic pattern of spiritual development towards knowledge of the Holy Trinity, particularly as found within Evagrius’ trilogy of works known as the *Praktikós*, the *Gnōstikós*, and the *Kephálaia Gnōstiká*. A strong case will be made that what Origen, Evagrius and Cassian derived from Greek philosophy was *not* a fixed body of doctrine, and certainly *not* an ironclad system, but rather a particular orientation to life itself which, as Pierre Hadot has repeatedly demonstrated, was the basic ‘decision’ or ‘choice’ that informed all subsequent philosophical practice and discourse.

Following this ‘rehabilitation’ of Origen and Evagrius, we will examine Evagrius’s teaching about the Eight Generic Thoughts, and its adaptation and development in Cassian’s teaching about the Eight Principal Vices. This examination will reveal the ways in which the teaching about the Eight Thoughts/Eight Vices functioned within the body of Christian theological discourse developed by each of these two Christian monks. We will show that the Evagrian theological discourse was dependent upon concepts and terminology derived from Greco-Roman religion and philosophy, but that, in at least one respect, this discourse was subtly altered by Cassian to reflect more Biblical forms of thought and terminology.

Our investigation will conclude with an analysis of an Evagrian work of the *kephálaia* (‘chapter’) genre, entitled *Ad Monachos* (‘To the Monks’). This analysis will reveal that the text incorporates several features derived from ancient Greco-Roman philosophy, especially from the Stoic philosophical school, and will demonstrate how this work functions as a Christian spiritual exercise that includes many of the Socratic elements that lie at the heart of ancient philosophy.

## Chapter 1

### Ethical Thought in Archaic Greece: Homer and Hesiod

#### Introduction

Léopold Migeotte has argued that “Modes of production, exchange and consumption are always influenced by their political, social and cultural context.”<sup>1</sup> However, “modes of production, exchange and consumption” need not only refer to the creation, distribution and use of consumer goods. It can also indicate the processes by which cultural products (such as forms of behaviour and discourse, as well as the ideas which underpin them) are generated and appropriated. The main purpose of the investigation to be conducted in Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5, is to trace the course of ethical development in ancient Greco-Roman society, both prior to, and parallel with, the emergence of Christianity. The investigation will help to determine the ways in which this ethical development, and the various behavioural and literary forms to which it gave rise, affected the structure and content of the distinctive Evagrian-Cassianic monastic scheme. In this first chapter, I will be focusing upon the development of key social, political, philosophical and theological ideas in Ancient Greece<sup>2</sup> during the Archaic Period<sup>3</sup> (c.1200-479 BCE),<sup>4</sup> and the implications that these ideas had for ethical thought and behaviour at this time, and in later periods.

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<sup>1</sup> Léopold Migeotte (Janet Lloyd, trans.), *The Economy of the Greek Cities: From the Archaic Period to the Early Roman Empire* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA & London, England: University of California Press, 2009; original French edition, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to key themes in Ancient Greek history, see: Robin Osborne, *Greek History*, Classical Foundations (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 2004). For an overview of Ancient Greek society, see: Paul Cartledge (ed.), *The Cambridge Illustrated Ancient History of Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1998). For an older, but still useful orientation to Greco-Roman society in general, see: John Boardman, Jasper Griffin & Oswyn Murray (eds.), *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (Oxford, England & New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>3</sup> For the Archaic Period, see: Robin Osborne, *Greece in the Making 1200-479 BC*, Routledge History of the Ancient World, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 2009); Kurt A. Raaflaub & Hans Van Wees (eds.), *A Companion to Archaic Greece*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Malden, MA, USA; Oxford & Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2009); Jonathan M. Hall, *A History of the Archaic Greek World ca. 1200-479 BCE*, Blackwell History of the Ancient World (Malden, MA, USA; Oxford, England; Carlton, VIC, Australia: Blackwell Publishing, 2007); Harvey Alan Shapiro (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Archaic Greece* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Oswyn Murray, *Early Greece*, Fontana History of the Ancient World, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, England: Fontana Press, 1993).

<sup>4</sup> The Archaic Period can be further divided into the Early Archaic (c.1200-776 BCE) and Late Archaic (776-479 BCE). The years around 1200 BCE mark the end of the Mycenaean period and the beginning of the invasions of Greece, whilst 776 BCE was the year of the first Olympic Games, one of the first identifiable pan-Hellenic activities. The end of the Archaic Period is generally considered to fall around the time of the Persian Wars, between the initial Battle of Marathon (490 BCE) and the final Battle of Plataia (479 BCE).

## Establishing a Framework for Ethical Analysis

In 1776, the framers of the United States Declaration of Independence asserted that: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.” Nonetheless, despite this declaration, the practice of slavery remained legal in the USA until the passing of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in 1865. In a variation upon the words of George Orwell in his novel *Animal Farm*, one could have said that, in the USA, prior to 1865: “All men are created equal, but some men are more equal than others”.<sup>5</sup> Ethical discourse often proceeds on the basis of a number of assumptions that are considered axiomatic, even when the participants in ethical discussion are not fully conscious of these foundational beliefs, or any logical implications that would seem to flow from them. The apparent incongruity that existed between the ethical and legal principles articulated in the Declaration of Independence, and the actual behaviour of slave-owners in the period between 1776 and 1865, is just one of the more famous examples of the truism that the assessment of ‘good’ or ‘bad’, and ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, always takes place within a specific cultural context, in which many ethical blind spots can exist.

In the ancient world, there was little pretence at universal human equality, and so even in a relatively enlightened city-state such as ancient Athens, citizenship was restricted to those adult males who had been born in Athens to Athenian parents. Women, slaves and foreigners were deliberately excluded from Athenian citizenship; women were largely confined to their homes, foreigners could only hold a limited range of jobs, and slavery was an integral feature of the economy.<sup>6</sup> Aristotle even argued in *Politics* I: iii – v that slavery was morally right according to nature (φύσις), not just according to convention (νομός); thus, barbarians captured by Greeks, during war, ought to be enslaved.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, although most aristocratic Athenian men would expect to marry and have children, many of them also anticipated that they would have opportunities to develop pederastic sexual relationships with young boys at athletic contests, in the gymnasium, and at drinking parties.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> George Orwell, *Animal Farm*, in: *The Penguin Complete Novels of George Orwell* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Books, 1983), p. 63.

<sup>6</sup> For an examination of the social and cultural roles open to women, slaves and foreigners in ancient Athens, see: Osborne, *Greek History*, Chapter 6, *The city of freedom and oppression*, pp. 85-101.

<sup>7</sup> For analysis of the concepts of ‘nature’ (*phýsis*) and ‘convention’ (*nomós*) see Chapter 3.

<sup>8</sup> For an excellent discussion of the complicated nexus between athletics and sexual expression amongst aristocratic Athenian males, see: Osborne, *Greek History*, Chapter 1, *Familiar but exotic: Why Greece needs history*, pp. 7-22.

It is all too easy for modern students of history to condemn aspects of ancient societies that might seem unfamiliar, unpleasant or ethically dubious, according to our own contemporary standards. However, we need to make an open-minded attempt to grasp the features and complexities of the cultural context(s) of Ancient Greece and Rome, for if we do not, we may well fail to comprehend how certain ethical assumptions actually functioned. We may also fail to see why certain ethical assumptions were widely held, and even appeared, to some, to be self evident. As historian Robin Osborne puts it:

It is the historian's job to draw attention to the personal, social, political and indeed moral issues behind the literary and artistic representations of the Greek world. The historian's job is to present pederasty and all, to make sure that, in the comfortable analysis of a culture so like our own, we come face to face with the way the glory that was Greece was part of a world in which many of our own core values find themselves challenged rather than reinforced.

In this first part of the investigation, I will be utilising a methodology employed by Joseph M. Bryant. This methodology, known as sociology of knowledge, or as sociology of culture, has as its primary objective:

the specification of the varied and dynamic linkages between ideas and institutions, cultural forms and social structures... the enterprise is concerned with understanding and elucidating how cognitive-affective processes are bound up with concrete social arrangements and pressing existential concerns... Sociology thus constitutes an indispensable "discriminating" component in the grand project of critical rationalism, for it is only by relating thought to action, theory to praxis, that we can begin to assess the epistemic and existential value of intellectual, moral and aesthetic ideals.<sup>9</sup>

Bryant suggests that a sociological exegesis of ancient Greek moral codes and social philosophies will require an investigation of three stages. The first stage involves an examination of the main structural changes within the economic, political, military, religious and kinship institutions of ancient Greek society. The second stage traces the impact of those developments on the social position and consciousness of various groups and strata. The third stage relates the discourse of artists and intellectuals to their social affiliations and to the patterns of institutional change.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph M. Bryant, *Moral Codes and Social Structure in Ancient Greece: A Sociology of Greek Ethics from Homer to the Epicureans and Stoics*, SUNY Series in the Sociology of Culture (Albany, NY, USA: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. xi.

<sup>10</sup> Bryant, *Moral Codes*, p. xii.

Bryant summarises the developments that occurred during the post-Mycenaean, or Archaic period of ancient Greek history as follows:

... the aristocratic warrior ethos canonized in the Homeric epics comported with the social arrangements of the turbulent post-Mycenaean era, which were marked by the exclusive dominance of freebooting nobles whose claims to political supremacy and status honour were based on martial pre-eminence and wealth accumulated in landed property and livestock. Over the course of the Archaic period, colonization abroad and expanding trade and production combined to raise material standards, thereby enabling the more prosperous elements of the peasant-*dêmos* to acquire costly armour and therewith a more prominent role on the field of battle. As population pressures on the land mounted, the appropriation and defence of border territories became a communal imperative, requiring ever greater deployments of armed force. Changes in military technology and tactics followed accordingly: the heroic style of open-field combat is supplanted by disciplined formations of hoplites, heavily armed infantry whose success in battle depends on numerical strength and collective steadiness in the ranks. Those members of the *dêmos* with the means to equip themselves with the costly panoply now rise to become the military bulwark of their communities, and thus armed they successfully press their claims for greater legal and political rights.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, Bryant believes that changes in the “modes of production, exchange and consumption” led to a somewhat more equitable distribution of wealth, but also led to an increase in population, with consequent pressures to acquire more land. These pressures led to higher levels of military confrontation between adjoining city-states, necessitating the recruitment of more soldiers. These newer soldiers then began to demand the right to full participation in civic life, leading to a gradual transition from the dominance of individual aristocratic warrior heroes (especially in the military and political spheres), towards a greater democratisation and collectivisation of the ancient Greek πόλις (*pólis*). The earliest stage of this transitional process can be seen in the epic poetry<sup>12</sup> attributed to Homer<sup>13</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Bryant, *Moral Codes*, pp. xii-xiii.

<sup>12</sup> For an introduction to ancient epic poetry, see: Richard Jenkins, *Classical Epic: Homer and Virgil*, Classical World (London, England: Bristol Classical Press, 1992). See also: Jasper Griffin, ‘Greek epic’ (Chapter 2), pp. 13-30, and Peter Toohey, ‘Roman epic’ (Chapter 3), pp. 31-54 in: Catherine Bates, *The Cambridge Companion to The Epic* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For a more extensive treatment of ancient epic, see: John Miles Foley, *A Companion to Ancient Epic*, Blackwell Companions to the Ancient World (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

<sup>13</sup> For a recent helpful discussion of the various philological, historical and literary aspects of the perennial debate about the authorship of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the so-called ‘Homeric Question’, see: Barry B. Powell, *Homer*, Blackwell Introductions to the Ancient World, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2007).

## Epic Poetry and the Homeric Question(s)

Epic poetry, such as Homer's<sup>14</sup> *Iliad*<sup>15</sup> and *Odyssey*,<sup>16</sup> was originally an oral phenomenon, performed by an ἀοιδός (*aoidós*) or singer of epic, who constructed and recited his compositions using traditional material. The theme of epic poetry was usually that of the lives and adventures of the heroes who had lived toward the end of the Mycenaean period. The language of epic poetry was striking, distinctive and highly artificial; it was based on an Ionic dialect, with additional elements taken from Aeolic and other eastern Greek dialects. The epic poet used short formulaic units of speech, and had to adapt them to the standard metre of epic poetry, known as dactylic hexameter. The formulaic units could be inserted as necessary, in order to preserve the required metre of the poetic composition. Skilled poets had memorised many of these formulaic units, and could use them to create epic poetry extemporaneously. The use of such formulaic units meant that various descriptive elements survived in epic poetry long after the people, places, events and concepts to which they originally referred had ceased to exist. For this reason, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* preserve some helpful clues to the form of life that prevailed in the centuries before these works were first committed to writing, which occurred perhaps as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, or perhaps in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>17</sup> In addition to these written sources, our other primary evidence from this period is archaeological in nature.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For an overview of the works of Homer, see: Alberto Manguel, *Homer's The Iliad and The Odyssey: A Biography*, Books That Changed The World (New York, NY, USA: Grover Press, 2007); Robert Fowler (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Homer* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and William Anthony Camps, *An Introduction To Homer* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> For an introduction to the *Iliad*, see: Seth L. Schein, *The Mortal Hero: An Introduction to Homer's Iliad* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 1984). For commentaries on the text of *The Iliad* see: Martin Litchfield West, *The Making of the Iliad: Disquisition and Analytical Commentary* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011); Norman Postlethwaite, *Homer's Iliad: A Commentary on the Translation of Richmond Lattimore*, Exeter Studies in History (Exeter, England: University of Exeter Press, 2000); and Malcolm L. Willcock, *A Companion to The Iliad: Based on the Translation by Richmond Lattimore* (Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1976). For a six-volume commentary see: Geoffrey Stephen Kirk (gen. ed.), *The Iliad: A Commentary* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1985-1993).

<sup>16</sup> For an introduction to *The Odyssey*, see: Henry Power, *Homer's Odyssey: A Reading Guide*, Reading Guides to Long Poems (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2011). For commentaries on the text of the *Odyssey*, see: Irene J. F. de Jong, *A Narratological Commentary on The Odyssey* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2001); and Ralph Hexter, *A Guide to The Odyssey: A Commentary on the English Translation of Robert Fitzgerald* (New York, NY, USA: Vintage Books, 1993). For a three-volume commentary, see: Alfred Heubeck, Stephanie West & John Bryan Hainsworth (eds.), *A Commentary on Homer's Odyssey* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1990-1992).

<sup>17</sup> Barry B. Powell has argued that the Greek alphabet was invented c. 800 BCE, possibly by Homer himself, so that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* could be written down. See: Barry B. Powell, *Homer and the Origin of the Greek Alphabet* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Gregory Nagy counterclaims that the works of Homer were first written down c. 550 BCE. See: Gregory Nagy, *Homeric Questions* (Austin, TX, USA: University of Texas Press, 1996), Chapter 3, 'Homer and the Evolution of a Homeric Text', pp. 65-112.

<sup>18</sup> Murray, *Early Greece*, pp. 5-17.

Gregory Nagy (b. 1942) provides a helpful way of thinking about the various ancient and modern debates concerning the composition, authorship, and date of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.<sup>19</sup> In his work entitled *Homeric Questions*, Nagy notes that:

The title of this work is marked by the word *Questions*, in the plural. It takes the place of the expected singular, along with a definite article, associated with that familiar phrase, “the Homeric Question.” Today there is no agreement about what the Homeric Question might be. Perhaps the most succinct of many possible formulations is this one: “The Homeric Question is primarily concerned with the composition, authorship, and date of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.”<sup>20</sup> Not that any one way of formulating the question in the past was ever really sufficient. Who was Homer? When and where did Homer live?<sup>21</sup> Was there a Homer? Is there one author of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or are there different authors for each? Is there a succession of authors or even redactors of each? Is there, for that matter, a unitary *Iliad*, a unitary *Odyssey*? I choose *Homeric Questions* as the title of this book both because I am convinced that the reality of the Homeric poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, cannot possibly be comprehended through any one Question, and because a plurality of questions can better recover the spirit of the Greek word *zētēma*, meaning the kind of intellectual “question” that engages opposing viewpoints.<sup>22</sup>

Nagy’s approach to these questions is primarily that of a philologist, with an emphasis on the language, text, and most especially, the original performance context of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Nagy was originally trained in the field of linguistics, and he laments that “Few studies in Homer apply linguistics with the degree of intellectual rigor and flair that this field requires.”<sup>23</sup> In his own work, therefore, Nagy combines insights gained from the disciplines of descriptive and historical linguistics, as well as from the discipline of anthropology.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Nagy has written extensively in the field of Homeric studies, in works such as: *Greek Mythology and Poetics*, Myth and Poetics (Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 1990); *Pindar’s Homer: The Lyric Possession of An Epic Past* (Baltimore, MD, USA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); *Poetry as Performance: Homer and Beyond* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996); *The Best of the Achaeans: Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry*, rev. ed. (Baltimore, MD, USA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999 [1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1979]); *Homeric Responses* (Austin, TX, USA: University of Texas Press, 2003); *Homer’s Text and Language*, Traditions (Urbana, IL, USA: University of Illinois Press, 2004); *Homer the Preclassic* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2010); *Homer the Classic*, Hellenic Studies Series, Book 36 (Washington, DC, USA: Hellenic Studies Center, 2010); and *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Belknap Press, 2013).

<sup>20</sup> See: John Armstrong Davison, ‘The Transmission of the Text’, pp. 215-233; and ‘The Homeric Question’, pp. 234-265, in: Alan J. B. Wace & Frank H. Stubbings (eds.), *A Companion to Homer* (London, England: Macmillan, 1962). The definition of the ‘Homeric Question’ provided above appears on p. 234.

<sup>21</sup> Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, p. 4, indicates that Homer was traditionally thought to have been born on the island of Chios, which is located about 7 kilometres west of the Anatolian coast of modern-day Turkey.

<sup>22</sup> Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, p. 1.

<sup>23</sup> Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, p. 9, n. 20.

<sup>24</sup> See: Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, pp. 9-11.

Nagy's approach has been influenced by the work of Milman Parry (1902-1935)<sup>25</sup>, and Parry's assistant, Albert Bates Lord (1912-1991),<sup>26</sup> in relation to *oral poetry*, which, in Nagy's view, "provides the key to the primary Homeric question of *performance*" and "permanently changed the very nature of any Homeric question."<sup>27</sup> *Oral traditional poetry*, as Nagy prefers to call it,<sup>28</sup> is then qualified by ten additional concepts:

- (1) Fieldwork: the collection of comparative evidence about the performance of living oral traditions;
- (2) Synchrony versus Diachrony: analysis of the current form and developmental history of oral traditions;
- (3) Composition-in-Performance: analysis of the production of oral traditions in and by means of performance;
- (4) Diffusion: analysis of the centrifugal and centripetal patterns of transmission of oral traditions;
- (5) Theme: a basic unit of content;
- (6) Formula: a fixed phrase, conditioned by the traditional themes of poetry;
- (7) Economy (Thrift): oral performers limit the number of expressions used to refer to the same concept;
- (8) Tradition versus Innovation: oral traditions reflect a degree of innovation in each new performance;
- (9) Unity and Organisation: the unity and organisation of Homeric poetry arises from performance;
- (10) Author and Text: "authorship" reflects the degree of a composition's invariability across performances.<sup>29</sup>

*Oral traditional poetry*, and especially the related concept of composition-in-performance, conditions the extent to which we can make decisive statements about "the world of Homer":

To say in Homeric criticism that the "world" or "worldview" that emerges from the structure of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* is the construct of one man at one time and place, or however many men from however many different times and places, risks the flattening out of the process of oral poetic creation, which requires analysis in the dimensions of both diachrony and synchrony. This caveat is relevant to the question of whether the overall perspective of Homeric poetry is grounded in, say, an age dating back to before the middle of the thirteenth century B.C.E. or, alternatively, in the eight century B.C.E.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Milman Parry's collected papers were published posthumously. See: Adam Parry (ed.), *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1971.)

<sup>26</sup> Albert Bates Lord was the author of *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1960; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2000), a highly influential work based on an extensive set of audio recordings of South Slavic heroic songs, collected by Milman Parry in 1933-1935, and also by Albert Lord in 1950-1951. A sequel to this book was edited by Lord's wife, and published posthumously. See: Albert Bates Lord (Mary Louise Lord, ed.), *The Singer Resumes the Tale* (Ithaca, NY, USA & London, England: Cornell University Press, 1995).

<sup>27</sup> Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, p. 13, emphasises that the term *oral poetry*, which was first used by Parry and Lord, should be understood in such a way that "*oral* is not simply the opposite of *written* and that the *poetry* of *oral poetry*... is not necessarily to be distinguished from *singing* or *song*."

<sup>28</sup> Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, p. 14. Nagy proposes "to use the concept of *tradition*... in conjunction with *oral poetry* in such a way as to focus on the perception of tradition by the given society in which the given tradition operates, not on any perception by the outside observer who is looking in, as it were, on the given tradition."

<sup>29</sup> See: Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, pp. 16-19, for more detail.

<sup>30</sup> Nagy, *Homeric Questions*, p. 20.



## The Cultural World Depicted in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*

The cultural world depicted in the epic poetry of Homer partly reflects that which followed the widespread destruction, by invading forces, of the palace-based civilisation of the Mycenaean age. After the Dorian invasions, small independent communities began to be established on the Greek mainland, and in surrounding areas around the Mediterranean Sea. These communities were most probably organised along tribal lines, based partly upon the existing military structures of the Dorian invaders, and partly upon the need to incorporate segments of the original population into the new patterns of civic organisation.<sup>31</sup> Each community would come to be known as a *pólis*, or city-state.<sup>32</sup>

In social terms, the community was divided between ‘the best men’, or ἄριστοι (*áristoi*),<sup>33</sup> and ‘the people’, or δῆμος (*dēmos*), made up of the free peasantry and the landless θητεῖαι (*thēteíai*). Craftsmen often travelled from one community to another, where they would be regarded as ‘foreigners’, or ξένοι (*xénoi*). The δημιουργοί (*dēmiourgói*), or craftsmen, included seers, healers of pains, woodworkers, rhapsodes, metal workers and heralds. Craftsmen generally supplied goods and services that were particularly valuable to the aristocracy, but they were not themselves members of the aristocracy. The ambiguous status of craftsmen was even represented in Greek mythology,<sup>34</sup> in which prophets of the god Apollo were often blind, and the god of blacksmiths, Hephaistos, was lame. Murray addresses the peculiar depiction of these workers in Greek mythology as follows:

*Such attitudes to the craftsman and his skills in myth reflect the early ambivalence of his social status; in the case of manual skills this attitude persisted.* Greece was a society which never came to terms with technology.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> For a brief consideration of the evidence for this theory, see: Bryant, *Moral Codes*, pp. 16-18.

<sup>32</sup> Eberhard Ruschenbusch has estimated that there were around seven hundred and fifty city-states (*póleis*) in the core area of Greece alone. See: Eberhard Ruschenbusch, ‘Die Zahl der griechischen Staaten und Arealgrösse und Bürgerzahl der Normalpolis’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Volume 59 (1985), pp. 253-263. Cited in: Bryant, *Moral Codes*, p. 478, n. 7.

<sup>33</sup> For a detailed examination of the lifestyle of the Ancient Greek aristocracy, see: Murray, *Early Greece*, Chapter 12, ‘Life Styles: The Aristocracy’, pp. 201-219.

<sup>34</sup> For an introduction to mythology, see: Robert A. Segal, *Myth: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Helen Morales, *Classical Mythology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2007). For a more extensive treatment of Greek mythology, see: Claude Calame (Janet Lloyd, trans.), *Greek Mythology: Poetics, Pragmatics and Fiction* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Roger D. Woodard (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek Mythology* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007); and William Hansen, *Classical Mythology: A Guide to the Mythical World of the Greeks and the Romans* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005). For a comprehensive anthology of Greek mythology, see: Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths: Complete Edition* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1960).

<sup>35</sup> Murray, *Early Greece*, pp. 55-56, emphasis added.

The three basic political institutions of Greek civic life are depicted in the epic poems of Homer<sup>36</sup> and according to the Marx-Weber thesis, these political institutions reflect the military origins of Greek society:<sup>37</sup>

- (1) The ἐκκλησία (*ekklēsia*), or assembly of all adult male citizens is derived from the tribal people at arms;
- (2) the βουλή (*boulē*), or council of elders, consisting of the heads of the aristocratic families, represents the original military retinues; and
- (3) the βασιλεύς (*basileús*) or 'king', such as Agamemnon or Odysseus, was the supreme warlord.

Several centuries later, in the city-state of Athens, the assembly of all adult male citizens would be the means by which the opinions of the people would become more widely heard, and it became an avenue through which an incipient democracy could develop. Membership of the *boulē* in Athens would be dramatically expanded, and become open to all citizens, with appointment by lot. The role and functions of the *basileús* would be divided between several state magistrates, including a chief executive known as the ἄρχων (*arkhōn*) and a military commander called the πολέμαρχος (*polémarkhos*). However, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* show little evidence of the democratic forms of government that would eventually arise from these militarily-derived political institutions. Furthermore, the respective heroes of each poem, Ἀχιλλεύς (Achilles) and Ὀδυσσεύς (Odysseus), exemplify not the democratic spirit of Classical Athens, but rather the aristocratic warrior ethos that was dominant in the Early Archaic period, which can be represented best by the two virtues that are consistently praised, above all others, in the works of Homer: sagacity in counsel, and ferocity in combat.

In the highly competitive, agonistic culture of Archaic Greece, a man had to prove himself worthy to be one of the *áristoi*, the 'best men', through excellence in word and deed, both in cultural pursuits and in battle. The *áristoi* were those men who possessed the necessary material wealth to be able to afford weapons and armour, and the necessary leisure time in which to maintain their physical fitness and develop fighting skills. Therefore, παιδεία (*paideía*), or socialisation, of the young sons of the *áristoi*, was oriented towards the development of a range of military abilities. These abilities were developed through participation in arms training, gymnastic sports, horsemanship and hunting. Success in battle was the basis upon which the *áristoi* also assumed political dominance in civic life.

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<sup>36</sup> There are several detailed descriptions of political decision-making in Homer's works, with the longest one occurring in the *Iliad*, Book 2.

<sup>37</sup> For further explanation, and a defence of the Marx-Weber thesis, see: Bryant, *Moral Codes*, pp. 15-19.

The inspiration for the aristocratic warrior ethos was provided by means of stirring poetry, in which great warriors like Achilles and Odysseus served as παραδείγματα (*paradeigmata*), or exemplars, of appropriate military behaviour. Bryant identifies four reinforcing pillars of power in the Dark Age society of Ancient Greece: (1) martial pre-eminence; (2) political supremacy; (3) wealth; and (4) noble birth. In addition to these, the preeminent value for the *aristoi* was that of φιλοτιμία (*philotimía*), or love of glory and honour. But why was this particular value exalted above all others?:

As is commonly the case in the history of morals, a virtue was made out of a necessity, for in a world where violence and warfare were endemic, a congruent ethos emerged wherein a man's personal and public worth was largely measured by displayed skills in combat.<sup>38</sup>

In a society in which the warriors faced the constant threat of death, the only activities seen as worthy of pursuit were those that would help cultivate a reputation for personal honour and glory, so that a man might achieve a 'reputational immortality' in the memories of others.

The functional nature of the moral language used to characterise the warrior class of Ancient Greece is an example of a phenomenon identified by the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche,<sup>39</sup> in his book entitled *Toward The Genealogy of Morals: A Polemic* (1887). In this set of three essays, Nietzsche developed a sociology of language in which moral terminology, in a given social and cultural context, could be seen as a grid, through which social and cultural activities were filtered. Nietzsche believed that moral terminology could be interpreted as a contextually-dependent form of expression, which prioritised certain high status persons and activities, and correspondingly devalued other lower status persons and activities.<sup>40</sup> Moral terminology, then, was a kind of 'map', which actually delineated class structure in a particular society, rather than an assessment of the intrinsic worth of a person or an activity. The functional nature of moral terminology in many ancient societies became clear to Nietzsche when he discovered that the use of terms such as 'good' and 'virtue', in a given society, often did not have any direct correspondence to persons or activities that might be considered unselfish or altruistic.

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<sup>38</sup> Bryant, *Moral Codes*, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> For an introduction to the writings of Nietzsche, see: Bernd Magnus & Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), Chapter 1, 'Nietzsche's Works and their Themes', pp. 21-68.

<sup>40</sup> In contemporary Western societies, such a distinction might roughly correspond to that often made between different occupations, so that a 'good job' (high status) might be that of leader of the nation, and a 'bad job' (low status) might be that of a cleaner of public toilets. Both jobs are necessary for the well-being of the community, but the former carries a much higher level of social approbation than the latter.

The functional nature of moral terminology was particularly apparent in the context of the Archaic Period, in which acts of bravery, fighting efficiency and noble birth were associated with Greek words such as ἐσθλός / *esthlós* ('truthful') or ἀγαθός / *agathós* ('good'). Cowardice, ineffective fighting, or lower (non-noble) status were associated with words such as κακός / *kakós* ('bad') or δειλός / *deilós* ('cowardly, vile, worthless'). Therefore, moral assessment was made of a particular person's status, and not of internal motivations that might lie behind a given activity or form of behaviour. Moral approbation, or disapprobation, depended upon an assessment of whether a person was a member of a high status group or not. As a result, a person of noble birth was 'good' by default, and a person of non-noble birth was 'bad' by definition. Behaviour, as such, had little to do with moral assessment, except, perhaps, when a person of high status failed to conform to the social expectations associated with a person of that rank in society.

Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M. Higgins characterise Nietzsche's position this way:

Nietzsche contends that "the good" did not originally refer to that which maximized pleasure and minimized pain. Instead, it referred primarily to the self-description of the person who employed it. However, the individual's specific understanding of the term depended on whether he or she represented the perspective of a master or a slave. Those with the outlook of masters, as we have seen above, understood "good" as referring precisely to their own selves and their qualities. They concluded that those who differed from themselves are to that extent "bad." *Those with the less healthy perspective of slaves, in contrast, understood themselves to be "good" only derivatively.* Judging their masters "evil", they concluded that they were "good", in the negative sense of lacking the masters' evil traits.<sup>41</sup>

From the perspective of Christian ethics (with which we will be concerned in later chapters), Ancient Greek ethical expression as delineated here by Nietzsche must inevitably appear regressive or even immoral. In the light of the words of Jesus of Nazareth quoted below, we can see that the *áristoi* would have been considered to be moral failures, because the *áristoi* not only failed to love their enemies (a moral demand that few people have ever achieved), but they also failed to love even their own neighbours:

'[Jesus said] You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy."

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you,

and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you. [Matthew 5:43-44, New King James Version].

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<sup>41</sup> Magnus & Higgins, *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, p. 49, emphasis added.

Nietzsche, by contrast, characterised Christianity as a slave morality that:

depends on a fundamental disposition of *ressentiment* (resentment, understood as a basic character trait, more nearly the sense in which the poet John Milton characterized it as a sense of “injured merit”) towards the masters, and it accomplishes revenge imaginatively, by means of passing judgement. The strong, active traits of the master are vilified by the slavish, who come to regard their own passivity and weakness as virtues. Nietzsche suggests this pattern pervades the moral ideals of Christianity. Many modes of self-assertion are analysed as sins on the Christian scheme, while passive suffering is deemed characteristic of the blessed.<sup>42</sup>

We will return to Nietzsche and his assessment of Christianity in the next chapter, but let us simply say for now that the aristocratic classes in Archaic Greece had no time for something resembling a Christian ethic of self-restraint or self-effacement. Nietzsche found Christian ethics repugnant, and I suspect that aristocratic Greeks of the Archaic Period would have found many aspects of a Christian ethical approach almost incomprehensible.

### **The Cultural World of Hesiod**

One does not have to wait until the time of Christ, however, to encounter a sustained critique of the ethical framework reflected in Archaic Greek aristocratic morality. The first recorded challenge to the aristocratic warrior ethos was put forward by the poet Hesiod,<sup>43</sup> in two poems, called the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*. Hesiod probably lived and composed his poetry during the period between the second half of the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the first quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE (c. 750 – c. 675 BCE).

Many contemporary scholars believe that Hesiod came after Homer,<sup>44</sup> although some scholars believe that Hesiod may have been a contemporary of Homer.<sup>45</sup> The evidence for either view is inconclusive, and, just like the centuries-long debate over the authorship of the Homeric poems (the so-called “Homeric Question”), it seems that the exact nature of the relationship between Homer and Hesiod may never be decisively resolved.

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<sup>42</sup> Magnus & Higgins, *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, p. 49.

<sup>43</sup> For an introduction to the works of Hesiod, see: Robert Lamberton, *Hesiod*, Hermes Books (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 1988); and Apostolos N. Athanassakis (trans.), *Hesiod: Theogony; Works and Days; Shield*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baltimore, MD, USA & London, England: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004). For a detailed discussion of Hesiod’s perspective on the gods and human beings, see: Jenny Strauss Clay, *Hesiod’s Cosmos* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> See, for example: Athanassakis (trans.), *Hesiod: Theogony; Works and Days; Shield*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. xi.

<sup>45</sup> See: Murray, *Early Greece*, p. 18.

Various local versions of a modified Phoenician alphabet had been introduced to Greece in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and had probably spread to Boeotia at the time that Hesiod was composing his poems. Furthermore, Hesiod's style of composition is significantly different from that of Homer, which may be an indication of greater literacy in his region of Greece. Hesiod's poems, which are shorter than those of Homer, might have been written creations from the beginning, or they might have been composed and performed orally.

There are four brief passages that seem to provide reliable autobiographical details about the poet (*Theogony* 22-34; and *Works and Days* 27-41; 633-640; 646-662).<sup>46</sup> From these passages we learn: that the poet is named Hesiod and that he claimed divine inspiration from the Muses for his poetry; that Hesiod won a prize for his poetry at the funeral games of Amphidamas; that Hesiod's father was a sailor who left Aeolian Kyme because of poverty and settled in Askra, near Helikon in Boeotia; and that Hesiod's brother, Perses, had taken more than his fair share of the family allotment after the death of their father.

In his most well known poetic works, the *Theogony*<sup>47</sup> and the *Works and Days*,<sup>48</sup> Hesiod used the epic dialect, but his subject matter was not the traditional tales of the lives and adventures of the heroes. Instead, in the *Theogony*, he chose to produce a systematic account of the origin of the gods of Greece and their genealogical relationships. In so doing, he also constructed a *cosmogony*, or a systematic account of the creation of the world. Athanassakis also makes the claim that the *Works and Days* is not at all typical of an entirely oral work, since it contains a mixture of social and political commentary:

The ideological orientation of Hesiod's arguments, his persistently didactic intent, and his purposeful and politically expedient use of myth and religion do not seem to be the product of spontaneous creativity.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> For an excellent discussion of the reliability and significance of the surviving biographical evidence for the life of Hesiod, and the relationship between the works of Homer and Hesiod, see: Glenn W. Most (trans.), *Hesiod: Theogony, Works and Days, Testimonia*, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 57 (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 2006), pp. xi-xxv.

<sup>47</sup> For a brief commentary on the *Theogony*, see: Richard Hamilton, *Hesiod's Theogony*, Bryn Mawr Commentaries (Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing, 1981). For a comprehensive commentary, see: Martin Litchfield West, *Theogony: Edited with Prolegomena and Commentary* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1966).

<sup>48</sup> For a brief commentary on the *Works and Days*, see: Richard Hamilton, Ellen Rainis & Rebecca Ruttenberg, *Hesiod's Works and Days*, Bryn Mawr Commentaries (Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing, 1988). For a comprehensive commentary, see: Martin Litchfield West, *Works and Days: Edited with Prolegomena and Commentary* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1978); and David W. Tandy & Walter C. Neale (trans.), *Works and Days: A Translation and Commentary for the Social Sciences* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 1996). For a discussion of the philosophical implications of the *Works and Days*, see: Stephanie Nelson & David Grene, *God and the Land: The Metaphysics of Farming in Hesiod and Vergil* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>49</sup> Gregory Nagy, however, has defended the oral nature of Hesiod's work. See: Athanassakis, *Hesiod*, p. xiv.

Hesiod's works provide a glimpse into a period when literacy was probably beginning to make significant differences in the lives of lower status citizens.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, in these two poems, we can see how Hesiod could depict theological and cosmological realities in such a way as to subvert the aristocratic warrior ethos, and subtly advance a somewhat revised value system. As we shall see later in this chapter, Hesiod's careful delineation of the role of Zeus, in the *Theogony*, paves the way for Hesiod's distinctive presentation of Zeus, in the *Works and Days*, as the divine guarantor of earthly justice.

The construction of a *theogony* of the Greek gods was a formidable task. The religion of the Greeks was polytheistic, and the worship of the gods, especially minor deities, was primarily a local affair. Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* certainly made frequent reference to several of the traditional twelve Olympian gods (i.e. Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Hermes, Demeter, Dionysus, Hephaistos and Ares), as well as other deities and spirits, but Homer made little attempt to explain the origins of the gods or the relationships between them in any sustained or systematic way.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, Greek religion was generally more a matter of *orthopraxy* than *orthodoxy*, with an emphasis upon religious practice, rather than on the enforcement a particular standard of theological doctrine. Ancient Greek religion combined Indo-European elements (derived both from the Mycenaean Greeks, and from the later Dorian invaders) with pre-Greek Cycladic, Minoan, and Anatolian beliefs and practice, and the resulting mixture of myths and rituals had no clear unifying centre. This was a matter of concern, even in the Classical period:

But whence each of the gods came to be, or whether all had always been, and how they appeared in form, they did not know until yesterday or the day before, so to speak; for I suppose Hesiod and Homer flourished not more than four hundred years earlier than I; and these are the ones who taught the Greeks the descent of the gods, and gave the gods their names, and determined their spheres and functions, and described their outward forms. But the poets who are said to have been earlier than these men were, in my opinion, later.  
[Herodotus: *The Histories* 2.53.1-3]<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The letters of the Phoenician alphabet only represented consonants, but the letters of the Greek alphabet represented both consonants and vowels. For the history of the early Greek alphabet, see: John F. Healey, 'The Early Alphabet', in: John T. Hooker (ed.), *Reading The Past: Ancient Writing from Cuneiform to the Alphabet* (London, England: British Museum Press, 1990), pp. 196-257. For the use of the Greek alphabet in the writing of inscriptions, see: Brian F. Cook, 'Greek Inscriptions', in: Hooker (ed.), *Reading The Past*, pp. 258-319.

<sup>51</sup> There are also some discrepancies between Homer and Hesiod in their respective depictions of the gods, so for the sake of clarity, much of the ensuing analysis in this chapter will rely upon the more systematic presentation of the gods provided in Hesiod's *Theogony*.

<sup>52</sup> Alfred Denis Godley (trans.), *Herodotus: The Persian Wars*, Volume 1, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 117 (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1920).

Murray is inclined to agree with Herodotus about the critical role played by Hesiod and Homer in bringing a semblance of order to the Greek religion. He observes that:

The consistent tendency to anthropomorphism and the organisation of the world of the gods in terms of political and social relationships are characteristics which, if not epic in origin, derive their continuing impetus from epic. *Such uniformity as Greek religion possesses derives to a large extent from the picture of the Olympian and subsidiary gods in Hesiod and Homer.*<sup>53</sup>

The characteristics ascribed to the gods by Homer and Hesiod would also be influential at a later time, when the so-called Pre-Socratic philosophers began the process of rationalising Greek religion, by selecting and adapting certain attributes of the gods, and then creating new cosmological schemes of their own, as we shall see in Chapter 2.

The *Theogony* is notable for the way in which it seeks to delineate the precise nature of the relationships between these beings, as well as presenting their various attributes and capabilities. Homer had already provided a vivid portrayal of several traits of the gods that were later held to be morally questionable (e.g. deception, fornication, adultery, incest, gluttony, and most especially anger), some of which are also evident in Hesiod's presentation. As we will see in Chapter 9, many of these types of moral failure were subsequently subjected to intense scrutiny within the Christian monastic schema found in the Eight Generic Thoughts of Evagrius Ponticus, and the Eight Principal Vices of John Cassian.

Greek gods were not eternal (i.e. beginningless) beings.<sup>54</sup> Immortality was a chief characteristic that distinguished them from humans, although many of the gods were depicted in a highly anthropomorphic (human-like) manner, both in form and behaviour. In fact, many of the Greek gods or demigods are said to have come into existence from types of sexual unions that would have been condemned in Archaic Greek societies. Thus, Hesiod's systematic presentation of the origins of the various gods, and of the subsequent relationships between them, can do little to disguise the problematic moral elements inherent in traditional Greek mythology. Hesiod presents the gods arising from: (1) unknown origin; (2) generation from a single divine parent; (3) mother-son unions; (4) generation from the genitals or blood of Ouranos (5) unions between siblings, or other close relatives; (6) various unions with Zeus; and (7) unions between gods (or goddesses) and mortals.

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<sup>53</sup> Murray, *Early Greece*, p. 66, emphasis added.

<sup>54</sup> For a nuanced discussion of the ontological status of *χάος* (*khaós*), the primal god of Hesiod's *Theogony*, see: John Bussanich, 'A Theoretical Interpretation of Hesiod's Chaos', *Classical Philology*, Volume 78, Number 3 (July 1983), pp. 212-219.



**(1) Gods of the first generation were created from an unknown origin.**

The first gods were *Khaos*,<sup>55</sup> Earth (*Gaia*),<sup>56</sup> Pit (*Tartaros*)<sup>57</sup> and Love (*Eros*).<sup>58</sup>

**(2) Gods of the second generation came into existence from a single divine parent.**

*Khaos* became the mother of Darkness (*Erebos*) and Night (*Nyx*). In turn, *Gaia* became the mother of Sea (*Pontos*), the Mountains (The *Ourea*), and Sky (*Ouranos*).

**(3) Most gods of the third generation came from union of a mother with her son.**

*Gaia* mated with her son *Pontos*, to produce five aquatic offspring (*Nereus*, *Thaumas*, *Phorkys*, *Keto* and *Eurybia*). *Gaia* also mated with her son *Ouranos* to produce the three single-eyed *Kyklopes* (*Brontes*, *Steropes* and *Arges*); the three Hundred-Handers (*Kottos*, *Gyges* and *Briareos*); and the twelve Titans (*Okeanos* and *Tethys*; *Hyperion* and *Theia*; *Koios* and *Phoibe*; *Kreios*; *Iapetos*; *Themis*; *Mnemosyne*; and finally, *Kronos* and *Rhea*, who would later become the parents of *Zeus*).

**(4) Some gods of the third generation were born after the castration of Ouranos.**

The youngest Titan, *Kronos*, castrated his father *Ouranos*, at the behest of his mother, *Gaia*. The castrated genitals of *Ouranos* fell into the sea and *Aphrodite* was born. When the blood from the castration of *Ouranos* fell on *Gaia*, it gave rise to three Furies (The *Erinyes*), who were goddesses of retribution; one hundred Giants (The *Gigantes*); and various mountain nymphs (*Melii*).

**(5) Most gods of the fourth and fifth generation came from unions between relatives.**

Unions between siblings, or other close relatives, became increasingly common. Hesiod outlines three main lines of descent: the descendants of *Gaia* through *Ouranos*;<sup>59</sup> the descendants of *Gaia* through *Pontos*;<sup>60</sup> and the descendants of *Khaos*.

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<sup>55</sup> The Greek term *χάος* (*khaós*) means “emptiness; vast void; chasm; abyss”. It is derived from the Greek verb *χάσκω* (*kháskō*), meaning “to yawn; to gape”. See: Robert S. P. Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, Leiden Indo-European Etymological Dictionary Series, Volume 10 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 2009), pp. 1614 and 1616-1617.

<sup>56</sup> The Greek term *γαῖα* (*gaía*) is a poetic term derived from *Γῆ* (*Gē*) meaning “earth; land; country”. See: Beekes, *Etymological Dictionary of Greek*, pp. 269-270.

<sup>57</sup> The Greek term *Τάρταρος* (*Tártaros*) was “a dark abyss, as deep below Hades as earth below heaven, the prison of the Titans”. See: Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon, Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott’s Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1889), p. 793.

<sup>58</sup> The Greek term *ἔρως* (*érōs*) means “love; love of a thing; desire for it”. See: Liddell & Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, p. 317.

Hesiod's ingenuity, as well as his sober assessment of the darker side of human existence, is most clearly on display in his description of the descendants of *Khaos*. Here we can see one possible source for a distinctive element of the Christian monastic worldview of Evagrius and Cassian, in which demons were often directly associated with evil thoughts. *Khaos* gave birth to *Erebos*, the god of darkness, and *Nyx*, the goddess of night. The outcome of the union of *Erebos* with his sister *Nyx* was positive: it gave rise to *Aither*, the god of light and his sister-wife *Hemera*, the goddess of day. However, *Nyx* also produced from herself a line that consisted primarily of personified forms of various evils that afflict human beings. The offspring of *Nyx* included: *Moros*, a male δαίμων (daímōn, or spirit) of doom; *Ker*, and the *Keres*, female daímōnes of violent death; *Thanatos*, a male daímōn of non-violent death, and his twin brother *Hypnos*, the daímōn of sleep; the *Oneiroi*, dark-winged male daímōnes of dreams; *Momos*, a male daímōn of mockery; *Oizys*, a female daímōn of misery; the *Hesperides*, goddesses of the light of sunset; the *Moirai* or Fates, named *Klotho* (Spinner) who spun the thread of life, *Lakhsis* (Apportioner of Lots) who measured the thread of life, and *Atropos* (She who cannot be turned) who cut the thread of life; *Nemesis*, a goddess of retribution against evil deeds; *Apate*, a female daímōn of deceit; *Philotes*, a female daímōn of friendship; *Geras*, a male daímōn of old age; and *Eris*, a female daímōn of strife, discord, contention and rivalry.

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<sup>59</sup> *Okeanos* and his sister *Tethys* produced the Rivers (The *Potamoi*), and the *Okeanids* (forty-one of whom are named by Hesiod). *Hyperion* and his sister *Theia* produced: *Helios*, the sun god (who, in union with *Perseis*, produced the sorceress *Kirke*); *Selene*, the moon goddess; and Dawn (*Eos*). *Kreios* and his half-sister *Eurybia* produced three offspring: *Astraios*, who, in union with *Eos*, produced the Winds and the Stars; *Pallas*, who, in union with *Styx*, produced the attendants of Zeus known as *Nike* (Victory), *Zelos* (Rivalry), *Kratos* (Strength) and *Bia* (Force); and *Perses*, who, in union with *Asteria*, produced the sorceress *Hekate*. *Koios* and his sister *Phoibe* produced *Asteria* and *Leto*; *Iapetos* and his sister *Klymene* produced *Atlas*, *Menoitos*, *Prometheus* and *Epimetheus*; and finally, *Kronos* and his sister *Rheia* produced *Hestia*, *Demeter*, *Hera* (the mother of *Hephaistos*), *Haides*, *Poseidon* (the father of *Triton* and *Kymopoleia*) and, most importantly, *Zeus* (the future Lord of Olympus and King of the Gods).

<sup>60</sup> *Nereus* (a son of *Pontos* and *Gaia*) and *Doris* (a daughter of *Okeanos* and *Tethys*) produced the three thousand sea-nymphs known as *Nereids*. The union of *Thaumas* (a son of *Pontos* and *Gaia*) and *Elektra* (whose parents are not named in the *Theogony*) produced Rainbow (*Iris*) and the two Harpies, *Aello* and *Okypete*, who served *Zeus* by suddenly snatching people and things away from the earth. The union between the seagods *Phorkys* and his sister *Keto* gave rise to several generations of monsters. The two female *Graiai* (*Pemphredo* and *Enyo*) were grey from birth and shared between themselves a single detachable eye and tooth; the three female *Gorgones* (*Sthenno*, *Euryale* and *Medousa*) were winged sea-demons; *Ekhidna* was a she-dragon; and *Ladon* was a hundred-headed male dragon who guarded golden apples. *Medousa* then had two sons: the winged horse *Pegasos*, and the giant *Khrysaor*, both of whom emerged from her head, when it was severed by the hero *Perseus*. The subsequent union of *Khrysaor* (a name which means Golden Sword), with *Kallirhoe* (a female sea-nymph descended from *Okeanos* and *Tethys*), produced the triple-headed giant named *Geryones*. *Ekhidna* and the male storm-giant *Typhoeus* (the only offspring of *Tartaros* and *Gaia*) created terrifying monsters: *Orthos*, a two-headed, serpent-tailed herd dog of the giant *Geryones*; *Khimaira*, a composite creature with features of a lion, goat and serpent; *Kerberos*, a fifty-headed dog who guarded the gates of the Underworld; and the *Hydra* of Lerna, a gigantic many-headed water-serpent. From this fifth generation of gods within the line of *Pontos*, the union of *Orthos* and his sister *Khimaira* produced: the *Sphinx*; and the Nemean Lion, whose hide was impervious to weapons.

*Eris* (Strife) then produced, from herself, a fourth generation of gods in the line of *Khaos*, which consisted of yet another group of personified evils: *Ponos*, a male daímōn of hard labour; *Lethe*, a female daímōn of forgetfulness; *Limos*, a male daímōn of hunger; the *Algea*, daímones of pain and suffering; the *Hysminai*, daímones of non-martial fighting; the *Makkhai*, daímones of martial combat; the *Phonoi*, daímones of murder; the *Androktasiai*, female daímones of battlefield slaughter; the *Neikea*, daímones of quarrels, feuds and grievances; the *Pseudologoi*, male daímones of lies and falsehoods; the *Amphilogiai*, female daímones of disputes, debate and contention; *Ate*, the female daímōn of delusion, infatuation, blind folly, rash action and reckless impulse, who led men down the path to ruin; and *Horkos*, the male daímōn of oaths, who inflicted punishment upon perjurers.

## **(6) The incestuous and adulterous unions of Zeus**

In the *Theogony*, *Zeus* produced offspring with eight goddesses<sup>61</sup> and two human women.<sup>62</sup> It is partly through these unions<sup>63</sup> that the supremacy of *Zeus* over the other gods is asserted. Hesiod also implicitly presents *Zeus* as the founder of civilization, and as the guarantor of divine justice, especially through his unions with *Metis* and *Themis*.

## **(7) Unions between gods and mortals**

In the final section of the poem, Hesiod makes it clear that the essence of divinity is immortality, and that immortality can be granted to human beings.

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<sup>61</sup> *Hera*, *Metis*, *Themis*, *Eurynome*, *Demeter*, *Mnemosyne*, *Leto*, and *Maia*.

<sup>62</sup> *Semele* and *Alkmena*.

<sup>63</sup> The union of *Zeus* and his sister-wife *Hera*, Queen of the Olympian Gods, produced: *Ares*, the god of war, who was the father, with *Aphrodite*, of *Phobos* (Fear), *Deimos* (Terror) and *Harmonia* (Harmony); *Eileithyia*, the goddess of childbirth; and *Hebe*, goddess of youth. *Metis*, goddess of good counsel, advice, planning, craftiness and wisdom, became mother to *Athena*, who sprang full-grown from the head of *Zeus*, after he had swallowed *Metis*. *Zeus* did this in order to prevent the fulfilment of a prophecy that *Metis* would give birth to a son who would usurp the throne of *Zeus*. *Themis*, the goddess of divine law and order, became mother to the three goddesses of the Seasons (The *Horai*): *Eunomia*, the goddess of good order and lawful conduct; *Dike*, the goddess of justice and fair judgements; and *Eirene*, the goddess of peace. *Eurynome*, the goddess of water-meadows and pasturelands, became mother to the three Graces (The *Kharites*), the attendants to *Aphrodite* and *Hera*: *Aglaia*, *Euphrosyne*, and *Thalia*. *Demeter*, the goddess of agriculture, became mother to *Persephone*, who became wife of *Haidēs* and thus Queen of the Underworld. *Mnemosyne*, the goddess of memory and language, became mother to the nine Muses (The *Mousai*): *Kleio*, *Euterpe*, *Thaleia*, *Melpomene*, *Terpsikhore*, *Erato*, *Polyhymnia*, *Ourania* and *Kalliope*. *Leto*, goddess of motherhood produced the twin gods *Apollon* and *Artemis*.

Some of these divine-mortal unions gave rise to offspring who inherited, or subsequently acquired, immortality.<sup>64</sup> Some unions between gods and mortals produced both mortal and immortal children,<sup>65</sup> whilst others produced only mortal children, including many heroes of Greek mythology.<sup>66</sup>

### The *Theogony* and its Understanding of Divinity

The *Theogony* not only presents an intelligent and creative synthesis of various oral traditions from throughout the wider world of Archaic Greece, but also provides a stunning portrait of a world thoroughly imbued with divinity. Hesiod's concept of divinity was both broad and flexible; broad, in that many facets of the tangible and intangible world could be considered divine, and flexible, in that the boundaries between gods, humans and even animals were permeable.

Mortals could become divine, whilst gods could have human or animal characteristics, become ill<sup>67</sup>, be wounded (the castration of *Ouranos*), and even, on exceptionally rare occasions, be killed (the beheading of *Medousa*). From Hesiod's perspective then, the essential characteristic of divinity was not mere strength, but immortality itself, since, apart from *Medousa*, all of the other entities identified by Hesiod as gods were inherently immortal. Hesiod's depiction of the gods as inherently immortal might seem to set them irrevocably apart from all other beings. However, Hesiod showed that, on rare occasions, immortality could be given as a gift to those mortal beings whom the gods favoured, such as Ariadne and Hercules. As we will see in the following excerpts, those mortals granted immortality could then be referred to as 'ageless'.

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<sup>64</sup> Zeus's union with the Theban princess *Semele* led to the birth of *Dionysos*, the god of wine. After *Semele*'s death, *Dionysos* retrieved her from the Underworld, and brought her to *Olympos*, where she became the goddess *Thyone*. The goddess *Demeter*'s union with the hero *Iasion* in Crete led to the birth of *Ploutos*, god of wealth.

<sup>65</sup> The goddess *Harmonia*'s union with King *Kadmos*, the hero and founder of *Thebes*, produced: *Ino*, a mortal daughter who later became the sea-goddess *Leukothea*; the mortal daughters *Semele* (mentioned above), *Agaue*, and *Autonoe*; and the mortal son, *Polydoros*.

<sup>66</sup> The union of the goddess *Eos*, with the mortal *Tithonos*, produced the mortal sons *Memnon* and *Emathion*, but the union of *Eos*, with the mortal *Kephalos*, produced a son *Phaethon*, "equal to the gods". The union of *Psmathe*, a Nereid, with the mortal *Aiakos*, led to the birth of the mortal child *Phokos*. The union of the Okeanid nymph *Eidyia*, with the magician-king *Aeetes* of *Kolkhis*, produced the mortal witch *Medea*, who, in turn, married the mortal hero *Iason*, and produced a mortal son called *Medeus*. The union of *Thetis*, a Nereid, with the mortal man *Peleus*, led to the birth of the mortal child *Akhilleus* (Achilles), the hero of Homer's *Iliad*. *Odysseus*, the hero of Homer's *Odyssey*, had two unions with goddesses: *Kirke*, goddess and sorceress of the mythical island of *Aiaia*, produced the mortal sons *Agrios*, *Latinos* and *Telegonos*; *Kalypso*, goddess nymph of the mythical island of *Ogygia*, produced the mortal sons *Nausithoos* and *Nausinoos*.

<sup>67</sup> See *Theogony* 780-806 for a vivid description of the illness that could be inflicted upon a god for lying to the other gods.

References to immortality as the defining characteristic of divinity abound: “the immortals” (οἱ ἀθάνατοι);<sup>68</sup> “the immortal gods” (οἱ ἀθάνατοι θεοί);<sup>69</sup> “the immortals who always exist” (τ’ ἀθανάτων ἱερὸν γένος αἰὲν ἔόντων);<sup>70</sup> “the blessed ones who always exist” (μακάρων γένος αἰὲν ἐβόντων);<sup>71</sup> “Zeus, most renowned, greatest of the eternally living gods” (Ζεῦ κύδιστε μέγιστε θεῶν αἰεργενετάων);<sup>72</sup> “the gods that always exist” (θεῶν αἰὲν ἔόντων).<sup>73</sup> Furthermore, we are told that when Dionysus married Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, “[Zeus] made her immortal and ageless” (ἀθάνατον καὶ ἀγήρων) and “Herakles... after he had completed his painful tasks, now dwells among the immortals, unharmed and ageless...” (ἀπήμαντος καὶ ἀγήραος).<sup>74</sup>

### **Zeus as Guarantor of Divine Justice in the *Theogony***

The *Theogony* provides an explanation for the origin and prevalence of evil in the world, and then shows how some aspects of that evil, such as injustice, might be overcome. Hesiod’s *Theogony* achieves this goal by developing, and yet apparently subverting, a basic paradigm that can be found in the epic poetry of Homer. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* feature mortal heroes, such as Achilles or Odysseus, who exemplify the aristocratic warrior ethos of Archaic Greece. Achilles and Odysseus strive to demonstrate that they are worthy to be one of the *áristoi*, the ‘best men’, both in cultural pursuits and in battles (in which they are often assisted or hindered by divine intervention). The *Theogony*, by contrast, is primarily concerned with an immortal hero, Zeus, who demonstrates his military prowess by marshalling a divine army, and eventually overthrowing the divine tyranny of his father Kronos. In this battle against the Titans, known as the *Titanomachy*, Zeus is the leader of the Olympian gods. Zeus is assisted by the Kyklopes (who provide Zeus with his characteristic weapons of thunder, thunderbolts and lightning), and also by the mighty Hundred-Handers. In Homer’s *Iliad*, the Greek forces, under the command of Agamemnon, eventually triumphed over the army of Troy; in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, the Olympians gods and their divine allies, under the command of Zeus, secure the defeat of the Titans.

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<sup>68</sup> *Theogony* 43, 57, 67.

<sup>69</sup> *Theogony* 120.

<sup>70</sup> *Theogony* 21, 105.

<sup>71</sup> *Theogony* 33.

<sup>72</sup> *Theogony* 548 and 993.

<sup>73</sup> *Theogony* 801.

<sup>74</sup> *Theogony* 947-949; 950-955.

Glenn Most notes that:

In broad terms, the Hesiodic Titanomachy is obviously modelled upon the Trojan War familiar from the Homeric tradition: ten years of martial deadlock are finally broken by the arrival of a few powerful new allies (like Neoptolemus and Philoctetes) who alone can bring a decisive victory.<sup>75</sup>

After the victory of the Olympians over the Titans, Hesiod provides one more military encounter for Zeus, but this time, it is an episode of single combat, in which Zeus must do battle with Typhoeus, the last monstrous child of Gaia (Earth). Again, one can see strong parallels between this incident and the model provided by Homer in the clash between Achilles and Hector, found in Book 22 of the *Iliad*.

The victory of Zeus over the Titans, and then over Typhoeus, establishes that Zeus is both an effective military leader, and also a great hero. It is on the basis of complete martial supremacy that Zeus is able to establish himself, not as a tyrant (in the mould of his father Kronos, or grandfather Ouranos), but rather as a benign, just, and fair-minded ruler, who seeks to reward good, and punish evil, both in the divine and the human realms.

The nature of the new regime instituted by Zeus in the *Theogony* is indicated, symbolically, through the union of Zeus with the goddess Themis (who represents divine law and order). This union produces the divine children Eunomia (who represents good order and lawful conduct), Dike (who represents fair judgements and the rights established by custom), and Eirene (who represents peace between men and gods).<sup>76</sup>

An analysis of the language used by Hesiod bears out the points made above, and also demonstrates the centrality of Zeus to the narrative in the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*. Hesiod emphasises the divine descent and power of Zeus by depicting him as “Zeus, the lord, son of Kronos” (Διὸς Κρονίωνι ἄνακτι)<sup>77</sup>, the “mighty son of Kronos” (ἐρισθενέος Κρονίωνος)<sup>78</sup>, “very strong son of Kronos” (ὑπερμενέει Κρονίωνι)<sup>79</sup>, “strong-spirited” (καρτεροθύω)<sup>80</sup> and “high-throned son of Kronos” (Κρονίδης ὑψίζυγος)<sup>81</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> Most, *Hesiod*, p. xxxiii

<sup>76</sup> See: Most, *Hesiod*, pp. xxxiii-xxxiv.

<sup>77</sup> *Works and Days* 69.

<sup>78</sup> *Theogony* 4, 587; *Works and Days* 122.

<sup>79</sup> *Theogony* 534.

<sup>80</sup> *Theogony* 476.

<sup>81</sup> *Works and Days* 18.

## The Titles and Attributes of Zeus in the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*

Zeus is said to be “great” (μεγάλος);<sup>82</sup> “the protector of immortals” (ἀλκτὴρ ἀθανάτοισιν);<sup>83</sup> and “the holder of the aegis” [i.e. the shield] (Δία τ’ αἰγίοχον).<sup>84</sup> Zeus is “the cloud-gatherer” (νεφεληγερέτα),<sup>85</sup> who “lightens Olympos” (Ὀλύμπιος ἀστεροπητῆς)<sup>86</sup> and “who delights in the thunderbolt” (Δία τερπικέραυνον).<sup>87</sup> Zeus is “high-thundering”, (ὕψιβρεμέτην),<sup>88</sup> “loud-thundering” (ἐριγδούποιον),<sup>89</sup> and “great-thundering” (βαρυκτύπῳ).<sup>90</sup>

Zeus also possesses great knowledge and insight. “The counsellor Zeus” (μητίετα Ζεὺς)<sup>91</sup> is “far-seeing” (εὐρύοπα),<sup>92</sup> and it is not possible to deceive him.<sup>93</sup> Zeus uses his power, knowledge and insight in the exercise of his paternal care for the cosmos. Zeus is known as the father (Διὸς πατρί),<sup>94</sup> of gods and men.<sup>95</sup>

More powerful than any other god, Zeus is described as “the Olympian” (Ζηνὸς Ὀλυμπίου)<sup>96</sup> who “dwells in the loftiest mansions” (ὑπέρτατα δώματα ναίει).<sup>97</sup> Zeus “rules on high” (ὑψι μέδοντος)<sup>98</sup> as “king of the gods” (θεῶν βασιλεὺς)<sup>99</sup> and “king in the sky” (οὐρανῷ ἐμβασιλεύει).<sup>100</sup> Zeus rules over mortals and immortals<sup>101</sup> as the king of gods and men.<sup>102</sup>

Zeus demonstrates his care for the gods by being the bestower of various honours and blessings. In particular, Zeus “honoured Styx and gave her exceptional gifts”, he “honoured Hekate above all others”, and he “made [Hekate] nurse of all the children”.<sup>103</sup> Zeus also watches over the lives of humans, especially the lives of peasant farmers such as Hesiod, in his guise as “Zeus of the land” (Διὸς χθονίῳ).

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<sup>82</sup> *Theogony* 29, 76, 81, 465, 708, 952, 1002; *Works and Days* 4, 122.

<sup>83</sup> *Theogony* 657-660.

<sup>84</sup> *Theogony* 11, 13, 24, 52, 735, 918, 966, 1022; *Works and Days* 99, 483, 661.

<sup>85</sup> *Theogony* 558, 730, 944; *Works and Days* 53, 59.

<sup>86</sup> *Theogony* 391.

<sup>87</sup> *Works and Days* 52.

<sup>88</sup> *Theogony* 568, 601; *Works and Days* 8.

<sup>89</sup> *Theogony* 41, 815.

<sup>90</sup> *Theogony* 388; *Works and Days* 79.

<sup>91</sup> *Theogony* 56, 286, 457, 520, 904, 914; *Works and Days* 51, 104, 273, 769.

<sup>92</sup> *Theogony* 514, 884; *Works and Days* 229, 239, 281.

<sup>93</sup> *Theogony* 613, 656; *Works and Days* 105.

<sup>94</sup> *Theogony* 580, 587; *Works and Days* 84, 142, 168.

<sup>95</sup> *Theogony* 47, 457, 468, 542, 643, 838; *Works and Days* 59.

<sup>96</sup> *Works and Days* 87, 245, 474.

<sup>97</sup> *Works and Days* 8.

<sup>98</sup> *Theogony* 529.

<sup>99</sup> *Theogony* 886.

<sup>100</sup> *Theogony* 71.

<sup>101</sup> *Theogony* 506; *Works and Days* 668.

<sup>102</sup> *Theogony* 923.

<sup>103</sup> *Theogony* 399; 411-412; 450.

## Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic

Despite the apparent structural and thematic differences that have been noted between the Homeric and Hesiodic works in the previous section, with regard to the role of Zeus as guarantor of divine justice, William Allan believes that it would be a mistake to argue that there was significant or substantial *moral progress* within the Ancient Greek epic tradition, represented by the Homeric and Hesiodic works, as well as the so-called Homeric Hymns and the works of the Epic Cycle.<sup>104</sup> Allan notes that:

It was once popular to trace in early Greek thought a fundamental change in beliefs about the nature and values of the gods. The resulting cultural history detected a moral ‘progress’ in the evolution of early Greek literature itself, from the amoral powers of the *Iliad*, through the gods of the *Odyssey* with their concern for righteous conduct, to the moral certainties of the Hesiodic Zeus. This model was exploded many years ago by Hugh Lloyd-Jones in *The Justice of Zeus*. Nevertheless, it remains a commonplace of Homeric scholarship that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* differ in their presentation of the gods, especially with regard to divine justice... the two poems share the same moral and theological universe and, furthermore... the patterns of human and divine justice which they deploy are also to be found throughout the wider corpus of early Greek hexameter poetry.<sup>105</sup>

Allan concedes that the gods in the *Iliad* do have human favourites and are strongly motivated to maintain their honour, but he maintains that the gods are not ‘amoral’, since, in his view, “the action of the *Iliad* in fact embodies a system of social norms and punishments that is not different from that of the *Odyssey*”. He also argues that each of the Homeric epics seeks to explore the complexities and problems inherent in a ‘simple’ account of divine justice, according to which human wrongs will be punished more or less immediately by the gods.<sup>106</sup> Allan urges that “one should resist attempts to interpret the gods of Hesiod as if they were different from those of Homer” and he also maintains that “the divine world that Hesiod presents is no more ‘developed’ than that of Homer, nor is the rule of Zeus portrayed by Hesiod any more ‘enlightened’”.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See: William Allan, ‘Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic’, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume 126 (2006), pp. 1-35.

<sup>105</sup> Allan, ‘Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic’, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> Allan, ‘Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic’, p. 1. For an extensive argument in favour of the view that there are significant differences between the Homeric epics in their presentation of the relationships between gods and mortals, see: Wolfgang Kullmann, ‘Gods and Men in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*’, *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Volume 89 (1985), pp. 1-23.

<sup>107</sup> See the discussion in: Allan, ‘Divine Justice and Cosmic Order in Early Greek Epic’, pp. 27-28.



## The Origin and Problem of Evil in *Works and Days*

Hesiod's *Works and Days* reinforces the understanding of Zeus that seems to have emerged in the *Theogony*, by portraying Zeus as a god who rewards those who work hard, and punishes those who defraud others. The poem is nominally addressed to Perses, the brother of Hesiod, who is accused of having taken more than his fair share of the family allotment after the death of their father. The poem presents the reader with a vast range of practical suggestions for success in the areas of agriculture and sailing, as well as advice on economic, social and religious matters.

Just like the *Theogony*, the *Works and Days* is deeply concerned with the problem of the existence of evil in the world, and how the question of how evil might be overcome. However, the *Works and Days* appears to be more pessimistic about the prospects of evil being decisively overthrown than the *Theogony*, and it provides a series of markedly different explanations for the origin of evil, that clarify and underpin the greater degree of pessimism.

In the *Works and Days*, Hesiod begins his account of the origin of the evils that afflict human beings by making a slight modification to his earlier comments about Eris (Strife). In the *Theogony*, Hesiod had portrayed Eris as one of the baleful children of Nyx (Night), and as the mother of a host of personified evils (see above). However, in the *Works and Days*, Hesiod has apparently come to a different view about Eris, which he proceeds to outline in lines 11-24:

So there was not just one birth of Strifes after all, but upon the earth there are two Strifes.

One of these a man would praise once he got to know it, but the other is blameworthy; and they have thoroughly opposed spirits. For the one fosters evil war and conflict – cruel one, no mortal loves that one, but it is by necessity that they honour the oppressive Strife, by the plans of the immortals.

But the other one, gloomy Nyx bore first; and Kronos' high-throned son, who dwells in the aether, set it in the roots of the earth, and it is much better for men. It rouses even the helpless man to work. For a man who is not working but who looks at some other man, a rich one who is hastening to plow and plant and set his house in order, he envies him, one neighbour envying his neighbour who is hastening towards wealth: and this Eris is good for mortals.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> Most, *Hesiod*, pp. 87-89 (English translation slightly modified).

This passage is remarkable for three reasons: firstly, for its more nuanced view that strife is not always negative or destructive, and can in fact be a positive, competitive impulse; secondly, because in describing the two forms of strife as having “thoroughly opposed spirits”, it prefigures some of the later Christian monastic discussion found in the works of Evagrius and Cassian, which speak of the competitive and mutually antagonistic nature of the demons, in the course of their attempts to afflict human beings; and thirdly, the emphasis upon the agonistic form of strife, as a means by which even the indolent can be stirred towards work and greater prosperity, which prepares us for Hesiod’s later ‘revaluation of all values’ in *Works and Days* 286-292 (quoted below). Hesiod attacks a central pillar of the aristocratic warrior ethos, when he suggests that ἀρετή / *areté* (which can be variously defined as ‘goodness’, ‘excellence’ or ‘virtue’), is available for all men, regardless of status:

To you, Perses, you great fool, I will speak my fine thoughts: Misery is there to be grabbed in abundance, easily, for smooth is the road, and she lives very nearby; but in front of Arete the immortal gods have set sweat, and the path to her is long and steep, and rough at first – yet when one arrives at the top, then it becomes easy, difficult though it still is.<sup>109</sup>

In *Works and Days* 42-105, Hesiod provides one explanation for the origin of evil, insofar as it affects human beings. He suggests that human beings have had “the means of life” concealed from them, by Zeus and the gods, as a punishment for the earlier intervention of the god Prometheus, on behalf of humankind. Hesiod recounts how Prometheus circumvented the desire of Zeus to withhold the benefits of fire from human beings. Zeus, in his anger, devised a unique form of punishment. Calling upon the talents of various other gods, Zeus instructed them to fashion a woman, whom Hermes named as Pandora (All-Gift) since she had received various attributes from her divine creators. The woman was sent to Epimetheus, the brother of Prometheus, as a gift. However, Pandora then removed the lid of a storage jar in which many evils had been stored. The evils are not named, but it is not unreasonable to suggest that these evils may overlap, perhaps quite significantly, with the evils listed earlier, in the *Theogony*, as the descendants of Nyx (see above). The evils mentioned here, in the *Works and Days*, were released into the world, by Pandora, and they then continue to afflict human beings, as Zeus had intended. The punishment inflicted by Zeus serves to underscore his role as divine law-giver, but also tends to call his benevolence into question somewhat, since the punishment seems grossly out of proportion to the crime.

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<sup>109</sup> Most, *Hesiod*, p. 111 (English translation slightly modified).

## The Creation of Humanity and the Origin of Evil

In *Works and Days* 106-201, Hesiod outlines another, more extensive account of the origin of evil. He offers to provide a story of “how the gods and mortal beings came about from the same origin” (*Works and Days* 106). This story describes five distinct races of human beings: (1) the golden race; (2) the silver race; (3) the bronze race; (4) the race of demigods and heroes; and (5) the current iron race.<sup>110</sup>

The Olympian gods created the golden race at a time when Kronos was still the king. This race had all the good things of life and did not suffer from the evils of toil, distress or old age. However, for reasons that Hesiod does not reveal, the earth covered up the golden race, and they became guardian spirits of the later races of mortal human beings. The Olympian gods then created the silver race, which Hesiod describes as “much worse, of silver, like the golden one neither in body nor in mind.” These men had a prolonged childhood of one hundred years each, but then died soon after, due to their acts of “wicked outrage” against each other, and due to their unwillingness to honour the gods or offer sacrifice to them. The earth covered over this race as well, and surprisingly, they are called “blessed mortals under the earth” and they have the same honour attributed to them as the golden race.

Zeus created a third race, the bronze race of “speech-endowed human beings”. The bronze race “cared only for the painful works of Ares and for acts of violence”. They had houses and weapons made of bronze, and were apparently so destructive towards each other that the entire bronze race wiped itself out. Zeus then created a fourth race, whom Hesiod describes as “more just and superior, the godly race of men-heroes, who are called demigods, the generation before our own upon the boundless earth.” These were the generation that participated in the Trojan War, and despite the fact that they were superior to some of the previous races, many were destroyed by “evil war and dread battle”. Others were given homes on the Islands of the Blessed “at the limits of the earth”. In describing the fifth race of iron, Hesiod notes that: “for these people too, good things will be mingled with evil. But Zeus will destroy this race of speech-endowed human beings too, when at their birth the hair on their temples will be quite grey” (*Works and Days* 180-181).<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> For a discussion of the moral significance of the five distinct races, in terms of the concept of ὕβρις / *hybris*, see: Nicholas R. E. Fisher, *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips, 1992), pp. 188-193.

<sup>111</sup> Most, *Hesiod*, p. 103.

The postlude to Hesiod's depressing overview of human history is the brief fable of the hawk and the nightingale (*Works and Days* 202-212):

This is how the hawk addressed the colourful-necked nightingale, carrying her high up among the clouds, grasping her with its claws, while she wept piteously, pierced by the curved claws; he said to her forcefully, "Silly bird, why are you crying out? One far superior to you is holding you. You are going wherever I shall carry you, even if you are a singer; I shall make you my dinner if I wish, or I shall let you go. Stupid he who would wish to contend against those stronger than he is: for he is deprived of the victory, and suffers pains in addition to his humiliations."<sup>112</sup>

The moral of the fable might appear to be that each human being is like the nightingale, which is easily caught in the claws of the hawk, which might be thought to represent Zeus, as king of the immortal gods, or perhaps the unjust mortal kings. Humans are at the mercy of the gods and the kings, so the best course in life, appears to be to work hard, honour the gods, obey the kings, and to be 'a small target', i.e. not to attract undue attention from the gods, or the kings, through *hubristic* behaviour.<sup>113</sup> However, Nicholas R. E. Fisher has argued against the interpretation just provided, stating that:

The more usual interpretation is correct; the Hawk is a King, cynically, and amusedly, abusing his power, and toying with his victim ("I may have you for dinner, or I may let you go", 209), and hence a clear example of *hybris*. He presumes that no authority can touch him. The Nightingale is an innocent and pitiable victim, and the point of choosing the nightingale, the 'singer' (208) should be to suggest a connection with a poet like Hesiod, and also to suggest that the poet had some power, through the power of publicity, to counter, in the longer term, a King's power.<sup>114</sup>

As we shall see in Chapter 2, Hesiod's poetic reflections upon the origin, nature and role of the gods, and his ruminations on the nature of evil, provided a foundation from which the Pre-Socratic thinkers were able to pursue their own cosmological investigations into the origin, nature and purpose of the universe, and also, to a somewhat lesser extent, to pursue an exploration of various ethical matters, such as the origin of cosmic and human evil.

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<sup>112</sup> Most, *Hesiod* p. 105.

<sup>113</sup> N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris*, p. 195,

<sup>114</sup> N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris*, p. 194. Fisher suggests (p. 195) that, in the works of Hesiod, "*hybris* is used as the primary opposite of justice, and should therefore denote the settled intent to commit a variety of unjust acts, or such acts themselves..."

## Conclusion

In Chapter 1, we have seen that the modes of production, exchange and consumption of cultural products (such as forms of behaviour and discourse, as well as the ideas which underpin them) are always influenced by their political, social and cultural context. We have also observed that ethical discourse proceeds on the basis of a number of presuppositions that are considered axiomatic within a given society, or subculture. Making use of a methodology known as the sociology of knowledge, we have sought to provide what Joseph M. Bryant describes as a “sociological exegesis” of the moral codes and social philosophies in Archaic Greece, especially as these have been mediated through the preeminent works of Ancient Greek epic poetry attributed to Homer and Hesiod. In the course of this investigation, we have examined the contours of the aristocratic warrior ethos, exemplified by Achilles, in the *Iliad*, and Odysseus, in the *Odyssey*. We also noted the ways in which Hesiod subtly adapted and modified elements of the aristocratic warrior ethos, in the *Theogony*, and in the *Works and Days*. Against this backdrop, we considered the concepts of divine justice and cosmic order, as well as the nature and limits of divinity, and assessed how an understanding of Greek epic as *oral traditional poetry* might affect our views concerning the composition, authorship and date of these works, and thus our reading of the evidence which they contain.

In Chapter 2, a methodological approach known as worldview analysis will be used so as to consider the ways in which theological, cosmological and ethical ideas, such as those put forward by Hesiod, were modified, extended, or even rejected, by later thinkers. Chapter 2 will contrast Hesiod’s theological and cosmological worldview with the various worldviews that are articulated, either explicitly or implicitly, within the surviving fragments or testimonia of the disparate collection of thinkers that are conventionally known as the Pre-Socratic philosophers. Many of the Pre-Socratic thinkers are often thought of as being primarily concerned with what we might call cosmological issues. Through the use of worldview analysis, it will be possible to make some defensible, albeit limited inferences, about the ethical position(s) that can be derived from particular cosmological starting points.

Chapter 3 will include a careful examination of certain aspects of the thought of the Sophists. Chapter 4 will extend this analysis to the early interpreters of Socrates. Chapter 5 will consider later developments within the school of Plato, the school of Aristotle, and in the writings of other ancient thinkers associated with various Hellenistic and Roman philosophical schools.

## Chapter 2

### Ethical Thought in Late Archaic and Early Classical Greece: The Pre-Socratics

#### Introduction

The story of the rise of ancient Greek thought has been told many times before. The account of ancient Greek ethical thought given in Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5, however, will seek to counteract a tendency, present in some modern scholarship, which has tended to posit a rigid distinction between the ‘theological’ preoccupations of Homer and Hesiod, and what are now labelled as the ‘cosmological’, ‘scientific’, or ‘ethical’ speculations of several Pre-Socratic, Classical, Hellenistic and Roman thinkers.<sup>1</sup> Undoubtedly, in our own 21<sup>st</sup> century setting, it is useful to classify particular strands of ancient thought in terms of the currently accepted boundaries between academic disciplines, and in the light of the usual historical periodisation.<sup>2</sup> However, it is also important to avoid the methodological pitfalls that can arise from an uncritical, and sometimes quite anachronistic application of contemporary academic categories and terminology to ancient thought. With this in mind, we should also strongly reject the imposition of any kind of Post-Enlightenment framework that might seek to prioritise science at the expense of religion, or to elevate philosophy over theology.<sup>3</sup>

The modern terminology, which designates particular ancient Greek thinkers from the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods as ‘Pre-Socratic’, will be used in this chapter, and in those following. Nonetheless, the following words of caution from James Warren alert us to some of the difficulties which this terminology presents:

The term “Presocratic” is a modern classification not found in the ancient sources themselves, and although it is still commonly used, some scholars have argued that it ought to be allowed to fall into disuse.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For a particularly egregious example of this tendency, see: Anthony C. Grayling, *What is Good? The Search for the Best Way to Live* (London, England: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2003).

<sup>2</sup> The Classical Greek period is usually dated from either the Battle of Marathon (in 490 BCE), or from the Battle of Plataia (in 479 BCE), until the death of Alexander the Great in Babylon, on 10/11 June in 323 BCE.

<sup>3</sup> On the fundamentally ‘religious’ nature of Pre-Socratic thought, see: Gregory Vlastos, ‘Theology and Philosophy in Early Greek Thought’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 2, Number 7 (April 1952), pp. 97-123, esp. pp. 97-98.

<sup>4</sup> James Warren, *Presocratics*, Ancient Philosophy (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2007), p. 1; see also p. 185, n. 1. For a brief discussion of the origins and use of the term ‘Pre-Socratic’, see: Anthony Arthur Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 5-10.

The designation ‘Pre-Socratic philosophy’ is problematic, and four qualifications of that term need to be considered: (1) strictly speaking, there was no clearly delineated discipline of thought known as ‘philosophy’ until the time of Plato;<sup>5</sup> (2) the ‘Pre-Socratic philosophers’ expressed a range of disparate views and do *not* form a doctrinally consistent grouping; (3) the term ‘Pre-Socratic’ is historically inexact, since it is applied to some thinkers who were actually contemporaries of Socrates; (4) the designation ‘Pre-Socratic’ often tends to reinforce an assumption that the primary value in studying the works of these thinkers lies in establishing the extent to which they served as precursors to the work of Socrates himself. However, when using the term ‘Pre-Socratic’, it is better to understand it only in a loosely chronological sense, rather than as a term that implies a kind of teleological scheme of philosophical development that necessarily culminates in the work of Socrates and his immediate successors. However, we should also note that one of the major differences between Pre-Socratic thought, and that which followed, might have had as much to do with *where* such thinking took place, as it did with *what* was being discussed:

The crucial transition, *if there was one*, from “Presocratic” to “classical” philosophy is not one of a radical shift in the philosophical questions being addressed. Rather in many ways, the important shift is geographical: at the end of the period of these early Greek philosophers, Athens has become a dominant economic and cultural centre. Towards the end of the fifth century, philosophy becomes increasingly focused on Athens, and Athens becomes the place to make a philosophical reputation.<sup>6</sup>

Unfortunately, many of the writings of the Pre-Socratic thinkers have only been passed down to us in fragmentary form, and/or have only been preserved in excerpts, known as *testimonia*, in the works of later authors such as Aristotle, who sometimes appear to have quoted these earlier thinkers quite tendentiously. Furthermore, ethical reflection was generally *not* a central feature of Pre-Socratic thought. Despite the significant limitations of the extant evidence, the use of a methodology called worldview analysis will allow us make some defensible inferences about the metaphysical structure implicit in the works of each author, and then to arrive at some, *albeit quite limited*, conclusions about the ethical stance of the Pre-Socratic thinkers who will be briefly described in the next section.

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Ancient Philosophy: A New History of Western Philosophy, Volume 1* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. xiv. See also: Gerald A. Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London England & New York, NY, USA: Continuum, 2007), pp. 30 and 165-166.

<sup>6</sup> Warren, *Presocratics*, p. 181, emphasis added.

## Brief Biographical Sketches of the Major Pre-Socratic Thinkers<sup>7</sup>

**Thalēs** (620-546 BCE) was born in Mílētos, a Greek city on the western coast of the Anatolian peninsula (in modern-day Turkey). Thalēs is considered to be the founder of the Milesian ‘school’ of philosophy, which also included **Anaxímandros** (610-546 BCE) and **Anaximenēs** (585-528 BCE).

**Pherekydēs** (580-520 BCE) was born on the Greek island of Sūros. Pherekydēs wrote one of the first attested prose works in Greek literature, which contained a cosmogony similar to that found in Hesiod’s *Theogony*.

**Pythagóras** (570-495 BCE) was born on the Greek island of Sámos. He later established the Pythagorean ‘school’ of philosophy in the Greek colony of Metapóntion (southern Italy). Other Pre-Socratics who were influenced by the teaching of Pythagóras include **Alkmaíōn** (510-450 BCE) and **Philólaos** (470-385 BCE), both born in Krótōn, a Greek colony in southern Italy; and **Arkhýtas** (428-347 BCE), born in Táras (southern Italy).

**Xenophanēs** (570-478 BCE) was born in Kolophōn (modern-day Turkey) but he travelled widely throughout his life. Xenophanēs is notable for his criticisms of the anthropomorphic depictions of the Greek gods in the works of Homer and Hesiod.

**Herákleitos** (535-475 BCE) was born in Éphesos on the west coast of modern-day Turkey.

**Parmenídēs** (510-450 BCE) was born in Eléa, a Greek colony on the west coast of southern Italy. Parmenídēs was the founder of the Eleatic ‘school’ of philosophy, which also included **Mélissos of Sámos** (500-440 BCE) and **Zēnōn of Eléa** (490-430 BCE).

**Anaxagóras** (500-428 BCE) was born in Klazomenaí, a Greek city on the western coast of Anatolia (modern-day Turkey). **Empedoklēs** (492-432 BCE) was born in Akragas, a Greek town on the southern coast of modern-day Sicily. Anaxagóras and Empedoklēs are both described as pluralists, because of their opposition to the monistic tendencies of the Eleatic ‘school’ of Parmenídēs.

**Leúkippos** (475-425 BCE) and his student **Dēmókritos** (460-370 BCE) were born in Abdēra, a city-state in northern Greece. They were the founders of the Atomist ‘school’.

**Diogénēs of Apollōnía** (460-400 BCE) was born in a Greek town located on the southern Black Sea coast of modern-day Bulgaria. His most famous work, *On Nature*, shows signs of influence from other Pre-Socratic thinkers, especially Anaximenēs and Anaxagóras.

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<sup>7</sup> All dates shown here are approximations. Names (in bold print) have been transliterated, with an indication of accents and vowel lengths in the original Greek. Elsewhere, I will revert to the familiar Latinised forms.



## An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Worldview Analysis

In this section, I will be examining the concept of worldview analysis<sup>8</sup>, as developed by James W. Sire,<sup>9</sup> Francis Schaeffer<sup>10</sup>, and C. S. Lewis.<sup>11</sup> Worldview analysis can help to clarify the differences between the overall positions of various ancient Greek thinkers, especially with regard to the structural elements of each thinker's system. I will begin with a detailed explanation of the basic types of worldviews that can exist, and how each one functions, so that I can then establish some valid parallels between earlier systems (such as the portrait of the cosmos and the Greek gods which is found in Hesiod's *Theogony*) and their modern near-equivalents. Hesiod's polytheistic worldview, presented in Chapter 1, will be contrasted with other theistic systems (such as monotheism and dualism), as well as with non-theistic systems (such as monism and naturalism), so that the basis for ethics, and the nature of good and evil within each system, can be clearly delineated.

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<sup>8</sup> For a classic introduction to the concept of worldview, see: James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door: A Basic Worldview Catalogue*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (Downers Grove, IL, USA: IVP Academic, 2009). For the origins of the concept of worldview, see: David K. Naugle, *Worldview: The History of a Concept* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: William B. Eerdmans, 2002). For a more detailed examination of the concept, see: James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL, USA: IVP Academic, 2004); Paul J. Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 2008); and, J. Mark Bertrand, *Rethinking Worldview: Learning to Think, Live and Speak in this World* (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Books, 2007). For a history of the development of worldviews within Europe, from ancient times until the present day, see: Glenn S. Sunshine, *Why You Think the Way You Do: The Story of Western Worldviews from Rome to Home* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 2009); and W. Andrew Hoffecker, *Revolutions in Worldview: Understanding the Flow of Western Thought* (Phillipsburg, NJ, USA: P & R Publishing, 2007). For an examination of various modern worldview alternatives, see: Steve Wilkins & Mark L. Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Cultural Stories That Shape Our Lives* (Downers Grove, IL, USA: IVP Academic, 2009).

<sup>9</sup> James W. Sire (b. 1933) is the author of two books that deal specifically with the concept and application of worldview analysis (see the previous footnote) but he has also produced several other works that deal with issues relevant to worldview analysis, especially *Why Should Anyone Believe Anything At All?* (Downers Grove, IL, USA: Inter Varsity Press, 1994) and *Why Good Arguments Often Fail: Making A More Persuasive Case For Christ* (Downers Grove, IL, USA: Inter Varsity Press, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> For a helpful introduction to the life and thought of Francis August Schaeffer (1912-1984), see: Bryan A. Follis, *Truth With Love: The Apologetics of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Books, 2006). Schaeffer was the author of 22 books, which were re-edited and published in a five volume set as: *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: A Christian Worldview*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Books, 1985). The three foundational books, in which Schaeffer provides his own cultural and philosophical analysis of Western European society, from the time of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) until the late 1960s-early 1970s, were: *The God Who Is There* (1968), *Escape From Reason* (1968), and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* (1972). I will cite references in these three texts from a separately published edition: Francis A. Schaeffer, *Trilogy* (Downers Grove, IL, USA, Inter Varsity Press, 1990).

<sup>11</sup> Clive Staples Lewis (1898-1963), was a writer, poet, and lay theologian. He wrote a number of Christian apologetic works in which he contrasted a Christian worldview with other worldview alternatives. The most notable of these were: *The Problem of Pain* (London, England: Geoffrey Bles, 1940), *Miracles: A Preliminary Study*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (London, England: Geoffrey Bles, 1947); and *Mere Christianity* (London, England: Geoffrey Bles, 1952), based on three BBC radio talks given in 1942-1944, that were previously published as *The Case For Christianity* (1942); *Christian Behaviour* (1943); and *Beyond Personality* (1944).

Later in this chapter, I will use some of the insights derived from worldview analysis so as to provide a critique of the traditional account of the development of Pre-Socratic thought, found in the so-called ‘first principles’ story. Worldview analysis, augmented by the philosophical insights of Roy Clouser, will also be used to defend the plausibility of Adam Drozdek’s alternate account of the Pre-Socratic thinkers as theologians.

But first, what is a worldview? In the 1<sup>st</sup> (1976), 2<sup>nd</sup> (1988) and 3<sup>rd</sup> (1997) editions of *The Universe Next Door: A Complete Worldview Catalogue*, Sire defined it in this way:

A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic make-up of our world.

However, in response to several criticisms of his earlier definition,<sup>12</sup> Sire has employed a revised definition in the 4<sup>th</sup> (2004) and 5<sup>th</sup> (2009) editions:

A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or in a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) that we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.<sup>13</sup>

The new definition emphasises two things: firstly, the central role within any worldview of one’s presuppositions (basic assumptions) about the nature of reality; and secondly, the element of personal choice involved in the conscious selection, or subconscious acquisition, of a worldview. The revised definition recognises that people often embrace a particular *metanarrative* (i.e. a story which seeks to provide an explanation of all that happens in the world) due to its attractiveness or utility, rather than its accuracy or consistency. Sire rejects such an approach, and maintains that a reliable worldview ought to meet the following four criteria:<sup>14</sup> (1) inner logical coherence; (2) an ability to comprehend all the data of reality; (3) an ability to explain everything which it claims to explain, *especially the existence and truthfulness of the theory itself*; and (4) subjective satisfaction, which is primarily based on meeting the first three criteria.

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<sup>12</sup> For an overview of criticisms of the earlier definition, and a defence of the new definition, see Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 9-10, and pp. 20-22. See also: Sire, *Naming of the Elephant*, Chapter 7.

<sup>13</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 20.

<sup>14</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 282-283.

Sire maintains that if a worldview fails to meet any of the four criteria listed above, then it is inadequate and may well be false. Later in this chapter, we will see that it is possible that the failure of Hesiod's *Theogony* to provide subjective satisfaction may have led several Pre-Socratic thinkers to modify or reject elements of Hesiod's worldview.

The final assessment as to whether any given worldview provides subjective satisfaction, or whether it meets the other three criteria, is up to each individual person. Therefore, it is Sire's firm belief that:

... for any of us to be fully conscious intellectually, we should not only be able to detect the worldviews of others, but be aware of our own – why it is ours and why, in the light of so many options, we think it is true.<sup>15</sup>

Sire has proposed a list of eight basic questions<sup>16</sup> that aim to bring out the fundamental presuppositions (foundational beliefs) behind any particular type of worldview. These questions correspond to the areas of philosophical and/or theological investigation listed below [in square brackets].

1. What is prime reality – the really real? [i.e. metaphysics, ontology, cosmology or theology]
2. What is the nature of external reality, i.e. the world around us? [i.e. theology or cosmology]
3. What is a human being? [i.e. philosophical/theological anthropology]
4. What happens to a person at death? [i.e. thanatology or eschatology]
5. Why is it possible to know anything at all? [i.e. epistemology]
6. How do we know what is right and wrong? [i.e. ethics]
7. What is the meaning of human history? [i.e. history, providence or eschatology]
8. What personal, life-orienting core commitments are consistent with this worldview?

Schaeffer has argued that “philosophy and religion deal with the same basic questions”.<sup>17</sup> However, since there are so many different philosophical and religious systems, we might feel the need to ask, “How many basic types of worldview can there be?” In one sense, the answer is that there are as many different worldviews as there are individual people who hold them. However, if one seeks to count only the *basic* worldviews, that have a high degree of internal logical consistency, then there are, in fact, surprisingly few alternatives.

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<sup>15</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., pp. 22-23.

<sup>17</sup> Schaeffer, *Trilogy*, p. 279.

## Worldviews: An Analysis of the Fundamental Types and their Defining Elements

Sire emphasises that the kind of answer that one gives to the first of his eight questions, “What is prime reality – the really real?” strictly limits the types of responses that can be given, *in any logically consistent manner*, to any of the other seven questions. Therefore, Sire maintains that, in the modern period, the eleven worldviews that have been widely held in the Western world are variants of just two fundamental types of worldview: *theistic* (involving belief in the existence of God/gods) or *non-theistic*. Sire’s list of eleven worldviews that have been held in the modern West includes: Christian Theism;<sup>18</sup> Deism;<sup>19</sup> Naturalism;<sup>20</sup> Nihilism;<sup>21</sup> Theistic Existentialism and Atheistic Existentialism;<sup>22</sup> Eastern Pantheistic Monism;<sup>23</sup> New Age Spirituality (including elements of the much older worldview known as Animism);<sup>24</sup> Postmodernism;<sup>25</sup> and Islamic Theism.<sup>26</sup>

According to Schaeffer, all possible worldviews emerge from answers that we give in the three main areas of philosophic thought: *metaphysics* (explanations of the existence and structure of the universe), *ethics* (explanations of the basis for human interaction) and *epistemology* (explanations of the basis for human knowledge). The kinds of answers that one provides (or fails to provide) lead towards just two overarching categories of worldview: either (1), the *nihilistic* worldview category, in which it is believed that there are no rational answers, and therefore everything is finally chaotic, irrational and absurd; or (2), the *non-nihilistic* worldview category, which holds that there are answers, which can be considered in a rational manner, and which can be communicated to other people.<sup>27</sup>

The first worldview category is labelled *nihilistic*,<sup>28</sup> because worldviews of this type are “based on nothing”, i.e. they deny meaning and value, especially in the area of ethics.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 2, pp. 25-46.

<sup>19</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 3, pp. 47-65.

<sup>20</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 4, pp. 66-93.

<sup>21</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 5, pp. 94-116.

<sup>22</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 6, pp. 117-143.

<sup>23</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 7, pp. 144-165.

<sup>24</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 8, pp. 166-213.

<sup>25</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 9, pp. 214-243.

<sup>26</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., Chapter 10, pp. 244-277.

<sup>27</sup> Schaeffer, *Trilogy*, pp. 277-279.

<sup>28</sup> For a history of nihilistic thought, from Parmenides up to the present day, see: Conor Cunningham, *Genealogy of Nihilism*, Routledge Radical Orthodoxy (London, England: Routledge, 2002). Many scholars have attributed a nihilistic approach to Parmenides, and elements of nihilistic thought can be found within the Hellenistic philosophical schools of Cynicism and Scepticism.

<sup>29</sup> For an incisive critique of modern nihilism, see: Eugene (Seraphim) Rose, *Nihilism: The Root of the Revolution of the Modern Age* (Platina, CA, USA: St. Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1994).

Schaeffer argues that nihilistic worldviews cannot be held or practiced with logical consistency,<sup>30</sup> since the external world has a certain order that makes human life, communication and science possible. In fact, nihilism cannot even be articulated in a coherent manner, since any argument depends upon the assumption that human language is *not* chaotic, irrational or absurd. Nihilism, therefore, can be seen as a *transitional* worldview, or more precisely, a *denial* of any worldview. In fact, Sire argues that modern nihilism has emerged as a response of despair to perceived ethical and epistemological shortcomings within the dominant naturalistic worldview.<sup>31</sup> By contrast, the *non-nihilistic* worldview category (i.e. one in which there *are* rational answers that can be communicated) provides a foundation from which all other types of worldviews can be classified, on the basis of answers that each worldview gives for the *origin* of the existence of the material universe.

### Impersonal and Personal Explanations of the Origin of the Universe

Schaeffer has argued that there are three basic explanations for the origin of the universe: (1) An impersonal beginning from nothing; (2) An impersonal beginning from eternally pre-existing matter; or (3) A personal beginning initiated by a God or gods. ***The first possible answer*** claims that the universe came into being through *spontaneous creation*, i.e. there was no energy, no mass (Matter), no motion, and no personality (i.e. no God or gods).<sup>32</sup> However, several Pre-Socratic thinkers, especially the so-called Eleatic school, explicitly ruled out a spontaneous ‘creation from nothing’ (*genesis ex nihilo*).<sup>33</sup> ***The second possible answer*** claims that the universe had an impersonal beginning, i.e. the material universe itself is eternal, and energy, mass (Matter), or motion, are the only factors that bring order to the universe. Pre-Socratic thinkers such as Leucippus and Democritus (the founders of the Atomist school) seem to have affirmed this type of worldview, teaching that the universe is comprised of atoms and the void. Nevertheless, even the Atomist explanation invokes ‘Ἀνάγκη / *Anágkē* (Necessity), as a kind of impersonal Divine Principle.<sup>34</sup> ***The third possible answer***, a personal beginning, is compatible with monotheism, dualism, or polytheism. Personal creation of the *kosmos* can be *ex nihilo*, or from pre-existing matter.

<sup>30</sup> Schaeffer, *Trilogy*, pp. 280-281.

<sup>31</sup> Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed., p. 94.

<sup>32</sup> Schaeffer, *Trilogy*, p. 282. Although it is a logical possibility, Schaeffer is unaware of any ancient or modern thinker who has argued for an impersonal beginning from absolutely nothing.

<sup>33</sup> Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 90-93 and 116.

<sup>34</sup> Roy Clouser has defined a ‘Divine Principle’ as that *on which all other things depend*, yet which does *not* depend on anything else for its own existence.

## Monism and Naturalism: Two Explanations of the Unity and Diversity in the Universe

A worldview based on an impersonal origin of all things (i.e. a non-theistic worldview that rejects belief in God or gods) can lead to two differing explanations of the unity and diversity within the universe, *Monism* or *Naturalism*. *Monistic* (unitary) worldviews, either deny, or minimise, the reality of the observable universe and its diversity. *Monistic* worldviews can then be sub-divided into two main types: (1) ‘hard’, or metaphysical monism, and (2) ‘soft’, or material monism.

‘Hard’ monistic worldviews claim that the diversity in the universe is an illusion, and that all of the apparent plurality of things within the universe can, and must, be reduced to a single undifferentiated unity. Religious forms of ‘hard’ monism have also been referred to as *pan-theism* (i.e. the worldview which Sire labels as *Eastern Pantheistic Monism*). Schaeffer believes that this is quite misleading terminology, as *pan-theism* tends to create a semantic illusion of *personality* and purposeful intentionality. However, all that can really exist in any kind of ‘hard’ monistic system, by definition, is an *impersonal*, purposeless and undifferentiated unity. Thus, Schaeffer argues that it would be more accurate to use a term such as *pan-everythingism*, so as to emphasise the fundamentally impersonal nature of reality within such systems of belief.<sup>35</sup>

‘Hard’ monism cannot be articulated in a logically coherent manner, since an argument in defence of this position must assume the reality of the speaker, the listener, the argument itself, and the world within which the argument is taking place.<sup>36</sup> ‘Soft’ monistic worldviews, by contrast, affirm the genuine existence of diversity within the universe, but claim that all existing things within the universe are generated from one fundamental substrate. Early Pre-Socratic thinkers appear to have suggested that the substrate was water (Thales), the ‘Boundless’ (Anaximander), air (Anaximenes, and Diogenes of Apollonia) or fire (Heraclitus).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Schaeffer, *Trilogy*, pp. 282-283.

<sup>36</sup> The Pre-Socratic thinker called Parmenides of Elea, along with his followers in the Eleatic school, Zeno of Elea and Melissus of Samos, have often been considered as exponents of ‘hard’ monism, but, as we shall soon see, there are several reasons why it might be more accurate to see the Eleatics as proponents of a position that leans towards a kind of ‘pagan monotheism’.

<sup>37</sup> The traditional ‘first principles’ account of Pre-Socratic thought, which will be considered in some detail later in this chapter, has tended to portray the substrate as impersonal, but some later interpreters, such as Roy Clouser, have suggested that the substrate actually functions as an order-creating Divine Principle, or ‘God’.

Unlike the *Monistic* (unitary) systems surveyed immediately above, *Naturalistic* (non-unitary) worldviews are able to affirm completely the reality of the material universe and its diversity. All naturalistic types of worldview assume that there are no gods, and therefore, by definition, Nature is all that exists.<sup>38</sup> In addition to the basic naturalistic worldview (known simply as Naturalism), Sire has identified the following list of variants: Atheistic Existentialism; New Age Spirituality; and Postmodernism. Sire argues that these three major modern variants of Naturalism are attempts to avoid, or to transcend, the nihilistic implications of Naturalism itself.<sup>39</sup>

### **Theism: A Third Explanation for the Unity and Diversity in the Universe**

*The third possible answer* in the area of metaphysics is to posit a personal beginning for the universe,<sup>40</sup> which can involve one God, two gods, or multiple gods: either a form of *monotheism*, such as one finds in Judaism, Christianity, or Islam; *dualism*, such as that found within Zoroastrianism or Manichaeism; or *polytheism*, like that of Homer and Hesiod.

*Monotheistic* systems, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, often affirm a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*,<sup>41</sup> in which the sole creator God brings the material universe into existence (i.e. *not* from pre-existing matter).

In *dualistic* or *polytheistic* systems, the material universe is usually considered to be eternal and uncreated. To use the terminology of Roy Clouser, the material universe is organised by a ‘Divine Principle’. The ‘Divine Principle’ is an eternal, self-existent, order-creating principle, which can be either personal *or impersonal*, and which is usually co-existent with the eternal material universe.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Schaeffer, *Trilogy*, pp. 282-283. Schaeffer claims that such nihilistic tendencies must *inevitably* arise within naturalistic worldviews, since on the basis of an impersonal, non-theistic beginning to the universe, everything that now exists (including human beings) must be explained solely in terms of the impersonal, plus time, plus chance, since there are no other factors to provide a basis for ethics or epistemology.

<sup>39</sup> The Hellenistic school of philosophy founded by Epicurus, which shared the atomistic assumptions of Leucippus and Democritus, could perhaps be regarded, in part, as an attempt to overcome the nihilistic tendencies thought to flow from the doctrine of atomism.

<sup>40</sup> Schaeffer, *Trilogy*, p. 284.

<sup>41</sup> On the belief in a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, see: Gerhard May (A. S. Worrall, trans.), *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of ‘Creation out of Nothing’ in Early Christian Thought* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: T & T Clark International, 2004); and, Paul Copan & William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 2004).

<sup>42</sup> In many ancient Greek belief systems, the Divine Principle generates other divinities (the gods), and then shapes and organises the *kosmos*, i.e. an ordered universe. For example, Hesiod’s Divine Principle seems to have been *Khaos* (the abyss), from which all of the other divinities emerged. In the Orphic cosmogony, the Divine Principle was *Khronos* (Time). Similarly, in the cosmogony of Pherecydes of Syros, there were three Divine Principles: *Zas* (Zeus), *Khthonie* (the Earth) and *Khronos* (Time); *Khronos* was father of the first generation of gods.

## The Basis for Ethics: Five Different Logical Possibilities

In the area of ethics, Schaeffer argues that we are confronted by five logical possibilities. Firstly, in a ‘hard’ or metaphysical *monistic* worldview, any final distinction between good and evil is an illusion, since it implies a duality that cannot exist, by definition, in a ‘hard’ monistic system. Many individuals and societies that claim to hold ‘hard’ monistic beliefs have continued to make moral judgements, and attempted to live according to certain moral standards. Nonetheless, all dualities or distinctions, including ethical and even logical distinctions, can have no ultimate meaning, and no metaphysical reality, within a ‘hard’ monistic system. ‘Soft’ or material monism, by contrast, affirms genuine ontological diversity, and thus allows for the existence of genuine ethical distinctions as well.

Secondly, in a *monotheistic* system, such as Judaism, Christianity or Islam, God is considered to be the source of all good things. Evil is generally thought to originate from the abuse of free will by humans and/or angels. Monotheistic systems ascribe many forms of evil in the world to human causes, but also invoke personal non-human causes as well, such as Satan, and other fallen angels, known as demons. In monotheistic systems, as well as the dualistic systems described in the next paragraph, ‘good’ for human beings is defined in terms of conformity to the character and will of the all-good God, and ‘evil’ is defined as that which violates the character and will of the all-good God.

Thirdly, in a *dualistic* system, such as Zoroastrianism, we find that there are two eternal Divine Principles, one of which (Ahura Mazda) is the principle of good, and another (Angra Mainyu, or Ahriman) is the principle of evil. Ahura Mazda is regarded as the one universal and transcendent God, who must do battle against Angra Mainyu, until the final victory of good over evil is achieved. It is believed that this final victory of good over evil is assured, but will take countless centuries to achieve.

Fourthly, in a *polytheistic* system of belief, such as that found within Hesiod’s *Theogony* (see Chapter 1), ‘good’ actions tend to be defined either by reference to the various and contradictory wills of the polytheistic gods, or by reference to the one divine will of the supreme god Zeus, especially to the extent that the will of Zeus was thought to be reflected within the human laws of a particular *polis* (city-state). Since there were many gods, and many different sets of laws, it was sometimes difficult to have certainty about what the ‘good’ or ‘correct’ course of action might be, or what courses of action should be avoided. (Hesiod’s *Works and Days*, for example, sought to address some of these ambiguities and uncertainties, by providing practical and ethical advice in a number of areas.)



Fifthly, in *naturalistic* systems of belief, there is often no apparent metaphysical or logical basis for human morality, since the universe is generally supposed to have been brought about in a random, purposeless manner, through the chance interactions of atoms. Nonetheless, most ancient Greek thinkers held strongly to a belief in cosmic order, and rejected nihilism in the areas of ethics and epistemology, despite the fact that there might seem to be little logical basis for such beliefs in some thinker's systems. Commitment to a belief in cosmic order generally led to an expectation of some kind of moral order in the divine and human realms as well. In turn, a belief in the reality of human moral order, and a consequent need for a source of ethical guidance, often led proponents of these apparently non-theistic systems to advocate adherence to norms and values that were explicitly derived from theistic sources (such as traditional Greek religion), and to urge people to observe traditional forms of religious piety, as well as the man-made laws of the city-state.

In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the atheist philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche commented upon what he perceived as a similarly inconsistent approach to morality in England:

They are rid of the Christian God and now believe all the more firmly that they must cling to Christian morality. That is an English consistency; we do not wish to hold it against little moralistic females à la Eliot. In England one must rehabilitate oneself, after every little emancipation from theology, by showing in a veritably awe-inspiring manner what a moral fanatic one is. That is the penance they pay there. We others hold otherwise. When one gives up the Christian faith, one pulls the right to Christian morality out from under one's feet. This morality is by no means self-evident: this point has to be exhibited again and again, despite the English flatheads. Christianity is a system, a whole view of things thought out together. By breaking one main concept out of it, the faith in God, one breaks the whole: nothing necessary remains in one's hands. Christianity presupposes that man does not know, cannot know, what is good for him, what evil: he believes in God, who alone knows it. Christian morality is a command; its origin is transcendent; it is beyond all criticism, all right to criticism; it has truth only if God is the truth — it stands and falls with faith in God. When the English actually believe that they know "intuitively" what is good and evil, when they therefore suppose that they no longer require Christianity as the guarantee of morality, we merely witness the effects of the dominion of the Christian value judgment and an expression of the strength and depth of this dominion: such that the origin of English morality has been forgotten, such that the very conditional character of its right to existence is no longer felt. *For the English, morality is not yet a problem* [emphasis added].<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols: Or, How to Philosophise with a Hammer*, in: Walter Kaufmann (ed.), *The Portable Nietzsche* (New York, NY, USA: Penguin Books, 1976), pp. 515-516.

Nietzsche criticised the English “flatheads”, George Eliot (aka Mary Anne Evans) and John Stuart Mill, because he believed that they were fundamentally misguided in their assumption that morality could be known “intuitively”, without reference to any kind of divine revelation. Nietzsche’s critique was aimed at what he regarded as logical inconsistency in their attempts to create and conform to a form of morality derived from Christianity, since they had rejected any belief in the existence of the Christian God. Indeed, Nietzsche claimed that, on the basis of naturalistic, non-theistic assumptions, *all* moral systems must be seen as false, and without any logical foundation.<sup>44</sup> Whether we accept this claim or not, it is certainly true that once the Pre-Socratics began to challenge and revise traditional Greek religious concepts, morality was to become a significant problem for subsequent Greek thinkers, such as the Sophists, as we shall see in Chapter 3.

### **The Pre-Socratics: An Introduction**

The Pre-Socratics thinkers lived between the late 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Traditionally, the Pre-Socratics have been assigned to various ‘schools’, so I have continued to use this classificatory device, although formal, organised schools of philosophy did not really develop until the early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, when Plato established the Academy. In the remainder of this chapter, I will be concerned with eighteen of these Pre-Socratic thinkers who, in modern times, have been referred to as natural philosophers, cosmogonists, or cosmologists.

In the next section, I will examine some recent criticisms that have been raised about the accuracy of an older, traditional account of the Pre-Socratic thinkers, which scholars such as Osborne and Warren have referred to as the ‘first principles’ story.<sup>45</sup> Following this, I will consider the philosophical assumptions implicit in the ‘first principles’ story, with reference to the work of Roy Clouser on the hidden role of religious belief in theories. I will then put forward an alternate Pre-Socratic narrative, reflecting Adam Drozdek’s argument that the Pre-Socratic thinkers should be thought of primarily as theologians.

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<sup>44</sup> For a comprehensive sample of Nietzsche’s criticisms of the concept of morality, and of the various expressions of morality, from ancient Greece to 19<sup>th</sup> century European Christianity, see: R. J. Hollingdale (trans. and ed.), *A Nietzsche Reader* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1977), pp. 71-124.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example: Catherine Osborne, *Presocratic Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 29-39; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 1-9. See also: Adam Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers As Theologians* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England & Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. vii-viii.

## The Pre-Socratics: An Analysis and Critique of the ‘First Principles’ Story

Catherine Osborne and James Warren both refer to a traditional account of the Pre-Socratic thinkers, which Osborne has dubbed the ‘first principles’ story. Warren observes that this story has been very influential, since it has been reconstructed by modern scholars on the basis of accounts provided by Plato (427-347 BCE) and his student Aristotle (384-322 BCE).<sup>46</sup> However, Plato chose to write his philosophical works in the form of dialogues, with his teacher, Socrates (479-399 BCE) generally playing the starring role. Although these dialogues are presented as though they were genuine historical events, they are in fact works of carefully crafted literary fiction. Plato’s decision to canvas his ideas in the form of dialogues also means that we can never be entirely certain to what extent the words of ‘Socrates’ actually represent the opinions of the historical Socrates, and to what extent those words represent the opinions of Plato. Confronted by such difficulties, we might think that we would be on safer ground if we were to rely upon the summaries provided by Aristotle. However, Aristotle often provides excerpts of these earlier thinkers in the context of an argument that is designed to reveal the superiority of Aristotle’s views over those who came before him, so it is difficult to know whether Aristotle’s account is entirely accurate or fair.

So what was this “tale of first principles”? Warren offers the following summary:

... this story of Presocratic philosophy begins with Thales and the other Milesians who are principally interested in the question of what is the original material principle out of which all things in the universe are made, or, from which all things originate. (This is sometimes referred to as the *arkhé*: the Greek word for “beginning”, which can describe a temporal beginning, but also a first principle or cause.) Each Milesian offers a different candidate... a new movement is inaugurated by Parmenides and the “Eleatic philosophers”, Zeno and Melissus, perhaps also inspired by Xenophanes. They are radical monists, claiming that only one thing exists, and they also produce arguments that deny the possibility of plurality, coming-to-be and passing-away or change. After the Eleatics come various pluralists – Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Democritus – who accept certain Eleatic strictures such as a ban on any absolute coming-to-be, but nevertheless seek to explain the process of the natural world in terms of the interactions between a set of fundamental existents. They return... to the Milesian project of natural philosophy, but with a more sophisticated metaphysical view generated in reaction to Parmenides and his followers.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Several recent scholars hold to a much more nuanced and sophisticated view of the Pre-Socratic thinkers. See, for example: Richard D. McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Indianapolis, IN, USA & Cambridge, England: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010).

<sup>47</sup> Warren, *Presocratics*, p. 3.

Osborne notes that the traditional ‘first principles’ story has been accepted by some modern scholars (although by no means all) for at least three reasons: (1) the story is systematic and neat; (2) the story tells of progress over time; and (3) the story supports modern preconceptions about the nature of philosophy.<sup>48</sup> The ‘first principles’ story can be illustrated by means of the following table:<sup>49</sup>

<i>Thinker</i>	<i>First principle(s)</i>
Thales	Water
Anaximander	An indefinite principle (‘The Boundless’)
Anaximenes	Air
Heraclitus	Fire
Parmenides	THE ONE
Zeno	The one
Melissus	The one
Empedocles	Earth, air, fire and water
Anaxagoras	Numerous infinitely divisible components
Leucippus and Democritus	Numerous indivisible components (atoms), and the void

The traditional account places tremendous importance on Parmenides as the central figure within the development of Pre-Socratic thought. Pre-Socratic thinkers *before* Parmenides, such as the Milesians and Heraclitus, were supposed to be ‘soft’ or material monists, who each proposed a substrate from which everything else in the universe was constituted. Parmenides was then thought to have proposed a radical form of ‘hard’ or metaphysical monism, in an account that was so compelling that all Pre-Socratic thinkers *after* Parmenides were confronted by two choices: either, to embrace Parmenides’ ‘hard’ monistic account (as did Zeno of Elea and Melissus of Samos), or, to propose a modified pluralistic account, which adopted some, but not all, of the features of Parmenides’ system. The ‘first principles’ story insists that *all* Pre-Socratic thinkers after Parmenides were *either* radical monists, *or* pluralists. However, it seems that Empedocles actually proposed a system that *alternated* between both possibilities, and the ‘first principles’ story also fails to deal with the contributions of Pherecydes of Syros, or the entire Pythagorean school.

<sup>48</sup> Osborne, *Presocratic Philosophy*, pp. 32-33.

<sup>49</sup> Osborne, *Presocratic Philosophy*, pp. 34.

If the traditional ‘first principles’ story were an accurate reconstruction of the development of Pre-Socratic thought, and the classification of each thinker (as either a pluralistic material monist, a metaphysical monist or a modified pluralist) were accurate, then it would be a relatively easy task to assign each thinker to one of the worldviews described earlier in this chapter, and then to draw certain conclusions about the ethical position most consistent with the relevant worldview.

Based upon the ‘first principles’ story, the Pre-Socratic thinkers might be classified thus:

<i>Thinker</i>	<i>Worldview</i>
Thales	Pluralistic material monist; polytheistic
Anaximander	Pluralistic material monist (?); polytheistic
Anaximenes	Pluralistic material monist; polytheistic
Heraclitus	Pluralistic material monist; polytheistic
Parmenides	Metaphysical monist
Zeno	Metaphysical monist
Melissus	Metaphysical monist
Empedocles	Modified pluralist AND material monist; polytheistic
Anaxagoras	Modified pluralist; polytheistic
Leucippus and Democritus	Modified pluralist; non-theistic

This modern account of Pre-Socratic thought ought to make us very suspicious, since its trajectory and end point, what we might call its ‘story arc’, comports far too well with a modern Western non-theistic worldview. In my slightly revised table of the ‘first principles’ story, shown above, there is an uncanny resemblance to a Post-Enlightenment reading of the history of ideas, in which one finds an evolutionary progression, from the ‘darkness’ of ancient mythology and religion, to the ‘light’ of modern naturalistic and non-theistic science. There also seems to be an Hegelian progression, from *thesis* (pluralistic material monism), via *antithesis* (unitary metaphysical monism), to *synthesis* (non-theistic modified pluralism via Empedocles’ ‘mixed’ system). In the next sections, I will outline Roy Clouser’s provocative thesis about the hidden role of religious beliefs in theories, so as to demonstrate that the modern ‘first principles’ story does *not* take the religious sensibilities of the ancient Greek thinkers sufficiently seriously and, as a result, it is both anachronistic and unreliable.

## The Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories

Within much of modern academia, a naturalistic non-theistic worldview often provides an implicit or explicit interpretive framework, which is then used to generate theories and methodologies that are considered to be neutral and objective, since they are thought to be untouched by extraneous, or irrelevant, religious considerations. However, in his book called *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories*, Roy Clouser<sup>50</sup> has defined ‘religion’ in such a way that it is *not possible* to hold a neutral or objective theory. In his view, all theories are inherently and unavoidably ‘religious’, since they necessarily rest upon an ultimate principle, such as ‘God’, matter, numbers, or the laws of logic. It is very important to note that Clouser is *not* claiming that modern thinkers necessarily hold to a *Christian* foundation for scientific and philosophical theories, but often to a *pagan* foundation, based on an interpretive scheme that he calls the ‘Pagan Dependency Arrangement’ (see below). The origin of Clouser’s radical reinterpretation of the relationship between religion, science and philosophy can be traced back to a particular conception of these fields of academic enquiry which was developed by Jean Calvin (1509-1564), a French theologian, pastor, and leader in the development of the Reformed Protestant system of Christian theology known as Calvinism. Clouser claims that the idea is grounded in the teaching of the Christian Bible, but that it was largely lost to the Protestant Christian tradition until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when it was revived by Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer (1801-1876), a Dutch politician and historian,<sup>51</sup> and Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), a Dutch politician, journalist, statesman and theologian.<sup>52</sup> Clouser attributes further development of the idea in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to two Dutch Calvinist philosophers, Dirk Hendrik Theodoor Vollenhoven (1892-1978),<sup>53</sup> and Herman Dooyeweerd (1894-1977).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories* (Notre Dame, IN, USA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1991; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 2005).

<sup>51</sup> For an application of this idea in the area of politics, see: Harry Van Dyke (trans. and ed.), *Groen Van Prinsterer’s Lectures on Unbelief and Revolution* (Toronto, ON, Canada: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1989).

<sup>52</sup> For an application of this idea to religion, politics, science, art and the future, see: Abraham Kuyper, *Abraham Kuyper: Lectures On Calvinism. Six Lectures from the Stone Foundation Lectures Delivered at Princeton University* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: William B. Eerdmans, 1998); and, Peter Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper’s Lectures on Calvinism* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: William B. Eerdmans, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> For an application of this idea in the area of philosophy, see: Dirk H. Vollenhoven (John H. Kok & Anthony Tol, trans. & eds.), *Introduction To Philosophy* (Sioux Center, IA, USA: Dordt College Press, 2005).

<sup>54</sup> Vollenhoven and Dooyeweerd are jointly responsible for the development of an influential Neo-Calvinistic approach to philosophy. See: Anthony Tol, *Philosophy in the Making: D. H. Th. Vollenhoven and the Emergence of Reformed Philosophy* (Sioux Center, IA, USA: Dordt College Press, 2010); and, Andree Troost, *What Is Reformational Philosophy: An Introduction to the Cosmonomic Philosophy of Herman Dooyeweerd* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Paideia Press, 2012).

Most of the inspiration for Clouser's claim that "all theories cannot fail to be regulated by a religious belief of some kind" comes from the philosophical work of Dooyeweerd. Clouser proposes that:

... religious belief is the most influential of all beliefs, and the most powerful force in the world. Religious belief has the most decisive influence on everyone's understanding of the major issues of life across the entire spectrum of human experience. Moreover, it exercises this influence upon *all* people, independently of their conscious acceptance or rejection of the religious traditions with which they are acquainted.<sup>55</sup>

According to Clouser, the profound influence of religious beliefs is largely hidden, due to two significant errors that are often made about religions and religious beliefs:

*firstly*, the false assumption that all major religious traditions are basically the same as the religious tradition that is most familiar (*especially* if that tradition is Christianity); and *secondly*, the false assumption that the supposed likenesses between all religious traditions must lie in their most obvious or tangible features, such as prayer or worship.

Clouser's definition of religious belief (which we will examine in detail below):

- (1) identifies a key feature that all religious traditions *necessarily* have in common;
- (2) includes a number of belief systems that are not normally considered to be 'religious', since they do *not* involve prayer or worship, and do *not* acknowledge a Supreme Being; and
- (3) explains why some religious beliefs do not *need* to have rituals, or even ethical codes.<sup>56</sup>

Before we examine Clouser's definition of religious belief, however, it would be helpful to respond to some possible objections to his basic claim that "all theories cannot fail to be regulated by a religious belief of some kind":

- (1) Clouser is *not* attempting to argue that all theories have unprovable assumptions, that these unprovable assumptions constitute a form of religious faith, and that theories must therefore be influenced by religious faith;
- (2) Clouser is *not* connecting or equating morality with 'religion', so as to make the claim that, since theory making is sometimes influenced by the moral beliefs of the theorist, therefore all theories must be 'religious';
- (3) Clouser is *not* positing a "God-of-the-gaps" approach, in which, since philosophy and religion are sometimes limited in what they can explain, explanatory failings must therefore be overcome by resorting to 'religious' beliefs.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Clouser, *Myth of Religious Neutrality*, p. 1.

<sup>56</sup> Clouser, *Myth of Religious Neutrality*, p. 2.

Clouser's proposes a definition of 'the 'Divine' that will cover all possible religious traditions (e.g., the twelve classical religions: Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Shinto, Sikhism, Taoism and Zoroastrianism) as well as all belief systems not normally considered 'religious'. His approach notes that religions typically centre around *something* that is considered Divine, but differ over *what* it is that should hold the position of the Divine. Therefore, Clouser makes a theoretical distinction between the status of divinity in itself, and the material thing or immaterial principle that might occupy that status. Rather than trying to find something in common between all of the contradictory candidates thought to occupy the status of divinity, he considers it would be more fruitful to define what it is that might *qualify* a candidate for the status of divinity.

Clouser posits that ancient pagan thinkers conceived of the divine status as a personal, *or impersonal*, Divine Principle, *on which all other things depend*, yet which does *not* depend on anything else for its own existence. For example, Clouser argues that the Divine Principle in the Pythagorean system was numbers, and that all things in the universe were generated out of, and were dependent upon number combinations. Similarly, Clouser maintains that the Ideas or Forms in Platonic thought were considered to be self-existent, and he notes that, in at least one place, Plato explicitly calls the Forms 'gods' (*Timaeus* 37). Aristotle's definition of the Divine is perhaps the most startling, since he is the major source for the modern non-theistic 'first principles' account of the Pre-Socratic thinkers:

Therefore about that which can exist independently and is changeless, there is a science...

And if there is such a kind of thing in the world, here surely must be the Divine, and this must be the first and most dominant principle (Metaphysics 1064a34).<sup>58</sup>

Since Clouser's understanding of 'religion' is one in which the Divine can be a personal entity, *or an impersonal principle*, this provides the basis for a distinction between *core* and *secondary* religious beliefs:

- (1) *a core religious belief* is defined as a belief in something(s) as Divine, i.e. self-existent;
- (2) *a secondary religious belief* concerns how humans come into proper relation with the Divine. Religious practices such as prayer, worship, sacrifice, meditation, reading, study, etc. *may or may not be necessary*, depending on the type of Divine Principle that is postulated.

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<sup>57</sup> Clouser, *Myth of Religious Neutrality*, p. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Clouser, *Myth of Religious Neutrality*, p. 17.



## The Pagan Dependency Arrangement

The essential feature of the Pagan Dependency Arrangement is that the Divine is some part, aspect, force, or principle, '*in*', or '*alongside*', *the material universe*. The Divine is a *subdivision* of reality. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, for example, the Divine Principles are *Kháos* (The Abyss) and unformed Matter. Other gods, such as Zeus and the Olympians, are divine *only in a derivative sense*, since they have a beginning, and are *not* self-existent. These gods, or divinities, certainly possess super-human power. Nevertheless, even Zeus is not genuinely omnipotent (all-powerful) or omniscient (all-knowing); only the Divine Principle that gave shape and structure to the universe could possess these characteristics.

The most distinctive characteristic of the gods is their immortality. However, immortality is *not* the same as eternity. Only the Divine Principles are truly eternal, since they have always existed, and are *not* dependent on anything else. The Divine Principles are genuinely eternal (without beginning), but there was a time when the other gods did *not* exist.

Despite the fact that the gods are only divine in a derivative sense, they functioned in Ancient Greek religion as the focus for prayer and worship in a way that was *not* true for the Divine Principles. The gods came to be considered as personifications, or representatives, of that which is truly Divine, i.e. that which is not merely immortal, but eternal and self-existent. The gods were effectively intermediaries, between humans, who were subject to change and death, and the Divine, which was changeless, deathless and always-existing.

Ancient Greeks certainly worshipped Zeus and the Olympian gods, but it is particularly significant that there was *never* any religious cult directed toward *Kháos* or the material universe. Similarly, the Pre-Socratic thinkers each postulated one or more Divine Principles, but in most cases, religious practices (such as prayer, worship or sacrifices) were simply considered to be *unnecessary* to bring a human being into right relation with these Divine Principles. Thus, it becomes more plausible to believe, with Clouser, that modern theories, including the 'first principles' story of Pre-Socratic development, can in fact be based on a kind of 'religious' belief (usually some form of the Pagan Dependency Arrangement), even when contemporary theorists would not regard themselves as 'religious', and might never engage in any conventional 'religious' practices. If religious practices are *not needed* to bring one into proper relation with a particular self-existent Divine Principle (such as numbers, matter, or the laws of logic), then it becomes much easier to accept Clouser's claim that a modern academic might think, act and theorise in a genuinely 'religious' way (as defined by Clouser), *without any participation in 'religious' practices*.

## Greek Philosophers as Theologians

Clouser's 'Pagan Dependency Arrangement' appears to function as an implicit, but unstated element, within the theoretical framework of the Polish-American scholar, Adam Drozdek, as found in his book called *Greek Philosophers as Theologians: The Divine Arche*. Drozdek maintains that the early Pre-Socratic thinkers should *not* be regarded just as cosmologists, or scientists, who were supposedly searching for a purely physical (and non-religious) explanation of the material universe, as the modern 'first principles' story might seem to suggest. Rather, Drozdek insists that their theories are all inherently 'religious'.

Drozdek claims that early Pre-Socratic thinkers were *not* fundamentally opposed to existing ancient Greek religious beliefs and practices, but rather saw themselves as involved in a process of religious *rationalisation*, in which reflection upon the theological, cosmological and ethical aspects of ancient Greek religion brought about sometimes quite extensive modification, but not necessarily complete abandonment, of the ancient Greek religious inheritance.

Drozdek explains his basic thesis as follows:

***The emergence of Greek philosophy coincides with theological elaboration of the concept of the divine.*** The philosophical interest in establishing the cosmic *arche* – that is, both the principle and the beginning of the world – is rooted in the interest of what constitutes divinity of the gods, which together give rise to a very strong monotheistic bias of theological views of most of the Greek philosophers... This book attempts to present the process of the development of the concept of God... Monotheism will stay in Greek philosophy, and with it, a more personal side will be developed: the problem of immortality, the problem of theodicy, the problem of providence, [and] the problem of the structure of society [emphasis added].<sup>59</sup>

This philosophical and theological trajectory, towards an increasingly abstract form of pagan monotheism, is one which Drozdek claims to be able to trace in the work of the Pre-Socratic thinkers, beginning with Thales of Miletus,<sup>60</sup> then later in Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, and, finally, in the traditions of Cynicism, Epicureanism and Stoicism.

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<sup>59</sup> Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. vii-viii.

<sup>60</sup> Drozdek's reading of Thales, for example, is remarkably different from that found in more traditional accounts that reflect elements of the 'first principles' story, such as: Patricia F. O'Grady, *Thales of Miletus: The Beginnings of Western Science and Philosophy*, Western Philosophy Series (Aldershot, Hampshire, England and Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2002). A briefer treatment can be found in O'Grady's article 'Thales of Miletus' on the Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource at: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/thales/> Accessed on Wednesday January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013 at 3:54 pm.

## Ethical and Theological Problems in Traditional Accounts of Ancient Greek Religion

Drozdek draws attention to the fact that, in the works of Homer and Hesiod, the central attribute of the gods is immortality. As beings whose divinity was *derived* from the Divine Principle, the gods also possessed other divine attributes, such as intelligence, superhuman knowledge, superhuman powers, and an ability to appear in any form. However, as Clouser has already noted, only the Divine Principle(s) were eternal and self-existent.

Drozdek argues that an emphasis upon unrelenting fate, or μοῖρα / *moîra* (which precedes the existence of the gods, and which regulates all that happens within the universe) was intrinsic to the thought world conjured up by Homer. *Moîra* refers to a social order that *may also have moral overtones*, and something is considered fateful, *not* because it is unexpected, irregular or random, but rather because it is expected, regular and predictable. Since eternity and self-existence are the primary attributes of the Divine, then Homer's *moîra* can certainly be thought of as a Divine Principle. Furthermore, because *moîra* is the basis for the natural and social order, immortals and mortals ought to act in a moral fashion, and observe the principles of justice.<sup>61</sup> For Homer, the gods were supposed to be guardians of justice and morality:

Οὐ μὲν σχέτλια ἔργα θεοὶ μάκαρες φιλέουσιν  
ἀλλὰ δίκην τίουσιν καὶ ἄσινμα ἔργ' ἀνθρώπων.

Surely the blessed gods do not love reckless deeds,

but instead honour justice and the righteous deeds of men. (*Odyssey* 14.83-84).<sup>62</sup>

Nevertheless, the apparent injustice and immorality of the gods (especially as depicted elsewhere within the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, but also in many other Ancient Greek poetic and dramatic works) leads Drozdek to believe that traditional religion was increasingly experienced by many as “profoundly unfulfilling, disappointing, and almost irrelevant”.<sup>63</sup> In the analysis of the Pre-Socratic thinkers and schools that follows, I will argue that the response to this pessimism was *not* necessarily to abandon ‘religion’ and embrace ‘science’, but rather to re-examine the concept of divinity, and to see what could be salvaged from traditional accounts.

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<sup>61</sup> Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 1-2.

<sup>62</sup> Augustus Taber Murray & George E. Dimock (trans.), *Homer: Odyssey, Books 13-24*, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 105 (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1998), pp. 42-43.

<sup>63</sup> Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 2-3.

## Thales of Miletus and the Milesian School <sup>64</sup>

According to Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 983b6-13, 17-27 (A12), Thales posited water as the fundamental ἀρχή (*arkhē*), from which all other things derive their existence.<sup>65</sup>

τῶν δὴ πρῶτων φιλοσοφησάντων οἱ πλείστοι τὰς ἐν ὕλης εἶδει μόνας ὠλήθησαν ἀρχὰς εἶναι πάντων· ἐξ οὗ γὰρ ἔστιν ἅπαντα τὰ ὄντα καὶ ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται πρῶτου καὶ εἰς ὃ φθίρεται τελευταῖον, τῆς μὲν οὐσίας ὑπομενούσης τοῖς δὲ πάθεσι μεταβαλλούσης, τοῦτο στοιχεῖον καὶ ταύτην ἀρχὴν φασιν εἶναι τῶν ὄντων, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο οὔτε γίγνεσθαι οὐδὲν οἴονται οὔτ' ἀπόλλυσθαι, ὥς τῆς τοιαύτης φύσεως ἀεὶ σωιζομένης... ἀεὶ γὰρ εἶναι τινα φύσιν ἢ μίαν ἢ πλείους μῖας, ἐξ ὧν γίγνεται τὰλλα σωιζομένης ἐκείνης. τὸ μέντοι πλῆθος καὶ τὸ εἶδος τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρχῆς οὐ τὸ αὐτὸ πάντες λέγουσιν, ἀλλὰ Θαλῆς μὲν ὁ τῆς τοιαύτης ἀρχηγὸς φιλοσοφίας ὕδωρ εἶναι φησιν (διὸ καὶ τὴν γῆν ἐφ' ὕδατος ἀπεφάνετο εἶναι), λαβὼν ἴσως τὴν ὑπόληψιν ταύτην ἐκ τοῦ πάντων ὁρᾶν τὴν τροφὴν ὑγρὰν οὔσαν καὶ αὐτὸ τὸ θερμὸν ἐκ τούτου γιγνόμενον καὶ τούτῳ ζῶν (τὸ δ' ἐξ οὗ γίγνεται, τοῦτ' ἐστὶν ἀρχὴ πάντων), διὰ τε δὴ τοῦτο τὴν ὑπόληψιν λαβὼν ταύτην καὶ διὰ τὸ πάντων τὰ σπέρματα τὴν φύσιν ὑγρὰν ἔχειν· τὸ δ' ὕδωρ ἀρχὴν τῆς φύσεως εἶναι τοῖς ὑγροῖς.

Of the first philosophers, the majority thought the principles of all things were found only in the class of matter. For that of which all existing things consist, and that from which they come to be first and into which they perish last – the substance continuing but changing in its attributes – *this*, they say, is the element and this the principle of existing things. Accordingly they do not think anything either comes to be or perishes, inasmuch as this nature is always preserved... For a certain nature always exists, either one or more than one, from which everything else comes to be while this is preserved. All, however, do not agree on the number and nature of this principle, but Thales, the originator of this kind of theory, says it is water (and that is why he asserted that the earth floats on water), perhaps getting this conception from observing that everything derives its nourishment from what is moist and that the hot itself arises from and lives off it (and the thing from which the hot comes to be is the source of everything else.) He gets his conception both from this fact and from the fact that the seeds of all things have a moist nature, and also the fact that water is the source of growth for moist things.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>64</sup> On Thales, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 3-8; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 23-27; Richard D. McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), pp. 21-31; and Geoffrey Stephen Kirk, John Earle Raven & Malcolm Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 76-99.

<sup>65</sup> McKirahan, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, p. 27, notes that: "Aristotle's purposes are clear. He does not aim to discuss the complete theories of former philosophers sympathetically and in context; he wants only to see if they contain anything relevant to his own philosophical project of identifying different types of causes."

<sup>66</sup> For texts, translations, and brief commentary see: Daniel W. Graham (trans. and ed.), *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 17-44, esp. pp. 28-29.

In seeking to interpret ancient textual evidence such as that presented above, we need to keep the problematic nature of these sources and of their transmission history firmly in mind, as Richard D. McKirahan explains:

When we read a work by a modern author, we usually have no trouble about an accurate complete text... It is very different with ancient authors... No ancient prototypes survive, so ancient works come to us only through copies, or rather, copies of copies an unknown number of removes from the original... Each time a text was copied by hand, the copyist might introduce errors, especially since the Greek language and the way it was written changed over the centuries. As a result, the manuscripts of a work disagree at those points where different errors were introduced... The situation of the philosophers covered in this book is worse than the case just described, since... not only the prototypes but all the copies of their works have perished. We know these thinkers first through quotations or close paraphrases of what they wrote contained in surviving works of other authors who either had access to the lost writings or relied on other authors who did, and second through information about them preserved in other authors. These surviving works too underwent the process of copying described above with its attendant possibility for introducing errors. We must consider the interests, prejudices, approaches, and purposes of the authors and texts containing information on the early Greek philosophers in order to decide how far we can trust them and how they may have distorted the original. *The problematic nature of the evidence entails that there is ample room to disagree with any selection and interpretation of ancient evidence on early Greek philosophy... Only rarely can we be certain that an interpretation is correct... In this field there is no unanimity among experts...*<sup>67</sup>

Drozdek suggests that although Thales' first principle is clearly intended to be material water, it also served a specifically theological function in Thales' thinking. Water had a central role in the cosmogonic myths of Egypt and Mesopotamia, and, in Homer, *Okeanós* is considered to be the origin of the gods (*Iliad* 14.201, 246 and 302). In all of these accounts, water is seen as both the origin of the universe and the origin of all living things. In his attribution of divinity and eternity to 'ὕδωρ / *hýdor* (water), Drozdek believes that Thales had abstracted the theological quality of immortality, or what might be described as limited eternity, and turned it into an unlimited eternity or self-existence,<sup>68</sup> which, as we have seen above, is also the essence of Clouser's definition of the Divine Principle.

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<sup>67</sup> McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 1-2, emphasis added.

<sup>68</sup> See especially the discussion in: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians*, p. 6.

If Drozdek is correct, it is possible that a similar process of abstraction to that which he finds in Thales might also have occurred in the work of Thales' successors, namely Anaximander (the pupil of Thales) and Anaximenes (the pupil of Anaximander). According to Drozdek, Anaximander's main theological insight was that the essence of immortality was not simply eternality, i.e. self-existence. Instead, Anaximander may have believed that eternality also implied the concept of infinity, i.e. complete unboundedness in time, *but also* in space. Therefore, Anaximander's Divine Principle was called the ἄπειρον, which can be translated as 'The Boundless'.<sup>70</sup> In Aristotle, *Physics* 203b6-28 (A15+, B3) the *ápeiron* "is divine (τό θεῖον) because it is deathless (ἀθάνατον) and imperishable (ἀνώλεθρον):

ἅπαντα γὰρ ἢ ἀρχή ἢ ἐξ ἀρχῆς, τοῦ δὲ ἀπείρου οὐκ ἔστιν ἀρχή· εἴη γὰρ ἂν αὐτοῦ πέρας. ἔτι δὲ καὶ ἀγένητον καὶ ἀφθαρτον ὡς ἀρχή τις οὔσα· τό τε γὰρ γενόμενον ἀνάγκη τέλος λαβεῖν, καὶ τελευτὴ πάσης ἔστι φθορᾶς. διό, καθάπερ λέγομεν, οὐ ταύτης ἀρχή, ἀλλ' αὕτη τῶν ἄλλων εἶναι δοκεῖ καὶ περιέχειν ἅπαντα καὶ πάντα κυβερνᾶν, ὥς φασιν ὅσοι μὴ ποιοῦσι παρὰ τὸ ἄπειρον ἄλλας αἰτίας, οἷον νοῦν ἢ φιλίαν· καὶ τοῦτ' εἶναι τὸ θεῖον· ἀθάνατον γὰρ καὶ ἀνώλεθρον, ὥσπερ φησὶν Ἀναξίμανδρος καὶ οἱ πλείστοι τῶν φυσιολόγων.

τοῦ δ' εἶναι τι ἄπειρον ἢ πίστις ἐκ πέντε μάλιστα' ἂν συμβαίνοι σκοποῦσιν, ἔκ τε τοῦ χρόνου (οὗτος γὰρ ἄπειρος) καὶ ἐκ τῆς ἐν τοῖς μεγέθεσι διαιρέσεως (χρῶνται γὰρ καὶ οἱ μαθηματικοὶ τῷ ἀπείρῳ). ἔτι τῷ οὕτως ἂν μόνως μὴ ὑπολείπειν γένεσιν καὶ φθοράν, εἰ ἄπειρον εἴη ὅθεν ἀφαιρεῖται τὸ γιγνόμενον· ἔτι τῷ τὸ πεπερασμένον ἀεὶ πρὸς τι περαίνειν, ὥστε ἀνάγκη μηδὲν εἶναι πέρας, εἰ ἀεὶ περαίνειν ἀνάγκη ἕτερον πρὸς ἕτερον. μάλιστα δὲ καὶ κυριώτατον, ὃ τὴν κοινὴν ποιεῖ ἀπορίαν πᾶσι· διὰ γὰρ τὸ ἐν τῇ νοήσει μὴ ὑπολείπειν καὶ ὁ ἀριθμὸς δοκεῖ ἄπειρος εἶναι καὶ τὰ μαθηματικὰ μεγέθη καὶ τὸ ἕξω τοῦ οὐρανοῦ. ἀπείρου δ' ὄντος τοῦ ἕξω, καὶ σῶμα ἄπειρον εἶναι δοκεῖ καὶ κόσμοι· τί γὰρ μᾶλλον τοῦ κενοῦ ἐνταῦθα ἢ ἐνταῦθα; ὥστ' εἴπερ μοναχοῦ, καὶ πανταχοῦ εἶναι τὸν ὄγκον.

Everything is either a source or derives from a source, but there is no source of the boundless or infinite, for then there would be a boundary of it. Furthermore, it would be without coming to be and perishing insofar as it is a source; for what comes to be must reach an end, and there is an end of every perishing. For that reason, as we say, there is no source of the infinite, but this seems to be a source of everything else and to **contain all things and steer all things**, as everyone claims who does not posit some cause beyond the boundless, as for instance mind or love. And this is the divine, for it is **deathless and imperishable**, as Anaximander says, together with the majority of the natural philosophers.

<sup>69</sup> On Anaximander, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 8-12; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 27-33; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 32-47; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, pp. 100-142.

<sup>70</sup> ἄπειρον is a Greek word, derived from ἀ meaning 'without', and πείραρ meaning 'end' or 'limit'.

The belief in some infinite principle would seem to arise especially from five considerations: [1] from the concept of time (for this is infinite), [2] from the division in magnitudes (for mathematicians employ the concept of infinity), [3] and again from the fact that only in this way will coming to be and perishing not cease: so long as there is something infinite from which what comes to be is subtracted. [4] And again from the fact that what is limited always meets some limit, so there must be no limit if everything is limited by something else. [5] But the main and chief reason, is what causes a general problem for everyone: because we cannot imagine an end of the series, number seems infinite, and likewise mathematical magnitudes and also what is outside the heaven. And if what is outside the heavens is infinite, so, we tend to believe, are body and the world-orders themselves. For why should there be more void in one place than in another? So if there is body in one place it must be everywhere.<sup>71</sup>

Simplicius, *Physics* 24.13-25, Theophrastus fr. 226A Fortenbaugh (A9, B1) seems to suggest that the processes of formation and destruction can be conceived in moral terms:

τῶν δὲ ἔν καὶ κινούμενον καὶ ἄπειρον λεγόντων Ἀναξίμανδρος μὲν Πραξιάδου Μιλήσιος θαλοῦ γενόμενος διάδοχος καὶ μαθητῆς ἀρχὴν τε καὶ στοιχεῖον εἴρηκε τῶν ὄντων **τὸ ἄπειρον**, πρῶτος τοῦτο τοῦνομα κομίσας τῆς ἀρχῆς. λέγει δ' αὐτὴν μήτε ὕδωρ μήτε ἄλλο τι τῶν καλουμένων εἶναι στοιχείων, ἀλλ' ἑτέραν τινὰ φύσιν ἄπειρον, ἐξ ἧς ἅπαντας γίνεσθαι τοὺς οὐρανούς καὶ τοὺς ἐν αὐτοῖς κόσμους·

ἐξ ὧν δὲ ἡ γένεσις ἐστι τοῖς οὖσι, καὶ τὴν φθορὰν εἰς ταῦτα γίνεσθαι **κατὰ τὸ χρεών· διδόναι γὰρ αὐτὰ δίκην καὶ τίσιν ἀλλήλοισι τῆς ἀδικίας κατὰ τὴν τοῦ χρόνου τάξιν**, ποιητικωτέροις οὕτως ὀνόμασιν αὐτὰ λέγων.

δῆλον δὲ ὅτι τὴν εἰς ἄλληλα μεταβολὴν τῶν τεττάρων στοιχείων οὗτος θεασάμενος οὐκ ἤξιώσεν ἔν τι τούτων ὑποκείμενον ποιῆσαι, ἀλλὰ τι ἄλλο παρὰ ταῦτα· οὗτος δὲ οὐκ ἀλλοιούμενου τοῦ στοιχείου τὴν γένεσιν ποιεῖ, ἀλλ' ἀποκρινομένων τῶν ἐναντίων διὰ τῆς αἰδίου κινήσεως· διὸ καὶ τοῖς περὶ Ἀναξαγόραν τοῦτον ὁ Ἀριστοτέλης συνέταξεν.

[Report of the interpretation of Theophrastus:] Of those who say the source is one and in motion and boundless, Anaximander, the son of Praxiades, of Miletus, the successor and student of Thales, said the source and element of existing things was **the boundless**, being the first one to apply this term to the source. And he says it is neither water nor any other of the so-called elements, but some other boundless nature, from which come to be all the heavens and the world-orders in them: From what things existing objects come to be, into them too does their destruction take place, **according to what must be: for they give recompense and pay restitution to each other for their injustice according to the ordering of time**, expressing it in these rather poetic terms.

<sup>71</sup> Greek text and English translation from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 54-55, emphasis added.

[Comment by Simplicius:] It is clear that, observing the change of the four elements into each other, he did not think it appropriate to make one of them the substratum of the others, but something else besides them. And he did not derive generation from the alteration of some element, but from the separation of contraries due to everlasting motion. That is why Aristotle classified him with the followers of Anaxagoras.<sup>72</sup>

Drozdek claims that the *ápeiron* is a material substance; however, this view is not supported by many other scholars.<sup>73</sup> Whether material or not, the *ápeiron* still appears to conform to Clouser's 'Pagan Dependency Arrangement', in which there is only one continuous reality, part of which is the Divine Principle, on which all the rest depends.

### Anaximenes of Miletus<sup>74</sup>

Anaximenes, the third member of the Milesian school, posited ἀήρ (air) as his fundamental substrate. Anaximenes may have taken his inspiration from Anaximander's process of creation, in which the *ápeiron* gives rise to two opposites, the hot and the cold. Similarly, in Anaximenes' scheme, there is a condensation-rarefaction mechanism that gives rise to all things. In this sense, *aēr* is an entirely physical Divine Principle. However, for Anaximenes, cosmic *aēr* also surrounds the cosmos, and functions as a kind of world soul.

Simplicius, *Physics* 24.26-25.1, Theophrastus fr. 226A Fortenbaugh (A5) notes that *aēr* is determinate, unlike the *ápeiron* of Anaximander, and that *aēr* is the "underlying nature":

Ἀναξιμένης δὲ Εὐρυστράτου Μιλήσιος, ἐταῖρος γεγονώς Ἀναξιμάνδρου, μίαν μὲν καὶ αὐτὸς τὴν ὑποκειμένην φύσιν καὶ ἄπειρόν φησιν ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνος, οὐκ ἀόριστον δὲ ὥσπερ ἐκεῖνος, ἀλλὰ ὠρισμένην, ἀέρα λέγων αὐτήν· διαφέρειν δὲ μανότητι καὶ πυκνότητι κατὰ τὰς οὐσίας. καὶ ἀραιούμενον μὲν πῦρ γίνεσθαι, τὰ δὲ ἄλλα ἐκ τούτων. κίνησιν δὲ καὶ οὗτος αἰδίον ποιεῖ, δι ἣν καὶ τὴν μεταβολὴν γίνεσθαι.

<sup>72</sup> Greek texts and English translations from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 50-51, emphasis added. On Anaximander's concept of nature as a self-regulative equilibrium, see: Gregory Vlastos, 'Isonomia', *The American Journal of Philology*, Volume 74, Number 4 (1953), pp. 362-363.

<sup>73</sup> Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers as Theologians*, p. 11. For a rejection of the "materiality" of Anaximander's *ápeiron*, see, for example: McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, p. 34: "According to this account [i.e. that of Simplicius], for Anaximander the *apeiron* is the stuff of which all things are composed. On this influential view, Anaximander's *apeiron* replaces Thales' water as the Aristotelian "material cause" of all things. I have already called this way of interpreting Thales into question; as we will see, for Anaximander, it cannot stand."

<sup>74</sup> On Anaximenes, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 12-14; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 33-37; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 48-57; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 143-162.



Anaximenes, son of Eurystratus, of Miletus, was an associate of Anaximander, who says, like him, that the underlying nature is single and boundless, but not indeterminate as he says, but determinate, calling it air. It differs in essence in accordance with its rarity or density. When it is thinned it becomes fire, while when it is condensed it becomes wind, then cloud, when still more condensed, water, then earth, then stones. Everything else comes from these. And he too makes motion everlasting, as a result of which change occurs.<sup>75</sup>

Aëtius P 1.3.4, S 1.10.12 (B2) draws the connection between *aēr* and the soul:

Ἀναξιμένης Εὐρυστράτου Μιλήσιος ἀρχὴν τῶν ὄντων ἀέρα ἀπεφήματο· ἐκ γὰρ τούτου πάντα γίνεσθαι καὶ εἰς αὐτὸν πάλιν ἀναλύεσθαι. “οἷον ἢ ψυχὴ,” φησὶν, “ἡ ἡμετέρα ἀὴρ οὐσα συγκρατεῖ ἡμᾶς, καὶ ὅλον τὸν κόσμον πνεῦμα καὶ ἀὴρ περιέχει” (λέγεται δὲ συνωνύμως ἀὴρ καὶ πνεῦμα). ἀμαρτάνει δὲ καὶ οὗτος ἐξ ἀπλοῦ καὶ μονοειδοῦς ἀέρος καὶ πνεύματος δοκῶν συνεστάναι τὰ ζῶια· ἀδύνατον γὰρ ἀρχὴν μίαν τὴν ὕλην τῶν ὄντων ὑποστῆναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ποιοῦν αἴτιον χρὴ ὑποτιθέναι· οἷον ἄργυρος οὐκ ἀρκεῖ πρὸς τὸ ἔκπωμα γενέσθαι, ἐὰν μὴ τὸ ποιοῦν ᾖ, τουτέστιν ὁ ἀργυροκόπος· ὁμοίως καὶ ἐπὶ τοῦ χαλκοῦ καὶ τοῦ ξύλου καὶ τῆς ἄλλης ὕλης.

Anaximenes, son of Eurystratus, of Miletus, declared air to be the source of beings. For from this do all things arise and back into it do all things dissolve. As our soul, he says, which is air, controls us, so do breath and air encompass the whole world-order. (He uses the terms ‘air’ and ‘breath’ synonymously.) He too errs in thinking living things are composed of air or breath, a simple and homogenous stuff. For it is impossible for a single source to provide the matter of existing things, but one must posit also an efficient cause. For instance, silver does not suffice for a cup to come into existence if there is no maker, namely the silversmith. And similarly with bronze, wood or any other kind of matter.<sup>76</sup>

Anaximenes’ distinctive theological contribution, therefore, is based upon an extrapolation from the composition of a human being. In the same way that a human was believed to be a living being due to the presence of a soul or animating principle (the *ψύχη* / *psychē*), so too, Anaximenes seems to have thought of the entire cosmos as a living being. *Aēr*, like the *ápeiron*, is a governing principle, bringing order to the cosmos, but it is also a rational principle, from which the rationality of human beings is derived. *Aēr* is also less tangible than *hýdor* (water), but unlike the *ápeiron*, it is a part of this physical world. For Anaximenes, therefore, *aēr* is clearly a Divine Principle.

<sup>75</sup> Greek texts and English translations from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 74-75.

<sup>76</sup> Greek texts and English translations from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 76-77.

## Xenophanes of Colophon – An Early Pagan Monotheist?<sup>77</sup>

Xenophanes, unlike the members of the Milesian school, did *not* posit a fundamental substrate as a Divine Principle. However, in his attempt to focus on the concept of divine perfection, he seems to have come very close to denying the reality of the traditional gods, and instead, he appears to have been an exponent of an early form of pagan monotheism.

A far-reaching concept of divine perfection led Xenophanes to reject a number of characteristics traditionally attributed to the gods. McKirahan notes that Xenophanes mounted a fivefold attack on traditional Greek religion.<sup>78</sup> Firstly, Xenophanes criticised the “blameworthy”, “disgraceful” and “unholy deeds” of the Homeric and Hesiodic gods, as we see in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 9.193 (B11) and 1.289 (B12):

πάντα θεοῖς ἀνέθηκαν Ὅμηρός θ' Ἡσίοδος τε,  
ὅσσα παρ' ἀνθρώποισιν ὀνειδέα καὶ ψόγος ἐστίν,  
κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν.

Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things  
that are blameworthy and disgraceful for men:  
stealing, committing adultery, deceiving each other.

Ὅμηρος δὲ καὶ Ἡσίοδος κατὰ τὸν Κολοφώνιον Ξενοφάνη  
ὥς πλεῖστ' ἐφθέγγαντο θεῶν ἀθεμίστια ἔργα,  
κλέπτειν μοιχεύειν τε καὶ ἀλλήλους ἀπατεύειν.

Homer and Hesiod, according to Xenophon of Colophon,  
expressed as many unholy deeds as possible of the gods:  
stealing, committing adultery, deceiving each other.<sup>79</sup>

Secondly, Xenophanes was particularly scathing in his criticism of the concept of anthropomorphism (i.e. representation of the gods in human form), as we see, for example, in Clement of Alexandria, *Miscellanies* 5.109 (B14); 5.110 (B15); and 7.22 (B16):

ἀλλ' οἱ βροτοὶ δοκέουσι γεννᾶσθαι θεοῦς,  
τὴν σφετέρην δ' ἐσθῆτα ἔχειν φωνήν τε δέμας τε.

<sup>77</sup> On Xenophanes, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 15-25; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 41-56; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 58-69; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 163-180.

<sup>78</sup> See: McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 59-61, for English texts and commentary.

<sup>79</sup> Greek text and English translations from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 108-109.

But mortals think gods are begotten,  
and have the clothing, voice, and body of mortals.

ἀλλ' εἰ χεῖρας ἔχον βόες < ἵπποι τ' > ἢ λέοντες  
'ἢ γράψαι χεῖρεσσι καὶ ἔργα τελεῖν ἄπερ ἄνδρες,  
ἵπποι μὲν θ' ἵπποισι βόες δέ τε βουσὶν ὁμοίως  
καὶ < κε > θεῶν ιδέας ἔγραφον καὶ σώματ' ἐποίουν  
τοιαῦθ' οἷόν περ καὶ τοὶ δέμας εἶχον < ἕκαστοι >.

Now if cattle, < horses > or lions had hands  
and were able to draw with their hands and perform works like men,  
horses like horses and cattle like cattle  
would draw the forms of gods, and make their bodies  
just like the body < each of them > had.

Αἰθιοπές τε < θεοὺς σφετέρους > σιμὸν μέλανά τε  
Θρηῆκές τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρροὺς < φασι πέλεσθαι >.

Africans <say their gods are> snub-nosed and black,  
Thracians blue-eyed and red-haired.<sup>80</sup>

Thirdly, Xenophanes did *not* accept that truly divine beings could have a beginning and be born, or that they could die, since this violated the divine perfection of eternity. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.23 1399b6-9 (DK 21A12) informs us that: “Xenophanes used to say that those who say that the gods are born are just as impious as those who say that they die, since either way it follows that there is a time when the gods do not exist.”<sup>81</sup>

Fourthly, Xenophanes rejects any kind of belief in a divine hierarchy. In Pseudo-Plutarch, *Stromata* 4 (DK 21A32), we are told that “It is unholy to have a master.” McKirahan believes Xenophanes’ view means that:

Zeus’ preeminent rank among the gods here falls under attack. Though elsewhere Zeus’s rule is a basis of order among the potentially unruly Olympians and in the world, Xenophanes finds it intolerable for anything divine to be constrained.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Greek texts and English translations from: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 108-111.

<sup>81</sup> McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, p. 61.

Fifthly, Xenophanes' conception of divine perfection meant that it was incorrect to represent the gods as beings in motion, since this would violate the idea of divine immutability (changelessness). Xenophanes seems to have been driven by a concept of 'fittingness', according to which no attributes or behaviours ought to be assigned to the gods that are morally or ontologically incompatible with a rigorous kind of divine perfection. Xenophanes' radical critique of the traditional understanding of the gods drew attention to his own austere Divine Principle, an eternal, unchanging, unmoving and morally perfect 'God', as we see, for example, in Clement, *Miscellanies* 5.109 (B23):<sup>83</sup>

εἷς θεός, ἔν τε θεοῖσι καὶ ἀνθρώποισι μέγιστος, οὔτι δέμας θνητοῖσιν ὁμοίος οὐδὲ νόημα.

One God, greatest among gods and men, not at all like to mortals in body nor in thought.

In Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 9.144 (B24), 'God' is all-perceptive:

οὐλος ὁρᾷ, οὐλος δὲ νοεῖ, οὐλος δὲ τ' ἀκούει.

All of him sees, all thinks, all hears.

In Simplicius, *Physics* 23.11-12 (B26) and 23.20 (B25), we see the emphasis that Xenophanes places upon the immovability of 'God':

αἰεὶ δ' ἐν ταύτῳ μῖμνει κινούμενος οὐδεν  
οὐδὲ μετέρχεσθαι μιν ἐπιπρέπει ἄλλοτε ἄλλῃ. (B26)  
ἀλλ' ἀπάνευθε πόνοιο νόου φρενὶ πάντα κραδαίνει... (B25)

He remains ever in the same place moving not at all,  
nor is it appropriate for him to flit now here, now there. (B26)  
But without toil he shakes all things by the thought of his mind. (B25)

Finally, we should note that, despite his vigorous critique of many aspects of the traditional representation of the gods, it seems that Xenophanes did not advocate a complete abandonment of traditional forms of worship. This might be attributed to logical inconsistency, or perhaps the pragmatic realisation that an accusation of impiety (such as that which was later levelled at Socrates) was dangerous, and thus was something to be avoided.

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<sup>83</sup> Greek texts and English translations in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 110-111.

## Heraclitus of Ephesus and the *Logos*<sup>84</sup>

In some respects, the approach of Heraclitus seems to involve a return to the methodology of the earlier Milesian school, insofar as πῦρ (fire) functions as the material substrate in his system, as we see in the following three extracts taken from Simplicius, *Physics* 23.33-24.6, Theophrastus fr. 225 (A5); Aëtius, P 1.3.11, S 1.10.14; and Diogenes Laertius 9.7 (A1):

Ἴππασος δὲ ὁ Μεταποντῖνος καὶ Ἡράκλειτος ὁ Ἐφέσιος ἓν καὶ οὗτοι καὶ κινούμενον καὶ πεπερασμένον, ἀλλὰ πῦρ ἐποίησαν τὴν ἀρχήν, καὶ ἐκ πυρὸς ποιοῦσι τὰ ὄντα πυκνῶσει καὶ μανῶσει καὶ διαλύουσι πάλιν εἰς πῦρ, ὡς ταύτης μιᾶς οὔσης φύσεως τῆς ὑποκειμένης· πυρὸς γὰρ ἀμοιβὴν εἶναί φησιν Ἡράκλειτος πάντα. ποιεῖ δὲ καὶ τάξιν τινὰ καὶ χρόνον ὠρισμένον τῆς τοῦ κόσμου μεταβολῆς κατὰ τινὰ εἰμαρμένην ἀνάγκην.

Hippasus of Metapontum and Heraclitus of Ephesus also [said the source is] one, and also in motion and limited, but they designated fire as the source, and from fire they make existing things by condensation and rarefaction and they resolve them back into fire, as being the one underlying nature. Heraclitus says all things are an exchange for fire. And he assigns a certain order and definite time for the transformation of the world according to some necessity of fate.

Ἡράκλειτος καὶ Ἴππασος ὁ Μεταποντῖνος ἀρχὴν τῶν ἀπάντων τὸ πῦρ. ἐκ πυρὸς γὰρ τὰ πάντα γίνεσθαι καὶ εἰς πῦρ πάντα τελευτᾶν λέγουσι. τούτου δὲ κατασβεσμένου κοσμοποιεῖσθαι τὰ πάντα· πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ τὸ παχυμερέστατον αὐτοῦ εἰς αὐτὸ συστελλόμενον γῆν γίνεται, ἔπειτα ἀναχαλωμένην τὴν γῆν ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς χύσει ὕδωρ ἀποτελεῖσθαι, ἀναθυμιάμενον δὲ ἀέρα γίνεσθαι. πάλιν δὲ τὸν κόσμον καὶ τὰ σώματα πάντα ὑπὸ τοῦ πυρὸς ἀναλοῦσθαι ἐν τῇ ἐκπυρώσει.

Heraclitus and Hippasus of Metapontum [say] fire is the source of all things. For they say that from fire all things come to be and into fire all things perish. When this is quenched all things are formed into a world. For first the most compact part of it being compressed into itself comes to be earth, then earth being loosened by fire produces water through liquefaction, and by evaporation this becomes air. And in turn the world and all bodies in it are consumed by fire in the conflagration.

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<sup>84</sup> On Heraclitus, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 28-41; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 57-74; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 112-144; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 181-213. See also: Gregory Vlastos, 'On Heraclitus', *The American Journal of Philology*, Volume 76, Number 4 (1955), pp. 337-368; and Alexander P. D. Mourelatos, 'Heraclitus, Parmenides, and the Naïve Metaphysics of Things', in: Edward N. Lee, Alexander P. D. Mourelatos & Richard M. Rorty, *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, Phronesis, Supplementary Volume 1 (Assen, The Netherlands: Van Gorcum & Company, 1973), pp. 16-48.

ἐδόκει δὲ αὐτῷ καθολικῶς μὲν τάδε· ἐκ πυρὸς τὰ πάντα συνεστάναι καὶ εἰς τοῦτο ἀναλύεσθαι· πάντα δὲ γίνεσθαι καθ' εἰμαρμένην καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐναντιοτροπῆς ἡρμόσθαι τὰ ὄντα· καὶ πάντα ψυχῶν εἶναι καὶ δαιμόνων πλήρη. εἴρηκε δὲ καὶ περὶ τῶν ἐν κόσμῳ συνισταμένων πάντων παθῶν, ὅτι τε ὁ ἥλιός ἐστι τὸ μέγεθος οἷος φαίνεται. λέγει δὲ καὶ ψυχῆς πείρατα ἰὼν οὐκ ἂν ἐξεύροιο, πᾶσαν ἐπιπορευόμενος ὁδόν· οὕτω βαθὺν λόγον ἔχει. τὴν τε οἴησιν ἱερὰν νόσον ἔλεγε καὶ τὴν ὄρασιν ψεύδεσθαι. λαμπρῶς τε ἐνίστε ἐν τῷ συγγράμματι καὶ σαφῶς ἐκβάλλει, ὥστε καὶ τὸν νωθέστατον ῥαιδίως γινῶναι καὶ διάρμα ψυχῆς λαβεῖν· ἢ τε βραχύτης καὶ τὸ βάρος τῆς ἑρμείας ἀσύγκριτον.

He held these general opinions: From fire all things are composed and into it are all things dissolved. All things happen by fate, and through changes of contraries existing things are connected. All things are full of souls and divinities. He has also spoken concerning all the orderly phenomena of the world, that the sun is the size it appears to be. He also says: If you went in search of it, you would not find the limits of the soul, though you travelled every road – so deep is its measure. Conceit he said was a seizure and eyesight deceptive. Sometimes he expresses himself so clearly and perspicuously in his treatise that even the dullest reader can easily understand and be uplifted. The terseness and density of his style is unparalleled.<sup>85</sup>

However, Heraclitus also speaks of a rational principle, known as the λόγος, which Drozdek believes was the specifically intellectual, or rational, aspect of Fire. *Lógos* manifests itself in human beings as an animating principle, in much the same way that *aēr* functioned in the scheme of Anaximenes. *Lógos* is a Divine Principle, functioning as the source of rationality, particularly in human beings, as well as being the foundation of cosmic order, and thus guides and directs events within the cosmos. Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors* 7.132-133, relates Heraclitus' doctrine of the *Lógos* as follows:

ἐναρχόμενος γοῦν τῶν Περὶ φύσεως ὁ προειρημένος ἀνὴρ, καὶ τρόπον τινὰ δεικνὺς τὸ περιέχον, φησί· τοῦ δὲ λόγου τοῦδε ἐόντος αἰεὶ ἀξύνετοι γίνονται ἄνθρωποι, καὶ πρόσθεν ἢ ἀκοῦσαι, καὶ ἀκούσαντες τὸ πρῶτον· γινομένων γὰρ πάντων κατὰ τὸν λόγον τόνδε ἀπείροισιν εἰκόασιν, πειρώμενοι ἐπέων καὶ ἔργων τοιούτων, ὅκοῖα ἐγὼ διηγέσθαι, κατὰ φύσιν διαιρέων ἕκαστον καὶ φράζων ὅπως ἔχει. τοὺς δὲ ἄλλους ἀνθρώπους λαμβάνει ὁκόσα ἐγερθέντες ποιοῦσιν, ὅκωσπερ ὁκόσα εὖδοντες ἐπιλαμβάνονται.

διὰ τούτων γὰρ ῥητῶς παραστήσας, ὅτι κατὰ μετοχὴν τοῦ θείου λόγου πάντα πράττομέν τε καὶ νοοῦμεν, ὀλίγα προδιελθὼν ἐπιφέρει·

διὸ δεῖ ἔπεσθαι τῷ < ξυνῶι (τουτέστι τῷ > κοινῶι· ξυνὸς γὰρ ὁ κοινός). τοῦ λόγου δ' ἐόντος ξυνοῦ ζώουσιν οἱ πολλοὶ ὡς ἰδίαν ἔξοντες φρόνησιν. ἢ δ' ἔστιν οὐκ ἄλλο τι ἄλλ' ἐξήγησις τοῦ τρόπου τῆς τοῦ παντὸς διοικήσεως.

<sup>85</sup> Greek texts and English translations in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 150-151.

Of this Word's being forever do men prove to be uncomprehending, both before they hear and once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this Word, they are like the unexperienced experiencing words and deeds such as I explain when I distinguish each thing according to its nature and show how it is. Other men are unaware of what they do when they are awake just as they are forgetful of what they do when they are asleep.

For thus having expressly asserted that by partaking in the divine reason we do and think everything we do, going on a little he adds:

That is why one must follow *to <xunon>* (that is, the common. For the *xunos* is the common). Although this Word is common, the many live as if they had a private understanding. This is nothing but an explication of how the whole universe is organised.<sup>86</sup>

In his doctrine of opposites, Heraclitus sought to explain how order could be brought about through a form of harmonisation of apparently discordant physical and moral features of the universe. In Diogenes Laertius 9.8 (A1), we read:

καὶ τὰ ἐπὶ μέρους δὲ αὐτῷ ὧδ' ἔχει τῶν δογμάτων· πῦρ εἶναι στοιχεῖον καὶ πυρὸς ἀμοιβὴν τὰ πάντα, ἀραιώσκει καὶ πυκνῶσει γινόμενα. σαφῶς δὲ οὐδὲν ἐκτίθεται. γίνεσθαι τε πάντα κατ' ἐναντιότητα καὶ ῥεῖν τὰ ὅλα ποταμοῦ δίκην, πεπεράνθαι τε τὸ πᾶν καὶ ἕνα εἶναι κόσμον. γεννᾶσθαι τε αὐτὸν ἐκ πυρὸς καὶ πάλιν ἐκπυροῦσθαι κατὰ τινος περιόδου ἐναλλάξ τὸν σύμπαντα αἰῶνα· τοῦτο δὲ γίνεσθαι καθ' εἰμαρμένην. τῶν δὲ ἐναντίων τὸ μὲν ἐπὶ τὴν γένεσιν ἄγον καλεῖσθαι πόλεμον καὶ ἔριν, τὸ δ' ἐπὶ τὴν ἐκπύρωσιν ὁμολογίαν καὶ εἰρήνην, καὶ τὴν μεταβολὴν ὁδὸν ἄνω κάτω, τὸν τε κόσμον γίνεσθαι κατ' αὐτήν.

Here are his doctrines on particular subjects: Fire is the element and all things are an exchange for fire, as they come to be by rarefaction and condensation – but he explains nothing clearly. All things come to be by contrariety, and the totality is in flux in the manner of a river, and the totality is limited and there is one world-order. It is generated from fire and in turn is consumed by fire in certain cycles, in alternating times through all eternity; and this happens by fate. Of contraries, that which leads to generation is called war and strife, that which leads to conflagration, harmony and peace, and change is a road up and down, and the world comes to be in accordance with it.<sup>87</sup>

Heraclitus is famous for his portrait of a visible world that is in constant flux, unlike Parmenides and the Eleatic school, whom we will consider in the next section. However, it seems that all of these thinkers accepted Xenophanes' emphasis upon immutability, in one sense or another, as a fundamentally divine characteristic.

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<sup>86</sup> Greek texts and English translations in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 142-143.

<sup>87</sup> Greek text and English translation in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 152-153.

## Parmenides of Elea, The Eleatic School, and *Being*<sup>88</sup>

Parmenides' poem is divided into two sections: *The Way of Truth* and *The Way of Opinion*. *The Way of Truth* [*Alētheia*] deals with Being, which is said to have genuine existence, whereas *The Way of Opinion* [*Doxa*] describes a world of changing and unreliable appearance that only *seems* to be real. Plutarch summarised Parmenides' view as follows:

Παρμενίδης δὲ ὁ Ἐλεάτης, ἑταῖρος Ξενοφάνους, ἅμα μὲν καὶ τῶν τούτου δοξῶν ἀντεποιήσατο, ἅμα δὲ καὶ τὴν ἐναντίαν ἐνεχείρησεν στάσιν. αἰδίων μὲν γὰρ τὸ πᾶν καὶ ἀκίνητον ἀποφαίνεται καὶ κατὰ τὴν τῶν πραγμάτων ἀλήθειαν· εἶναι γὰρ αὐτὸ “μῦθον μουνγενές τε καὶ ἀτρεμές ἢ δ’ ἀγένητον.” γένεσιν δὲ τῶν καθ’ ὑπόληψιν ψευδῇ δοκούντων εἶναι, καὶ τὰς αἰσθήσεις ἐκβάλλει ἐκ τῆς ἀληθείας. φησὶ δὲ ὅτι εἴ τι παρὰ τὸ ὄν ὑπάρχει, τοῦτο οὐκ ἔστιν ὄν· τὸ δὲ μὴ ὄν ὑπάρχει, τοῦτο οὐκ ἔστιν ὄν· τὸ δὲ μὴ ὄν ἐν τοῖς ὅλοις οὐκ ἔστιν. οὕτως οὖν τὸ ὄν ἀγένητον ἀπολείπει· λέγει δὲ τὴν γῆν τοῦ πυκνοῦ καταρρύντος ἀέρος γεγυμέναι.

Parmenides of Elea, associate of Xenophanes, at the same time adopted his views and undertook the contrary position. For he declares that the totality is eternal and motionless according to the true account of things. For it is “single and of a single nature, unshaken, and ungenerated”. But coming to be belongs to things that appear according to a false conception. And he dismisses the senses from the realm of truth. He says that if anything exists beside what-is, this is not being. And what-is-not does not exist in the totality. In this way therefore he leaves what-is ungenerated. He says the earth came to be from the dense air flowing down.<sup>89</sup>

Similarly, Hippolytus notes that:

καὶ γὰρ καὶ Παρμενίδης ἔν μὲν τὸ πᾶν ὑποτίθεται αἰδιόν τε καὶ ἀγένητον καὶ σφαιροειδές – οὐδ’ αὐτὸς ἐκφεύγων τὴν τῶν πολλῶν δόξαν πῦρ λέγων καὶ γῆν τὰς τοῦ παντὸς ἀρχάς, τὴν μὲν γῆν ὡς ὕλην, τὸ δὲ πῦρ ὡς αἷτιον καὶ ποιούν. τὸν κόσμον ἔφη φθείρεσθαι, ὧι δὲ τρόπῳ, οὐκ εἶπεν. ὁ αὐτὸς δὲ εἶπεν αἰδίων εἶναι τὸ πᾶν καὶ οὐ γενόμενον καὶ σφαιροειδές καὶ ὅμοιον, οὐκ ἔχον δὲ τόπον ἐν ἑαυτῷ, καὶ ἀκίνητον καὶ πεπερασμένον.

<sup>88</sup> On Parmenides, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 43-52; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 77-101; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 145-173; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 239-262. See also: David J. Furley, ‘Notes on Parmenides’ in: Lee, Mourelatos & Rorty, *Exegesis and Argument: Studies in Greek Philosophy Presented to Gregory Vlastos*, pp. 1-15. On Zeno, see: Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 104-110; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 174-192; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 263-279. On Melissus, see: Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 110-114; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 293-302; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 390-401.

<sup>89</sup> Plutarch, *Miscellanies* 5, from Eusebius, *Preparation for the Gospel* 1.8.5 (A22), in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 218-219.



Parmenides also supposes that the totality is one, eternal, ungenerated, and spherical. But not even he escapes the opinion of the many when he says that fire and earth are the sources of the totality, earth as matter and fire as cause and agent. He said that the world perishes, but in what way he did not say. The same said the totality is eternal, not generated, spherical, all alike (but having no place in itself), motionless, and limited.<sup>90</sup>

McKirahan summarises the problems presented by Parmenides' strict contrast between *The Way of Truth* and *The Way of Opinion* as follows:

If in reality there is no coming to be, perishing, motion, or change, then what is the status of Parmenides himself, the goddess, and the mortals whose opinions he disbelieves? Parmenides can dismiss the last group as part of the unreal world of opinions. And he can dismiss his own body in the same way. But how about his mind, which is having the thoughts?<sup>91</sup>

Parmenides and his successors in the Eleatic school, Zeno and Melissus, seem to have adopted Anaximander's emphasis upon divine eternality and divine infinity, but taken it to an even more radical extreme. For Parmenides, divine immutability appears to lead to a view of Being as the *sole* Divine Principle, but also the *only* reality, with the visible world reduced to the status of an illusion. However, as Shaul Tor has recently demonstrated, it is possible to question the metaphysical monist reading of Parmenides, and to believe that this world must still have some, albeit diminished reality for Parmenides, since otherwise Being need not have sent the goddess to Parmenides, and Parmenides would have had no need to record this encounter, nor the detailed cosmological scheme found at the end of the poem:

Doxastic things, we saw, are manifestly available for experience, discussion and belief. The goddess speaks of, and to, Doxastic things and, furthermore, we can describe them correctly and incorrectly. Indeed, one can acquire knowledge of the nature of Doxastic things and processes... Parmenides clearly takes it that there are present such things as mortals, who can experience, be experienced, err, know and be spoken to and about... the mortals' error consists not least in mistaking Doxastoc accounts for accounts of the nature of the core or ultimate reality, and *Doxa*'s cosmology is 'deceptive' precisely insofar as it is liable to be misinterpreted in just this way.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Hippolytus, Refutation 1.11.1-2 (A1). Greek text and English translation in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 220-221.

<sup>91</sup> McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 165 and 172.

<sup>92</sup> Shaul Tor, 'Parmenides' Epistemology and the Two Parts of his Poem', *Phronesis*, Volume 60 (2015), pp. 33-34.

## Pythagoras of Samos and the *Harmonía*<sup>93</sup>

Pythagoras' theological views have not survived, but we can discern certain theological tendencies, especially in his central focus on the significance of numbers. Iamblichus, *Life of Pythagoras* 18.82-86, provides this description of Pythagoras' teaching:

ἔστι δὲ ἡ μὲν τῶν ἀκουσματικῶν φιλοσοφία ἀναπόδεικτα καὶ ἄνευ λόγου, ὅτι οὕτως πρακτέον, καὶ τὰλλα, ὅσα παρ' ἐκείνου ἐρρέθη, ταῦτα πειρῶνται διαφυλάττειν ὡς θεῖα δόγματα, αὐτοὶ δὲ παρ' αὐτῶν οὔτε λέγειν προσποιούνται οὔτε λεκτέον εἶναι, ἀλλὰ καὶ αὐτῶν ὑπολαμβάνουσι τούτους ἔχειν βέλτιστα πρὸς φρόνησιν, οἵτινες πλεῖστα ἀκούσματα ἔσχον. πάντα δὲ τὰ οὕτως <καλούμενα> ἀκούσματα διήρηται εἰς τρία εἶδη· τὰ μὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν τί ἐστι σημαίνει, τὰ δὲ τί μάλιστα, τὰ δὲ τί δεῖ πράττειν ἢ μὴ πράττειν. τὰ μὲν οὖν τί ἐστι τοιαῦτα, οἶον τί ἐστὶν αἱ μακάρων νῆσοι; ἥλιος καὶ σελήνη. τί ἐστι τὸ ἐν Δελφοῖς μαντεῖον; τετρακτὺς. ὅπερ ἐστὶν ἡ ἁρμονία, ἐν ᾗ αἱ Ζειρήνες. τὰ δὲ τί μάλιστα, οἶον τί τὸ δικαιοτάτον; θύειν. τί τὸ σοφώτατον; ἀριθμός· δεύτερον δὲ τὸ τοῖς πράγμασι τὰ ὀνόματα τιθέμενον. τί σοφώτατον τῶν παρ' ἡμῖν; ἱατρική. τί κάλλιστον; ἁρμονία. τί κράτιστον; γνώμη. τί ἄριστον; εὐδαιμονία. τί δὲ ἀληθέστατον λέγεται; ὅτι ποιητοὶ οἱ ἄνθρωποι. διὸ καὶ ποιητὴν Ἰπποδάμαντά φασιν ἐπαινέσαι αὐτὸν τὸν Σαλαμίνιον, ὃς ἐποίησεν·

ὦ θεοί, πόθεν ἐστέ, πόθεν τοιοῖδ' ἐγένεσθε;

ἄνθρωποι, πόθεν ἐστέ, πόθεν κακοὶ ὦδ' ἐγένεσθε;

The wisdom of the Hearers consists of oral teachings without proof or explanation, that so one must act, and everything else that was said by him [Pythagoras]. They undertake to maintain these things as sacred doctrines, which they for their own part promise not to reveal nor to allow to be spoken, but they suppose those of their group are best in reasoning who have learned the most sayings. All the <so-called> sayings are divided into three kinds: some of them express what something is, some what is the most such-and-such, and some what one should do or not do. Those that express what something is are for example, "What is the oracle at Delphi?" "The tetractys, which is harmony, in which the Sirens are present." Examples of what is the most such-and-such are, "What is most just?" "To sacrifice." "What is wisest?" "number; second, giving names to things." "What is wisest of human practices?" "Medicine". "What is fairest?" "Harmony." "What is most powerful?" "Intelligence." "What is best?" "Happiness." "What is the truest statement?" "That men are evil." That is why they say he praised the poet Hippodamus of Salamis, for his lines:

Gods, whence are you? How did you become divine?

Men, whence are you? How did you become so bad?<sup>94</sup>

<sup>93</sup> On Pythagoras, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 53-70; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 37-39; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 79-111; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 214-238.

<sup>94</sup> Greek text and English translation in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 922-923.

The τετρακτύς (*tetraktýs*) had profound significance for the Pythagoreans, as it was the sum of the first four positive integers ( $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ ), and also represented the basic harmonic ratios found within music (the octave = 1:2; the perfect fifth = 3:2; and the perfect fourth = 4:3). The discovery of these mathematical patterns led Pythagoras to believe that the universe was inherently ordered and harmonious. An emphasis upon cosmic harmony was clearly present in the work of the later Pythagorean philosopher, Philolaus of Tarentum, and, as we shall see in the next section, it also seems to have influenced the work of Empedocles.

### **Empedocles of Acragas and the *Phrēn***

Empedocles'<sup>95</sup> system contained four eternal 'roots' (air, fire, water, and earth):

τέσσαρα γὰρ πάντων ῥιζώματα πρῶτον ἄκουε·  
 Ζεὺς ἀγρῆς Ἥρη τε φερέσβιος ἦδ' Ἀιδωνεύς  
 Νῆστις θ', ἣ δακρύοις τέγγει κρούνωμα βρότειον.

The four roots of all things hear first:  
 shining Zeus, life-giving Hera, Aidoneus,  
 and Nestis, who by her tears moistens the mortal spring.

Δία μὲν γὰρ λέγει τὴν ζέσιν καὶ τὸν αἰθέρα, Ἥρην τε φερέσβιον τὸν ἀέρα τὴν δὲ γῆν τὸν  
 Ἀιδωνέα Νῆστιν δὲ καὶ κρούνωμα βρότειον οἶονεὶ τὸ σπέρμα καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ.

He calls the fervent heat and aether 'Zeus', air 'life-giving Hera', earth 'Aidoneus,' and the seed, as it were, and water, 'Nestis' and 'the mortal spring'.<sup>96</sup>

The four 'roots' were moulded by two eternal forces, ἔρως (Love) and ἔρις (Strife). When Love was dominant, all of the elements became blended together in a perfect mixture, in the cosmic sphere; when Strife was dominant, all of the elements became completely separated from each other. Love and Strife seem to have *no* moral significance; they are merely cosmic forces, controlled and regulated by ἁρμονία (*harmony*). Simplicius, *Physics* 25.21-31 (A28) describes the system of Empedocles as follows:

<sup>95</sup> On Empedocles, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 71-83; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 135-151; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 230-292; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 280-321.

<sup>96</sup> Aëtius P. 1.3.20 (B6); and Hippolytus, *Refutation* 7.29.5-6 (A33). Greek texts and English translations in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 344-347.

οὗτος δὲ τὰ μὲν σωματικὰ στοιχεῖα ποιεῖ τέτταρα, πῦρ καὶ ἀέρα καὶ ὕδωρ καὶ γῆν, αἶδια μὲν ὄντα, πλήθει δὲ καὶ ὀλιγότητι μεταβάλλοντα κατὰ τὴν σύγκρισιν καὶ διάκρισιν, τὰς δὲ κυρίως ἀρχάς, ὑφ' ὧν κινεῖται ταῦτα, Φιλίαν καὶ Νεῖκος. δεῖ γὰρ διατελεῖν ἐναλλὰξ κινούμενα τὰ στοιχεῖα, ποτὲ μὲν ὑπὸ τῆς Φιλίας συγκρινόμενα, ποτὲ δὲ ὑπὸ τοῦ Νείκους διακρινόμενα· ὥστε καὶ ἔξ ἐῖναι κατ' αὐτὸν τὰς ἀρχάς. καὶ γὰρ ὅπου μὲν ποιητικὴν δίδωσι δύνάμιν γ' τῷ Νείκει καὶ τῇ Φιλίᾳ... ποτὲ δὲ τοῖς τέτταρσιν ὡς ἰσόστοιχα συνταύττει καὶ ταῦτα...

He [i.e. Empedocles] makes the corporeal bodies four in number: fire, air, water, and earth, everlasting but changing in their multitude and fewness by congregation or segregation, while he makes the real principles, those by which these are moved, to be Love and Strife. For the elements must continually move back and forth, at one time being congregated by Love, at another time being segregated by Strife, so that there are in fact six principles according to him. Indeed, in one place he grants active power to Strife and Love... but sometimes he ranks these powers with the four as equals...<sup>97</sup>

McKirahan notes the moral and psychological significance of Empedocles' scheme:

The equality of Love and Strife is a striking feature of Empedocles' system and must be understood at the moral and psychological level as well as at the mechanical level. The treatment of opposites given by his predecessors made it unthinkable for Empedocles to attempt to account for strife, hatred and evil in the world if the only relevant principle was a principle of love, harmony and good. Opposites are equally powerful and cannot be generated one from the other... if there were only a single principle, Empedocles would be vulnerable to questions Parmenides had raised: how the cosmic process got started in the first place, and what the original arrangement was like – questions to which Empedocles' everlasting cosmic cycle powered by Love and Strife makes cosmology immune.<sup>98</sup>

Drozdek claims that Pythagorean influence on the system of Empedocles can be seen not only in the use of the concept of *harmony*, but also in Empedocles' explanation of the formation of different objects in the world through precise mathematical combinations of each of the four eternal elements. Empedocles' Divine Principle was the φρόν (Mind), which was an embodiment of rationality, and seems to have had some limited kind of moral aspect. However, since the *Phrēn* was so dependent on the ever-changing material substrate, it was a Divine Principle that was markedly inferior to those of Xenophanes, Pythagoras, Heraclitus and Parmenides.

<sup>97</sup> Greek texts and English translations in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 344-347.

<sup>98</sup> McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, p. 260.

## Anaxagoras of Clazomenae and *Noûs*<sup>99</sup>

Anaxagoras proposed an explanation of the *kosmos* which seems to have drawn its inspiration from elements of the systems of Parmenides and Empedocles. Aëtius P 1.3.5, S 1.10.12 (A46) describes it as follows:

Ἀναξαγόρας Ἡγησιβοῦλου ὁ Κλαζομένιος ἀρχὰς τῶν ὄντων τὰς ὁμοιομερείας ἀπεφήνατο. ἐδόκει γὰρ αὐτῷ ἀπορώτατον εἶναι, πῶς ἐκ τοῦ μὴ ὄντος δύναται τι γίνεσθαι ἢ φθείρεσθαι εἰς τὸ μὴ ὄν. τροφήν γοῦν προσφερόμεθα ἀπλήν καὶ μονοειδῆ, ἄρτον καὶ ὕδωρ, καὶ ἐκ ταύτης τρέφεται θριξὶ φλέψι ἄρτηρία σὰρξ νεῦρα ὅστω καὶ τὰ λοιπὰ μόρια. τούτων οὖν γιγνομένων ὁμολογητέον ὅτι ἐν τῇ τροφῇ τῇ προσφερομένῃ πάντα ἐστὶ τὰ ὄντα, καὶ ἐκ τῶν ὄντων πάντα αὔξεται. καὶ ἐν ἐκείνῃ ἐστὶ τῇ τροφῇ μόρια αἵματος γεννητικὰ καὶ νεύρων καὶ ὀστέων καὶ τῶν ἄλλων· ἃ ἦν λόγῳ θεωρητὰ μόρια. οὐ γὰρ δεῖ πάντα ἐπὶ τὴν αἴσθησιν ἀνάγειν, ὅτι ἄρτος καὶ τὸ ὕδωρ ταῦτα κατασκευάζει, ἀλλ' ἐν τούτοις ἐστὶ λόγῳ θεωρητὰ μόρια.

Anaxagoras, son of Hegesibulus, of Clazomenae, asserted the homeoeries to be the principle of all things. For he thought the most puzzling difficulty was to explain how from what-is-not something could come to be, or how something could perish into what-is-not. For instance, we partake of simple food of one kind, bread and water, and from this are nourished hair, veins, arteries, flesh, sinews, bones, and the other parts. So since these things happen, it must be granted that in the food consumed are all these entities, and from these entities all things grow. And in that food are parts productive of blood, sinews, bones, and the rest, which parts are grasped by reason. For one should not appeal to sensation in everything, because although bread and water provide nourishment, the parts in them are grasped by reason.<sup>100</sup>

McKirahan observes that Anaxagoras's accounts of the origin of the *kosmos* and of the nature of mind and matter are “intimately related and inseparable from one another.” They are founded on five kinds of entities and six basic principles. The five kinds of entities are:

- (1) Objects and their parts;
- (2) Basic Ingredients;
- (3) Portions;
- (4) Seeds; and
- (5) Mind.

<sup>99</sup> On Anaxagoras, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 85-93; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 119-134; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 193-229; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 352-384. See also: Gregory Vlastos, ‘The Physical Theory of Anaxagoras’, *The Philosophical Review*, Volume 59, Number 1 (January 1950), pp. 31-57.

<sup>100</sup> Greek text and English translation in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 288-289.

The six principles are:

- (1) There is no coming to be or perishing;
- (2) There are many (perhaps unlimitedly many) different types of Basic Ingredients;
- (3) There is a Portion of everything in everything;
- (4) Each thing is most plainly those things of which it has the largest Portions;
- (5) There are no smallest Portions; and
- (6) Mind (*nous*) is unmixed with other things and has the following functions:
  - (a) it knows all things;
  - (b) it rules all things;
  - (c) it sets all things in order; and
  - (d) it causes motion.<sup>101</sup>

McKirahan contrasts the system of Anaxagoras with that of Empedocles:

The special status of Mind is reflected in its principal functions: knowing, ruling, setting things in order, and causing motion. Unlike Empedocles' four elements (earth, water, air, and fire), which have psychological as well as physical attributes, Anaxagoras's "things" are conceived in wholly physical terms. And unlike Empedocles' causes of motion Love and Strife, Anaxagoras's Mind is devoid of all moral aspects.<sup>102</sup>

Noûς / nous (*Mind*) seems to function as a 'Divine Principle', and, according to Simplicius, it is infinite, autonomous, mixed with no thing, independent, omniscient and all-powerful (Simplicius, *Physics* 156.14 – 157.4). *Mind* is coterminous with matter (which is infinite, and is infinitely divisible), but *Mind* is *not* composed of matter. Similarly, *Mind* is infinite in the temporal sense, and is thus eternal. *Mind* knows everything, and possesses consciousness and personality. *Mind* shapes and controls the material universe, with which it is coexistent. *Mind* is completely immutable and motionless, since it is manifest throughout the entire infinite universe. *Mind* controls and is present in all living beings, but is not to be identified with the soul. Rather, soul is a material principle of life in people, animals and plants, whereas *Mind* is a rational, extra-material principle, that guides and controls the activities of the soul. Amongst the Pre-Socratics, Anaxagoras' 'pagan monotheism' seems to have come closest to that of Judaism, Christianity or Islam, albeit in a system that pre-supposed the existence of an eternally-existing material universe.

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<sup>101</sup> McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 200-201.

<sup>102</sup> McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, p. 216.

### The Atomists and *Anágkē* (Necessity)<sup>103</sup>

Democritus proposed a radically new approach to the physical universe, in which there are only two fundamental factors: atoms and the void. Atoms have always existed, are ungenerated, and are constantly in motion, thus supposedly eliminating a need for any kind of sentient Divine Principle. There was no first cause of motion, since atoms are believed to have always been in motion, and therefore the ordered universe has no real beginning either. Atoms are the material aspect of the universe and effectively comprise a collective, self-organising *arkhē*, a self-existent, but fundamentally impersonal Divine Principle. The ontological status of the void is also unusual. The void is non-being, but is also ‘real’, and is a necessary aspect of the material universe, so that atoms can be in motion. Simplicius, *Physics* 28.4-16 (67A8) presents the essence of the Atomic system:

Λεύκιππος δὲ ὁ Ἐλεάτης ἢ Μιλήσιος (ἀμφοτέρως γὰρ λέγεται περὶ αὐτοῦ) κοινωνήσας Παρμενίδῃ τῆς φιλοσοφίας, οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν ἐβάδισε Παρμενίδῃ καὶ Ξενοφάνει περὶ τῶν ὄντων ὁδὸν, ἀλλ’ ὥς δοκεῖ τὴν ἐναντίαν. ἐκείνων γὰρ ἓν καὶ ἀκίνητον καὶ ἀγένητον καὶ πεπερασμένον ποιούντων τό πᾶν καὶ τὸ μὴ ὄν μηδὲ ζητεῖν συγχωρούντων, οὗτος ἄπειρα καὶ ἀεὶ κινούμενα ὑπέθετο στοιχεῖα τὰς ἀτόμους [καὶ τῶν ἐν αὐτοῖς σχημάτων ἄπειρον τὸ πλῆθος διὰ τὸ μηδὲν μᾶλλον τοιοῦτον ἢ τοιοῦτον εἶναι ταύτην γὰρ] καὶ γένεσιν καὶ μεταβολὴν ἀδιάλειπτον ἐν τοῖς οὖσι θεωρῶν. ἔτι δὲ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον τὸ ὄν ἢ τὸ μὴ ὄν ὑπάρχειν, καὶ αἷτια ὁμοίως εἶναι τοῖς γινομένοις ἄμφω. τὴν γὰρ τῶν ἀτόμων οὐσίαν ναστὶν καὶ πλήρη ὑποτιθέμενος ὄν ἔλεγεν εἶναι καὶ ἐν τῷ κενῷ φέρεσθαι, ὅπερ μὴ ὄν ἐκάλει καὶ οὐκ ἔλαττον τοῦ ὄντος εἶναί φησι.

Leucippus of Eleas or Miletus (he is variously said to be from both cities), although he was committed to Parmenides’ theory, did not pursue the same path about existing things as Parmenides and Xenophanes, but the opposite, as it were. For whereas they held that the totality was one, motionless, ungenerated, and limited, and ruled out seeking what-is-not, he theorised that the elements were atoms innumerable and in motion, and that there was unceasing coming to be and change in existing things. Moreover, what-is exists no more than what-is-not, and they are both equally causes of generated things. He theorised that the essence of atoms was compact and full and held that they existed as what-is and travelled in the void, which he called what-is-not and claimed it existed no less than what-is.<sup>104</sup>

<sup>103</sup> On the Atomists, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 95-107; Warren, *Presocratics*, pp. 153-171; McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates*, pp. 303-342; and Kirk, Raven & Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, pp. 402-433. For an exploration of the link between Democritean ethics and physics, see: Gregory Vlastos, ‘Ethics and Physics in Democritus’ (Part 1), *The Philosophical Review*, Volume 54, Number 6 (November 1945), pp. 578-592; and ‘Ethics and Physics in Democritus’ (Part 2), *The Philosophical Review*, Volume 55, Number 1 (January 1946), pp. 53-64.

<sup>104</sup> Greek text and English translation in: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 528-529.

Atoms are classified according to intrinsic properties, such as size, motion, and indivisibility, but relational properties (such as spatial orientation and spatial arrangement) are also required for any explanation of the overall organisation of the universe. Democritus had to introduce organisational laws, that functioned on a supra-atomic level, in order to explain how an ordered and coherent universe could emerge from the random motion and clashes of the atoms in the void. These supra-atomic laws seem to be implicit in the concept of 'Ανάγκη / *Anágkē* (*Necessity*), which is portrayed as a kind of non-personal, non-intentional force, which guides the universe in such a way that personal and intentional creatures, such as human beings, might come into existence.

*Necessity*, in the Atomist scheme, functions as a replacement for the theologically-derived Divine Principles of earlier Pre-Socratic systems. *Necessity* is eternal, but is also an essentially blind and mechanical force, which serves as no more than an organisational principle. Thus, *Necessity* must almost be thought of as a kind of 'non-divine' Divine Principle, i.e. an explanatory element required within an eternally-existing material universe (and thus one which exemplifies the 'Pagan Dependency Arrangement'), but one which Democritus seems to posit grudgingly and without enthusiasm.

Somewhat surprisingly, Democritus does seem to acknowledge that the traditional gods are real, in some sense, and that they can interact with the world. The gods bestow blessings and judgements and expect moral behaviour from human beings. However, Democritus seems to reject the anthropomorphism of traditional religion, and the gods of the Atomist system are material beings composed of atoms, and thus, like all other beings within an Atomist universe, the gods are subject to decay.

Given the fundamentally impersonal and non-teleological nature of the Democritean universe, it is also surprising that Democritus is thought to have written extensively on moral matters. Several fragments of ethical teaching attributed to Democritus have been preserved, although this attribution is somewhat insecure.<sup>105</sup> A Democritean focus on morality might, at first glance, seem to emerge from the concerns of earlier Pre-Socratic thinkers for equality and justice.<sup>106</sup> Vlastos has argued that many of the Pre-Socratic thinkers were overwhelmingly concerned with the twin concepts of 'cosmic justice' and 'cosmic equality':

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<sup>105</sup> See: Graham, *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy*, Chapter 14, 'The Atomists, continued: Democritus' ethical fragments', pp. 630-686. Graham (p. 630) notes that there are several problems with the reliability of the sources within which the ethical fragments are found, and that "the philosophical value of the fragments remains open to question".

<sup>106</sup> See: Gregory Vlastos, 'Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies', *Classical Philology*, Volume 42, Number 3 (July 1947), pp. 156-178.



The early Greek notion of justice lends itself with seductive ease to application far beyond the bounds of politics and morals. To respect the nature of anyone or anything is to be “just” to them. To impair or destroy that nature is “violence” or “injustice”... Cosmic justice is a conception of nature at large as a harmonious association, whose members observe, or are compelled to observe, the law of the measure. There may be death, destruction, strife, even encroachment (as in Anaximander). There is justice nonetheless, if encroachment is invariably repaired and things are reinstated within their proper limit... Cosmic equality was conceived as the *guaranty* of cosmic justice: the order of nature is maintained *because* it is an order of equals.<sup>107</sup>

However, when compared with a system such as that of Anaximander, Vlastos believes that the Democritean universe is really quite indifferent to equality:

The order of nature is now assured through the impenetrability of the atoms, the eternity of their motion, the infinity of their number and form... The infinite worlds are unequal in size and power and at unequal intervals from one another. Earth, sun, moon, and stars are also, no doubt, unequal in size and at unequal intervals. As for the earth, its breadth and length are unequal, and the northern and southern halves of the cylindroid are unequal in weight. Cosmic equality has lost its importance, for cosmic justice no longer makes sense. ***Justice is now a human device; it applies solely to the acts and relations of conscious beings. It is not arbitrary, for it is rooted in the necessities of man’s nature and environment. But neither does man find it in the universe as such; it is a product of civilisation and art. Justice is only the form which the immanent order of nature achieves in the mind and works of man. Justice is natural, but nature is not just.***<sup>108</sup>

The process of theological refinement and readjustment that we have observed in the work of earlier Pre-Socratic thinkers, therefore, came to a ‘cul-de-sac’ in the work of Democritus. Democritus himself seems not to have advocated an abandonment of belief in the traditional gods, or the forms of public worship associated with them. In the ethical fragments, there also seems to be a continuing role for elements of traditional morality. Nonetheless, the Atomist worldview provided little logical support for traditional religion or morality, and as Vlastos has argued above, the Democritean approach effectively makes ‘justice’ a strictly human construct. As we shall see in the following chapter, there were several thinkers in the Classical period who were willing to embrace and develop these troubling aspects of Democritean thought.

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<sup>107</sup> Vlastos, ‘Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies’, p. 156.

<sup>108</sup> Vlastos, ‘Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies’, p. 178, emphasis added.

## Conclusion

In Chapter 2, we have considered the nature of Pre-Socratic thought in the light of the worldview analysis of James W. Sire, Francis Schaeffer and C. S. Lewis. We have examined the various types of worldviews that can be proposed in a logically consistent manner, and sought to classify the worldviews of each Pre-Socratic thinker accordingly, so as to derive some limited conclusions about their ethical views, especially from a careful consideration of the logical implications of their basic theological commitments.

We have demonstrated that a ‘first principles’ account of early Pre-Socratic thought (developed by some modern scholars on the basis of the surviving fragmentary evidence, as well as the opinions of Plato, Aristotle and other ancient interpreters) has significant methodological flaws. These flaws include an implicit dependence upon naturalistic assumptions, and an apparent bias against authentically ‘religious’ elements within each Pre-Socratic system of thought.

The insights of Roy Clouser about: (1) the hidden role of religious beliefs in theories; (2) the personal or impersonal Divine Principle underlying each theory or worldview; and (3) the Pagan Dependency Arrangement (characterised by a distinctive relationship between a self-existent Divine Principle and an eternal material universe) have served to provide a heightened degree of plausibility for the broad contours of the alternate theological account of Pre-Socratic thought developed by Adam Drozdek. Whether one is convinced by every aspect of Drozdek’s argument or not, the broad theological sweep of Drozdek’s account allows us to see why many of these Pre-Socratic thinkers might not have been as thoroughly ‘naturalistic’ as some modern interpreters have suggested. This, in turn, might partly explain why Pre-Socratic thinkers continued to adhere to at least some aspects of traditional Ancient Greek religious and ethical modes of thought and behaviour. The work of Gregory Vlastos has allowed us to see how the physical or cosmological theories of the Pre-Socratic thinkers incorporated certain elements of ancient political thought, such as an emphasis upon *isonomia*, or equal representation, as a means by which to balance competing cosmological elements, forces, or principles.

In Chapter 3, we will turn to an examination of the beliefs and behavior of the Sophists. We will consider the ways in which each thinker embraced or rejected elements of traditional religious and ethical thought, as well as the extent to which the Sophists paved the way for other great thinkers of the Classical period, such as Plato and Aristotle.

## Chapter 3

### Ethical Thought in Classical Greece: The Sophists

#### Introduction

The ‘First Principles’ account of the Pre-Socratic thinkers has had a profound impact upon modern interpretation of the nature, scope and content of Late Archaic and Early Classical Greek thought. The linear chronology to which it gave rise, developed particularly in 19<sup>th</sup> century Germany and Britain, has also had a significant, although less direct, impact upon analysis and interpretation of the teaching of the Sophists as well. Therefore, it will now be helpful to reconsider *why* the ‘First Principles’ story has begun to fall into disrepute, and then to think about *how* the failure of this approach might lead us to reassess the traditional account of the development of ancient Greco-Roman ethical thought.

To begin with, it is often quite difficult to assess the extent to which any ancient thinker had access to, and familiarity with, the verbal statements and written texts of other earlier thinkers. It is also difficult to establish whether Plato or Aristotle have provided a balanced assessment of either the Pre-Socratic thinkers or the Sophists. In the case of Plato, difficulties arise from his treatment of thinkers and issues within the context of literary dialogues. These dialogues *appear* to offer historically accurate depictions of interactions between Socrates (who is the leading character in most of the dialogues) and various other interlocutors. However, these dialogues are, in fact, clever works of fiction, written several years after the events that they purport to represent. Likewise, Aristotle certainly *seems* to have taken great care to consider the full range of views previously expressed on a given topic, but these summaries of previous philosophical development are also presented primarily as a preamble to the articulation of Aristotle’s own distinctive conclusions.

Some of these same problems apply, perhaps to an even greater extent, when we turn to consider the contribution of the Sophists to the development of ancient Greek thought. As with the earlier thinkers, some of our difficulties can be attributed to the paucity or fragmentary nature of the extant sources. We also have to contend with the often uncritical acceptance shown by some ancient and modern interpreters towards the significantly biased Platonic portrait of the Sophists. However, as I have suggested above, perhaps the greatest difficulty that we face is a conceptual framework imposed upon early Greek thought during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which still exercises a powerful influence upon contemporary scholarship.

In a book entitled *Rethinking Revolutions through Ancient Greece*, Catherine Osborne contributes a chapter that addresses the question: “Was there an Eleatic revolution in philosophy?” She notes that it would be difficult to find a book, in English, that did not claim that Parmenides had provoked a revolution in early Pre-Socratic thought, but that it would be equally difficult to find a book that offered any evidence in support of that claim. As we have already seen in the last chapter, Osborne believes that this central aspect of the ‘First Principles’ story rests on rather flimsy evidence, and thus she sets out “to highlight how we create stories that reflect our own preconceptions, in this case about what philosophy should be like”.<sup>1</sup> In particular, she has sought to uncover the motivations that lay behind 19<sup>th</sup> century attempts to construct a ‘linear chronology’ of Pre-Socratic thought. This ‘linear chronology’ has had a marked influence upon the way in which many contemporary interpreters still think about the immediate impact of ancient Greco-Roman thinkers, as well as the contribution of those thinkers to the trajectory of later Western philosophy.

Osborne suggests that the impetus to construct a linear chronology of early Greek thought arose between the 1870s and the 1890s, roughly in the period between that of the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and that of the Scottish classicist John Burnet (1863-1928).<sup>2</sup> According to Osborne, this chronology seems to have been constructed in opposition to the vision of Greek thought proposed by the German philosopher George W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), in which Hegel insisted that there had been an ongoing dialectical encounter between elements of early Greek thought that he labelled as Doric and Ionic, idealist and realist. Osborne attributes the subsequent development of the conceptual category of ‘Pre-Socratic philosophy’ to Eduard Zeller (1814-1908), a student of Hegel, who argued for a major division *between* the Sophists and Socrates, rather than at Aristotle (as Hegel had suggested), or before the Sophists. Zeller also insisted that Pre-Socratic thought comprised a single period whose focus was the material investigation of nature.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Osborne, ‘Was there an Eleatic revolution in philosophy?’, in: Simon Goldhill & Robin Osborne (eds.), *Rethinking Revolutions through Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 218.

<sup>2</sup> During the 1870s, Nietzsche advanced challenging new approaches to ancient Greek philosophy in works such as *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872) and *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (1873). In the early 1890s, at the age of 28, John Burnet wrote his first book, *Early Greek Philosophy* (1892), which became the most influential general study of early Greek thought and the Pre-Socratics in English until the publication of Bertrand Russell’s *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945). See: J. A. Smith, ‘Burnet, John (1863–1928)’, rev. N. G. Wilson, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004. Online at: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32186>. Accessed on 1 May 2013 at 2:30 pm.

<sup>3</sup> The designation ‘Presocratic Philosophy’, or *Vorsokratische Philosophie*, was probably the invention of Johann August Eberhard (1739-1809), who used the term in *Allgemeine Geschichte der Philosophie zum Gebrauch akademischer Vorlesungen*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Halle, Germany: Hemmerdeshen Buchhandlung, 1788). See: C. Osborne, ‘Eleatic revolution?’, in: Goldhill and R. Osborne (eds.), *Rethinking Revolutions*, p. 221, n. 8.

Zeller's magnum opus, *The Philosophy of the Greeks: An Investigation Into the Character, Transition and Principal Moments of its Evolution in its Historical Development*,<sup>4</sup> was translated into several European languages and became a standard textbook for many years.<sup>5</sup> Osborne summarises its importance and the presuppositions on which it was based:

Zeller resisted the dialectical analysis associated with Hegel, and instead promoted (along with many of his immediate predecessors) a more historical narrative. He saw in Presocratic philosophy a succession of movements, each prompted by its predecessors in a roughly chronological progression, albeit with some dialectical debate whereby successive thinkers would resist or modify claims made by their predecessors. In this Zeller set the pattern for narrative 'history of ideas', in which thinker follows thinker in a rational sequence, marked by progress towards truth... Thus we may thank Zeller for the model of diachronic interaction, to which we have become so intuitively wedded. ***On this model the Presocratic philosophers converse, one with another, pursuing a respectable philosophical debate.*** They do not pop out of the blue as independent sages, each throwing out his own views on an un-listening world. ***There is an implicitly evaluative side to this project, even in Zeller, since the philosophical historian invariably judges philosophy's origins on the basis of its current values.*** It is surely better, the historian hints and the late nineteenth-century philosophical reader will agree, that the early thinkers should have listened to each other's views and discussed them as gentlemen should. Philosophers do not just declare. They discuss.<sup>6</sup>

Plato's dialogues suggest that Socrates and the Sophistic thinkers "listened to each other's views and discussed them as gentlemen should." But was this really the case? In order to arrive at a clearer understanding of the Sophists and the manner in which they operated, I will now present: biographical sketches of the most significant Sophists; an overview of recent scholarship about the Sophists; a consideration of the reception of early Greek thought in the work of the Sophists, and of their immediate successors; ancient and modern reactions to the Sophists; and finally, an examination of the teachings of the Sophists.

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<sup>4</sup> Eduard Zeller, *Die Philosophie der Griechen: Eine Untersuchung über Charakter, Gang und Hauptmomente ihrer Entwicklung in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Three Volumes (Tübingen, Germany: Ludwig Friedrich Fues, 1844-1852). Later editions were published under the title *Die Philosophie der Griechen in ihrer geschichtlichen Entwicklung* [*The Philosophy of the Greeks in their Historical Development*].

<sup>5</sup> The first English translation of Zeller's work was: Sarah Frances Alleyne (trans.), *A History of Greek Philosophy from the Earliest Period to the Time of Socrates* (London, England: Longman, Green, & Company, 1881). For details of the publication histories of individual volumes of the original work, see: Necip Fikri Alican, *Rethinking Plato: A Cartesian Quest for the Real Plato*, Value Inquiry Book Series, Volume 251 (Amsterdam, The Netherlands and New York, NY, USA: Rodopi, 2012), p. 579.

<sup>6</sup> C. Osborne, 'Eleatic revolution?', in: Goldhill & R. Osborne (eds.), *Rethinking Revolutions*, pp. 222-223, emphasis added.

## Biographical Sketches of the Sophists<sup>7</sup>

**Prōtagóras** (c.490-420 BCE) was born in Abdēra, a city-state on the coast of Thrace. Prōtagóras was reputed to have been a student of **Dēmókritos of Abdēra** (460-370 BCE); however, since Prōtagóras was perhaps thirty years older than Dēmókritos, this teacher-student relationship is probably unlikely. Prōtagóras features in the Platonic dialogue entitled *Protagoras*, and his ideas are also discussed in Plato's *Theaetetus*.

**Gorgías** (c.485-c.380 BCE) was born in Leontínoi, a Greek colony located in what is now the province of Syracuse in southeastern Sicily. Gorgías was said to have been a student of the Pre-Socratic philosopher **Empedoklēs of Akragas** (492-432 BCE). **Kalliklēs** (c.484-late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was probably born in the Acharnae district of Athens and was depicted along with his teacher Gorgías in the Platonic dialogue entitled *Gorgias*. **Lykóphrōn** (origin and dates unknown) was also a student of Gorgías. His words are quoted in Aristotle's *Politics* 1280b10, but no other information about him has survived.

**Antiphōn of Rhamnoús** (480-411 BCE) was an Athenian statesman who became a rhetorician, and was the first of the so-called Ten Attic Orators. There is significant scholarly debate as to whether Antiphōn of Rhamnoús was the same person as Antiphōn the Sophist, who was the author of a treatise called *On Truth*.

**Pródikos** (c.465-c.395 BCE) was born in the town of Ioulís, on the Greek island of Kéōs. He came to Athens frequently on business for his native city and acquired a favourable reputation as an orator. Several Platonic dialogues mention him, including: *Hippias Major*; *Theaetetus*; *Phaedo*; *Protagoras*; *Charmides*; *Meno*; *Cratylus*; *Symposium*; and *Euthydemus*.

**Kritías** (460-403 BCE) was born in Athens. He was one of the leading members of the Thirty Tyrants, a pro-Spartan oligarchy installed in Athens after its defeat in the Peloponnesian War in 404 BCE. Kritías was also an associate of **Sōkrátēs**. Trevor Curnow believes that the younger Kritías appears in the Platonic dialogues called *Protagoras* and *Charmides*, whilst Kritías' grandfather, of the same name, appears in *Timaeus* and *Critias*.<sup>8</sup>

**Hippiás** (c.460-after 399 BCE) was born in Ēlis, a city-state in southern Greece, on the Peloponnesian peninsula. He was a disciple of a teacher called **Hēgēsídamos**, about whom nothing else is known. Hippiás was a younger contemporary of **Prōtagóras** and **Sōkrátēs**, and he features in two Platonic dialogues, the *Hippias Major* and *Hippias Minor*.

<sup>7</sup> All dates shown here are approximations. Names (in bold print) have been transliterated, with an indication of accents and vowel lengths in the original Greek. Elsewhere, I will revert to the familiar Latinised forms.

<sup>8</sup> Trevor Curnow, *The Philosophers of the Ancient World: An A-Z Guide* (London, England: Gerald Duckworth, 2006), p. 87.

**Thrasýmakhos** (c.459-400 BCE) was born in Khalkēdōn, an ancient maritime town in Bithynía in northwest Asia Minor. He appears as a character in a Platonic dialogue called *The Republic* and his ideas are also discussed in *Clitophon*.

**Kratýlos** (fl. mid to late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was born in Athens. He was an exponent of the views of the Pre-Socratic philosopher **Herákleitos** (535-475 BCE). Kratýlos features in a Platonic dialogue entitled *Cratylus*.

**Euthýdēmos** and **Dionysódōros** (both c. 430-late 5<sup>th</sup> or early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) were brothers from the Greek island of Khíos. The two brothers appear together in the Platonic dialogue entitled *Euthydemus*.

### The Sophists – A Brief Overview of Some Recent Scholarship

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in scholarship relating to the Sophists, including: new editions and translations of original texts;<sup>9</sup> brief surveys in introductory texts;<sup>10</sup> monographs;<sup>11</sup> as well as treatments of the Sophists in relation to Plato and rhetoric,<sup>12</sup> and in relation to ancient Greek concepts of politics and citizenship.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Daniel W. Graham (trans. and ed.), *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: The Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Presocratics*, Part 2 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 687-904. For contemporary English translations with commentary, see: Robin Waterfield (trans.), *The First Philosophers: The Presocratics and Sophists*, Oxford World Classics (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Richard D. McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates: An Introduction with Texts and Commentary*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing Company, 2010), pp. 365-426.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Gagarin & Paul Woodruff. 'The Sophists' in: Patricia Curd & Daniel W. Graham (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Presocratic Philosophy* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 365-384; Rachel Barney, 'The Sophistic Movement' in: Mary Louise Gill & Pierre Pellegrin (eds.), *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy*, Blackwell Companions to Philosophy (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 77-100; and Karsten Friis Johansen, *A History of Ancient Philosophy: From the Beginning to Augustine* (London, England: Routledge, 1999), pp. 105-124.

<sup>11</sup> Patricia F. O'Grady, *The Sophists: An Introduction* (London, England: Gerald Duckworth, 2008); Jacqueline de Romilly (Janet Lloyd, trans.), *The Great Sophists in Periclean Athens* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1992; original French edition, 1988). See also: Gilbert Romeyer Dherbey, *Les Sophistes*, Que sais-je?, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paris, France: Presses Universitaires de France, 2012); and Bernhard H. F. Taureck. *Die Sophisten zur Einführung* (Hamburg, Germany: Junius Verlag, 1995).

<sup>12</sup> On the Sophists and Plato, see: Hákan Tell, *Plato's Counterfeit Sophists*, Hellenic Studies (Washington, DC, USA: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2011); and Joseph Moreau, *Platon devant les sophistes* (Paris, France: J. Vrin, 1987). In relation to rhetoric, see: Marina McCoy, *Plato on the Rhetoric of Philosophers and Sophists* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Susan C. Jarratt, *Rereading the Sophists: Classical Rhetoric Refigured* (Carbondale, IL, USA: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991).

<sup>13</sup> Manfred Kraus, 'The Making of Truth in Debate: The Case of (and a Case for) the Early Sophists', in: Christian Kock & Lisa S. Villadsen (eds.), *Rhetorical Citizenship and Public Deliberation*, Rhetorical and Democratic Deliberation, Volume 3 (University Park, PA, USA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), pp. 28-45; and Thomas L. Dynneson, *City-State Civism in Ancient Athens: Its Real and Ideal Expressions* (New York, NY, USA: Peter Lang Publishing, 2008), pp. 97-116.

## Reception of Early Greek Thought: The Sophists, Plato, Aristotle and Theophrastus<sup>14</sup>

Jaap Mansfeld notes that it was actually Sophists, such as Gorgias and Hippias, who first collected together the views of earlier Greek ‘Pre-Socratic’ thinkers, but whereas Hippias tended to emphasise agreement and continuity between these figures, Gorgias stressed what he saw as the insoluble disagreements. Mansfeld characterises Plato’s appropriation of Sophistic summaries of the early Greek thinkers as follows:

Plato... combined the approaches of Hippias and Gorgias and added to the material that they had collected... *the more or less rigid schemes which underlie [Plato’s] expositions are presented in the course of imaginary conversations among civilised people, not as ingredients of a systematic treatise.*<sup>15</sup>

Aristotle and Theophrastus (c.371-c.287 BC), the first and second leaders of the Peripatetic school, built upon a Platonic foundation, and initiated an interpretation of early Greek philosophy that is reflected in the work of 19<sup>th</sup> century scholars such as Zeller and Burnet. However, A. A. Long is very critical of this traditional interpretation, since it:

... imports some anachronism and misrepresentation. In addition, it has helped to promote the view that early Greek philosophers in general were predominantly, if not exclusively, cosmologists, whose chief questions were about the origins and material principles of the world. Cosmologists, indeed, most of them were, if we exempt the sophists. But should the sophists be extruded from the ranks of the early Greek philosophers because they did not engage, to any great extent in cosmology? Apart from the inappropriateness of answering yes to that question, *identifying early Greek philosophy as predominantly cosmology has had the unfortunate effect of making its contributions to epistemology, ethics and other topics seem ancillary and perfunctory.* That misconception is no longer so entrenched, but it has hardly disappeared... *By representing the early Greek philosophers as conceptually or methodologically Presocratic, we have tended to overlook or marginalise their interest in such topics as I have already mentioned, including ethics, psychology, theology, and epistemology.*<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> For details of the works, fragments and testimonies relevant to each of the Sophists, see the section entitled ‘Lives and Writings of the Early Greek Philosophers’ in: Anthony Arthur Long (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Early Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. xvii-xxviii. For an extended discussion of the nature and reception of these sources, see: Jaap Mansfeld, ‘Sources’ in: Long, *Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 22-44.

<sup>15</sup> Mansfeld, ‘Sources’, in: Long, *Greek Philosophy*, pp. 26-28, emphasis added.

<sup>16</sup> Long, *Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 5-6, emphasis added.



## The Sophists: An Introduction

The Sophists were itinerant teachers who travelled from one ancient Greek city-state to another, offering instruction in rhetoric (the art of persuasive public speaking).<sup>17</sup> The earliest Sophists, all of whom were probably born before Socrates, included: Protagoras of Abdera;<sup>18</sup> Gorgias of Leontini;<sup>19</sup> Callicles of Athens;<sup>20</sup> and Antiphon of Rhamnus.<sup>21</sup> Several other Sophists were near contemporaries of Socrates: Prodicus of Ceos;<sup>22</sup> Critias of Athens;<sup>23</sup> Hippias of Elis;<sup>24</sup> Thrasymachus of Chalcedon;<sup>25</sup> and Cratylus of Athens.<sup>26</sup> A younger generation of Sophists, about whom less is known, included: Euthydemus and Dionysodorus of Chios, who were brothers; and Lycophron, a student of Gorgias.

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<sup>17</sup> For Sophistic rhetoric, see: John Poulakos, *Sophistical Rhetoric in Classical Greece*, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, SC, USA: University of South Carolina Press, 1995). For the history of rhetoric in ancient Greece, see: A. Thomas Cole, *The Origins of Rhetoric in Ancient Greece* (Baltimore, MD, USA: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); James J. Murphy, Richard A. Katula & Michael Hoppmann (eds.), *A Synoptic History of Classical Rhetoric*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, England: Routledge, 2013); and George A. Kennedy, *A New History of Classical Rhetoric* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> For a rigorous yet sympathetic treatment of Protagoras, see: Edward Schiappa, *Protagoras and Logos: A Study in Greek Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Columbia, SC, USA: University of South Carolina Press, 2003). For a response to the epistemological challenges raised by aspects of Protagoras' teaching, see: Mi-Kyoung Lee, *Epistemology after Protagoras: Responses to Relativism in Plato, Aristotle, and Democritus* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> For recent considerations of Gorgias, based on a careful reading of the surviving fragments, see: Bruce McComiskey, *Gorgias and the New Sophistic Rhetoric* (Carbondale, IL, USA: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002); and Scott Consigny, *Gorgias: Sophist and Artist*, Studies in Rhetoric/Communication (Columbia, SC, USA: University of South Carolina Press, 2001). For Gorgias's use of rhetoric, see: Christina H. Tarnopolsky, *Prudes, Perverts and Tyrants: Plato's Gorgias and the Politics of Shame* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 2010); Robert Wardy, *The Birth of Rhetoric: Gorgias, Plato and their Successors*, Issues in Ancient Philosophy (London, England: Routledge, 1998); and Seth Benardete, *The Rhetoric of Morality and Philosophy: Plato's Gorgias and Phaedrus* (Chicago, IL, USA: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed study of Callicles, Polus and Thrasymachus, the so-called 'immoralists', see: Curtis N. Johnson, *Socrates and the Immoralists* (Lanham, MD, USA: Lexington Books, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> For a recent treatment in which the author argues that Antiphon of Rhamnus and Antiphon the Sophist are the same individual, see: Michael Gagarin, *Antiphon the Athenian: Oratory, Law and Justice in the Age of the Sophists* (Austin, TX, USA: University of Texas Press, 2002). See also: Gerard J. Pendrick (trans.), *Antiphon the Sophist: The Fragments*, Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

<sup>22</sup> For consideration of the views of Prodicus on religion, language and ethics, see: Robert Mayhew, *Prodicus the Sophist: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>23</sup> For an examination of the philosophical views of Critias, see: John M. Dillon, 'Will the Real Critias Please Stand Up?', in: Richard Patterson, Vassilis Karasmanis & Arnold Hermann (eds.), *Presocratics and Plato: Festschrift at Delphi in Honor of Charles Kahn* (Las Vegas, NV, USA; Zurich, Switzerland & Athens, Greece: Parmenides Publishing, 2013), pp. 111-124.

<sup>24</sup> For a brief treatment of Hippias (in German), see: Stefan Witzman, *Hippias und die Anfänge der griechischen Philosophiegeschichte* (Norderstedt, Germany: GRIN Verlag, 2006).

<sup>25</sup> For Thrasymachus' views on justice, see: Johnson, *Socrates and the Immoralists*; and Peter Jerrold Hansen, *Plato's Immoralists and their Attachment to Justice: A Look at Thrasymachus and Callicles* (Ann Arbor, MI, USA: ProQuest, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> For recent commentaries on the Cratylus, see: S. Montgomery Ewegen, *Plato's Cratylus: The Comedy of Language*, Studies in Continental Thought (Bloomington, IN, USA: University of Indiana Press, 2013); and Ori Z. Soltes, *The Problem of Plato's Cratylus: The Relation of Language to Truth in the History of Philosophy* (Lewiston, NY, USA: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2007).

Many Sophists were not Athenian citizens, but all of them taught in Athens, at one time or another, and some remained in Athens for several years. Some of the Sophists came to Athens initially as ambassadors or businessmen, acting on behalf of their own city-state. Steven R. Robinson describes the role played by democratic beliefs and practices in the development of Sophistry, and its application in the areas of politics and law, as follows:

... democracy provided an opportunity for motivated and able individuals to emerge as leaders regardless of their backgrounds. And once the high-stakes political decisions had been handed over to absolute and direct determination by the vote, a politician's personal rhetorical ability became a much greater factor in politics than it had ever been before... It is therefore no accident that the beginnings of sophistry were bound up with democracy. However... sophistry did not begin at Athens. All the famous early sophists would appear to have acquired their skills by means of practical exposure within their own native democracies... What drew these men to Athens was not primarily its freedom of speech but its wealth and its large population – the sheer number of its citizens who were willing and able to pay for rhetorical training. Moreover, the infamous litigiousness of the Athenians... caused a disproportionate amount of forensic rhetoric to be practiced there.<sup>27</sup>

Areas of expertise addressed by at least some Sophists included: mathematics; astronomy; music; history; literature; and mythology. The Sophists were particularly concerned with the study of all aspects of language, as well as its use in texts and in various forms of public discourse, including debate, exhortation, pleading, and formal eulogy.<sup>28</sup> Anthony Kenny has suggested that the Sophists played roles in ancient Greek society that today would be fulfilled by “tutors, consultants, barristers, public relations professionals and media personalities”.<sup>29</sup> Jonathan Lavery has described the first generation of Sophists as “leading members of the 5<sup>th</sup> century intelligentsia”<sup>30</sup> and Sarah Broadie has characterised them as professional practitioners of wisdom who were “the first exponents of higher education in the West.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Steven Robinson, ‘The Political Background of the Sophists at Athens’ in: O’Grady (ed.), *The Sophists*, p. 25.

<sup>28</sup> For a brief yet helpful discussion of the development and role of persuasive public speech in ancient Greek culture, especially at Athens, see: Robinson, ‘Political Background’, in: O’Grady (ed.), *The Sophists*, pp. 21-29.

<sup>29</sup> Anthony Kenny, *Ancient Philosophy. A New History of Western Philosophy, Volume 1* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 29. For Kenny’s brief treatment of the Sophists, see pp. 28-32.

<sup>30</sup> Jonathan Lavery, ‘The Sophists: 5<sup>th</sup> century BC’, in: Patricia O’Grady (ed.), *Meet the Philosophers of Ancient Greece: Everything you always wanted to know about Ancient Greek philosophy but didn’t know who to ask* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England & Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate, 2005), p. 81.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Broadie, ‘The Sophists and Socrates’, in: David Sedley (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Philosophy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 73.

## Ancient Objections to the Sophists

The term ‘Sophist’ (σοφιστής) is derived from the Ancient Greek word σοφός (*sophós*) meaning ‘wise’, ‘skilful’, or ‘clever’. In the works of Homer and Hesiod, the term was generally used to describe a teacher, poet or wise man. Patricia O’ Grady notes that the word ‘sophist’ could also be used to describe a person who exhibited particular skill or expertise in a craft or practical art. When Homer or Hesiod described a person as a ‘sophist’, the term was always used in a complimentary manner.<sup>32</sup> However, during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, the term gradually acquired pejorative connotations, due to social, cultural, political and philosophical objections to the teaching and beliefs of the Sophists. Many of these objections are stated, alluded to, or implied, in the various Platonic dialogues in which the Sophists are represented. So on what were these objections based?

Firstly, we must remember that the majority of the Sophists were citizens of foreign city-states, and thus the power, wealth and influence that they were able to accumulate through their teaching led to negative reactions of fear, jealousy, and even mild xenophobia from some Athenians. In the city-state of Athens, non-Athenian citizens were not able to vote, or to take part in the political process directly. However, the Sophists developed a significant indirect influence, on the legal and political institutions of Athens, through their tutorship of rich and influential young Athenian citizens.

Secondly, although the Athenian democracy was generally quite stable, there was always a concern that those wealthy citizens who took advantage of the rhetorical training provided by the Sophists might actually be intending to overthrow the existing democratic government, and to install an oligarchic government in its place.<sup>33</sup>

Thirdly, and most importantly for our purposes, the Sophists were seen as a threat to existing religious and ethical beliefs, and their teaching raised some very awkward questions about the basis of legal and political institutions and practices as well. Protagoras and some other early Sophists tended to be socially conservative, and to uphold traditional religious observances and ethical beliefs. Nonetheless, the theological, epistemological and ethical implications of Sophistic teaching had a corrosive effect upon Athenian beliefs and institutions, which led to deep antipathy and distrust, especially amongst certain elements of the aristocratic elite.

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<sup>32</sup> Patricia O’Grady, ‘What is a Sophist?’, in: O’Grady (ed.), *The Sophists*, p. 9. For an overview of the usage of the term ‘sophist’, in the period following Homer and Hesiod, see pp. 9-10.

<sup>33</sup> See: Robinson, ‘Political Background of the Sophists’, in: O’Grady (ed.), *The Sophists*, pp. 27-28.

## Modern Assessments of the Teachings of the Sophists

Modern interpreters have been inspired, challenged, and sometimes even disturbed, by the teachings of the Sophists. Long maintains that “the Sophists’ most distinctive contribution to early Greek philosophy was their teaching of rhetoric and linguistics, relativism and political theory”.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Lavery points to contributions by the Sophists in the areas of “rhetoric, linguistics, literary theory, anthropology, psychology, social theory, ethics and a number of related fields.”<sup>35</sup> However, from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE until the present day, opinions about the merits of the teaching of the Sophists have been mixed. In times somewhat closer to our own, Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900), an English utilitarian philosopher and economist, upheld certain aspects of the ethical objections to the Sophists’ teaching that had previously been raised by Plato. In 1872, in an article published in the *Journal of Philology*, Sidgwick severely denounced the Sophists, referring to them as:

... a set of charlatans who appeared in Greece in the fifth century, and earned an ample livelihood by imposing on public credulity: professing to teach virtue, they really taught the art of fallacious discourse, and meanwhile propagated immoral practical doctrines... they were met and overthrown by Socrates, who exposed the hollowness of their rhetoric, and triumphantly defended sound ethical principles against their pernicious sophistries.<sup>36</sup>

In 1888, however, Friedrich Nietzsche put forward a far more positive assessment of the Sophists, in his philosophical work *Der Wille zur Macht (The Will To Power)*. Nietzsche argued that: “... every advance in epistemological and moral knowledge has reinstated the Sophists.”<sup>37</sup> Such vastly different perspectives on the nature and value of the Sophists’ teaching clearly call for some kind of explanation. In the next section, therefore, I will provide a detailed examination of the teachings of the Sophists, especially in areas that we might classify as metaphysical/theological, epistemological and ethical, in an attempt to discern the worldview(s) espoused by these ancient thinkers, and the impact that they had upon the development of ancient ethical thought.

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<sup>34</sup> Long, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> Lavery, ‘The Sophists’, in: O’Grady, *The Sophists*, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> Henry Sidgwick, ‘The Sophists’, *Journal of Philology* (1872), pp. 288-307 and (1873), pp. 66-80. Cited by O’Grady, ‘What is a Sophist?’, in: O’Grady, *The Sophists*, p. 11.

<sup>37</sup> Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (Anthony M. Ludovici, trans.; Oscar Levy, ed.) *The Will To Power: An Attempted Transvaluation Of All Values*, Volume 1, The Complete Works of Friedrich Nietzsche (New York, NY, USA: Russell and Russell, 1964 reprint of the 1924 edition), numbers 348 and 428. Cited by O’Grady. ‘What is a Sophist?’, in: O’Grady, *The Sophists*, p. 11.

## The Sophists: Theology and Metaphysics

The Sophists, perhaps even more than the Pre-Socratic thinkers, did not form a unified school of thought. They also did not owe allegiance to a single founder, as was the case for those philosophical sects and schools that looked to the teaching and example of figures such as Pythagoras, Plato or Aristotle. However, as Lavery points out, “the individual Sophists had enough in common to justify collecting them under the same label – even if much of the movement’s vitality was due to some fierce internal rivalries.”<sup>38</sup>

Views expressed by Sophists that dealt with aspects of traditional Greek religion have often been classified by modern scholars as falling on a spectrum between *agnosticism* (uncertainty about the existence of the gods) and *atheism* (denial of the existence of the gods). In one of the two fragments of his writings that have survived, Protagoras, the first of the Sophists, expressed a view that has usually been interpreted as an *agnostic* perspective. The opening line of his work *On Gods* has been rendered in English as follows:

Concerning the gods, I cannot know either that they exist or that they do not exist or what form they might have, for there is much to prevent one’s knowing: the obscurity of the subject [or possibly: their (i.e. the gods’) imperceptibility] and the shortness of man’s life.<sup>39</sup>

As with many of the surviving fragments of the Sophists’ writings, the ambiguity of this sentence is enhanced by its detachment from its context within the original document. We simply do not know what direction the subsequent argument might have taken, although Broadie is prepared to make the following suggestions:

... it would seem that the bulk of *On Gods* must have been about human religion, rather than about divinities themselves. It was a work of anthropology, not theology. Protagoras may have surveyed beliefs and cultic practices; he may have examined the psychological and social effects of belief and disbelief in gods; he may have speculated on the origin of religion. One thing is clear: since it would have been obvious to him that belief in gods is all but universal, his own agnosticism would have told him that a belief that is humanly irrepressible, even partly definitive of human nature, may simply *not be true* – if by ‘true’ we mean made so by an independently existing reality to which it conforms.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Lavery, ‘The Sophists’, in: O’Grady (ed.), *Meet the Philosophers*, p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> Broadie, ‘The Sophists and Socrates’, in: Sedley (ed.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, p. 80.

<sup>40</sup> Broadie, ‘The Sophists and Socrates’, in: Sedley (ed.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, p. 80.

Broadie's statements about 'truth', in the final sentence quoted above, point towards the difficulty that we have in knowing whether the primary intention of Protagoras' statement was to emphasise what might be called *theological/ontological agnosticism* (i.e. uncertainty about the existence of the gods), or *epistemological agnosticism* (i.e. uncertainty about the reliability of one's own thoughts, experiences and knowledge). As I have already indicated in Chapter 1, ancient Greek religion was generally more a matter of *orthopraxy* rather than *orthodoxy*, with an emphasis upon the observance of particular religious rituals, rather than a concern with upholding a detailed set of common beliefs. Thus, in the early Classical Athenian setting, the thrust of Protagoras' position might have had more to do with recognition of human finitude, and a consequent epistemological humility, rather than representing a deliberate attempt to undermine existing Greek religious beliefs and practices. Drozdek's view is that:

Protagoras does not make an ontological but an epistemological statement. He does not *know* whether the gods exist or not, which does not mean that he denies their existence. He pronounces his inability to have definite knowledge concerning this theological issue, but he leaves open a possibility that some positive pronouncements about the gods can be made.<sup>41</sup>

The portrait of Protagoras found within the eponymous Platonic dialogue would seem to support the view that Protagoras may not have been as theologically agnostic as some ancient and modern interpreters have claimed. Plato's characterisation of many of the Sophists was often unflattering, so it is striking that Protagoras is presented in a generally favourable light. The Platonic Socrates appears to give broad support to the views articulated by Protagoras, especially those expressed in the so-called 'Great Speech', found in *Protagoras* 320c-328d. The 'Great Speech' contains a story that seems to reflect several elements of the creation accounts that we have already encountered in the context of Hesiod's *Works and Days*, especially the creation of humanity, as articulated in *Works and Days* 106-201, but also the creation of Pandora, the first woman, which is recounted in *Works and Days* 42-105. Protagoras' story specifically mentions gods such as Zeus, Prometheus, Epimetheus, Hephaestus and Athena. However, rather than focusing on the creation of the first woman, Protagoras' story begins with the gods moulding mortal beings inside the earth, by blending together earth and fire and various compounds of earth and fire.

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<sup>41</sup> See: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, p.109.

I shall return to Protagoras' 'Great Speech' when I discuss the specific contribution of the Sophists to epistemological and ethical teaching. For now, however, I merely wish to emphasise the remarkable similarities between the story attributed to Protagoras by Plato, and the Hesiodic account in the *Works and Days*. If the 'Great Speech' broadly reflects the views of the historical Protagoras, it seems unlikely that we should describe him as a theological agnostic. Of course, Plato may have attributed views to Protagoras that are *not* an accurate indication of his true position, but we simply do not have sufficient evidence to make a definitive judgement either way.<sup>42</sup> In any event, at least some of the original readers of this Platonic dialogue found the 'Great Speech' to be a plausible Protagorean summary.

By contrast, Prodicus advances a position that can be classified, in some sense, as atheistic. George Arabatzis explains that, between the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE and the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, charges of atheism were based on: (1) the absolute denial of the existence of the gods; (2) the denial of the established gods in favour of foreign cults; or (3) the denial, after critique, of the accepted gods, followed by the introduction of more adequate conceptions of the divine, against, for example, animism, anthropomorphism, or polytheism.<sup>43</sup> Using this typology of atheism, it would perhaps be most accurate to assign the views of Prodicus to the third category. Prodicus seems to have held to a two phase account of the origin of human belief in the gods: in the first phase, natural elements were deified by human beings due to the role that they play in making human life flourish;<sup>44</sup> in the second phase, human beings who provided benefit to others could also come to be considered as divine. Thus, for Prodicus, religion is merely a human invention, and the gods have no ontological existence.

Finally, we should briefly consider the views that were attributed by ancient authors to Critias, which can perhaps be gleaned from a consideration of the forty-two line fragment from the play called *Sisyphus*. The protagonist in this play claims that some clever and wise man invented the gods so "that the wicked might experience fear, even if they act or say or think in secret." Furthermore, the gods "will hear all that is said among mortals and will be able to see all that is done."<sup>45</sup> Thus, it would seem that the author, like Prodicus, is denying that the gods have any ontological existence. For him, the gods are merely a useful fiction, created to instil fear in humanity, and to prevent them from committing secret crimes.

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<sup>42</sup> For further discussion of the theological issues raised by Protagoras' 'Great Speech', see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 110-113. See also: Adam Drozdek, 'Protagoras and Instrumentality of Religion', *L'Antiquité Classique* 74 (2005), pp. 41-50.

<sup>43</sup> George Arabatzis, 'The Sophists and Natural Theology', in: O'Grady, *The Sophists*, pp. 204-205.

<sup>44</sup> See: Adam Drozdek, 'Prodicus: Deification of Usefulness', *Myrtia* 21 (2006), pp. 57-63.

<sup>45</sup> The fragments from *Sisyphus* have been attributed either to Critias or to Euripides. For further discussion of this fragment and its theological implications, see: Drozdek, *Greek Philosophers*, pp. 115-117.

## The Sophists: Epistemology and Relativism

The teaching of several Sophists has had a lasting impact on ancient and modern thinking about epistemological issues. In his *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Diogenes Laertius tells us that Protagoras “was the first to maintain that in every experience there are two *lógoi* in opposition to each other” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* IX, 51). Aristotle was critical of Protagoras’ approach to rhetorical instruction, claiming that Protagoras trained his students “to make the weaker/inferior argument [become] the stronger/superior”: καὶ τὸ τὸν ἥττω δὲ λόγον κρείττω ποιῆν τοῦτ’ ἔστιν (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1402a 24.11). Gorgias’ rhetorical training built upon Protagoras’ foundation, emphasising an approach to human knowledge that has been labelled as *relativism* (the view that any truth claim is merely relative to the experience and perception of the individual making that claim). A stronger form of epistemological uncertainty is that of *scepticism*. The strongest form of epistemological uncertainty is *nihilism*, an approach which denies that there is any possibility of either truth or meaning. None of the Sophists are recorded as having held views that could be classified as *nihilistic* in the strict sense, but there were some examples of *relativistic* statements, or even *sceptical* statements, about: the existence of the gods; the possibility of reliable knowledge of humanity and the world; and the existence of binding moral standards.

The most famous *relativistic* statement made by any of the Sophists is one found in the opening sentence of a work, by Protagoras, called *Truth*: “A human being is the measure of all things: of the things that are, that they are; and of the things that are not, that they are not” (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 151e; Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians* VII.60). This so-called ‘Man – measure’ doctrine has been regarded by many ancient and modern commentators as reflecting the essence of Sophism. But what form of relativism does this statement really represent? Many modern scholars agree<sup>46</sup> that Protagoras’ statement should be taken to refer to an individual human being, and not humankind as a whole. Furthermore, in the Platonic dialogue entitled *Theaetetus*, Protagoras’ ‘Man – measure’ doctrine seems to be portrayed as an expression of epistemological relativism, rather than ontological relativism, i.e. as a statement about the subjective relativism of individual perception, rather than as a denial of the possibility of an objective external reality.

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<sup>46</sup> For a brief but very helpful outline of the Protagorean ‘Man – Measure’ dictum and its philosophical and practical implications, see: Broadie, ‘The Sophists and Socrates’, in: Sedley (ed.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, pp. 80-83.



## The Sophists: Epistemology, Language and Reality

Protagoras' 'Man – Measure' doctrine ("A human being is the measure of all things: of the things that are, that they are; and of the things that are not, that they are not") suggests that an individual human being has the capacity, and, indeed, the responsibility, to make an assessment of his/her own life, as well as making an assessment of the gods, people and objects that impinge upon one's life. In fact, A. A. Long believes that the work of the Sophists, taken as a whole, should be seen as an integral part of the broader project of all early Greek thought, since it also reflects an attempt to account for "all things". However, what was distinctive about the Sophists' approach was the humanistic and existential emphasis that they placed upon an individual's perception of the world. Knowledge was generally valued not so much for its own sake, as for its immediate social, legal and political utility for the knower. Unlike earlier Pre-Socratic thinkers, Long argues that the focus had shifted from a preoccupation with the cosmos in itself, to a more human-centric perspective:

As a defining mark of early Greek philosophy's scope, "accounting for *all things*" can accommodate the so-called sophists within the tradition. Doubtless Gorgias and Protagoras had nothing to say about objective nature, but that can be explained by their sceptical or relativistic views on truth. They certainly were prepared to talk about "all [the] things" they deemed relevant to human utility and understanding, as befits Protagoras' famous slogan "Man is the measure of *all things*."<sup>47</sup>

Long possibly overstates his case a little when he says that "Gorgias and Protagoras had nothing to say about objective nature" due to their supposedly "sceptical or relativistic views on truth". However, Long is undoubtedly correct in his characterisation of the Sophists' desire to speak and to teach about matters that "they deemed relevant to human utility and understanding." Collectively, the Sophists claimed to have an expertise in a dizzying array of subject areas, but what really made the teaching of the Sophists so attractive to the young, rich, and ambitious men of Athens, and those of many other Greek city-states, was the priority given to the use of language itself, both as a means by which to understand particular topics more clearly, but also as a powerful persuasive tool with which a citizen might achieve dominance over his political and legal adversaries.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Long (ed.), *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 12, emphasis in the original text.

<sup>48</sup> For analysis of the different approaches to language adopted by various Sophists, see: Broadie, 'The Sophists and Socrates', in: Sedley (ed.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, pp. 84-86.

Plato was highly critical of the claims that certain Sophists made about the effectiveness of their teaching and he also tended to disparage the rhetorical efforts of some Sophists (such as the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus of Chios in the dialogue entitled *Euthydemus*, or Hippias of Elis in the dialogues known as the *Hippias Major* and the *Hippias Minor*.)<sup>49</sup> However, Plato spoke more favourably of Prodicus of Ceos, who sought to differentiate fine shades of meaning between near synonyms, and he devoted an entire dialogue to Cratylus who “apparently held that the fundamental words phonetically mimic fundamental natural movements and forces”.<sup>50</sup> A similar appraisal of the origins and function of human language is put forward by the literary Protagoras in the Platonic dialogue of the same name. In the ‘Great Speech’, *Protagoras* 322a links the origin of human language to acknowledgement of the gods, in a manner reminiscent of Hesiod’s references in *Works and Days* to “speech-endowed human beings”:

“It is because humans had a share of the divine dispensation that they alone among animals worshipped the gods, with whom they had a kind of kinship, and erected altars and sacred images. It wasn’t long before they were articulating speech and words and had invented houses, clothes, shoes, and blankets, and were nourished by food from the earth.”<sup>51</sup>

Protagoras affirms in this passage that worship of the gods, in all its forms, is a development amongst human beings that, in some sense, might be regarded as natural, insofar as humans are said to have a unique relationship, or kinship with the gods, a view that was also at least implied in Hesiod’s *Works and Days*. However, in the ‘Great Speech’, humans are also explicitly described as animals. For Protagoras, it seems that there was no significant tension, between a view of humans as animals that have a kinship with the gods, but which also have a direct kinship with other non-human creatures. However, as we turn to consider Sophistic views on the relationship between *phýsis* (nature) and *nomós* (law, custom or convention), we shall soon see that scepticism about the characteristics of the gods, or even their very existence, could lead to a radically different assessment of human nature, customs and society, especially from Sophist ‘immoralists’ such as Thrasymachus and Callicles.

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<sup>49</sup> Some contemporary scholars have expressed doubts as to whether Plato is the author of the *Hippias Major* (also known as the *Greater Hippias*). Nonetheless, it forms a part of the thirty-six dialogues contained within the canonical collection established in the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE by Thrasyllus, an astrologer and Platonist philosopher from Alexandria in Egypt. For a discussion of the history and contents of the ‘Canon’ of Thrasyllus, see: John M. Cooper & Douglas S. Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works* (Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), pp. viii-xii.

<sup>50</sup> Broadie, ‘The Sophists and Socrates’, in: Sedley (ed.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy*, p. 84.

<sup>51</sup> Stanley Lombardo & Karen Bell (trans). *Protagoras*, in: Cooper & Hutchison, *Plato: Complete Works*, p. 757.

Nevertheless, for early Sophists such as Protagoras, it seems that human language, which is said to have emerged in the form of speech and (written?) words, *might* be considered innate and god-given, and therefore a natural ability. After all, the gods clearly possessed the capacity to use language, and since Protagoras and several other early Greek thinkers believed that human beings shared a kinship with those gods, it would have seemed entirely reasonable to assume that humans had been created with some inherent linguistic capacity, so as to interact with the gods through verbal means, such as prayer.

If language were a capacity granted to humans by the gods, then it also would not be unreasonable to assume that human language(s) would correspond to objects in the world in a manner that was clear and direct. However, once Sophists and other early Greek thinkers began to question traditional *characteristics* of the gods, or even the *existence* of the gods, it became more and more difficult, if not impossible, to see human language as a capacity that could provide an unambiguous description of reality. If the gods differed radically from the way in which they had been represented in the works of Homer and Hesiod (as some earlier Pre-Socratic thinkers, such as Xenophanes, had already suggested), or if the gods did not exist at all, then humans might simply be clever animals, with no inherently godlike qualities. Human language would be something that was developed solely by humans, without any divine intervention whatsoever, which would then make human language contingent and merely ‘conventional’. Human language would be no more than a tool, a strictly human invention, consisting of various sets of arbitrary sounds and words, which could not provide an entirely reliable picture of “the way things really are”. Indeed, even the concept of “the way things really are”, both epistemologically and ethically, would become extremely problematic, as we shall see in the next section of this chapter.

The gradual abandonment, by some Sophists, of traditional religious beliefs and the worldview associated with them, led ineluctably to epistemological difficulties, and related ethical difficulties. P. J. Rhodes notes that:

A contrast of which [the Sophists] were fond was that between *physis*, nature, what could not be other than it is, and *nomos*, law understood as human convention, what has been decided one way by one community but could have been decoded otherwise. If the traditional gods were rejected or drastically re-imagined, a new kind of justification was needed for laws and morality – *if they were justifiable at all*.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Peter John Rhodes, *A History of the Classical Greek World: 478-323 BCE*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), p. 215, emphasis added.

## ***Phýsis and Nomós: Justice and Ethics***

A degree of *relativism*, such as that found in Protagoras' 'Man – Measure' doctrine, as well as an *agnosticism* about the nature or existence of the gods, are not the only two elements that can be discerned in the thought of several early Sophists. At least implicitly, the teaching of most Sophists also relied upon a conceptual distinction between *phýsis* (nature) and *nomós* (law, custom or convention) that can be traced back at least as far as the works of Hesiod. However, some Sophists, especially Thrasymachus and Callicles, redefined the concept of *nomós*, so that the earlier logical connection between *phýsis* and *nomós*, became instead a radical opposition. Thus, on the one hand, *phýsis* now referred to the eternally-existing cosmos and the natural behaviour of non-human creatures and barbarians within it. On the other hand, *nomós* now referred to arbitrary, socially-conditioned, and thus merely conventional norms of behaviour, which prevailed within structured, law-bound 'civilised' human societies, such as the ancient Greek city-states. In order to have a more complete understanding of the philosophical and practical significance of this subtle, but profoundly important, redefinition of terms, and the effect that it would have upon ethical thought, it is important to begin with an examination of the earlier approach to *phýsis* and *nomós* that can be found within Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. As we shall see in the final sections of this chapter, Hesiod's approach was preserved, to a certain extent, in the thought of Sophists like Protagoras, but was progressively overturned by later Sophists.

In Chapter 1, we observed that Hesiod sought to portray Zeus as the guarantor of divine and earthly justice. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod laid the groundwork for this revised understanding of the role of Zeus as a generally benign, just and fair-minded ruler, who seeks to reward good and punish evil, both in the divine and the human realms. The union of Zeus with the goddess Thémis (representing divine law and order) is said to have produced the divine children Eunomía (good order/lawful conduct), Díkē (fair judgements/rights established by custom) and Eirēnē (peace between men and gods). In Chapter 1, we also saw that Hesiod's *Works and Days* portrays Zeus as a god who rewards those who work hard, and punishes those who defraud others. Zeus' desire to reward the just, and to punish the wicked, is made especially clear in *Works and Days* 213-273, in which δίκη / *díkē* (justice) is opposed to ὕβρις / *hybris* (the deliberate infliction of shame and dishonour upon another person).<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> For a detailed summary of Hesiod's understanding of *hybris*, see: Nicholas R. E. Fisher, *Hybris: A Study in the Values of Honour and Shame in Ancient Greece* (Warminster, England: Aris and Phillips, 1992), Chapter 5, 'Hesiod and Unwritten Law', pp. 185-200.

Nicholas R. E. Fisher has been highly critical of what he describes as the ‘traditional’ understanding of *hybris*, the various elements of which he outlines as follows:

The main elements of this view, which has been held in various forms by numerous scholars, many of the greatest distinction, may be briefly summarised. *Hybris* is held to be essentially an offence against the gods, and a central concept in the thought of authors such as Pindar, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Herodotus, and Thucydides; it is the act, word or even thought whereby the mortal forgets the limitations of mortality, seeks to acquire the attributes of the gods, or competes with the gods, or boasts over-confidently; or it is any act or word by which a man incurs the hostility of the gods, or even arouses their jealousy, regardless of whether any one is adversely affected; or it is any ‘excessive act or word contrary to the spirit of the Delphic Oracle’s pronouncements; it may even be no more than the possession of great good fortune, which in itself offends the gods. The gods, on these views, are held to punish instances of *hybris*, sooner or later, by direct action, like thunderbolts, by natural disasters, like earthquakes, or by instigating human opposition to the *hybristai*; such punishment is held to be called *nemesis*.<sup>54</sup>

However, Fisher’s examination of the ancient evidence has led him to believe that there is a single ‘focal’ or ‘core’ meaning to the concept of *hybris*, that unites its uses in all the surviving texts from Homer to New Comedy.<sup>55</sup> According to Fisher, the central meaning of *hybris* may be expressed as follows:

... *hybris* is essentially the serious assault on the honour of another, which is likely to cause shame, and lead to anger and attempts at revenge. *Hybris* is often, but by no means necessarily, an act of violence; it is deliberate activity, and the typical motive for such infliction of dishonour is the pleasure of expressing a sense of superiority, rather than a compulsion, need, or desire for wealth. *Hybris* is often seen to be characteristic of the young, and/or of the rich and/or upper classes; it is often associated with drunkenness. *Hybris* thus most often denotes specific acts or general behaviour directed against others, rather than attitudes; it may, though, on occasions, especially in more reflective or philosophical texts, denote the drive or desire, in a specific individual, or in humans generally, to engage in such behaviour directed against others.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris*, pp. 2-3.

<sup>55</sup> Fisher maintains (p. 7) that the definition and discussion of the concept of *hybris* in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, is the ‘*locus classicus*’, and “the best account of the concept as a whole.”

<sup>56</sup> N. R. E. Fisher, *Hybris*, p. 1.

Rachel Barney notes that, in earlier Greek thinking (and especially in the works of Hesiod) it was understood that there was an intrinsic connection between *nomós* (law) and *dikē* (justice).<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the ancient Greek language allowed one to easily distinguish between ‘Justice’ as a divine, personified abstract concept (δίκη); as a quality of character displayed by one or more persons (δικαιοσύνη); or as a term that could be used to describe a group of persons as “the just/righteous” (τό δίκαιον). Hesiod does not define ‘justice’, but the contours of the Hesiodic understanding of the concept can be determined by reference to those actions that are denounced as examples of injustice, such as bribery, oath-breaking, perjury, theft, fraud, and the rendering of crooked verdicts by judges. Barney maintains that Hesiod’s concept of justice, which can be derived from the list of unjust actions listed above, reflects two underlying kinds of unity. These two underlying kinds of unity can be discerned by comparing *dikē* with *nomós* (law, custom or convention), and also with πλεονεξία / *pleonexia* (greed). Firstly, all of the unjust actions outlined by Hesiod are violations of *nomós*, a term which refers not only to written laws, but also to long established customs, as well as other traditional and socially enforced norms of behaviour. Secondly, the unjust actions listed by Hesiod are motivated by a desire to advance one’s own standing in life to the detriment of others. Barney summarises the significance of *nomós* and *pleonexia* for an understanding of the concept of justice in Hesiod and later philosophical thought as follows:

The unjust man is motivated by the desire to have more (*pleon echein*); more than he has, more than his neighbour has, more than he is entitled to, and, ultimately, all there is to get. These polarities of the lawful/unlawful and the restrained/greedy are later used by Aristotle to structure his discussion of justice in *Nicomachean Ethics* V, which is in many ways a rational reconstruction of traditional Greek ideas.<sup>58</sup>

The twin characteristics identified here, i.e. lawlessness and greed, in addition to *hybris* (the opposite of *dikē*) perhaps bear some relationship to the Eight Generic Thoughts of Evagrius and the Eight Principal Vices of John Cassian (i.e. gluttony; sexual immorality; avarice; sadness; anger; spiritual weariness; vainglory; and pride) since, as we shall see in Chapter 9, the elements of the Evagrian/Cassianic system listed here can be seen as violations of God’s moral law, based on a desire for something more than, or other than, God’s providential care.

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<sup>57</sup> Rachel Barney, ‘Callicles and Thrasymachus’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Section 1. *Justice*. URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/callicles-thrasymachus/> Accessed on Tuesday 25/06/2013 at 4:00 pm.

<sup>58</sup> On greed and injustice in Hesiod, see also: Ryan K. Balot, *Greed and Injustice in Classical Athens* (Princeton, NJ, USA & Oxford, England: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 70-73 & 85-86.

## Hesiod and Homer: Law, Justice and Two Competing Ethical Visions

According to Hesiod's account of the five races of humanity (gold, silver, bronze, demigods and iron), which we examined in Chapter 1, Zeus is said to have been a co-creator of the first two races, in conjunction with the other Olympian gods, and then the sole creator of the last three races of humanity. Zeus had a special interest in seeing the fifth and final race of iron thrive under his oversight, especially as the previous races of humanity had not fared so well (cf. *Works and Days* 106-201). In the *Works and Days*, Zeus seeks to create a moral universe for humanity by implanting a sense of justice within them. Thus, *dikē* is based on conformity to *phýsis* and *nomós*. Barney draws attention to *Works and Days* 276-281, in which Hesiod "sets out the origins, authority and rewards of justice":

The son of Kronos [i.e. Zeus] has set down this law [*nomós*] for human beings:  
Fish and animals and winged birds  
Eat each other, since there is no justice [*dikē*] among them.  
But to humans he has given justice, which turns out the best  
By far. And if one knows and is willing to proclaim what is just,  
Zeus far-sounding gives him wealth.<sup>59</sup>

We should note that human beings are explicitly *contrasted* with other creatures, such as "fish, animals and winged birds", unlike the creation story in Plato's *Protagoras*, in which human beings themselves are referred to as animals. In Hesiod's account, non-human creatures "eat each other, since there is no justice among them." For Hesiod, eating another creature seems to serve as a model for human *hybris*, or injustice, and perhaps it is for this reason that Hesiod refers to certain human acts of injustice in similar language, e.g. in *Works and Days* 39, kings who commit acts of injustice are described as δωροφάγους (gift-eaters). Hesiod held that human beings would be punished for such acts of injustice, since, unlike non-human creatures, human beings have been granted an awareness of a better way to think and act, one which does not entail exploitation or degradation of other people. Justice, in the Hesiodic view, is thus fundamentally dependent upon the existence of the gods, and upon divine intervention to enforce the standards of the divine law (*nomós*), which ought to differentiate the behaviour of human beings from all other non-human creatures.

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<sup>59</sup> Barney, 'Callicles and Thrasymachus', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Section 1. *Justice*. The translation of Hesiod provided here is Barney's own rendering.

Hesiod's conception of justice was perhaps put forward as a response to, and a critique of, the earlier understanding of justice which is implicit within the writings of Homer. Hesiod also sought to 'democratise' the concept of *aretē* (virtue; excellence), which is so strongly emphasised in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, so that *aretē* would be available to any individual who was prepared to work hard. Homer does not deal with the concept of justice in as direct a manner as Hesiod, and Homer's representation of the aristocratic warrior ethos entails a far more exclusive account of *aretē*, and of the manner in which members of ancient Greek society should interact with each other. Barney characterises the relationship between *aretē* and *dikē*, in the writings of Homer, as follows:

Justice is understood to be a part of *aretē*, or as we would say, it is a virtue. More particularly it is the virtue governing social interactions and good citizenship or leadership. In the world of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, *aretē* is understood as that set of skills and aptitudes which enables someone – paradigmatically, a noble warrior – to function successfully in his social role. The key virtues of the Homeric warrior are courage and practical intelligence, which enable him to be an effective 'speaker of words and doer of deeds'.<sup>60</sup>

As we shall see in the following chapters, ancient Greek thinkers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle each sought, in their own ways, to come to terms with the contradictions between the Hesiodic and Homeric approaches to virtue and justice. Hesiod had argued for an ethical approach in which a 'just' person was one who was a reliable, supportive neighbour and citizen. However, Homer's agonistic, competitive ethical vision, with its more functional approach to *aretē*, was more attractive to many members of a Classical Athenian society in which violation of *nomós* and the pursuit of *pleonexía* were seen as strategies that would ensure an individual's political and financial success. It is against this backdrop of ongoing tension (between the ethical implications of the competing Hesiodic and Homeric understandings of *aretē* and their relationship to *dikē*) that we can see why the teachings of the Sophists were so attractive to some, and considered to be so dangerous by others. The Sophists sought to maximise the opportunities for wealthy individuals to achieve dominance over other citizens in the social, legal and political arenas. Therefore, the Sophists, either unintentionally, or in some cases quite deliberately, exploited and radicalised the distinction between *phýsis* and *nomós*. This made it easier for them to promote an approach which had the practical effect of validating lawlessness and greed.

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<sup>60</sup> Barney, 'Callicles and Thrasymachus', *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Section 1. *Justice*.



## The Redefinition of *Phýsis* and *Nomós* in the Teaching of the Sophists: Protagoras

The Sophistic approach to the distinction between *phýsis* and *nomós* was far from uniform or monolithic. Some Sophists, such as Protagoras and Hippias, adopted a largely positive approach to the relationship between these two concepts. Lycophron, and the unknown author of the so-called *Double Arguments*, tended to stress the arbitrariness of all laws. However, we can only draw limited conclusions about their understanding of the ethical implications of this view of *nomós*. The most radical set of Sophists, such as Antiphon, Thrasymachus and Callicles, were those who proposed that *nomós* was not merely arbitrary, but also a hindrance to human flourishing which needed to be overcome. These radical Sophists argued that *nomós* conflicted with *phýsis* so much that a person ought to break the laws whenever it was to his own personal advantage to do so, as long as he could avoid detection and punishment for such a violation.

In the ‘Great Speech’ of Protagoras, we are provided with a more favourable account of the origins of human justice. Protagoras advances his story so as to defend his own view that political or civic *aretē* can be taught, since he claims that all human beings have been granted a share in this virtue by Zeus. The story of human origins found within the ‘Great Speech’ is also notable for the emphasis that it places upon the necessity of cities for human survival, and for what it describes as “the art of politics”:

... human beings at first lived in scattered isolation; there were no cities. They were being destroyed by wild beasts because they were weaker in every way, and although their technology was adequate to obtain food, it was deficient when it came to fighting wild animals. This was because they did not yet possess the art of politics, of which the art of war is a part. They did indeed try to band together and survive by founding cities. The outcome when they did so was that they wronged each other, because they did not possess the art of politics, and so they would scatter and again be destroyed. Zeus was afraid that our whole race might be wiped out, so he sent Hermes to bring justice and a sense of shame to humans, so that there would be order within cities and bonds of friendship to unite them. Hermes asked Zeus how he should distribute shame and justice to humans... “To all”, said Zeus, “and let all have a share. For cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these, as is the case with the other arts. And establish this law as coming from me: ‘Death to him who cannot partake of shame and justice, for he is a pestilence to the city’ ” [Protagoras 322 a-d].<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Lombardo and Bell (trans), *Protagoras*, in: Cooper & Hutchison, *Plato: Complete Works*, pp. 757-758.

If the views of the literary Protagoras in this Platonic Dialogue correspond to those of the historical Protagoras of Abdera, then we can see that he held to an understanding of human origins and human nature that is remarkably consonant with the views of Hesiod which we examined in Chapter 1 and again in this chapter.<sup>62</sup> In the ‘Great Speech’, Zeus (in conjunction with the other gods) is directly responsible for the creation of human beings. Zeus is also responsible for endowing them with a sense of justice and shame, so that they might live together harmoniously in cities, so that they might not “wrong” each other, and so that they might not be destroyed by wild animals, due to a lack of “the art of politics, of which the art of war is a part.” Zeus also issues a law (*nomós*) that any individual who cannot partake of shame and justice must die, “for he is a pestilence to the city.” Thus, it Protagoras seems to come down firmly on the side of a Hesiodic conception of justice, in which *nomós* should be observed, and in which *hybris* and *pleonexía* should be avoided.

### **The Redefinition of *Phýsis* and *Nomós* in the Teaching of the Sophists: Hippias**

Hippias of Elis articulates a sharper and less favourable distinction between *phýsis* and *nomós* than that of Protagoras. Nonetheless, Hippias does use this distinction in order to promote a form of cosmopolitan pan-Hellenic solidarity.<sup>63</sup> Hippias features in the Platonic dialogue *Protagoras*, a dialogue that is set c. 432 BCE, shortly before the beginning of the Peloponnesian War. The dialogue features a number of Athenian citizens (Socrates, Alcibiades, Callias, and Critias), as well as a foreign-born physician (Hippocrates of Cos) and several foreign-born Sophists (Protagoras of Abdera, Prodicus of Ceos and Hippias of Elis). Hippias addresses these Athenian and non-Athenian citizens with the following words:

“Gentlemen, I regard all of you here present as kinsmen, intimates, and fellow citizens by nature [*phýsis*] not by convention [*nomós*]. For like is akin to like by nature [*phýsis*], but convention [*nomós*], which tyrannises the human race, often constrains us contrary to nature [*phýsis*]” [*Protagoras* 337 c-d].<sup>64</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See: Christopher C. W. Taylor & Mi-Kyoung Lee, ‘The Sophists’, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Section 1, ‘Protagoras’. URL: <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/sophists/> Accessed on Thursday 28/06/2013 at 11:30 am. Taylor and Lee argue that “It is at least plausible that this complex of themes, including the development of civilization from primitive beginnings, the nature of social virtue and its foundation in human nature, represents some of the content of Protagoras’ actual teaching; the list of titles of his works preserved by Diogenes Laërtius (IX.55) includes ‘On the Virtues’, ‘On (the) Constitution’ (*Peri Politeias*) and ‘On the State of Things in the Beginning’.”

<sup>63</sup> According to Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* IV.iv.19, Hippias also claimed that there are some unwritten laws which are observed everywhere, and that these must have been prescribed for men by the gods.

<sup>64</sup> Lombardo & Bell (trans), *Protagoras*, in: Cooper & Hutchinson, *Plato: Complete Works*, pp. 769-770.

Hippias' view that "convention [*nomós*] tyrannises the human race" and that it "constrains us contrary to nature [*phýsis*]" was a view shared by many other Sophists. This view of *nomós* developed out of the realisation that human laws varied, often quite substantially, from one city-state to another, and from one culture to another. Paul Woodruff explains the theoretical implications and practical effects of this realisation as follows:

Early Greek travellers readily came to the idea that the different moral traditions they discovered were *equally arbitrary*, since they rested only on custom. The power of custom (*nomos*) was recognised before the sophists and celebrated in the often-quoted line of Pindar, "*Nomos* is king" (to be found, for example, at Plato's *Gorgias* 484b). Herodotus observes how customary notions of right and wrong vary across cultural boundaries (III.38), and as travelling teachers, some sophists developed an interest in comparing ethical, political, and religious ideas in various cultures. Research of this kind tends to make traditional values seem arbitrary, and defenders even of newly spawned traditions had reason to feel threatened by the new learning in the later fifth century, because it appealed to the conservatives who were critical of the new customs of democratic Athens.<sup>65</sup>

Hippias himself was apparently not prepared to draw some of the more radical conclusions that might seem to follow from the recognition of widely varying laws amongst different human communities. According to Xenophon's *Memorabilia* 4.4.19, Hippias is said to have claimed that there are, in fact, some unwritten laws that are observed everywhere, and that these unwritten laws must have been prescribed for men by the gods. In this respect, Hippias seems to be in at least partial agreement with the views about the origin of law that were expressed earlier in the *Protagoras*. Hippias' appeal to the idea of unwritten, or 'natural' law, builds upon a tradition already established within earlier Greek thought:

The conception of natural or unwritten law is frequently appealed to in oratory and drama, notably Sophocles' *Antigone*... ; one of its most extended expressions occurs in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* IV.4.14–25, where in conversation with Socrates the sophist Hippias is represented as saying that since the unwritten laws are common to all countries, they cannot have arisen from agreement among humans who spoke different languages, and as being persuaded by Socrates that breach of such laws inevitably leads to bad consequences, thus guaranteeing the rationality of this divine legislation.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Paul Woodruff, 'Rhetoric and relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias', Chapter 14, in: Long (ed.), *Early Greek Philosophy*, pp. 300-301.

<sup>66</sup> Taylor and Mi-Kyoung Lee, 'The Sophists' *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Section 2. '*Nomos* and *Phusis*'.

Hippias makes a clear distinction between ‘natural’ god-given law and ‘conventional’ man-made law. Some laws are universal and thus potentially beneficial for all human beings. Other laws are particular to only some human communities, and it is this lack of universality that reveals their potentially damaging nature. Protagoras, in the Platonic dialogue *Theaetetus*, also focuses upon the arbitrary nature of such non-universal laws:

“Whatever in any city is regarded as just and admirable is just and admirable in that city, and for so long as that convention [*nomós*] maintains itself” [*Theaetetus* 167c].<sup>67</sup>

### **The Redefinition of *Phýsis* and *Nomós* in the Teaching of the Sophists: Lycophron, and the unknown author of the *Double Arguments***

In the only surviving fragment of his thought, Lycophron, a student of the Sophist Gorgias, stated that law is only a convention, a guarantor of mutual rights, but not in such a way as to make the citizens good and just [cf. Aristotle *Politics*, 1280b10]. The unknown author of a document known as the *Double Arguments* [*Dissoi Logoi*] points to extensive legal and ethical disagreements between members of different states and cultures:

“And I think, indeed, that if someone should order all men to bring into one heap everything that each of them regards as shameful, and then to take from the collection what each of them considered to be fine, not a thing would be left, but they would all divide up everything, because all men do not hold the same views” (*Double Arguments* II.18).<sup>68</sup>

Daniel Silvermintz suggests that the significance of the *Double Arguments* lies in its use of the antilogical method (i.e. arguing for both sides of an argument) in its defence of a nuanced version of ethical and epistemological relativism:

The author frames the central dispute of the treatise by asserting that the absolutists contend that notions such as good and bad, noble and base, just and unjust, true and false represent mutually exclusive opposites while the relativists conceive that the same thing may at one time be good for one and bad for another, noble for one and base for another, just for one and unjust for another, true for one and false for another.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Margaret J. Levett, trans. (Myles Burnyeat, rev.), ‘Theaetetus’, in: Cooper & Hutchison, *Plato: Complete Works*, p. 186.

<sup>68</sup> Daniel Silvermintz, ‘The *Double Arguments*’, in: O’Grady, *Sophists*, p. 150.

<sup>69</sup> Silvermintz, ‘*Double Arguments*’, in: O’Grady, *Sophists*, p. 149.

## **The Redefinition of *Phýsis* and *Nomós* in the Teaching of the Sophists: Gorgias**

The radical Sophists, such as Antiphon of Athens, Thrasymachus of Chalcedon, and Callicles of Athens, seem to have taken at least some of their inspiration from Gorgias of Leontini. Indeed, Colin Higgins describes Gorgias as “the most controversial and polarizing” of all the early Sophists. Gorgias, unlike Protagoras, did *not* claim to be able to teach virtue. Instead, Gorgias emphasised the overwhelming power of persuasive rhetoric, particularly in works such as his *Encomium on Helen*, in which he sought to overturn conventional understandings of the role of Helen of Troy in the *Iliad*. Gorgias maintained that Helen had succumbed either to: (a) physical force (Paris’ abduction); (b) love (*érōs*); or (c) verbal persuasion (*lógos*); and that, in any case, Helen was completely blameless.<sup>70</sup>

In another short treatise, entitled *On the Nonexistent*, or *On Truth*, Gorgias provided another example of his legendary rhetorical skill. This treatise advances an argument known as a trilemma, which consists of three fundamental assertions in the areas of ontology and epistemology:

- (i) Nothing exists;
- (ii) Even if existence exists, it cannot be known;
- (iii) Even if it could be known, it cannot be communicated.

In what is perhaps the starkest statement of cosmological nihilism to be found in early Greek philosophy, Gorgias articulated a position that has been understood by many ancient and modern commentators as the seedbed for later examples of antinomianism, and even ethical nihilism, in the thinking of Sophists such as Antiphon, Thrasymachus and Callicles.

## **The Redefinition of *Phýsis* and *Nomós* in the Teaching of the Sophists: Antiphon**

Antiphon the Sophist can be seen as somewhat of a bridge figure between the views of Hippias and those of the so-called ‘immoralist’ Sophists, Thrasymachus and Callicles. Like Hippias, Antiphon seems to affirm that at least some human laws are compatible with the requirements of nature. Thus, Hippias and Antiphon can both be seen as early exponents of the natural law tradition.

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<sup>70</sup> Colin Higgins, ‘Gorgias’, in: O’Grady, *Sophists*, pp. 45 and 50.

Antiphon has also been seen by some interpreters as offering support for a cosmopolitan pan-Hellenic solidarity, such as that advanced by Hippias in the *Protagoras*. In a fragment from a work called *On Truth*, Antiphon states that men of his time generally respected the laws of their own cities, but not those of distant lands, since they were ignorant of the fact that ‘as far as nature is concerned, we are all equally adapted to being either barbarians or Greeks.’<sup>71</sup> Jonathan Barnes has argued that Antiphon’s statement can be regarded as an endorsement of the natural equality of all peoples, and thus a possible moral equality as well.<sup>72</sup> However, Andrew Shortridge and Dirk Baltzly reject that interpretation:

Antiphon suggests only that people are equally suited to be either barbarian or Greek, not that being barbarian or Greek is of equal moral worth. Even if one cannot be a natural slave, Antiphon has no obvious objection to the idea that some cultures might produce subjects who are servile because of the social conventions they follow. While we might equally have been barbarians or Greeks, if we had been born and raised in different cities, it does not follow that Greek and barbarian cities are equal in any way, nor does Antiphon make this claim.<sup>73</sup>

Antiphon accentuates a perceived antithesis between *phýsis* and *nomós* in another fragment from *On Truth*. Antiphon seems to believe that the antithesis, between man-made laws and the requirements of nature, is so great that a citizen should only obey the laws of a city-state when he is potentially under observation from witnesses:

Justice, then, is not to transgress that which is the law of the city in which one is a citizen. A man, therefore, can best conduct himself in harmony with justice if when in the company of witnesses he upholds the laws, and when alone without witnesses he upholds the edicts of nature. For the edicts of laws are imposed artificially, but those of nature are compulsory [*anángkē*]. And the edicts of the laws are arrived at by consent [*homología*], not by natural growth, whereas those of nature are not a matter of consent. So, if the man who transgresses the legal code evades those who have agreed to these edicts, he avoids both disgrace and penalty; otherwise not. But if a man violates against possibility any of the laws which are implanted in nature, even if he evades all men’s detection, the ill is no less, and even if all see, it is no greater. For he is not hurt on account of an opinion, but because of truth. The examination of these things is in general for this reason, that the majority of just acts according to law are prescribed contrary to nature (Fragment 44).<sup>74</sup>

<sup>71</sup> John Dillon & Tania Gergel (trans.), *The Greek Sophists* (London, England: Penguin Books, 2003), p. 150.

<sup>72</sup> Jonathan Barnes, *The Presocratic Philosophers. Volume II: Empedocles to Democritus* (London, England: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 211.

<sup>73</sup> Andrew Shortridge & Dirk Baltzly, ‘Antiphon’, in: O’Grady (ed.), *Sophists*, pp. 84-85.

<sup>74</sup> Kathleen Freeman, *Ancilla to the Presocratic Philosophers* (Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1948), p. 147.

Antiphon's argument apparently presupposes the distinction implicit in Protagoras' 'Great Speech' between god-given laws and man-made laws. However, whilst Protagoras maintained a Hesiodic conception of justice, in which lawlessness, *hybris* and greed would be punished by Zeus, it seems that Antiphon is not concerned by the possibility of divine intervention, if an individual were to violate any of the laws in private. Instead, Antiphon appears to have adopted Hippias' view that "convention [*nomós*] tyrannises the human race", and that it "constrains us contrary to nature [*phýsis*]", and thus drawn the conclusion that all man-made laws should be disregarded, whenever it is safe for an individual to do so. Admittedly, we only have fragments of *On Truth*, and perhaps Antiphon did support a greater role for the gods in upholding justice in other parts of the treatise. However, even if Antiphon did leave some room for divine oversight of the moral economy, it is difficult to see how a Hesiodic conception of justice could be reconciled with the blatant hypocrisy that Antiphon's approach to man-made laws entails. Antiphon's position also requires that a person is able to discern what is in his or her best interests, so as to know when it is appropriate to break the man-made laws. In this regard, he believes that actions that are genuinely advantageous (for an individual) are those that help rather than harm. This may or may not have been intended as a defence of some kind of hedonistic calculus in which the moral worth of actions can be determined on the basis of maximising (personal) pleasure and minimising (personal) pain. Unfortunately, the fragment that deals with this aspect of Antiphon's argument breaks off before any clarification can be given.<sup>75</sup>

### **The Redefinition of *Phýsis* and *Nomós* in the Teaching of the Sophists: Thrasymachus and Callicles**

Thrasymachus is portrayed in the *Republic* as a severe critic of traditional Hesiodic conceptions of justice and, along with Callicles, has been described as an 'immoralist', since both posit an extreme antithesis between *phýsis* and *nomós*. For Thrasymachus, conventional morality is a sham, and so an individual should always follow the dictates of nature whenever possible. Nonetheless, Thrasymachus retained conventional language in describing such violations of traditional morality as 'unjust'. Callicles, however, is depicted in the *Gorgias* as a proponent of a radical inversion of conventional morality, in which conventionally 'unjust' actions should be considered genuinely 'just'.

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<sup>75</sup> See: Shortridge and Baltzly, 'Antiphon', in: O'Grady (ed.), *Sophists*, pp. 86-87.

The antinomian stance of thinkers such as Thrasymachus and Callicles arises from the recognition of the diversity of human laws in different states and cultures that we have already considered in connection with our investigation of the views of Hippias, Lycophron, Antiphon and the unknown author of the *Double Arguments*. However, the ‘immoralist’ thinkers were prepared to tease out the apparently logical implications of such a realisation and then to apply them in a much more thoroughgoing manner, as Broadie explains:

The fact that custom and law, like language, differ for different societies, together with the assumption that what is lawful is what is right, suggested to some that right and wrong, just and unjust, are relative to the society, while to others it suggested that there is a natural justice and injustice over and above the man-made systems.... According to a very different interpretation, natural justice is exploitation of weaker by stronger. This is what we see throughout the animal kingdom; and on some views it ought to be the law of human life as well. Such is the position of the character... of Callicles in Plato’s *Gorgias*. Elements of this view surface in the *Republic* too, voiced by Thrasymachus (an historical sophist from Chalcedon), and by Plato’s brother Glaucon. According to this sort of view, an individual who is strong and clever enough to take advantage of his neighbour’s weakness but refrains out of justice and respect, betrays his own nature and natural inheritance. In fact, he has been made artificially weak by the naturally weak many (*hoi polloi*), who for self-protection have conditioned men into accepting the myth that true justice requires individuals to sacrifice their own well-being for others. The sort of doctrine favoured by Callicles and Thrasymachus, while sharing roots with theories of Protagoras, moves in a very different direction... according to Callicles and Thrasymachus, society represses the best natures, fostering the weak without improving them individually, and encouraging the cult of mediocrity.<sup>76</sup>

Plato’s portrait of Thrasymachus’ rejection of conventional morality, and Callicles’ inversion of conventional morality, served, in part, as an inspiration for Friedrich Nietzsche’s attempted ‘transvaluation of all values’. As we saw in Chapter 2, Nietzsche recognised that if one was to be logically and philosophical consistent, then the elimination of a theistic philosophical foundation (be it the *polytheistic* religious views of ancient Greek society, or the *monotheistic* views of Nietzsche’s 19<sup>th</sup> century European society) ought to require a person to find an entirely new basis for epistemology and ethics. Nietzsche could see the extent of the challenge raised by the radical ideas of the Sophists, and given his own anti-theistic perspective, we can now understand Nietzsche’s claim, cited earlier in this chapter, “... every advance in epistemological and moral knowledge has reinstated the Sophists.”

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<sup>76</sup> Broadie, ‘Thrasymachus’, in: Sedley (ed.), *Greek and Roman Philosophy* pp. 86-87.



## Conclusion

The Sophists initiated a marked shift from a traditional ancient Greek theological anthropology (in which the gods created human beings with godlike qualities: e.g. Homer, Hesiod and implicitly Protagoras), via the revision of traditional Greek religious beliefs initiated by the earlier Pre-Socratic philosophers (in which the anthropomorphic qualities of the gods were heavily criticised: e.g. Xenophanes), to what is effectively a naturalistic anthropology (in which the existence and benevolence of the gods is called into question, and human beings are considered to be no more than animals: e.g. Thrasymachus and Callicles). These fundamental changes in the manner in which ancient Greek thinkers thought of the gods, and human beings, had far-reaching effects in the areas of epistemology and ethics. Thinkers such as Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were particularly sensitive to the challenges that Sophistic thought raised for traditional understandings of the gods and of justice, and each sought to meet those challenges in various ways. Thinkers of the Hellenistic traditions either continued to build upon the foundations laid by Socrates, Plato or Aristotle, or else they sought to return to the perspectives of some of the earlier Pre-Socratic thinkers, as will become clear in Chapter 5.

The view that each Sophist took of the essential nature of human beings had a direct bearing on the ethical stance that each Sophist adopted. Some, like Protagoras, saw human beings as a creation of the gods, with an implanted sense of justice and shame, such that all humans had the ability and the responsibility to follow the divine *nomós*. For Protagoras, there was no final conflict between *phýsis* and *nomós*. However, it is also critical to recall that, for all ancient Greek thinkers, there is no fundamental discontinuity between human beings and other non-divine creatures. Thus, Antiphon can claim in Fragment 40 of *On Truth* that a human being is “the most godlike of all the beasts”.<sup>77</sup> Thrasymachus and Callicles capitalised on the perception of human beings as no more than animals (within a theologically-denuded natural realm that was taken as the template and benchmark for appropriate human behaviour) in order to defend extreme self-aggrandisement, based on lawlessness and greed. These radical Sophists not only rejected the Hesiodic sense of justice, but also embraced a life of hedonism and sensual indulgence which presupposed that whatever was truly natural was also necessarily morally correct.

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<sup>77</sup> Dillon & Gergel (trans.), *Greek Sophists*, p. 160.

The self-indulgent, unrestrained lifestyle proposed by the ‘immoralist’ Sophists is antithetical to the early Christian ascetic approach represented in the monastic schema of Evagrius and Cassian, which begins from very different assumptions about the origin and nature of human beings, and of the merits of using nature as a means to determine morality. Callicles’ impassioned defence of immoralism in *Gorgias* 482c-484c is the clearest statement of the immoralists’ ‘transvaluation of all values’, an approach which stands in stark contrast to both traditional Greek religious views, and the views of the early Christians. In this passage, we find Callicles bringing together a potent combination of ideas: the radical antithesis between *phýsis* and *nomós*; the overturning of any sense of Hesiodic justice; the tacit rejection of any role for the gods in upholding conventional morality; and the assertion that nature itself teaches us that ‘the strong’ should dominate ‘the weak’:

“... trying to get a greater share than most is said to be unjust and shameful by law [*nomós*]... they call it doing what is unjust. But I believe that nature [*phýsis*] reveals that it’s a just thing for the better man and the more capable man to have a greater share than the worse man and the less capable man. Nature [*phýsis*] shows that this is so in many places; both among the other animals and in whole cities and races of men, it shows that this is what justice has been decided to be: that the superior rule the inferior and have a greater share than they... we mould the best and the most powerful among us, taking them while they’re still young, like lion cubs, and with charms and incantations we subdue them into slavery, telling them that one is supposed to get no more than his fair share, and that that’s what’s admirable and just. But surely, if a man whose nature is equal to it arises, he will shake off, tear apart, and escape all this, he will trample underfoot our documents, our tricks and charms, and all our laws that violate nature. He, the slave, will rise up and be revealed as our master, and here the justice of nature will shine forth [*Gorgias* 483d-484b].<sup>78</sup>

The work and writings of the Sophists raised many fundamentally important questions: Do the gods exist at all, and if so, what are they really like? Do the gods really uphold morality? Are humans godlike beings, or are humans no more than clever animals? What is the nature of the relationship between *phýsis* and *nomós*? As we will see in the following chapters, subsequent philosophers, both in the ancient and modern eras, would have to wrestle long and hard with many of these challenging questions.

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<sup>78</sup> Donald J. Zeyl (trans.), *Gorgias*, in: Cooper & Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works*, p. 828.

## Chapter 4

### Socrates:

#### His Early Interpreters, His Ethical Teaching, and the Nature of Ancient Philosophy

### Introduction

Socrates (470/469-399 BCE)<sup>1</sup> and Plato (427 or 424/423-347 BCE)<sup>2</sup> were two of the most important thinkers in Classical Greece.<sup>3</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero (106-43 BCE), the great Roman statesman, when considering the development of ancient Greek thought, made the following comparison between Socrates and his predecessors:

But from the ancient days, down to the time of Socrates, who had listened to Archelaus the pupil of Anaxagoras, philosophy dealt with numbers and movements, with the problem whence all things came, or whither they returned, and zealously inquired into the size of the stars, the spaces that divided them, their courses and all celestial phenomena.

Socrates, on the other hand, was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens, and set her in the cities of men, and bring her also into their homes, and compel her to ask questions about life and morality, and things good and evil” (*Tusculan Disputations* 5.4.10-11).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the life and thought of Socrates, as well as an overview of various interpretive approaches applied to the Platonic dialogues, see: Sara Ahbel-Rappe, *Socrates: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Continuum, 2009). For comprehensive, multi-author assessment, see: John Bussanich & Nicholas D. Smith (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates* (New York, NY, USA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012); Donald R. Morrison (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010); and Sara Ahbel-Rappe & Rachana Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates* (Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> For an introduction to the Platonic dialogues, see: Gerald A. Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Continuum, 2007); and Andrew S. Mason, *Plato, Ancient Philosophies* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2010). For comprehensive, multi-author assessment, see: Gerald A. Press (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Plato* (New York, NY, USA: Continuum, 2012); Hugh H. Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato* (Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009); and Gail Fine (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Plato* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> For general treatments of Classical Greece, see: Simon Hornblower, *The Greek World 479-323 BC*, Routledge History of the Ancient World, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (London, England: Routledge, 2011); and Peter John Rhodes, *A History of the Classical Greek World 478-323 BC*, Blackwell History of the Ancient World, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden, MA, USA: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2010). For a focus on Athens in the Classical Period, see: Robin Osborne (ed.), *The World of Athens: An Introduction to Classical Athenian Culture*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> *Sed ab antiqua philosophia usque ad Socratem, qui Archelaum, Anaxagorae discipulum, audierat, numeri motusque tractabantur, et unde omnia orerentur quove reciderent, studioseque ab is siderum magnitudines intervalla cursus anquirebantur et cuncta caelestia. Socrates autem primus philosophiam devocavit e caelo et in urbibus conlocavit et in domus etiam introduxit et coegit de vita et moribus rebusque bonis et malis quaerere.* See: John Edward King (trans.), *Cicero: Tusculan Disputations*, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 141 (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1927), p. 435.

Harry Neumann has also drawn attention to the impact of Socrates upon later thinkers:

Socrates proved so successful an advocate of his ascetic ideals, that his modern opponent, Nietzsche, was moved to see in him: ‘den einen Wendepunkt und Wirbel der sogenannten Weltgeschichte’ [‘the turning point and vortex of so-called world history’].<sup>5</sup>

These two assessments of the contribution of Socrates are typical of the view that Socrates is, *in some sense*, of central importance, not just for ancient Greek thought, but also for the development of Roman, European and world thought. Nonetheless, closer analysis of the first quotation above reveals some of the problems identified in the two previous chapters, with regard to the nature, scope and content of ancient Greek thought. Cicero ascribes a common ‘cosmological’ purpose to the ‘philosophy’ of the Pre-Socratic thinkers, and thus supports a position that was critiqued in Chapter 2, namely that the intellectual investigations of the Pre-Socratic thinkers were of a piece with each other and with Socrates, but with a different focus, i.e. cosmology vs. ethics. Furthermore, Cicero’s claim that Socrates “was the first to call philosophy down from the heavens, and set her in the cities of men, and bring her also into their homes, and compel her to ask questions about life and morality, and things good and evil” also tends to overlook the role that Hesiod and the Sophists played in bringing certain ethical matters into greater focus (as outlined in Chapters 1 and 3). By contrast, Harry Neumann’s remarks in the second quotation suggest that, at least for Nietzsche, it was not so much Socrates’ ideas or teaching, but precisely the Socratic ascetic *lifestyle*, i.e. “his ascetic ideals”, which made Socrates “the turning point and vortex of so-called world history”.

Socrates functioned as a moral exemplar for many subsequent thinkers in the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods, just as Achilles and Odysseus had done for the aristocratic elite in Archaic Greece. However, the ‘Socrates’ who was revered or reviled by members of one philosophical school was often at variance with the ‘Socrates’ of other schools. In light of these ambiguities, Chapter 4 will consider what can be known about the ‘historical’ Socrates and his teaching (i.e. the so-called ‘Socratic Problem’). A detailed examination of three early literary representations of Socrates, including an analysis and critique of modern interpretative approaches, will help us to identify the elements and ultimate goal of Socratic ethical teaching, and also to discern the similarities and differences that emerge from a comparison of the various depictions of this most influential of men.

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<sup>5</sup> The German phrase appears in Friedrich Nietzsche’s ‘Birth of Tragedy’, 96. See: Harry Neumann, ‘Socrates in Plato and Aristophanes: In Memory of Ludwig Edelstein (1902-1965)’, *The American Journal of Philology*, Volume 90, Number 2 (April 1969), p. 214, English translation in square brackets added.

## The Socratic Problem: An Overview of the Sources

There are three major sources of evidence that might be relevant to the resolution of the Socratic problem. Firstly, we have three comedies written by Aristophanes (c.446-c.386 BCE).<sup>6</sup> ‘Socrates’ appears as one of the protagonists in the *Clouds*, but Aristophanes also makes brief references to him in two later comedies, the *Birds* and the *Frogs*. Secondly, we have other early evidence for the life and teaching of Socrates in the writings of Socrates’ companions.<sup>7</sup> The Σοκρατικὸι λόγοι (*Sokratikòì λόγοι*)<sup>8</sup> were literary works in which Socrates appeared as a central character. Several of these works may even have been written during Socrates’ lifetime. However, the only extant examples of the genre that have survived complete are known to have been written after Socrates’ death in 399 BCE. Xenophon (c.430-354 BCE), an Athenian soldier and historian was the author of four Socratic works,<sup>9</sup> whilst Plato was the author of thirty-five dialogues, many of which feature Socrates as a central character.<sup>10</sup> Finally, we have some non-contemporaneous references to Socrates’ teaching and influence in the works of Aristotle (384-322 BCE) and Diogenes Laërtius (fl. 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE).<sup>11</sup> Before we begin an assessment of these sources, it will be helpful to briefly review some of the basic, commonly accepted details of Socrates’ life.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Aristophanes was an Athenian playwright who wrote within the genre now known as Old Comedy. *The Clouds* was first performed in 423 BCE, *The Birds* in 414 BCE, and *The Frogs* in 405 BCE.

<sup>7</sup> The Socratic circle, as portrayed in the works of Plato, seems to have included the following persons: Crito of Alopecce (c.469-c.399 BCE); Hermogenes (c.450-c.392 BCE); Eucleides of Megara (c.450-380 BCE); Antisthenes of Athens (c.446-c.366 BCE); Simmias of Thebes (born 430s BCE); Aristippus of Cyrene (c.435-c.356 BCE); Cebes of Thebes (c.430-c.354 BCE); Apollodorus of Phaleron (c.429-4<sup>th</sup> century BCE); Plato (424/423-347 BCE); Critoboulos of Alopecce, son of Crito (c.425-early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE); Ctesippus of Paeania (born c.425 BCE); Menexenus of Athens, son of Demophon (born c.422 BCE); Phaedo of Elis (born c.419/8 BCE); Terpsion of Megara (fl. late 5<sup>th</sup>-early 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE); Aeschines (died c.356 BCE); and Epigenes of Cephisia, son of Antiphon (dates unknown). All dates are derived from: Debra Nails, *The People of Plato: A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics* (Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> Nine of the sixteen members of the Socratic circle listed above are known to have written Socratic literature. However, most of the *Sokratikòì λόγοι* have been lost, whilst some survives only in fragmentary form. For a recent thematic English translation of Xenophon, Plato and fragments from other early *Sokratikòì λόγοι*, see: George Boys-Stones & Christopher Rowe (trans. & eds.), *The Circle of Socrates: Readings in the First-Generation Socratics* (Indianapolis, IN, USA: Hackett Publishing, 2013). For an overview of the Socratic Movement see: Michael Trapp, ‘Beyond Plato and Xenophon: some other ancient Socrateses’, in: Michael Trapp (ed.), *Socrates from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, Publications of the Centre for Hellenic Studies, Kings College London, Volume 9 (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate Publishing, 2007), pp. 51-64; and Paul A. Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement* (Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 1994), pp. 1-240.

<sup>9</sup> Xenophon’s four Socratic works are: *Apology*; *Symposium*; *Oeconomicus*; *Memorabilia*.

<sup>10</sup> For an English translation of all 35 dialogues that were anciently attributed to Plato in the so-called Thrasyllan canon, as well as the 8 additional ‘spurious’ works, see: Cooper & Hutchinson (eds.), *Plato: Complete Works*.

<sup>11</sup> Aristotle makes reference to Socrates in: *Metaphysics*; *Eudemian Ethics*; *Nicomachean Ethics*; and *Politics*. Diogenes Laërtius included a *Life of Socrates* in: *The Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II. 5. 18-47.

<sup>12</sup> For the following summary of the biographical details of Socrates’ life, I am primarily indebted to the account provided by William J. Prior, ‘The Socratic Problem’, in: Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato*, p. 29.

Socrates, an Athenian citizen from the deme of Alopecce, was born c. 470 or 469 BCE, and died, aged 70, in 399 BCE. His father was Sophroniscus, a stone mason or sculptor, and his mother, Phaenarete, was possibly a midwife. Socrates married later in life to Xanthippe, with whom he had three sons: Lamprocles, Sophroniscus and Menexenus. Socrates lived during a period of Athenian history that has come to be known as the Golden Age of Athens, or the Age of Pericles,<sup>13</sup> named after a famous Athenian statesman (c.495-429 BCE) who occupied the role of στρατηγός (*stratēgós*: a military general and politician) from 445 BCE until his death. Socrates served as a hoplite (a heavily armed infantryman) in the Athenian military, which suggests that he came from a reasonably wealthy family background. Socrates was a particularly brave warrior who fought in at least three battles. One of these battles occurred before the Peloponnesian War<sup>14</sup> (Potidaea in 432 BCE) and two occurred during the Peloponnesian War (Delion in 424 BCE and Amphipolis in 422 BCE).<sup>15</sup>

Socrates displayed great moral courage in two incidents that are recorded in the accounts of both Xenophon and Plato. *The first incident* occurred late in the Peloponnesian War, when the Athenians had wanted a collective trial of ten generals who had abandoned dead or wounded soldiers after the naval battle of Arginœusai (406 BCE). Socrates, who at that time was serving on the Athenian Council, refused to put this motion to a vote, on the grounds that a collective trial was illegal under Athenian law.

*The second incident*, in which Socrates demonstrated great resolve, occurred during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants (404-403 BCE), a group who sought to restore Athens to its pre-democratic constitution, after the disastrous end of the Peloponnesian War. The Thirty Tyrants ordered several men, including Socrates, to arrest Leon of Salamis, a general and supporter of the Athenian democracy. Socrates alone refused to do so, and his refusal to bow to the will of those in power placed his own life at great risk.

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<sup>13</sup> For recent treatment of the history of 'Golden Age' Athens, see: Loren J. Samons II (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Pericles*, Cambridge Companions to the Ancient World (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>14</sup> The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) was fought by Athens and its allies against the member states of the Peloponnesian League, led by Sparta. Thucydides (460-395 BCE), wrote the definitive account of this conflict. For an overview of the geopolitical situation at this time, see: Edith Foster, *Thucydides, Pericles, and Periclean Imperialism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010). For conditions in Athens during and after the conflict, see: Barry Strauss, *Fathers and Sons in Athens: Ideology and Society in the Era of the Peloponnesian War* (London, England: Routledge, 1993); Alexander Rubel, *Fear and Loathing in Ancient Athens: Religion and Politics During the Peloponnesian War* (Durham, England: Acumen Publishing, 2013); and, Barry Strauss, *Athens after the Peloponnesian War: Class, Faction and Policy 403-386 B.C.* (London, England: Routledge, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> Two of these battles occurred prior to the production of Aristophanes' *Clouds* in 423 BCE. The fame that Socrates derived from his military bravery may have been a factor in Aristophanes' decision to make Socrates a central character in this play.

Socrates' greatest act of bravery occurred within the context of the trial that was launched against him in 399 BCE.<sup>16</sup> Socrates was prosecuted by Meletus,<sup>17</sup> Anytus<sup>18</sup> and Lycon<sup>19</sup> on the basis of two charges: (1) that Socrates was guilty of impiety towards the traditional Athenian gods; and (2) that Socrates had corrupted the youth of Athens by teaching them to hold some of his 'heterodox' views.<sup>20</sup> Socrates was found guilty, by a narrow margin, and was condemned to death. He claimed to be guided by a 'divine sign', or δαίμόνιον (*daimónion*)<sup>21</sup> which prevented him from fleeing Athens, and thus he remained to face his execution. There is still ongoing debate about the reason(s) behind the legal charges brought against Socrates, and whether the nature of the animosity that each accuser felt towards Socrates was primarily derived from religious, political or personal considerations.<sup>22</sup> The negative depiction of Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds* seems to have been a contributory factor; Xenophon's and Plato's accounts of Socrates' trial can, in some sense, be seen as a response to Aristophanes' caricature of Socrates' beliefs and actions.

### **The Socratic Problem: An Analysis of the Reliability of the Sources**

William J. Prior points out that: "the Socratic problem can be summarised in terms of two basic questions:

- (1) Who was the historical Socrates?; and
- (2) What doctrines, philosophical or otherwise, did the historical Socrates teach?<sup>23</sup>

<sup>16</sup> For an examination of Socrates' trial, see: Robin Waterfield, *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths* (New York, NY, USA: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009); and Thomas C. Brickhouse & Nicholas D. Smith, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Plato and the Trial of Socrates* (London, England: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>17</sup> Meletus (fl. 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was an Athenian poet and the principal accuser of Socrates.

<sup>18</sup> Anytus (c. 5<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was an Athenian politician who served as a general in the Peloponnesian War. He also helped to overthrow the pro-Spartan oligarchic rule of the Thirty Tyrants in 403 BCE.

<sup>19</sup> Lykon (c. 5<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century BCE) was an orator, who, like Meletus and Anytus, may have considered Socrates a threat to the Athenian democracy that had been re-established after the overthrow of the Thirty Tyrants.

<sup>20</sup> For analysis of the religious views of the Platonic Socrates, see: Mark L. McPherran, 'Socratic Theology and Piety', in: Bussanich & Smith (eds.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates*, pp. 257-275.

<sup>21</sup> For the role of Socrates' 'divine sign' in the works of Xenophon, see: Louis-André Dorion & Matthew Brown, 'The "Daimonion" and the "Megalēgoria" of Socrates in Xenophon's "Apology"', *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, Volume 38, Number 2 (June 2005), pp. 127-142. For the role of Socrates' 'divine sign' in the works of Plato, see: Anthony Arthur Long, 'How Does Socrates' Divine Sign Communicate with Him?', in: Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, pp. 63-74.

<sup>22</sup> For a description of each accuser and the nature of his relationship to Socrates, see:

<http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/socrates/accusers.html>

Accessed on Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2014 at 5:20 pm.

<sup>23</sup> For a helpful introduction to the post-Enlightenment history of the 'Socratic problem', see: Debra Nails, *Agora, Academy, and the Conduct of Philosophy* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer Science & Business, 1995), pp. 22-24; and Mauro Bonazzi et al., 'Socratic Dialogues', *Plato: The Electronic Journal of the International Plato Society*, Volume 9 (2009). <http://gramata.univ-paris1.fr/Plato/article88.html?lang=en>

Prior believes that in relation to the first question “we know a good deal about the life, character, philosophical interests and method of the historical Socrates”.<sup>24</sup> However, he also believes that we face considerable difficulties in establishing any kind of reliable answers to the second question, and that these difficulties can be traced back to conflicting or ambiguous information, both between different sources (e.g. Aristophanes, Xenophon and/or Plato) and even within a single source (e.g. Plato).

As we shall see later in this chapter, some modern scholars, such as Gregory Vlastos,<sup>25</sup> have argued that there are effective ways to achieve a dependable historical portrait of Socrates, and then, on the basis of that portrait, to identify specific doctrines that were held by the historical Socrates. Other scholars, such as Debra Nails,<sup>26</sup> have adopted a much more sceptical approach, and some, such as Louis-André Dorion, have even gone so far as to claim that “the Socratic question, as it was debated from the time of Schleiermacher to the beginning of the twentieth century is not only an unsolvable problem – as is shown by the lack of any agreement – but also a pseudo-problem.”<sup>27</sup>

### **Aristophanes *Clouds* – Assessing the Reliability of the Source**

In his analysis of the relevant extant literary texts, Prior reflects a sceptical stance similar to that of Nails, noting that “none of our sources has impeccable credentials as a biographer”.<sup>28</sup> Prior also reminds us that the *earliest* literary evidence for the life of Socrates comes from a genre<sup>29</sup> known as Old Comedy<sup>30</sup> which was popular in Classical Athens.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Prior, ‘The Socratic Problem’, in: Benson (ed.) *A Companion to Plato*, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Gregory Vlastos (1907-1991) was perhaps the most influential Platonic scholar in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>26</sup> Debra Nails, ‘Problems with Vlastos’s Platonic Developmentalism’, *Ancient Philosophy* Volume 13, Number 2 (1993), pp. 273-291; and ‘Mouthpiece Schmouthpiece’, in: Gerald Press (ed.), *Who Speaks For Plato?: Studies in Platonic Anonymity* (Lanham, MD, USA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), pp. 15-26.

<sup>27</sup> Louis-André Dorion (Stephen Menn, trans.), ‘Xenophon’s Socrates’, in: Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, p. 93. Dorion argues that all of the *Socratikòì lógoi* are inherently fictional works.

<sup>28</sup> Prior, ‘The Socratic Problem’, in: Benson (ed.) *A Companion to Plato*, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview of ancient Greek drama, see: Ian C. Storey & Arlene Allan, *A Guide to Ancient Greek Drama*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2014); and Marianne McDonald & Michael Walton (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Greek and Roman Theatre*, Cambridge Companions to Literature (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

<sup>30</sup> For Ancient Greek comedy, see: Michael Fontaine & Adele C. Scafuro (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Comedy* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014). For Greek Old Comedy and its social function, see: Matthew Wright, *The Comedian as Critic: Greek Old Comedy and Poetics* (London, England: Bristol Classical Press, 2012). On Aristophanic comedy itself, see: Zachary P. Biles, *Aristophanes and the Poetics of Competition* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2011), pp. 167-210.

<sup>31</sup> For the role of the theatre in the life of ancient Athens, see: David Kawalko Roselli, *Theater of the People: Spectators and Society in Ancient Athens* (Austin, TX, USA: University of Texas Press, 2011).



Aristophanes' *Clouds* is the only extant literary source from Socrates' lifetime that makes frequent and extensive reference to Socrates. Socrates appears as a central character in the *Clouds*, whereas in the *Birds*, Socrates receives only a brief mention as a dirty, ragged beggar (*Birds*, lines 1280-1283 and 1553-1555). In the *Frogs*, Socrates is criticised again, in the context of Aristophanes' condemnation of the Athenian tragic poet, Euripides (*Frogs*, lines 1491-1495).

So, how historically reliable a source is a comedy like the *Clouds*?<sup>32</sup> How is Socrates depicted in this play? And what, if anything, can we discern from the play about the historical Socrates and/or his teaching? Socrates certainly seems to have been known to many Athenian play-goers when he was in his mid-forties, at the time of the production of the *Clouds*, and continued to have enough cultural resonance to warrant Aristophanes' comedic jibes again roughly ten and twenty years later, when the *Birds* and the *Frogs* were performed.<sup>33</sup> Prior posits that:

Aristophanes portrays Socrates as a "new intellectual", a disbeliever in the gods of traditional Greek religion and a sophist who teaches "unjust argument" to his pupils. Scholars have found reason to minimise the importance of, or ignore, Aristophanes' portrait of Socrates. Comedy is not biography; the relevant question was not, "Is it true? or "Is it fair?" but "Is it funny?" Aristophanes' portrait looks to many scholars like a composite picture of Athenian intellectuals in the latter part of the fifth century; they have therefore rejected the idea that it contains accurate information about Socrates.<sup>34</sup>

Herbert D. Rankin, by contrast, has argued that Aristophanes had a more serious purpose when he wrote the *Clouds*, since he "distrusted what he saw as the socially and morally subversive consequences of new intellectual movements."<sup>35</sup> The *Clouds* is perhaps the earliest extant comedy of ideas, and as we shall see later in this chapter, there are a number of features, within the second version of the play that has been handed down to us, which are highly unusual and quite uncharacteristic of other plays within the Old Comedy genre.

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<sup>32</sup> For an introduction to the works of Aristophanes, see: James Robson, *Aristophanes: An Introduction* (London, England: Gerald Duckworth, 2010).

<sup>33</sup> For Aristophanes and Socrates, see: Jacques A. Bromberg, 'Academic Disciplines in Aristophanes' *Clouds* (200-3)', *The Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Volume 62, Number 1, (May 2012), pp. 81-91; Jeff Mitscherling, 'Socrates and the Comic Poets', *Apeiron: A Journal for Ancient Philosophy and Science*, Volume 36, Number 1 (March 2003), pp. 67-72; and John Whitehorne, 'Aristophanes' Representation of 'Intellectuals'', *Hermes*, Volume 130, Number 1 (January 2002), pp. 28-35.

<sup>34</sup> Prior, 'The Socratic Problem', in: Benson (ed.) *A Companion to Plato*, p. 26.

<sup>35</sup> Herbert David Rankin, *Sophists, Socratics and Cynics* (London, England: Croom Helm, 1983), p. 147, as cited in: Raymond K. Fisher, 'The Relevance of Aristophanes: A New Look at *Clouds*', *Greece and Rome*, Volume 35, Number 1 (April, 1988), p. 23.

Raymond K. Fisher does *not* accept that Rankin has provided an accurate characterisation of Aristophanes' intentions or motivations when writing the *Clouds*. Fisher claims that:

... Aristophanes' primary purpose in writing and producing *Clouds* was to make his audience laugh... Aristophanes was not writing serious satire or expressing personal opinions which he wished to impose on his audience... we see that every line in the play is either intended to be funny in itself or is derived from, or looks forward to, a comic situation, episode or statement. In addition to this, one of the main characteristics of comic drama in general is its universality, its tendency to depict character types and to deal with stock themes. Old Comedy is no exception to this, and there is little doubt that the main thrust of Aristophanic satire is not against individual people... We should not, therefore, look for a 'message' in an Aristophanes play, or for an expression of his personal opinions, or for attempts by him to influence the opinions of his audience... The essence of his comedy is the exposure of pretentiousness... Aristophanes is not trying to persuade his audience of the immorality of the historical Socrates or of the Sophists; rather he is making fun of what he sees as the pretentious elements in modern intellectual and social trends, and exaggerating some of the more extreme features of these trends in order to represent them as inherently illogical and absurd, and so to create laughter.<sup>36</sup>

It would certainly be difficult to dispute that the portrait of Socrates in the *Clouds* has been distorted for comic purposes. But how extensive was that distortion, and was it likely to have brought about significant or lasting change in an Athenian's views of Socrates? After all, Prior argues that many Athenians in 423 BCE were not even able to distinguish Socrates from the Pre-Socratic thinkers<sup>37</sup> or from the Sophists,<sup>38</sup> despite the fact that the *Clouds* presents Socrates as a well-known personality in late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE Athenian society.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> R. K. Fisher, 'The Relevance of Aristophanes', pp. 23-24.

<sup>37</sup> For the radical religious beliefs held by some Pre-Socratic thinkers, some of which might have been held by Socrates as well, see: Richard Janko, 'Socrates the Freethinker', in: Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, pp. 48-62, esp. pp. 48 & 55-61. For the visit of the character Strepsiades to Socrates and his students in the *phrontistērion* (the 'think tank'), the manner in which this scene was likely to have been depicted on stage, and what this play reveals about common attitudes toward Athenian intellectuals during the lifetime of Socrates, see: Whitehorne, 'Aristophanes' Representations of 'Intellectuals'', pp. 33-34.

<sup>38</sup> For an analysis of the similarities and differences between Socrates and the Sophists, see: Paul Woodruff, 'Socrates Among the Sophists', in: Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, pp. 36-47. See also: Trevor Curnow, 'Were the Sophists Philosophers?', in: Pamela O'Grady (ed.), *The Sophists: An Introduction* (London, England: Gerald Duckworth, 2008), pp. 185-193; and Christine Farmer, 'Was Socrates a Sophist?', in: O'Grady (ed.), *Sophists*, pp. 164-174.

<sup>39</sup> For other recent assessments of Aristophanes' portrait of Socrates, see: Peter Brown, 'The Comic Socrates' in: Trapp (ed.), *Socrates from Antiquity to the Enlightenment*, pp. 1-16; David Konstan, 'Socrates in Aristophanes' *Clouds*', in: Morrison (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, pp. 75-90; and Paul A. Vander Waerdt, 'Socrates in the Clouds', in: Vander Waerdt (ed.) *The Socratic Movement*, pp. 48-86.

If we are to believe the account of Socrates' trial found in Plato's *Apology*, confusion over the precise nature of Socrates' beliefs and teachings reigned in the minds of many members of the Athenian public for the following 24 years, up to and including Socrates' trial and execution in 399 BCE. In the next section, therefore, I will examine the nature and purpose of Old Comedy in general, and of Aristophanic satire in particular, so as to determine whether Aristophanes might have intended any of his comedies to convey serious moral, cultural and/or political critique about Socrates, and, if so, whether this critique might help to clarify the nature and purpose of Aristophanes' depiction of Socrates in the *Clouds*, and establish the degree of historical reliability that can be attributed to it.

### The Nature and Purpose of Old Comedy and Aristophanic Satire

Writing in 1988, R. K. Fisher could claim that: "It is remarkable that there is still no general consensus concerning Aristophanes' intentions in writing and producing his plays."<sup>40</sup> This lack of consensus is particularly apparent in discussions concerning whether any apparent moral, cultural and/or political critique in Aristophanes' plays should be accepted at face value, or whether such critique should be considered merely as a humorous component of Aristophanic satire.<sup>41</sup> Therefore, before we can assess the nature, purpose and reliability of the portrait of Socrates presented in Aristophanes' *Clouds*, we must first examine the nature of ancient Greek comedy in general.

F. Stephen Halliwell characterises ancient Greek comedy as follows:

A standard ingredient of the *kōmos*, and of kindred practices, was the abuse of bystanders, or a general mockery of those outside the solidarity of the celebrating group... Aristophanic satire is to be interpreted, then, in the broad context of 'a festival in a season of licence'... ***Comic satire was therefore the expression of a spirit of unbridled freedom of speech, and this fact consorts ill with the idea of responsible criticism motivated by serious standards.***<sup>42</sup>

<sup>40</sup> R. K. Fisher, 'The Relevance of Aristophanes', pp. 23.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Wilson's rejection of the widely held view that *Lysistrata* should be considered as a 'serious' character in: Nigel Guy Wilson, 'Two Observations on Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*', *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, Volume 23, Number 2 (Summer 1982), pp. 157-163. MacDowell, after surveying various positions held from as far back as 1897, comes down in favour of the genuine political 'seriousness' of Aristophanes' *Akharnians*, in: Douglas M. MacDowell, 'The Nature of Aristophanes' 'Akharnians'', *Greece and Rome*, Second Series, Volume 30, Number 2 (October, 1983), pp. 143-162.

<sup>42</sup> F. Stephen Halliwell, 'Aristophanic Satire', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, Volume 14, Satire Special Number. Essays in Memory of Robert C. Elliott 1914-1981 (1984), pp. 6-8, emphasis added. Joseph M. Bryant also notes that "The distinctive feature of attic comedy, formally institutionalized in 486 BCE as part of the annual religious festival honoring the wine god, was its combination of the narrative farce with older rituals of choral song and dance." See: Bryant, *Moral Codes*, p. 182.

Halliwell, like R. K. Fisher, claims that even when certain characters, actions or events in Aristophanes' plays appear to convey a 'serious' critique, we should not interpret them as anything other than examples of mockery and abuse situated within Aristophanes' broader satirical vision. Halliwell also claims that it would have been nearly impossible for Aristophanes to include any specific, topical critique in his plays, especially any that would have had any lasting impact on the audience, due to the limited time available for putting a play into production, as well as the restriction of comic performances to only two major occasions each year, with the possibility of another performance at a small local festival.<sup>43</sup>

Halliwell concedes that the Roman satirist Horace (65-8 BCE) did look back to the poets of Old Comedy as chastisers of criminals and reprobates, and that the Roman rhetorician Quintilian (35-100 CE) likewise described the genre as 'pre-eminent in the censure of vice' [cf. Horace, *Satires*, 1.4.1-5; Quintilian, *Institutes of Oratory* 10.165].<sup>44</sup> Halliwell also acknowledges that Aristophanes' himself makes certain statements in his plays in which he lays claim to a 'serious' function as a poet in Athenian society. Examples of such statements from Aristophanes include: *Akharnians*, lines 630-658, in which Aristophanes describes himself as one who provides true and righteous admonishment to the Athenians;<sup>45</sup> or *Wasps*, lines 1029-1043, in which Aristophanes claims that his critique of the politician Cleon, and of other similar persons, is part of an attempt to purify the city of Athens and to fight for the interests of the Athenian citizens. Nonetheless, Halliwell cautions us against taking any of these Aristophanic claims 'seriously':

... the apologetics of satirists who purport to work 'for Truth's defence' cannot always be taken at face value. Aristophanes's claims to a serious purpose not only need to be assessed in context, with careful attention to the tone of the rhetoric with which they are usually expressed, but must also be measured against the details of his practice. Moreover, any general interpretation of the satirical element in Old Comedy must take into account the implications of the genre's cultural setting... any straightforward version of the moralistic argument falls not only on the grounds of historical naivety, but also because of the patently gratuitous nature of so much of the personal abuse in his plays... ***If we wish to try to recover the personal voice of Aristophanes behind his satire, we can do so only by a difficult and critical process of discrimination...***<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> These festivals included: the Lenaia, held in Gamelion (roughly corresponding to January); the City (Greater) Dionysia, held from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of Elaphebolion (near the Vernal equinox in March or April); and the Rural (Lesser) Dionysia, held in the month of Poseidon (near the Winter solstice in December).

<sup>44</sup> Halliwell, *Aristophanic Satire*, p. 6.

<sup>45</sup> A position which, as I have noted above, is strongly defended by Douglas M. MacDowell.

<sup>46</sup> Halliwell, *Aristophanic Satire*, pp. 6, 19 and 20, emphasis added.

## Old Comedy and the Structure of Aristophanic Comedy

In this section, I intend to take up the challenge posed above by R. K. Fisher and Halliwell. Through an analysis of the structure of the Old Comedy genre, I will attempt to identify Aristophanes' purpose(s) in writing the *Clouds*. This, in turn, should assist us to discern how and why Aristophanes has chosen to present Socrates in such a striking manner.

The works of most poets of the Old Comedy are known only in fragments, or as titles in ancient lists of their works. Therefore, our knowledge of the nature, purpose and structure of Old Comedy is largely derived from an examination of Aristophanes' 11 extant works. Analysis of the Old Comedy genre in this chapter will rely primarily on the seminal work of Gregory Sifakis in relation to the structure of Aristophanic comedy,<sup>47</sup> which, in turn, is based on the insights of the Russian folklorist Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp (1895-1970).<sup>48</sup>

Sifakis's reduction of the plot of Aristophanes' plays, to a short, universalising, narrative paraphrase, sets out to isolate the various actions that make up a particular story, so that a direct comparison of the sequence of these actions can be made.<sup>49</sup> Sifakis has isolated 8 structural elements, or functions, and has sought to align his descriptors of these 8 functions as closely as possible with Propp's list.<sup>50</sup> Sifakis's 8 functions are:<sup>51</sup>

- (1) *Villainy, or lack, or misfortune*
- (2) *Decision / plan to counteract misfortune*
- (3) *Service or help of a supernatural or quasi-magical helper is obtained*
- (4) *Transference*
- (5) *Opposition or obstacles to be overcome*
- (6) *Persuasion exercised in debate*
- (7) *Liquidation of villainy or misfortune*
- (8) *Triumph*

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<sup>47</sup> Gregory Michael Sifakis, 'The Structure of Aristophanic Comedy', *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume 112 (1992), pp. 123-142.

<sup>48</sup> Propp developed a distinctive method of literary analysis by applying the principles of Formalism to a study of one hundred Russian folktales, chosen by Propp, at random, from a famous collection compiled by Alexander Nikolaevich Afanasiev (1826-1871), entitled *Naródnýe Rúskie Skázki* [= 'Russian Folk Tales'], 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (Moscow, Russia: Gosudarstvennoye Izdatel'stvo Khudozhestvennoy Literatury, 1957 [1855-1866].)

<sup>49</sup> Sifakis, *Structure of Aristophanic Comedy*, pp. 140-142.

<sup>50</sup> In each cell of his tabular representation of Aristophanes' plays, Sifakis has provided a narrative summary of the events that correspond to the particular 'function' listed at the top of each vertical 'function' column.

<sup>51</sup> General descriptions of each 'function', as well as the manner in which each 'function' is manifested in a specific play of Aristophanes can be found in: Sifakis, *Structure of Aristophanic Comedy*, pp. 129-133.

Sifakis' 'functional' analysis of the play reveals a puzzling combination of features, some of which are unique to the *Clouds*. The first, second, third, and fifth functions follow the conventional patterns of the Old Comedy genre, but the fourth function is omitted, the sixth function is modified, and the seventh and eighth functions are completely undermined.

**The first function** (*Villainy, or lack, or misfortune*) refers to Strepsiades, who is burdened by the debts brought about by the reckless spending of his son, Pheidippides.

**The second function** (*Decision/plan to counteract misfortune*) refers to Strepsiades' initially unsuccessful plan to persuade his son to attend the Φροντιστήριον of Socrates, causing Strepsiades to make the reluctant choice to attend Socrates' school in his son's place.

**The third function** (*Service or help of a supernatural or quasi-magical helper is obtained*) refers to Socrates and the highly unusual form and content of his teaching, but most especially to Socrates' ability to summon the divine Clouds.

**The fourth function** (*Transference*) does not occur in the *Clouds* at all. Unlike other Aristophanic comedies, the protagonist is not conveyed from one place to another, does not cover a long distance, and is not transferred to a different world.

**The fifth function** (*Opposition or obstacles to be overcome*) occurs in a more conventional manner, when Strepsiades fails to grasp the complexities of Socrates' teaching.

**The sixth function** (*Persuasion exercised in debate*) is substantially modified in the *Clouds*. Typically, plays of the Old Comedy genre featured an ἀγών (*agōn*), i.e. a contest or debate between one actor and the chorus, or between two actors, each supported by half of the chorus. However, in the *Clouds*, the formal *agōn* is omitted from the first part of the play, where it would normally appear, and does not occur until two-thirds of the play have elapsed. The *agōn* is held between contestants that are personifications of ideas (the Weaker Argument and the Stronger Argument), rather than between Strepsiades and Socrates.<sup>52</sup>

**The seventh function** (*Liquidation of villainy or misfortune*) is not achieved at all, leading Sifakis to characterise this as a "false or imaginary liquidation". Pheidippides uses the instruction that he has received from Socrates to justify the shocking act of beating his own father, and Pheidippides hints that he might do the same, or worse, to his own mother.

**The eighth function** (*Triumph*) is, in fact, what Sifakis describes as an "illusory and then a negative triumph". Generally, an Aristophanic comedy would conclude with celebration and festivities, but in the *Clouds*, Pheidippides' Socratic education has been so damaging that Strepsiades seeks revenge, by burning down Socrates' *Phrontistērion*.

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<sup>52</sup> R. K. Fisher, 'The Relevance of Aristophanes', pp. 25. Fisher notes that this is the only extant play in which the two participants in the *agōn* are not also two of the main characters.

Joseph M. Bryant points out that the *Clouds* is not the only extant Aristophanic comedy which seems to attack the new intellectualism. In the *Frogs*, the *agōn* takes place between two great Athenian tragedians, Aeschylus (c.525/524-c.456/455 BCE) and Euripides (c.480-406 BCE). Aeschylus, like the Just Logos in the *Clouds*, represents the Old Education; Euripides, like the Unjust Logos in the *Clouds*, represents the New Education. Euripides seems to have been an associate of Socrates,<sup>53</sup> and the parallels between the depiction of Euripides (in the *Frogs*) and Socrates (in the *Clouds*) are quite striking. Bryant describes the *agōn* in the *Frogs* as follows:

The two tragedians pick each other's work apart in hilarious yet sophisticated criticism (an indication of the audience's high poetic literacy)... the decisive criterion of poetic excellence hinges upon the traditional moral function: "who makes men better for the Polis?"... Aeschylus... is credited with imparting to the citizenry martial courage, a yearning after noble deeds, and moral decency. Euripides, in contrast, is censured for having corrupted the Athenians with subtle sophistries, atheism, and immoral relativism... ***And what is Euripides' legacy? He has taught the people "to babble, to think, to see, to understand, to love to twist, to contrive, to suspect all and consider things from every angle" – in short a hyperintellectualism that is perverting the standards that gave the Athenians their victory at Marathon...*** the play ends with Dionysus selecting Aeschylus as the superior poet, the one who will exit Hades and save Athens with his wise counsels.<sup>54</sup>

In addition to the extremely unusual narrative features in the *Clouds* that have been identified above by Sifakis, there is one feature of the dramatic structure, in particular, which might also help us to understand Aristophanes' intentions in the production of the *Clouds*, namely Aristophanes' uncharacteristic employment of a mechanical device called a μηχανή (*mēkhanē*). A *mēkhanē* was a crane, made of wooden beams and a system of pulleys, that was used in Ancient Greek tragedies and comedies during the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE. Many of these ancient Greek plays featured the presence of a god, usually making his or her first appearance from above, so a *mēkhanē* could be used to create the illusion of flight, by lifting and suspending one of the actors above the stage. The use of this dramatic device, which was a particular favourite of Euripides, gave rise to the expression "god from the machine" (in Greek, ἀπὸ μηχανῆς θεός; or, in Latin, *deus ex machina*).

<sup>53</sup> See: Christian Wildberg, 'Socrates and Euripides' in: Abhel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, pp. 21-35, but esp. p. 25.

<sup>54</sup> Bryant, *Moral Codes*, p. 183, emphasis added. 'Babbler' (ἄδολεσχη) seems to have been commonly used, by various poets, to refer to Socrates as well. See: Mitscherling, 'Socrates and the Comic Poets', p. 68, n. 7.

One of the earliest uses of the *mēkhanē*, in conjunction with a non-divine character, occurs at the end of the Euripidean tragedy *Medea*, allowing the mortal woman Medea<sup>55</sup> to be transported from the stage in the dragon-drawn chariot provided by her grandfather, the sun god Helios. In Aristophanes *Clouds*, when Socrates makes his first appearance, he is also suspended above the stage, in a basket, performing meteorological observations.<sup>56</sup> Socrates' does not have any divine lineage, and his appearance in a basket, rather than in a divine chariot like Medea, seems designed to undermine and mock the traditional usage of the *mēkhanē*.<sup>57</sup> Peter Cruikshank, therefore, suggests that Socrates' first haughty line (223), as he is being lowered from the heavens, is intended to reflect Socrates' divine pretensions, and that Socrates' last despairing line (1504), as he is caught inside the burning *Phrontistērion*, correctly indicates his non-divinity, and thus his mortality.<sup>58</sup>

### **Socrates in the *Clouds*: Some Unresolved Tensions**

Halliwell maintains that Socrates is presented merely as a generic type of the philosopher, and that there is little coherence to the various words, ideas and behaviours attributed to him:

In the case of the Socrates of *Clouds*, who furnishes probably the most debated issue in the history of Aristophanic criticism, it has often been recognised that Aristophanes attributes to the philosopher somewhat indiscriminately a whole cluster of features which make up a generalised and prejudiced picture of 'the intellectual type'... The play's emphasis on a *school* of intellectuals, which can be represented as well by the personified Unjust Argument as by Socrates himself, intimates Aristophanes's greater concern with the popular view of philosophers as a class, than with any particular individual.

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<sup>55</sup> Mēdeia was the daughter of King Aiētēs of Kolkhís, who was the son of the sun god Hēlios and the Oceanid goddess Persēis. Mēdeia thus came from a divine background, and was also a witch, but she was still a mortal.

<sup>56</sup> For an examination of other dramatic features, such as props, costumes, masks and staging, that are used by Aristophanes to depict Socrates in the *Clouds*, see: Whitehorne, 'Aristophanes' Representation of 'Intellectuals', pp. 28-35, esp. pp. 33-34.

<sup>57</sup> In later comedies, Aristophanes used the *mēkhanē* in even more unconventional ways. In the comedy *Peace*, first produced at the Greater Dionysia in 421 BCE, the mortal character Trygaios, who is a farmer, is introduced to the audience in the *mēkhanē*, flying on the back of an enormous dung beetle with its wings spread. Aristophanes also subverts the conventional usage of the *mēkhanē* in the comedy *Thesmophoriazousae* (i.e. *Women Celebrating the Festival of the Thesmophoria*), which was probably first produced at the Greater Dionysia in 411 BCE. In this comedy, Aristophanes parodies a number of famous scenes from Euripidean tragedy. In fact, Aristophanes has Euripides appear as a character in *Thesmophoriazousae*, who is then made to take on roles from Euripidean plays, firstly as Menelaus, from Euripides' *Helen*, and then, using the *mēkhanē*, Euripides is made to take on the role of Perseus, a character from Euripides' *Andromeda*.

<sup>58</sup> Peter Cruikshank, 'Socrates in the Clouds: Excess and Impiety' (2008). *Open Access Dissertations and Theses*, Paper 5331, pp. 84-85.



By contrast, Richard Janko claims that the physical, or cosmological doctrines attributed to Socrates in the *Clouds* are those of a ‘Pre-Socratic’ contemporary of Socrates, Diogenes of Apollonia (fl. 425 BCE), since “there are powerful reasons for believing that Socrates did, at some stage, hold Diogenean views himself.”<sup>59</sup> Janko also draws attention to the peculiarly ‘mystical’ nature of Strepsiades’ first visit to Socrates’ *Phrontistērion*:

The seeker after knowledge is depicted as a would-be initiate. When first Strepsiades approaches the place [i.e. the *Phrontistērion*] he is told that it is ‘not holy’, οὐ θέμις, for an outsider to learn of Socrates’ ideas (*Clouds*, line 140). These are ‘mysteries’ (μυστήρια) (*Clouds*, line 143). The pupils are initiates (τελούμενοι), (*Clouds*, line 258), and are to learn true knowledge of the gods (*Clouds*, line 250f).<sup>60</sup>

Janko suggests that Empedocles (490-430 BCE), another enigmatic ‘Pre-Socratic’ figure, may also have served as a model for the depiction of Socrates in the *Clouds*:

Until recently [Empedocles’] pretensions to magical powers and claims to divine status have been neglected; indeed the most important fragment, fr. 111 DK, where he claims that he can teach his disciple (and him alone) how to control the weather and raise the dead, has actually been denounced as spurious, because it did not fit into our image of a scientist. Led on by Aristotle’s classification of him as a *physiologos* rather than a poet, we have tended to overlook his credentials as a holy man as well... he was what his contemporaries call a μάγος... Empedocles was not alone in presenting himself as a hierophant initiating his hearers into mystery-rites, blurring to an extraordinary degree the boundaries between philosophy, science, religion and magic. It is of course anachronistic to describe these arts thus; one should really say that the differences between them had not yet been understood, save by all but the most radical of thinkers.<sup>61</sup>

Is there any way in which we can reconcile these differing assessments of the historical reliability of Aristophanes’ *Clouds*? In the next section, we will examine the possibility that there is a genuine coherence to Aristophanes’ portrait of Socrates, which, in turn, explains why Socrates was subjected to such sustained critique.

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<sup>59</sup> Richard Janko, ‘The Physicist as Hierophant: Aristophanes, Socrates and the Authorship of the Derveni Papyrus’, *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Volume 118 (1997), p. 70. Diogenes was a contemporary of Socrates, and was also a follower of the Pre-Socratic thinker, Anaxagoras (500-428 BCE).

<sup>60</sup> Janko, ‘The Physicist as Hierophant’, p. 69.

<sup>61</sup> Janko, ‘The Physicist as Hierophant’, p. 70. See also: Peter Kingsley, *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery, and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1996).

## Aristophanes' Depiction of Socrates as the Antithesis of the 'Middling Man'

Aristophanes' 'Socrates' manifests a potent mixture of beliefs and behaviours. Modern scholars often attempt to isolate and identify these elements, seemingly drawn indiscriminately from the teaching and example of various 'Pre-Socratics' and Sophists. Cruikshank, however, argues that these attributes have *not* been selected randomly, but, in fact, have a unity that is grounded in: (1) heterodox religious belief and practice; and (2) careless indoctrination of students. Cruikshank also maintains that it is precisely these Socratic characteristics which stand in strongest opposition to the Athenian egalitarian values of the 'middling man',<sup>62</sup> and thus prompted Aristophanes' biting satire in the *Clouds*.

Ian Morris has argued that the Athenian democracy of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE was based upon a "strong principle of equality", which entailed that all the members of the community were supposed to be equally qualified to make decisions about public matters.<sup>63</sup> Morris links this political approach to a class of citizens known as μέσοι (mésoi), or 'middling men', who emerged in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, as a social group located between the wealthy elite and the lower class poor. By the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, 'middling' status in the Athenian democracy seems to have been typified more by attitude and manner. The 'middling man' was supposed to exercise restraint and propriety, by moderating his various appetites and desires, and by channelling his energies into activities that would bring superiority and fame to his city, rather than seeking to achieve personal distinction and achievement.

According to Morris, the archetypal 'middling man' was Hesiod, in his self-representation within the *Works and Days*.<sup>64</sup> Victor Davis Hanson also supports this characterisation of Hesiod, noting Hesiod's preoccupation with the values of self-control, hard work, and, most especially, αὐτάρκεια (i.e. self-sufficiency). As we shall see shortly, Xenophon has attributed these Hesiodic values to Socrates, in a manner that seems designed to counter Aristophanes' criticisms, by depicting Socrates as an ideal 'middling man'.

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<sup>62</sup> Cruikshank, 'Socrates in the *Clouds*', pp. 2 and 10-12.

<sup>63</sup> See: Ian Morris, 'The Strong Principle of Equality and the Archaic Origins of Greek Democracy', in: Josiah Ober & Charles Hedrick, *Demokratia: A Conversation on Democracies, Ancient and Modern* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 1996), pp. 19-48; and Ian Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History: Words and Things in Iron Age Greece* (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 'Equality for Men', pp. 109-154.

<sup>64</sup> Morris, *Archaeology as Cultural History*, pp. 164 and 166, as cited in: Anthony T. Edwards, *Hesiod's Ascra* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2004), p. 125. See also: Victor Davis Hanson, *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 1999), 'The Ways of Farmers', pp. 91-125. Anthony T. Edwards, whilst supportive of Morris's and Hanson's concept of the 'middling man', questions whether Hesiod himself can be described in this way. See: Edwards, *Hesiod's Ascra*, pp. 125-126.

## Xenophon – Assessing the Reliability of the Sources

Xenophon of Athens,<sup>65</sup> son of Gryllus, from the deme of Erchia, was a companion and student of Socrates, for an unknown length of time, during the final decade of Socrates' life (c.408-399 BCE). After Socrates' death, Xenophon wrote four Socratic works "in part to defend Socrates against the charges of Aristophanes and others".<sup>66</sup> Prior claims that "Xenophon did not associate with Socrates to become a philosopher, but to become a gentleman".<sup>67</sup> Unfortunately, Prior's assessment of Xenophon's motivations seems to depend upon a modern misconception of the nature of ancient philosophy, which posits a fundamental distinction between speculative discourse ("philosophy") and practical action ("being a gentleman").<sup>68</sup> From the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, similar criticisms of Xenophon's Socrates, such as that provided by John Ferguson below, have become common:

... we have two principal sources for our knowledge of Socrates... One is Xenophon, in whose pages he appears a pietistic, prosy moralist. The other is Plato, in whose greatest dialogues he is shown as a brilliant constructive metaphysician. Neither can be authentic. If (as we must) we accept the evidence of Aristotle, Plato has put his own metaphysical constructs into his master's mouth. But if Plato has imposed his own, very different genius on Socrates, Xenophon has created a Socrates equally in his own duller image. *The Athenians would never have executed Xenophon's Socrates... [although, Xenophon's] evidence may be confidently accepted when it accords with that of others...*<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For an overview of Xenophon and his works, see: John Kinlich Anderson, *Xenophon*, Bristol Classical Paperbacks, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, England: Gerald Duckworth, 2001); and John Dillery, *Xenophon and the History of His Times* (London, England: Routledge, 1995). For a multi-author survey of Xenophon's works, see: Vivienne J. Gray (ed.), *Xenophon*, Oxford Readings in Classical Studies (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010), especially Part III, *Socrates*, pp. 195-326.

<sup>66</sup> Prior, 'The Socratic Problem', p. 26. In fact, Socrates was also criticised in the works of Eupolis, Callias, Ameipsias and Telecleides. Mitscherling believes that if more examples of these other poets' works had survived, it is likely that we would not regard Aristophanes "as the prime culprit and chief historical villain". See: Mitscherling, 'Socrates and the Comic Poets', pp. 71-72.

<sup>67</sup> Prior, 'The Socratic Problem', p. 26.

<sup>68</sup> Pierre Hadot (1922-2010) has repeatedly argued that such an understanding of ancient philosophy is both anachronistic and misleading. See: Pierre Hadot (Arnold I. Davidson, ed. & trans.), *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 1995); Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *What Is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Belknap Press, 2002); and Pierre Hadot (Marc Djaballah & Michael Chase, trans.), *The Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, Cultural Memory in the Present, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stanford, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>69</sup> John Ferguson, *Morals and Values in Ancient Greece*, Classical World Series (Bristol, England: Bristol Classical Press, 1989), p. 57, emphasis added. Ferguson completely discounts Aristophanes' *Clouds* as a "caricature", and does not seem to put much weight on Diogenes Laërtius's *Life of Socrates*. Ferguson's position implicitly relies upon the view that a reliable chronology of the Platonic dialogues can be determined, so that the 'historical' Socrates can then be discerned from within the 'early', or 'Socratic' Platonic dialogues. His assessment that Xenophon's evidence "may be confidently accepted when it accords with that of others" seems to imply that the Socrates depicted within the so-called 'early', or 'Socratic' dialogues of Plato should be taken as the standard from which to assess the historical reliability of all other literary portraits of Socrates.

Xenophon's four Socratic works were written in the early 4th century BCE, although there is little internal or external evidence from which we can determine the date of composition, or the relative chronology, of these works. The precise nature of the relationship between Xenophon's Socratic works and the works of the other members of the Socratic circle (especially those of Plato) is also unclear. Vivienne J. Gray notes that:

The death of Socrates gave birth to an industry of biographical literature which often took the form of a defence (*apologia*) or prosecution (*katēgoria*), sometimes purporting to be the actual defence or prosecution conducted at his trial. Plato and Xenophon wrote works in his defence. Among his critics, one Polycrates had a certain notoriety. Lysias, Theodectes and Demetrius of Phalerum, orators and rhetoricians like Polycrates, were credited with further works of apology. There were doubtless many others.<sup>70</sup>

Xenophon was not present in Athens for the trial and execution of Socrates in 399 BCE, but he may have written his *Defence of Socrates* on the basis of eyewitness evidence received from Hermogenes, another member of the Socratic circle.<sup>71</sup> According to Mario Montuori, if Xenophon obtained his information about the trial and death of Socrates from Hermogenes, then this would most probably have occurred when Xenophon returned from Asia, and settled at Skilloûs,<sup>72</sup> in western Greece. Thus, Montuori has dated the *Defence of Socrates* to c. 386 BCE.<sup>73</sup> However, Dorion has argued that any uncertainty about the dating of Xenophon's Socratic works need not have a significant impact upon interpretation of these works:

Xenophon has sketched a portrait of the character of Socrates, and of the ethics he defends, which is perfectly uniform and coherent throughout the *Memorabilia*, *Symposium*, *Apology* and *Oeconomicus*. Because there is no noticeable doctrinal evolution between these four texts, it does not matter much whether we know the chronological order of their composition. As is well known, this is not the case for Plato's dialogues, where we can find divergences, even contradictions, between the positions Plato attributes to Socrates in different dialogues...<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Vivienne J. Gray, 'Xenophon's *Defence of Socrates*: The Rhetorical Background to the Socratic Problem', *Classical Quarterly*, Volume, 39, Number 1, p. 136.

<sup>71</sup> For Xenophon's dependence on Hermogenes for other information concerning Socrates, see: Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 4.8.

<sup>72</sup> Skilloûs (modern day Skillountia), was a small town about 185 km west of Athens.

<sup>73</sup> Mario Montuori, *Socrates: Physiology of a Myth*, London Studies in Classical Philology, Book 6 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 1981), p. 75, n. 4. See also: Anton-Hermann Chroust, *Socrates, Man and Myth: The Two Socratic Apologies of Xenophon* (Notre Dame, IN, USA: University of Notre Dame Press, 1957), p. 17, n. 72. Both references cited in: Gray, 'Xenophon's *Defence of Socrates*', p. 136, n. 3.

<sup>74</sup> Dorion (Menn, trans.), 'Xenophon's Socrates', in: Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, p. 105.

Xenophon's *Apology* was written so as to provide a general defence of Socrates against the criticisms that had been raised by poets such as Eupolis and Aristophanes, and also to provide a more specific defence against the two charges levelled at Socrates during his trial in 399 BCE: (1) the charge of rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and of bringing in strange deities; and (2) the charge of corrupting the youth. In fact, in each of Xenophon's four Socratic works, we see a forceful and consistent portrait of Socrates as both a pious believer in the traditional gods of ancient Athens, and as a morally righteous man. In *Apology* 5, Socrates tells Hermogenes:

[5] And when Hermogenes observed, "That is a surprising statement," he had replied, "Do you think it surprising that even God [τῷ θεῷ] holds it better for me to die now? Do you not know that I would refuse to concede that any man has lived a better life than I have [ὑφείμην, lit. weaved, created, constructed] up to now? For I have realised that my whole life has been spent in piety and righteousness [ὁσίως καὶ δικαίως] – a fact that affords the greatest satisfaction; and so I have felt a deep self-respect [ισχυρῶς ἀγάμενος ἑμαυτὸν] and have discovered that my associates hold corresponding sentiments toward me.<sup>75</sup>

In this brief statement, we see a number of the themes which Xenophon seeks to develop in various ways across the course of his four Socratic works. Firstly, Socrates is presented as a person who claims to have a degree of insight into the divine will for his life. This statement is expressed with reference to God [τῷ θεῷ] in the singular, a God who is not named and whose identity is not specified. Secondly, Socrates claims that even God believes that, as a result of his trial, it is better for him to die than to live. Thirdly, Socrates puts himself forward as a *moral exemplar*, claiming that, up until this point in time, no other human being has constructed a better life than Socrates himself has done. Fourthly, Socrates seeks to undermine the two claims raised against him in his trial, by claiming that his whole life has been spent in piety [ὁσίως] and righteousness [δικαίως]; in other words, Socrates maintains that he has lived in consistently right relation with the gods and with human beings, and thus *could not* be guilty of, on the one hand, rejecting the gods acknowledged by the state and bringing in strange deities, or, on the other hand, corrupting the youth. Fifthly, Socrates states that the exemplary manner in which he has lived his life has brought him self-respect, and also the respect of his close companions.

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<sup>75</sup> Edgar Cardew Marchant & Otis Johnson Todd (trans.), *Xenophon: Memorabilia; Oeconomicus; Symposium; Apologia*, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 168 (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1923).

Before I pursue a more detailed investigation of the manner in which the themes outlined above have been developed in Xenophon's Socratic works, and the ways in which this portrait differs from that of Plato, I will address the concerns of those scholars who, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards, have maintained that Xenophon's portrait of Socrates is historically unreliable, and ought to be disregarded in the pursuit of a solution to the Socratic Problem. As we shall see shortly, there are a number of irreconcilable discrepancies, and even outright contradictions, between Xenophon's Socrates (Socrates<sup>X</sup>), and Plato's Socrates (Socrates<sup>P</sup>). However, as I have indicated earlier, there are several interpreters, especially Xenophonic scholars such as Louis-André Dorion, and Platonic scholars such as Debra Nails, who maintain that the Socratic Problem is only a pseudo-problem of modern academic scholarship, which was completely unknown in the ancient world, and which is based on a misunderstanding of the genre of the *Sōkratikoí logoi*. Dorion suggests that:

If the *logoi Sōkratikoí* are works of fiction, allowing their authors considerable scope for invention, not only in the setting, but also in the ideas expressed by the characters, including Socrates, then it seems hopeless to try to reconstruct the thought of the historical Socrates on the basis of the *logoi Sōkratikoí*. But if the Socratic question is doomed to remain an unsolvable (pseudo-)problem, we must draw the consequences; and one of the consequences is that there is no longer any obstacle to rehabilitating Xenophon's Socratic writings.<sup>76</sup>

Dorion notes that the "eclipse" of Xenophon's Socratic writings, from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, was directly related to modern attempts to solve the Socratic Problem. However, if the Socratic Problem is really a pseudo-problem, then most of the criticisms of Xenophon's Socratic writings "become irrelevant". Nonetheless, Dorion does acknowledge that there is a further, potentially significant criticism of Xenophon's Socratic works, first raised by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) in his influential 1818 study entitled 'Über den Werth des Sokrates als Philosophen'.<sup>77</sup> This criticism is twofold: (1) Xenophon was not a true philosopher; (2) Socrates<sup>X</sup> was also not a true philosopher.<sup>78</sup> As I will demonstrate in the next section, this criticism of Xenophon, and of Socrates<sup>X</sup>, seems to rest on a misunderstanding of Xenophon's Socratic works, in particular, and also on a more general misunderstanding of the nature of ancient philosophy.

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<sup>76</sup> Dorion (Menn, trans.), 'Xenophon's Socrates', p. 93.

<sup>77</sup> Friedrich Schleiermacher, 'Über den Werth des Sokrates als Philosophen' ['On the Value of Socrates as a Philosopher], in: *Abhandlungen der philosophischen Klasse der Königlich-Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften aus den Jahren 1814-1815* (Berlin, Germany: Realschul-Buchhandlung, 1818), pp. 51-68.

<sup>78</sup> Dorion (Menn, trans.), 'Xenophon's Socrates', pp. 93-94.

## The Nature of Ancient Philosophy: Xenophon & Socrates<sup>X</sup> vs. Plato & Socrates<sup>P</sup>?

Since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, critics of Xenophon, and of Xenophon's portrait of Socrates, have relied upon a particularly modern conception of ancient philosophy, in which the most essential element is supposed to be written discourse, aimed at the construction of an all-embracing philosophical system, in which metaphysical, epistemological and ethical elements are expounded in a more or less explicit, coherent, and logically consistent manner.<sup>79</sup> These scholars all reject the Socratic works of Xenophon, in favour of those of Plato. For example, Gregory Vlastos states that Plato's Socrates is "in fact the only Socrates worth talking about";<sup>80</sup> Gerasimos X. Santas claims that "it is only Plato's Socrates that is of major interest to the contemporary philosopher";<sup>81</sup> and Charles H. Kahn has argued that "as far as we are concerned, the Socrates of [Plato's] dialogues is the historical Socrates. He is certainly the only one who counts for the history of philosophy."<sup>82</sup> Somewhat ironically, these scholars look to the works of Plato as an early example of genuinely 'philosophical' writing, despite the fact that these works depict Socrates<sup>P</sup> as one who did *not* write anything (just like the later Cynic school of philosophy, which was inspired, in part, by precisely this aspect of Plato's portrait of Socrates). After rejecting the Socratic works of Xenophon, Gregory Vlastos and many of his successors have sought to make a distinction between a body of teaching that can be attributed to the historical Socrates, and a body of teaching that can be attributed to Plato. I will explore the methodological flaws inherent in that approach later in this chapter, when I consider the dialogues of Plato in more detail.

Victor Goldschmidt (1914-1981), who was both a philosopher and a historian of philosophy, has strongly rejected the modern understanding of ancient philosophy that was outlined above, and, in particular, its reading of the Platonic dialogues, by stating that "These dialogues aim not to *inform* but to *form*".<sup>83</sup> Pierre Hadot (1922-2010) completely endorsed this "absolutely extraordinary" reading of Plato's dialogues:

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example: Thomas C. Brickhouse & Nicholas D. Smith, *The Philosophy of Socrates*, History of Ancient and Medieval Philosophy (Boulder, CO, USA: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 38 & 42-43.

<sup>80</sup> Gregory Vlastos, 'The Paradox of Socrates', in: Gregory Vlastos (ed.), *The Philosophy of Socrates: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Garden City, NY, USA: Anchor Books, 1971), p. 2, as cited in: Dorion p. 106, n. 2.

<sup>81</sup> Gerasimos Xenophon Santas, *Socrates: Philosophy in Plato's Early Dialogues* (London, England: Routledge, 1979), p. x, as cited in: Dorion, 'Xenophon's Socrates', p. 106, n. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Charles H. Kahn, 'Did Plato write Socratic dialogues?', *Classical Quarterly*, New Series, Volume 31, Number 2 (December 1981), p. 319, as cited in: Dorion 'Xenophon's Socrates', p. 106, n. 2.

<sup>83</sup> These words of Victor Goldschmidt (emphasis added) and the words of Pierre Hadot that follow, appear in an interview between Hadot and Arnold I. Davidson, recorded in: Hadot (Djaballah & Chase, trans.), *The Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, Chapter 6, 'Philosophical Discourse as Spiritual Exercise', p. 91.

... this is valid for all ancient philosophy. Naturally, philosophical discourse also provides information about being, matter, celestial phenomena, and the elements. However, it is also meant to form the mind, to teach it to recognise problems and methods of reasoning, and to allow one to orient oneself in thought and in life. I believe that Werner Jaeger had an excellent intuition when he entitled his book *Paideia*, which means “education”... For the Greeks, what counts is the education of the body and the mind. When Epictetus designates the philosopher who has made progress, he often says that he is *pepaideumenos*, that he is “educated”. This is perhaps the main contrast with a certain modern philosophy, this attitude toward education.

Dorion, one of the few modern scholars who has been prepared to defend the philosophical credentials of Xenophon, maintains that modern criticisms of Xenophon and of Socrates<sup>X</sup> can be overcome, if one takes into consideration the following three arguments:

**(1) Criticism of Xenophon and of Socrates<sup>X</sup> as “un-philosophical” was completely unknown before the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.**

Modern criticisms of Xenophon and of Socrates<sup>X</sup> are premised on a conception of ancient philosophy that scholars such as Victor Goldschmidt and Pierre Hadot have shown to be a misrepresentation of the manner in which ancient philosophy was understood and practiced in the ancient world. If, instead, ancient philosophy is understood as being more *formative* than informative (Goldschmidt), and more about *a way of life* than a specific type of written discourse (Hadot), then Xenophon’s Socratic works can certainly be regarded as ‘philosophical’. Socrates<sup>X</sup> is also a ‘philosopher’, since he strives to make his life and his words consistent,<sup>84</sup> and he also strives to make other people better.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> See, for example: Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1: Socrates<sup>X</sup> honoured his counsellor’s oath to act in accordance with the laws of Athens; *Memorabilia* 1.3.1: Socrates<sup>X</sup> words and deeds are in harmony, since, following the advice given by the priestess at Delphi, he acts piously by following the custom of the state; *Memorabilia* 1.5.6: Socrates<sup>X</sup> exercised self-control (*enkráteia*) in his words, and in the subjection of bodily and financial pleasures.

<sup>85</sup> See, for example: Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.4.1: Socrates<sup>X</sup> sought to improve his companions through daily conversation; *Memorabilia* 1.4.19: Socrates<sup>X</sup> kept his companions from impiety, injustice and shameful actions through his words, and through inculcating a sense that all deeds were observed by the gods; *Memorabilia* 1.5.1ff: Socrates<sup>X</sup> urged his followers to pursue the virtue of self-control (*enkráteia*); *Memorabilia* 1.6.14: Socrates<sup>X</sup> taught his friends all the good he could, sent them to others from whom they could derive moral benefit, and explored the writings of wise men with his friends; *Memorabilia* 1.7.1: Socrates<sup>X</sup> said that “the best road to glory is the way that makes a man as good as he wishes to be thought”; *Memorabilia* 2.1.1: Socrates<sup>X</sup> urged his associates to practice self-control with regard to eating, drinking, sexual indulgence, sleeping, and in the endurance of cold, heat and toil; Socrates<sup>X</sup> encouraged his associates to develop prudence (*sophrosýne*), especially towards the gods (*Memorabilia* 4.3.1-2), piety (*Memorabilia* 4.3.18), justice (*dikaíosýne*) (*Memorabilia* 4.3.25), and above all, self-control (*Memorabilia* 4.5.1). Xenophon concludes the *Memorabilia* with two general statements of the ability of Socrates<sup>X</sup> to improve his friends (4.8.7 and 4.8.10-11).



**(2) *The Socratic works of Xenophon, and Socrates<sup>X</sup> who is depicted within them, exercised a decisive influence upon many ancient authors, especially those from the Stoic school of philosophy.***

Evidence of the pervasive influence of Xenophon and of Socrates<sup>X</sup> can be seen in the *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, written by Diogenes Laertius (fl. 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE).<sup>86</sup> In the chapter about Socrates, Diogenes refers to Xenophon as a ‘Socratic’ (2.5.47) and, immediately after his chapter on Socrates, Diogenes devotes a chapter to Xenophon.<sup>87</sup>

Further evidence for the ‘philosophical’ status of Xenophon amongst ancient thinkers can be seen in the writings of the ancient Skeptic philosopher Sextus Empiricus (c.160-210 CE).<sup>88</sup> Echoing the thoughts of Cicero at the start of this chapter, Sextus Empiricus makes an indirect allusion to Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* 1.1.11ff, stating that Socrates, unlike the Pre-Socratic thinkers before him, “was concerned, at least according to his other companions, with only the ethical part, seeing that Xenophon in his *Memoirs* explicitly says that he rejected the physical part as being beyond us, and studied the ethical part alone as being our business.”<sup>89</sup>

**(3) *Some modern philosophers have completely rejected Schleiermacher’s negative assessment of Xenophon and Socrates<sup>X</sup>.***

Friedrich Nietzsche described the *Memorabilia* as “the most attractive book of Greek literature”,<sup>90</sup> and claimed that:

Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* gives a truly faithful image [of Socrates], just as intelligent as their model; but one must understand how to read this book. The philologists at bottom believe that Socrates has nothing to tell them, and they get bored with reading it. Other people feel that this book both wounds you and makes you happy.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Xenophon is mentioned in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 2.3; 2.5; 2.7; 2.8; 3.1; 6.1; 6.4; 7.1; & 9.2.

<sup>87</sup> Book 2, Chapter 6 is devoted entirely to Xenophon.

<sup>88</sup> Sextus’s three extant philosophical works, *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, and two other works preserved under the title, *Against the Mathematicians*, are the fullest account of the beliefs of ancient Greek and Roman Skeptics.

<sup>89</sup> *Against the Logicians* 1.8. See: Richard Bett (ed. & trans.), *Sextus Empiricus: Against the Logicians*, Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>90</sup> Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari (eds.), *Friedrich W. Nietzsche: Werke* (Berlin: Germany: Walter De Gruyter, 1967), Volume IV 3, p. 442; posthumous fragment 41 [2] 1879. As cited in: Dorion (Menn, trans.), ‘Xenophon’s Socrates’, p. 94.

<sup>91</sup> Colli & Montinari, *Friedrich W. Nietzsche: Werke*, Volume IV 2, p. 423; posthumous fragment 18 [47] 1876. As cited in: Dorion (Menn, trans.), ‘Xenophon’s Socrates’, p. 94.

## An Overview of the Main Differences Between Socrates<sup>X</sup> and Socrates<sup>P</sup>

If Xenophon and Socrates<sup>X</sup> can both be regarded as genuine philosophers, it then becomes necessary to identify, as clearly as possible, the ways in which Socrates<sup>X</sup> differs from Socrates<sup>P</sup>. Such a comparison should allow us to identify philosophical concepts and themes that are unique to either Socrates<sup>X</sup> or Socrates<sup>P</sup>, which will then serve as a foundation from which, in Chapter 5, we can discern how later philosophers have adopted, adapted, or rejected, elements from the depiction of Socrates found in the works of Xenophon and/or Plato. Dorion has identified 18 significant differences between Socrates<sup>X</sup> and Socrates<sup>P</sup>:<sup>92</sup>

- (1) Socrates<sup>X</sup> does not claim to be ignorant with regard to any moral issue,<sup>93</sup> and, unlike Socrates<sup>P</sup>, Socrates<sup>X</sup> is able to provide definitions of the various virtues. Socrates<sup>P</sup> claims that his wisdom consists in a recognition of his own ignorance in moral matters, and thus he cannot provide adequate definitions of the virtues.
- (2) Socrates<sup>X</sup> acknowledges that he is a teacher and an expert in various matters.<sup>94</sup> Socrates<sup>P</sup> denies that he is a teacher,<sup>95</sup> and often appears to adopt the student's role in a discussion with an interlocutor, although this can be done, at times, in an ironic manner.<sup>96</sup>
- (3) Socrates<sup>X</sup> states that he does not practice politics himself, but that he does train young people in politics.<sup>97</sup> Socrates<sup>P</sup> does not provide political training for the young, but he does make the remarkable claim that he is the only genuine political practitioner, since he regards the true purpose of politics to be the discernment of right and wrong courses of action, and, in that sense, Socrates<sup>P</sup> regards himself as the only Athenian who truly concerns himself with the moral improvement of his fellow citizens.<sup>98</sup>
- (4) Socrates<sup>X</sup> considers politics, and the art of generalship, to be a τέχνη (*tékhnē*), a technical competence.<sup>99</sup> For Socrates<sup>P</sup>, politics is (in Dorion's words) an "architectonic moral wisdom, that is, a knowledge of good and evil which encompasses the different *technai*."<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Dorion (Menn, trans.), 'Xenophon's Socrates', pp. 95-96.

<sup>93</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.1.16; 3.9; 4.6.

<sup>94</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.6.13-14; 4.2.40; 4.3.1; 4.7.1 & Xenophon, *Apology* 20.

<sup>95</sup> Plato, *Apology* 19d & 33a.

<sup>96</sup> Plato, *Euthyphro* 5a-b; *Greater Hippias* 286d-e, *Laches* 186a-187b.

<sup>97</sup> *Memorabilia*, 1.6.15; 4.3.1.

<sup>98</sup> *Gorgias* 521d.

<sup>99</sup> *Memorabilia* 3:6-7.

<sup>100</sup> *Charmides*, 174b-c.

- (5) Socrates<sup>X</sup> is concerned with economics and the conditions of material prosperity.<sup>101</sup> Socrates<sup>P</sup> does not appear to share these interests.
- (6) Socrates<sup>X</sup> shows considerable respect towards prominent Athenian leaders such as Pericles and Themistocles.<sup>102</sup> Socrates<sup>P</sup>, by contrast, is very critical of these leaders.<sup>103</sup>
- (7) Socrates<sup>X</sup> appears to be quite concerned about his own reputation, and encourages his associates to pursue honour and fame.<sup>104</sup> Socrates<sup>P</sup> does not share these concerns and encourages his associates to renounce the personal pursuit of honour and fame.<sup>105</sup>
- (8) Socrates<sup>X</sup> never displays the irony (or the closely related avowal of ignorance on which it so often depends) that is so typical of Socrates<sup>P</sup> (see point 2 above).
- (9) Socrates<sup>X</sup> regards self-knowledge as a quality that consists in a recognition of the extent and limits of a person's δύναμις (*dúnamis*) or technical capabilities.<sup>106</sup> For Socrates<sup>P</sup>, self-knowledge involves an acknowledgement of the soul as the true self, and thus a good life ought to be spent in the pursuit of the goods of the soul, rather than in the pursuit of the goods of the body, or in the pursuit of external goods.<sup>107</sup>
- (10) Socrates<sup>X</sup> believes that virtue (ἀρετή / *aretē*) arises from training (ασκήσις / *askēsis*),<sup>108</sup> and that virtue can be lost as soon as one ceases to practice.<sup>109</sup> Socrates<sup>P</sup> speaks of virtue as a kind of knowledge, and does not seem to acknowledge that virtue can be lost.<sup>110</sup>
- (11) Socrates<sup>X</sup> considers the care of the body to be very important<sup>111</sup> and shows little interest in the care of the soul, unlike Socrates<sup>P</sup>.<sup>112</sup>
- (12) Socrates<sup>X</sup> holds the traditional Greek view that a man's virtue consists in helping his friends and harming his enemies.<sup>113</sup> However, Socrates<sup>P</sup> does not support the pursuit of harm, even harm directed towards one's enemies.<sup>114</sup>

<sup>101</sup> *Memorabilia* 2.7; 3.4.6-12; 3.6; 3.7.2; 4.6.14.

<sup>102</sup> *Memorabilia* 2.6.13; Xenophon, *Symposium* 8.39.

<sup>103</sup> *Gorgias* 503c-d & 517b-c.

<sup>104</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.7.1; 3.3.13-14; 3.7.1.

<sup>105</sup> *Gorgias* 526d; *Republic* Book 1 347b; *Phaedo* 82c.

<sup>106</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.7.4; 3.7; 4.2.25-29. See also: Louis-André Dorion, 'Qu'est-ce que vivre en fonction de sa *dunamis*? Les deux réponses de Socrate dans le *Mémorables*, in: *Les Études Philosophiques* Volume 69, Number 2, (2004), pp. 235-252.

<sup>107</sup> Dorion believes that this is the position defended by Socrates<sup>P</sup> in *Alcibiades* 1 (129b-133d).

<sup>108</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.2.19-23; 2.1.20; 2.1.28; 2.6.39; 3.3.6; 3.5.14; 3.9.1-3.

<sup>109</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.2.19-24; 3.5.13.

<sup>110</sup> *Protagoras* 349d-360e; *Laches* 194d. For an extremely sophisticated analysis of the concept of virtue within the Platonic dialogues, see: Iakovos Vasiliou, *Aiming at Virtue in Plato* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008), esp. pp. 1-21.

<sup>111</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.2.4; 3.12.

<sup>112</sup> Plato, *Apology* 29e, *Alcibiades* 1 132c; *Charmides* 156d-157c; *Phaedo* 107c.

<sup>113</sup> *Memorabilia* 2.1.28; 2.2.2; 2.3.14; 4.2.15-17.

<sup>114</sup> *Crito* 49c-d; *Republic* Book 1, 332d-336a.

- (13) Socrates<sup>X</sup> almost never uses the ἔλεγχος (*élenkhos*, lit. refutation),<sup>115</sup> an argumentative technique that is characteristic of Socrates<sup>P</sup>.
- (14) Socrates<sup>X</sup> is usually quite predictable in his words and deeds, and there is only one conversation with Euthydemus (*Memorabilia* 4.2) in which Socrates<sup>X</sup> leads his interlocutor into ἀπορία (*aporía*: a difficulty of passing; an impasse; a lack of resources; puzzlement). Socrates<sup>P</sup>, by contrast, is known for his unusual words and deeds, referred to by the term ἀτοπία (*atopía*: lit. placelessness), and for his ability to lead his interlocutors into *aporía*.<sup>116</sup>
- (15) Socrates<sup>X</sup> seems to hold a very conventional concept of piety.<sup>117</sup> However, Socrates<sup>P</sup> maintains that he has a unique divine mission, given to him by the god Apollo, through the agency of the Oracle of Delphi.<sup>118</sup> Socrates<sup>P</sup> regards the practice of philosophy (i.e. an examination of oneself and others) as an act of piety and as service to God/the gods.<sup>119</sup>
- (16) Socrates<sup>X</sup> has a divine sign (δαίμόνιον σήμειον) which indicates to him what he and his associates should do or avoid.<sup>120</sup> The divine sign functions in a manner similar to other forms of divination.<sup>121</sup> For Socrates<sup>P</sup>, the divine sign functions negatively,<sup>122</sup> only intervening to prevent him from taking certain courses of action, but never providing positive guidance.<sup>123</sup>
- (17) Socrates<sup>X</sup> holds to the conventional religious view that the gods can bring harm to human beings,<sup>124</sup> while Socrates<sup>P</sup> denies that the gods are ever the causes of evil.<sup>125</sup>
- (18) Xenophon attributes a cluster of three qualities to Socrates<sup>X</sup>: ἐγκράτεια (self-mastery); καρτερία (patient endurance of physical hardships); and αὐτάρκεια (self-sufficiency). However, *enkráteia* and *kartería* do not play a central role in Platonic ethics, and Plato never attributes the quality of *autárkeia* to Socrates<sup>P</sup>.<sup>126</sup>

<sup>115</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.4.1. See also: Michele Bandini (ed.) & Louis-André Dorion (trans.), *Xénophon: Mémoires, Livres II-III*, Collection Des Universités De France, Book 477 (Paris, France: Les Belles Lettres, 2011), pp. cxxxvi-cxliv.

<sup>116</sup> Plato, *Symposium* 215a & 221d; *Gorgias* 494d; *Theaetetus* 149a; *Phaedrus* 229c.

<sup>117</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.3.1; 4.3.16; 4.6.2-4.

<sup>118</sup> Plato, *Apology* 29c-30b; 30d-e; 33b-c.

<sup>119</sup> Plato, *Apology* 23b & 30a.

<sup>120</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.1.2-5; 1.4.15; 4.3.12; 4.8.1. Xenophon, *Apology* 12-13.

<sup>121</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.1.2-5; 1.4.15; 4.3.12. Xenophon, *Apology* 12-13. See also: Louis-André Dorion, 'Socrate, le daimonion et la divination', in: Jérôme Laurent (ed.), *Les dieux de Platon: Actes du colloque organisé à l'Université de Caen Basse-Normandie les 24, 25 et 26 Janvier 2002* (Caen, France: Presses Universitaires de Caen), pp. 170-180.

<sup>122</sup> Plato, *Apology* 40a; *Phaedrus* 242c; Dorion, 'Socrate, le daimonion et la divination', pp. 183-188.

<sup>123</sup> Plato, *Apology* 31d & 40a; *Euthydemus* 272e; *Phaedrus* 242b-c.

<sup>124</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.4.16.

<sup>125</sup> *Republic*, Book 2, 379b.

<sup>126</sup> Dorion (Menn, trans.), 'Xenophon's Socrates', p. 105, emphasis added: "the only self-sufficiency that would count in Plato's eyes is self-sufficiency with regard to knowledge and the good... since Socrates<sup>P</sup> is ignorant and constantly in search of the knowledge and virtue which would finally satisfy his aspiration to the good, *he cannot be self-sufficient*."

## The Basic Elements of Xenophonic Ethics: *Enkráteia*, *Kartería* and *Autárkeia*

In *Memorabilia* 1.2.1, Xenophon defends Socrates<sup>X</sup> against the accusation that Socrates had corrupted the youth of Athens. Xenophon identifies three characteristics, possessed by Socrates<sup>X</sup>, which make the accusation seem less than plausible:

It also seems extraordinary to me that any people should have been persuaded that Socrates had a bad influence upon young men. Besides what I have said already, he was in the first place the most self-disciplined of men (πάντων ἀνθρώπων ἐνκρατέστατος) in respect of his sexual and other appetites; then he was most tolerant (καρτερικώτατος) of cold and heat and hardships of all kinds; and finally he had so trained himself to be moderate in his requirements that he was very easily satisfied (ἀρκοῦντα) with very few possessions.<sup>127</sup>

Dorion believes that *enkráteia*,<sup>128</sup> *kartería*,<sup>129</sup> and *autárkeia*<sup>130</sup> lie at the heart of the ethics of Socrates<sup>X</sup>. Of the three qualities, *enkráteia* comes first, and must be achieved before the others. In *Memorabilia* 1.5.4-5,<sup>131</sup> Socrates<sup>X</sup> asks: “Should not every man hold self-control [*enkráteia*] to be the foundation of all virtue, and first lay this foundation firmly in his soul? For who without this [i.e. *enkráteia*] can learn any good or practice it worthily?” In *Memorabilia* 1.2.23, Socrates<sup>X</sup> explains that self-control must be acquired through training, so that a person can overcome the bodily pleasures that have been implanted within: “To me indeed it seems that whatever is honourable, whatever is good in conduct is the result of training [ἀσκητὰ], and that this is especially true of prudence [σωφροσύνη]. For in the same body, along with the soul, are planted the pleasures which call to her: ‘Abandon prudence, and make haste to gratify us and the body.’” In *Memorabilia* 3.9.3, Socrates<sup>X</sup> emphasises both the pressing need, but also the genuine capacity, for training in virtue: “I find that human beings naturally differ one from another and greatly improve by application. Hence it is clear that all men, whatever their natural gifts, the talented and the dullards alike, must learn and practice what they want to excel in.”

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<sup>127</sup> Hugh Tredennick & Robin Waterfield (trans.), *Xenophon: Conversations of Socrates* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1990). As cited in: Dorion (Menn, trans.), ‘Xenophon’s Socrates’, pp. 96-97.

<sup>128</sup> For the *enkráteia* of Socrates<sup>X</sup>, see: *Memorabilia* 1.2.14; 1.3.5-14; 1.5.1; 1.5.6; 1.6.8; 2.1; 3.14; 4.5.9; 4.8.11; and Xenophon, *Apology* 16.

<sup>129</sup> For the *kartería* of Socrates<sup>X</sup>, see: *Memorabilia* 1:6.6-7.

<sup>130</sup> For the *autárkeia* of Socrates<sup>X</sup>, see: *Memorabilia* 1.2.14; 1.2.60; 1.6.10; 4.7.1; 4.8.11; and Xenophon, *Symposium* 4.43.

<sup>131</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all English citations of the works of Xenophon in this section are taken from: Marchant & Todd (trans.), *Xenophon: Memorabilia; Oeconomicus; Symposium; Apologia*, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 168.

Dorion notes that the centrality of *enkráteia*, in the Xenophonic ethics of Socrates<sup>X</sup>, is *not* matched in the works of Plato; Socrates<sup>P</sup> does not present self-mastery as the foundation of virtue, and the term *enkráteia* is not even found in the Platonic dialogues which many modern scholars tend to designate as ‘early’ or ‘Socratic’.<sup>132</sup> For Xenophon, however, there are at least six areas in which *enkráteia* is foundational for Socrates<sup>X</sup>.<sup>133</sup>

- (1) *Enkráteia* is a requirement for all persons who exercise power over others and for those who occupy positions of responsibility.<sup>134</sup>
- (2) *Enkráteia* is the pre-condition for freedom of all kinds, but especially for freedom from the passions of bodily pleasure.<sup>135</sup>
- (3) *Enkráteia* is the pre-condition for justice, since a person who lacks *enkráteia* may resort to injustice as a means to acquire the money and goods needed to satisfy bodily passions.<sup>136</sup>
- (4) *Enkráteia* is the pre-condition for genuine friendship, since without *enkráteia*, a person will inevitably treat other people as a means to the satisfaction of his or her own ends.<sup>137</sup>
- (5) *Enkráteia* is the pre-condition for wealth and prosperity, since a lack of *enkráteia* will lead a person to spend money and time on the satisfaction of desires, and will thus limit the money and time available for participation in money-generating activities.<sup>138</sup>
- (6) *Enkráteia* is the pre-condition for practicing dialectic, which is described in *Memorabilia* 4.5.12 as “the practice of meeting together for common deliberation, sorting, discussing things after their kind”.<sup>139</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Dorion (Menn, trans.), ‘Xenophon’s Socrates’, p. 97. Dorion makes use here of a modern convention within Platonic studies, by which the dialogues of Plato are described as ‘early’, ‘middle’, or ‘late’, based on certain methodological assumptions about the compositional chronology of Plato’s works that I will examine and critique later in this chapter.

<sup>133</sup> For more detail, see: Dorion (Menn, trans.), ‘Xenophon’s Socrates’, pp. 97-99.

<sup>134</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.5.1; 2.1.1-7.

<sup>135</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.5.5; 4.5.2-6; *Oeconomicus* 1.17-23; Xenophon, *Apology* 16.

<sup>136</sup> Xenophon, *Apology* 16: “Who is there in your knowledge that is less a slave to his bodily appetites than I am? Who in the world more free, for I accept neither gifts nor pay from any one? Whom would you, with reason regard as more just than the one so reconciled to his present possessions, as to want nothing beside, that belongs to another?”

<sup>137</sup> *Memorabilia* 2.1 is particularly relevant to this theme. See also: *Oeconomicus* 2.8 and *Memorabilia* 2.1.31. *Enkráteia* allows a person to fulfil the chief duty of friendship, which is to provide for the needs of a friend in difficulty.

<sup>138</sup> *Memorabilia* 1.2.22; 1.3.11; *Oeconomicus* 2.7. Dorion contrasts Socrates<sup>P</sup>, who was poor (see Plato, *Apology*: 23b-c; 31c; 36d) and had neglected his own affairs and the management of his household (see: Plato, *Apology* 31b & 36b), with Socrates<sup>X</sup>, who, due to his self-mastery, cannot be considered poor, since, as Dorion points out: “wealth is simply the excess of what one has over what one needs, [so] one can be rich even if one has very little, as long as it is sufficient for one’s needs” (p. 99). In the *Oeconomicus*, Socrates<sup>X</sup> also displays a keen interest in economic management that is completely uncharacteristic of Socrates<sup>P</sup>. Socrates<sup>X</sup> links the ability to manage a household (*oikos*) to the ability to manage a city (*polis*), and since Socrates<sup>X</sup> claims to be able to train future statesmen, it is essential that he should have at least some knowledge of management in both the private and public spheres of ancient Athenian life.

<sup>139</sup> For Socrates<sup>X</sup>, dialectic is an ability to distinguish good from evil, which is only possessed by those who also possess self-mastery (*enkráteia*), and thus who are not swayed in their moral assessments by their own passions.

## *Autárkeia*: The Goal of Xenophonic Ethics

*Enkráteia* (self-mastery) and *kartería* (patient endurance) lead to *autárkeia* (self-sufficiency), which is the *télos* (lit. end; purpose; goal) of Xenophonic ethics. These three qualities are mentioned together for the first time in *Memorabilia* 1.2.1, but it is only within the context of a later conversation, between Socrates<sup>X</sup> and Antiphon the Sophist, that the hierarchical ordering of these terms becomes apparent.

In *Memorabilia* 1.6.2-3, Antiphon the Sophist attacks Socrates, observing that, although it might be thought that philosophy is supposed to add to a person's store of happiness, in fact, the fruits which Socrates<sup>X</sup> seems to have reaped from philosophy are such that Socrates<sup>X</sup> life "would drive even a slave to desert his master". From Antiphon's perspective, the ascetic lifestyle of Socrates<sup>X</sup> is profoundly unsatisfactory, due to:

- (1) the poor quality of his food and drink;
- (2) the poor quality of his cloak, which "is never changed summer or winter";
- (3) the lack of shoes and a tunic; and
- (4) the consistent refusal of Socrates<sup>X</sup> to take money from his companions.<sup>140</sup>

Antiphon notes that it was common practice for a teacher to expect that his students should emulate the teacher's example, and consequently, those outside a teacher's school considered it entirely appropriate to judge the quality and effectiveness of a teacher on the basis of the actions of his students. (In Aristophanes' *Clouds*, the aggressive and violent behaviour of Pheidippides was a negative reflection not just on the *words* of Aristophanes' Socrates, but also on his *behaviour*.) Antiphon even suggests that, if Socrates<sup>X</sup> expects his students to follow his own example, then rather than being a teacher of *ευδαιμονία* (*eudaimonía*: happiness), Socrates<sup>X</sup> should consider himself "a professor of *κακοδαιμονία*" (*kakodaimonía*: unhappiness).

Socrates<sup>X</sup> makes his reply to Antiphon's attacks in *Memorabilia* 1.6.4-10. Socrates<sup>X</sup> begins by noting that his refusal to take money leaves him free to speak only with those with whom he chooses to have a conversation. In fact, as Dorion points out, the indifference of Socrates<sup>X</sup> to money is a sign of his *enkráteia*; since Socrates has achieved self-mastery with regard to bodily passions, he will have little need for money.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Both Socrates<sup>X</sup>, and Socrates<sup>P</sup>, refuse to accept money from their companions. In the Platonic dialogues, the refusal of Socrates<sup>P</sup> to accept payment clearly distinguishes him from the Sophists.

<sup>141</sup> Dorion observes that, three times in Book 1 of the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon makes use of the sequence *enkráteia* / indifference to money: 1.2.1-4 (*enkráteia*) followed by 1.2.5-7 (indifference to money); 1.5.1-5, followed by 1.5.6; and 1.6.1-10, followed by 1.6.11-14. The same sequence also appears in *Apology* 16.

Socrates<sup>X</sup> then addresses Antiphon's concerns about the apparently restricted and less pleasurable nature of his diet, by pointing out that his decision to eat simpler food does not mean that his dietary intake is any less wholesome or nourishing than that of Antiphon. In fact, Socrates<sup>X</sup> demonstrates his *enkráteia* (self-mastery) through his decision to take pleasure in the satisfaction of his hunger and thirst by means of simple fare, and thus to be unconcerned by the absence of more sumptuous food and drink. In a similar manner, Socrates<sup>X</sup> rejects another element of Antiphon's criticisms, since by wearing simple clothing and abstaining from wearing shoes or a tunic, no matter whether the temperature is hot or cold, Socrates is able to show his *kartería* (patient endurance of hardship).

In *Memorabilia* 1.6.7-8, Socrates<sup>X</sup> explains how it is that he has been able to cultivate the qualities of *enkráteia* and *kartería*. *Kartería* has been achieved through a constant process of rigorous training, so that the body of Socrates<sup>X</sup> will respond effectively to any demand that he should make of it. *Enkráteia*, especially over hunger, sleep and sexual desire, has been achieved through "the possession of other and greater pleasures, which are delightful not only to enjoy, but also because they arouse hopes of lasting benefit..."

In *Memorabilia* 1.6.8-9, Socrates<sup>X</sup> demonstrates that the power of positive thinking is also a key component of his success. He notes that "he who believes that he is successful in farming or a shipping concern or any other business he is engaged in is happy in the thought of his prosperity" and that, for his own part, there can be no more pleasant thought than the one which constantly tells him that he is "growing in goodness" and is "making better friends". Furthermore, Socrates<sup>X</sup> derives happiness from the knowledge that his self-mastery and patient endurance of hardship have prepared him well to assist his friends or his city, and have also prepared him to act effectively as a soldier when in a situation of limited food supplies, whether as a part of an attacking force, or amongst those besieged within a city.

In *Memorabilia* 1.6.10, Socrates<sup>X</sup> criticises Antiphon's assumption that happiness (*eudaimonía*) derives from luxury and extravagance, and he make the case that *enkráteia* and *kartería* have helped to prepare him for an *autárkeia* which brings him as close to the supreme life of the gods as is possible for a mortal human being:

You seem, Antiphon, to imagine that happiness [τὴν εὐδαιμονίαν] consists in luxury and extravagance. But my belief is that to have no wants is divine [θεῖον]; to have as few as possible comes next to the divine [τοῦ θείου]; and as that which is divine [θεῖον] is supreme, so that which approaches nearest to its nature is nearest to the supreme [τοῦ κρατίστου].



This brief passage from the *Memorabilia* provides the key to understanding the ethical approach of Xenophon and Socrates<sup>X</sup>. Dorion believes that *autárkeia* needs to be understood in connection with the concept of ‘assimilation to god/the gods/the divine’:

[Xenophonic] *autárkeia* is not a total absence of needs – which only the gods can have – but rather the ability to provide by oneself for one’s own needs... only *autárkeia* is attributed to the gods. Since a god, unlike a human being, has no needs, a god is self-sufficient from the outset, so that it has no need to practice *enkráteia* to limit its needs, or *karteria* to tolerate extreme temperatures, to which it will not be exposed in the first place. [The] aspiration [of Socrates<sup>X</sup>] to self-sufficiency must be understood in the more general perspective of assimilation to god (*hōmoiōsis theoi*): since human beings aspire to happiness, and since a god gives us the model of a being who is both self-sufficient and happy, the philosophers in their search for happiness privilege ways of life which promise the highest degree of self-sufficiency to human beings.<sup>142</sup>

In the works of Xenophon, ethical reflection has been brought to bear on ancient Greek conceptions of the divine, and then revised conceptions of the divine have brought about further ethical reflection. Hadot points to the ubiquity of this phenomenon:

From its origins, philosophy developed as a critique of religion: a destructive critique – for example, that of Xenophanes, who said that men made gods in their own image – or a purifying critique – such as that of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Epicureans, and finally the Neoplatonists. It was a purifying critique in the sense that philosophy finally tends to transform religion into philosophy, either by developing a theology, albeit a purely rational theology, or by using allegory to think about the different divinities in a philosophical way, as did the Stoics, for who Zeus was fire, Hera air, and so on. The Neoplatonists did this as well, identifying the gods of paganism with Platonic entities; as did the Epicureans, who represented the gods as sages. In general, philosophy has always had the tendency to rationalise religious myths, emptying them of their mythical content and providing them with philosophical content.<sup>143</sup>

In the final sections of this chapter, therefore, we will turn to an examination of Plato and his dialogues, in order to discover how Socrates<sup>P</sup> provided a “purifying critique” of ancient Athenian religion, and how this “purifying critique” provided an inspiration for many of the philosophical schools that were to follow in the Hellenistic and Roman Imperial periods.

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<sup>142</sup> Dorion (Menn, trans.), ‘Xenophon’s Socrates’, p. 105.

<sup>143</sup> Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., pp. 37-38.

## Plato: From Childhood to the Establishment of the Academy

Like Xenophon, his slightly older contemporary, Plato also became a companion of Socrates during the final decade or so of Socrates' life. Plato was an Athenian citizen, and was either born in Athens, or on the island of Aegina, at some point between 429 BCE<sup>144</sup> and 423 BCE.<sup>145</sup> The Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE) served as the backdrop to Plato's childhood. The war had been going for around 7 years at the time of Plato's birth, and it only came to an end when Plato was about 20 years old.<sup>146</sup> Despite the difficulties and upheaval during the final stages of the Peloponnesian War, Plato and his male siblings would still have received a traditional Athenian education. Plato's dialogues called *Lysis* (possibly set in 409 BCE) and *Euthydemus* (set in 407 BCE), provide a vivid portrait of the type of education that was available in Athens during Plato's mid-teens.<sup>147</sup> Young Athenian males were usually socialised by their father, older brothers, or a male guardian, and would accompany them around the city of Athens.<sup>148</sup> It was probably in a context such as this that both Xenophon and Plato would have first encountered Socrates.

In 394 BCE, 5 years after the death of Socrates, Plato would have turned 30. At this age, an Athenian male would normally have been expected to get married and establish his own household. However, Plato did *not* get married, but instead, in the grove of the hero Hecademus, northwest of urban Athens, Plato created an informal 'school', later to become known as the Academy. Plato met here with a number of Athenian thinkers, including: Theaetetus of Sunium and Leodamas of Thasos, who were both mathematicians, and Archytas of Tarentum, a student of Pythagorean thought and a musical theorist.

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<sup>144</sup> Diogenes Laertius cites the *Khroniká* of the grammarian Apollódōrus of Athens (c.180-after 120 BCE) as evidence for the traditional birth date of Plato on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of the month Thargelion (the birth date of the god Apollo) in the first year of the 88<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (i.e. 427 BCE). However, Diogenes Laertius also cites another ancient biographer, Néanthēs of Kýzikos, who places Plato's birth in the second year of the 87<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (i.e. 429 BCE). See: Diogenes Laertius 3.1.2.

<sup>145</sup> Debra Nails is critical of the overly neat scheme of Apollodorus of Athens, in which Plato is born in 427 BCE, meets Socrates at the age of 20 (i.e. when Socrates is 60), founds the Academy at the age of 40, voyages to Sicily at the age of 60, and dies at the age of 80. According to Nails, Plato was actually born in the year 424/423 BCE, as the fourth child of Ariston of Collytus, son of Aristocles, and of Perictione, daughter of Glaucon.

<sup>146</sup> The interpretation of events that I will outline in this section is largely based on: Debra Nails, 'The Life of Plato of Athens', in: Benson (ed.) *Companion to Plato*, pp. 1-12, which places Plato's birth in c.424 BCE.

<sup>147</sup> Athenian education would involve training in several areas, including: gymnastics; dance; lyric; epic; instrumental music; reading; writing; arithmetic; geometry; history; astronomy; and other disciplines.

<sup>148</sup> Tad Brennan advances the controversial, yet illuminating suggestion that the strangeness of the behaviour of Socrates<sup>p</sup>, especially his "passive aggressive attitude towards the beauty of young boys, and his spitefully ironical attitude towards those who claimed to be wise" can be attributed, at least in part, to Socrates' ugliness, and his consequent failure as a teenager to attract the attention and guidance of an older Athenian male. See: Tad Brennan, 'Socrates and Epictetus', in: Ahbel-Rappe and Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, pp. 285-297, esp. pp. 292-295.

## Plato: Adulthood and the Composition of the Platonic Dialogues

Evidence for Plato's adult life comes from the sources cited within the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE account of Diogenes Laërtius, in *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, Book 3, as well as from a collection of 13 letters that were attributed, in antiquity, to Plato. John M. Cooper makes these observations about the dating and authenticity of the 13 letters:

The biographer Diogenes Laertius tells us that Thrasyllus included in his edition of Plato thirteen letters alleging to have been written by him. Apart from two insignificant ones indicating no presumed date, they all profess to be from the last two decades of Plato's life... Are... any of them genuine? We have no way of knowing for sure. We have no record of any Platonic letters existing before the end of the third century B.C., some one hundred and fifty years or more after the nominal date of composition. We know that many such 'letters' of famous personages originated as exercises in the schools of rhetoric in later times, and others were forged for various reasons. Our manuscripts report a doubt (perhaps going back to Thrasyllus) about Letter XII's authenticity, and from their content others can hardly be by Plato.<sup>149</sup>

Letter VII, perhaps the only genuine letter in the collection, claims to have been written shortly after the death of Plato's friend, Dion, in 354/353 BCE. If Letter VII can be considered reliable, then it would provide some basic insights as to the chronology, the nature and the purpose of the Platonic dialogues. Cooper assesses the authenticity of Letter VII as follows:

Letter VII, the least unlikely to have come from Plato's pen, contains much tantalising information about Plato's views about philosophy which, if genuine, could be of some significance for working out his final positions. **The author** reiterates in bold language his commitment to Forms, and, drawing upon an elaborate theory about the means of arriving at philosophical truth and the defectiveness of language to express it, he **explains why he would never write any philosophical treatise**. If not by Plato, Letter VII must have been written about when it says it was – not long after Dion's death in 354 – and by someone close enough to Plato to be confident of writing about philosophy in a way that could convince a discriminating audience that included Greek philosophers in Southern Italy that the author was indeed Plato.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, pp. 1634-1635.

<sup>150</sup> Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, p. 1635, emphasis added. Later in this chapter, I will consider the significance of Plato's refusal to write philosophical treatises, and the implications of this for interpretation of the Platonic dialogues.

Nails also draws attention to a similarity of style between Letter VII and two of the Platonic dialogues thought to be among Plato's final works, the *Laws* and the *Epinomis*:

The letter's authenticity was once much discussed, but even its detractors concede that its author, if not Plato, was an intimate of the philosopher with first-hand knowledge of the events reported. Many of its details are augmented and corroborated by contemporaneous historians of Greece and of Sicily, and its style – unlike other letters in the series – is that of *Laws* and *Epinomis*.<sup>151</sup>

The extant evidence for Plato's adult life suggests that there were three periods during which Plato resided in Athens, in which the Platonic dialogues could have been written:

- (1) **The Early Period:** from the informal beginnings of the Academy in c. 394 BCE, until Plato's visit to the court of Dionysius I, the tyrant of Syracuse in Sicily, in 384 BCE;
- (2) **The Middle Period:** from Plato's liberation from slavery and return to Athens in 383 BCE, until Plato's visit to the court of Dionysius II, new tyrant of Syracuse, in 366 BCE;
- (3) **The Late Period:** from Plato's return to Athens in c. 360 BCE (after about seven years of unsuccessful philosophical interaction with Dionysius II), until Plato's death in 347 BCE.

Due to apparent doctrinal inconsistencies within the Platonic corpus, many modern Platonic interpreters have abandoned the ancient Unitarian model (which affirmed a logically consistent body of philosophical doctrine across the dialogues), and have embraced a Developmental model that divides the corpus into three distinct groups, roughly corresponding to the chronological divisions outlined above, as Prior explains:

Scholars have... [divided] Plato's dialogues into three groups: an early group, containing dialogues that (it is argued) present a faithful portrait of the historical Socrates; a middle group, containing dialogues that represent Plato's own philosophical views; and a late group, containing a further stage of Plato's development. This tripartite division, however, has been criticised; both the membership of the respective groups and the order of the dialogues within them have been questioned... *Even if we accept the tripartite grouping of the dialogues, however, and the general developmental picture that goes with them, it seems there is no decisive reason to believe that the dialogues of the early group represent the views of the historical Socrates, rather than an early stage of Plato's own philosophical thought.*<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> Nails, 'The Life of Plato of Athens', p. 3. For details of the similarities in style between the Seventh Letter, on the one hand, and the *Laws* and the *Epinomis*, on the other hand, Nails cites the computer-assisted stylometric work of G. R. Ledger.

<sup>152</sup> Prior, 'The Socratic Problem', pp. 27-28, emphasis added.

## The Platonic Corpus: Difficulties in Establishing a Compositional Chronology

Cooper remarks that, as far as the chronology of Plato's works is concerned, "we have really only two bits of reliable, hard information":

(1) The *Theaetetus* seems to be a memorial to Plato's friend and long time companion within the Academy, Theaetetus of Sunium (c.417-369 BCE). Cooper believes that the dialogue was probably written in the period immediately following the death of Theaetetus, and that since internal evidence links the *Theaetetus* to the *Sophist* and the *Statesmen*, it is likely that these three dialogues were written in that order, after about 367 BCE. However, these assumptions do not provide any secure basis upon which to date any of the other dialogues.

(2) The *Laws*, said to have been left unfinished at the time of Plato's death,<sup>153</sup> shares certain stylistic features with only the *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Sophist*, *Stateman*, *Philebus*, and *Epinomis*. Stylometric analysis suggests that these dialogues *might* be works of Plato's 'late' period, but cannot determine the relative chronological order of these dialogues.

Nails affirms Cooper's classification of *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Sophist*, *Stateman*, *Philebus*, *Laws* and *Epinomis* as 'late' works. However, while Cooper remains uncertain about the Platonic authorship of the *Epinomis*,<sup>154</sup> Nails unambiguously rejects such authorship: "*Epinomis* was uncontroversially written and published after Plato's death, yet it has the unmistakable, turgid prose of the others, suggesting that Plato had the assistance of a scribe whose responsibility it was to reformulate Academic productions into the approved Academic style." If some of Plato's dialogues were composed with the help of a scribe, and/or subsequently re-edited by Plato or another person (e.g. Philip of Opus), then it throws doubt upon the capacity of stylometric evidence to provide a reliable chronology for the Platonic corpus. Furthermore, if some of the Platonic dialogues were actually multi-author works, as Nails has suggested, then stylometric evidence would be even more unreliable:

... there is good reason to believe that Plato's Academy was like other ancient institutions (e.g. Hippocrates' and Aristotles' schools, or the Hellenistic Pythagoreans) in which collaborative writing projects were undertaken [and that] the *Laws* is almost certainly such a collective effort, with sustained dialectical argument confined primarily to Books 1-2, [since] it was incomplete when Plato died."<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> See: Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, 3.37, in which Philip of Opus, a member of the Academy, is said to have transcribed the *Laws*, and to have composed the *Epinomis*.

<sup>154</sup> Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, p. iv.

<sup>155</sup> Nails, 'The Life of Plato of Athens', p. 11.

## Platonic Interpretation – An Outline of Vlastos’s Developmentalist Thesis

Gregory Vlastos’s Developmental thesis presupposes the threefold chronological division of the Platonic corpus that has been outlined above. On this basis, Vlastos has provided ten criteria by which he believes one can distinguish the historical Socrates (Socrates<sup>H</sup>) from the Platonic Socrates of the ‘middle’ and ‘late’ dialogues (Socrates<sup>P</sup>):<sup>156</sup>

1. Socrates<sup>H</sup> is a moral philosopher;  
Socrates<sup>P</sup> is a cosmologist, a metaphysician and an epistemologist.
2. Socrates<sup>H</sup> does not make any reference to the theory of the Forms;  
Socrates<sup>P</sup> gives a central role to the theory of the Forms.
3. Socrates<sup>H</sup> pursues knowledge through the use of a question and answer method, known as the *elenchus*, which inevitably results in *aporia* (cf. n. 145 above);  
Socrates<sup>P</sup> seeks ‘demonstrative’ knowledge, and his results are positive.
4. Socrates<sup>H</sup> denies the existence of motivational conflict within a person;  
Socrates<sup>P</sup> affirms motivational conflict, and bases it on a distinctive tripartite division of the soul.
5. Socrates<sup>H</sup> is not interested in mathematics; Socrates<sup>P</sup> is a master of mathematics.
6. Socrates<sup>H</sup> is a populist; Socrates<sup>P</sup> is an elitist.
7. Socrates<sup>H</sup> is critical of the democracy, but does not propose any alternative form of government;  
Socrates<sup>P</sup> has an elaborate statecraft.
8. Socrates<sup>H</sup> is seen most often in company with a group of attractive young Athenian males;  
Socrates<sup>P</sup> explains erotic relationships in terms of a metaphysical and psychological theory.
9. Socrates<sup>H</sup> is pious and understands deity as ‘rigorously ethical’;  
Socrates<sup>P</sup> is a contemplative mystic.
10. Socrates<sup>H</sup> pursues philosophical questions through adversarial conversation with interlocutors, who disagree with him, sometimes most vehemently;  
Socrates<sup>P</sup> is didactic, expounding complex truths to interlocutors who serve as his ‘yes’ men.

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<sup>156</sup> The outline of Vlastos’s ten points, and the analysis and critique of Vlastos’s approach which follows, has been adapted from: Ahbel-Rappe, *Socrates: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 49-52.

According to Vlastos, what typifies the Socrates of the ‘early’ or ‘Socratic’ dialogues is a search for definitions of moral terms, especially virtues recognised in ancient Greek culture, such as φρόνησις (*phrónēsis*: prudence/wisdom); δικαιοσύνη (*dikaíosunē*: justice/fairness); σωφροσύνη (*sōphrosúnē*: temperance/restraint), ἀνδρεία (*andreía*: courage/fortitude) and ὁσιότης (*hosiótēs*: piety).<sup>157</sup> In all of these dialogues, Socrates questions his interlocutors, whilst denying that he possesses any ethical knowledge of his own. Vlastos’s identification of the historical Socrates (Socrates<sup>H</sup>) with the Socrates of the ‘aporetic’<sup>158</sup> dialogues, depends upon a Developmentalist chronology.<sup>159</sup> For Vlastos, the ‘transitional’ dialogues provide hints of doctrines that become more explicit in the ‘middle’ dialogues. For example, in the *Meno*, which Vlastos considers a ‘transitional’ dialogue, Socrates initiates a discussion in the same manner as that of the ‘early’ or ‘aporetic’ dialogues, but he also raises doubts about the appropriateness of adversarial argument as a means to make reliable philosophical discoveries. Socrates also advances a theory of learning that presupposes doctrines such as: the immortality of the soul; reincarnation; and ‘innate’ knowledge. In the ‘middle’ dialogues,<sup>160</sup> Socrates continues to be the dominant speaker, but becomes increasingly didactic. However, the presence of detailed biographical information about Socrates, such as that found within the *Phaedo* (Socrates’ execution), the *Symposium* (Socrates’ initiation into the mysteries of love by Diotima), and the *Parmenides* (Socrates’ encounter with the eponymous ‘Pre-Socratic’ thinker) reveals the apparent arbitrariness of Vlastosian Developmentalism and the chronology on which it depends:

On Vlastos’ theory, we are forced to isolate these biographical sketches in the middle dialogues and say that some of them are somehow reflections of the historical Socrates, while also insisting that what Socrates is made to say in these same dialogues, because of its philosophical content, could never be Socratic... here Socrates is more or less a cipher, who has simply an honorific position in the dialogues, and no real philosophical part to play in what are increasingly Plato’s own thoughts.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> The first four items in this list came to be known as the cardinal virtues, and they were discussed extensively in Plato’s *Republic*, Book 4, 426a-435e. *Protagoras* 330b makes reference to all five items.

<sup>158</sup> The ‘aporetic’ dialogues, in alphabetical order, are: *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Crito*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, *Protagoras*, and *Republic*, Book 1. In the ‘aporetic’ dialogues, Socrates initiates a discussion with his interlocutor(s) about the definition of a particular virtue. These discussions end inconclusively, in *aporia*.

<sup>159</sup> Ahbel-Rappe (p. 49 and 160, n. 2) observes that although Platonic Developmentalism is most strongly associated with Vlastos, the essence of his framework was anticipated much earlier by Eduard Zeller, whose attempt to construct a linear chronology of ancient philosophy was outlined and critiqued in Chapter 3.

<sup>160</sup> Ahbel-Rappe (p. 160, n. 4) states that, for Vlastos, the ‘middle’ dialogues would include *Republic*, Books 2-10, *Phaedo*, *Phaedrus*, and the *Symposium*, “at the very least.”

<sup>161</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Socrates: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 51.

## Alternatives to the Vlastosian Developmental Scheme

Gerald Press and Catherine Zuckert have rejected Vlastosian Developmentalism and have attempted to discern a *dramatic* chronology, based on the dates of the events as depicted in the dialogues.<sup>162</sup> Press has proposed a scheme, based on a 52 year dramatic time frame, from the *Parmenides*,<sup>163</sup> set in 450 BCE, to the *Phaedo*,<sup>164</sup> set in 399 BCE.<sup>165</sup> Zuckert has proposed an alternate scheme, which incorporates all 35 items of the Platonic corpus, and places the *Laws* at the beginning, prior to the start of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BCE.<sup>166</sup>

Whilst these literary schemes have produced some intriguing insights, Nails believes that any attempt to construct a Platonic chronology is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the nature and purpose of the Platonic dialogues. She suggests that the dialogues were put into *written form* so as to emphasise certain positive features of the *exclusively oral* method of philosophy pursued by the historical Socrates, but also to make up for some shortcomings of that method. She notes that Socrates' question-and-answer method of enquiry had the advantage of being somewhat adaptable to the knowledge and intellectual capacities of the interlocutor(s), but that it did not really allow for the introduction of a substantial body of information for discussion, especially when the interlocutor(s) lacked the interest or capacity to engage on a given topic in a sustained manner. The Platonic dialogues, a written, dramatic re-enactment of an originally oral method of enquiry, sought to remedy these disadvantages.

Nails offers an account of Plato's literary and philosophical activity which emphasises that the Platonic dialogues were written for the educational benefit of specific individuals *within* the Academy (i.e. *not* for a general audience) and that their purpose was to promote open, ongoing philosophical enquiry (rather than fixed, unchallengeable doctrines):

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<sup>162</sup> For a chart outlining a 'dramatic' chronology, based on the date of the events depicted in each dialogue, see: Press, *Plato: A Guide for the Perplexed*, pp. 72-73. Press's scheme includes 24 items (3 items fewer than Rowe's list), excluding: *Lesser Hippias*; *Menexenus*; and *Laws*. For the only comprehensive interpretation of the entire 35 item Platonic corpus, undertaken on the basis of a 'dramatic' chronology that differs in some significant respects from that of Press, see: Zuckert, *Plato's Philosophers: The Coherence of the Dialogues*.

<sup>163</sup> According to Press, the principal themes of the *Parmenides* are 'The Forms' and 'Being'.

<sup>164</sup> According to Press, the principal themes of the *Phaedo* are 'The Forms' and 'the soul', thus emphasising an approach in which Plato *never* abandoned his teaching about the importance of 'The Forms,' unlike the reading proposed by many modern interpreters who still subscribe to the Vlastosian Developmental scheme.

<sup>165</sup> Curiously, both dialogues are depicted as a narration of events long past: in *Parmenides*, Antiphon narrates events from 50 years earlier; in *Phaedo*, the narrator (Phaedo) reflects upon the death of Socrates.

<sup>166</sup> Zuckert was a student of Leo Strauss (1899-1973), a German-American political philosopher and classicist. Zuckert's interpretational scheme, which Nails has labelled as 'literary contextualism', also builds on the insights of scholars such as Drew A. Hyland and Jacob Howland.



... Plato... wrote dialogues that were appropriate in subject matter and methodological sophistication to his students' and colleagues' interests and needs in the Academy, which included presenting material representing the positions of other philosophers from time to time. Whether or not his own doctrines evolved significantly in his lifetime, whether or not he had a systematic philosophy at all, the character Socrates of his dialogues sometimes argues for opposite positions, sometimes develops positions in subtly and not-so-subtly different ways – all consistent with benefitting an academic community.

The arguments for and against various philosophical positions that Plato put into the mouth of Socrates, whatever he intended, brilliantly exhibited the conduct of philosophy itself. *Two effects of Plato's writing in the genre of philosophical dialogue were: to keep philosophical issues open for further examination, and to discourage slavish adherence to doctrine.* In fact, the Platonic dialogues systematically compensate for the defects of the Socratic oral method and give up none of their advantages precisely because the possibility for personalised oral instruction in the Academy is retained.<sup>167</sup>

Nail's assessment finds support from *Letter VII*, in which the author suggests that:

- (1) philosophical matters are best dealt with in the context of a face-to-face encounter; and
- (2) philosophical matters are too complex for most readers, so there would be no point in attempting to write philosophical material "for the multitude":

There is no writing of mine about these matters, nor will there ever be one. For this knowledge is not something that can be put into words like other sciences; but after long-continued intercourse between teacher and pupil, in joint pursuit of the subject, suddenly, like light flashing forth when a fire is kindled, it is born in the soul and straightaway nourishes itself... *if these matters... could be put into written words adequate for the multitude, what nobler work could I do* in my life than to compose something of such benefit to mankind and bring to light the nature of things for all to see? *But I do not think that the "examination", as it is called, of these questions would be of any benefit to men, except to a few*, i.e. to those who could with a little guidance discover the truth by themselves. [*Letter VII*, 341c-e].<sup>168</sup>

Nails has presented some compelling reasons as to why Plato chose to write philosophical dialogues. Might there be some other reasons that Plato chose to present his ideas in dramatic form, particularly in some of the so-called 'late' dialogues?

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<sup>167</sup> Nails, *Agora, Academy, and the Conduct of Philosophy*, p. 30, emphasis added.

<sup>168</sup> Cooper, *Plato: Complete Works*, p. 1659, emphasis added. This letter, whether written by Plato, or by Philip of Opus, seems to provide strong evidence for the primarily personal, interactive conception of the nature of philosophy within Plato's Academy.

## Mary Margaret McCabe on Plato and the ‘Dramatisation of Reason’

In the introduction to her study of four ‘late’ period Platonic dialogues (*Theaetetus*; *Sophist*; *Politicus*; and *Philebus*), Mary Margaret McCabe reflects upon why it was that Plato chose to address the views of some of his ‘Pre-Socratic’ predecessors in the form of dramatic dialogues.<sup>169</sup> McCabe notes that many modern philosophers, particularly those of an analytic bent, have felt that they needed “to pare away the literary skin to find the philosophical fruit within.” However, McCabe believes that the latter approach to the dialogues is problematic:

the contrast between the literary and the philosophical may in general be tendentious; and in particular cases it may be inaccessible – where the argument and the dialogue form are so closely interwoven that it becomes impossible to decide which is which... the relation between the form of the dialogues and their argument is itself a philosophical relation, whose importance is denied by the suggestion that form and argument simply belong to different genres, or different types of thinking (or whatever difference the contrast between the literary and the philosophical is supposed to capture).<sup>170</sup>

McCabe points out that in the four ‘late’ dialogues under consideration, there are two types of conversation that take place: (1) directly reported conversation between the protagonists; and (2) indirectly reported conversations between Socrates or the Eleatic Stranger, on the one hand, and some imaginary interlocutors, on the other hand. However, four of the ‘Pre-Socratic’ predecessors (Heraclitus, Parmenides, Protagoras, or some strict materialists) fail to turn up, suggesting, in a dramatic manner, that their respective philosophical positions cannot be “occupied”, i.e. cannot be upheld or defended. Furthermore, McCabe argues that:

In even the earliest dialogues, arguments... are *framed* in the narrative of the dialogue, in the drama of the debate. But the frame itself reflects on the argument; in particular, it reflects on the conditions under which that argument is conducted – on its assumptions and its conditions. So the frame, in these cases, investigates the methods and principles of philosophy itself... Central to this... is the fact that the drama of the dialogues is fiction; all of these characters, *including Socrates himself*, are imaginary.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> See: Mary Margaret McCabe, *Plato and his Predecessors: The Dramatisation of Reason*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2000), esp. pp. 1-21. See also: Christopher Gill & Mary Margaret McCabe (eds.), *Form and Argument in Late Plato* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

<sup>170</sup> McCabe, *Plato and his Predecessors*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>171</sup> McCabe, *Plato and his Predecessors*, p. 10, emphasis added.

## Socrates as Philosophical Champion, Hero and Moral Exemplar

Plato seems to have been intent on pursuing several different tasks in his representation of Socrates. Sara Ahbel-Rappe believes that these tasks included: (1) portraying Socrates as an exemplary human being; (2) presenting, developing and critiquing the philosophical commitments of Socrates; and (3) tracing the antecedents of Socrates' teaching amongst earlier thinkers, especially the 'Pre-Socratics'. Ahbel-Rappe also notes various ways in which Plato drew on Greek mythology, 'reconfiguring' Socrates to become the new champion, hero and exemplar of philosophy:

.... Plato likens Socrates to Theseus entering the labyrinth (*Phaedo*), to Orpheus descending into the underworld (*Symposium*), to Odysseus in search of his comrades (*Protagoras*), and to Zalmoxis returning from the dead (*Charmides*). Within these narrative frames, **Socrates takes on the role of the traditional Greek hero**, dedicated to his mission (*Apology*), obedient to a higher authority (*Apology*) and acting for the salvation of his community. **Most often in Plato this activity takes the form of a spiritual combat...**<sup>172</sup>

Socrates<sup>X</sup>, like Socrates<sup>P</sup>, was deeply aware of his exemplary status. Socrates<sup>X</sup> and Socrates<sup>P</sup> are both represented as striving to make their lives and words consistent, and to make other people better. Both are pious worshippers of the traditional gods. Both are committed to pursuing an ascetic form of life, and yet there are some subtle differences between Socrates<sup>X</sup> and Socrates<sup>P</sup> with respect to the ways in which their respective ethical commitments are expressed. For Socrates<sup>X</sup>, *enkráteia* (self-mastery) and *kartería* (patient endurance) lead to *autárkeia* (self-sufficiency). For Socrates<sup>P</sup>, by contrast, philosophy is described, in *Phaedo* 64a-67e, as being "practice for death" (μελέτη θανάτου / *melétē thanátou*).<sup>173</sup> Socrates<sup>P</sup> defines death as the separation of the soul from the body, and argues that the true philosopher should separate the soul from the body as much as possible, by seeking to limit concern for bodily pleasures, such as food, drink, and sex, as well as avoiding distinguished clothes, shoes and other bodily ornaments. Socrates<sup>P</sup> maintains that such ascetic freedom allows the soul to pursue true knowledge, free from the deception otherwise imposed upon the soul by the demands and limitations of the body.

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<sup>172</sup> Ahbel-Rappe, *Socrates: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 53, emphasis added. 'Spiritual combat' was also a critically important concept in the life and teaching of the Apostle Paul, as well as Christian monks like Antony the Great, Evagrius and Cassian.

<sup>173</sup> On 'practice of death', see: Raphael Woolf, 'The Practice of a Philosopher', in: David Sedley (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Volume 16 (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 97-129.

For Socrates<sup>P</sup>, the goal of the philosophical life is to “become like God”:

But it is not possible, Theodorus, that evil should be destroyed... But it must inevitably haunt human life, and prowl about this earth. That is why *a man should make all haste to escape from earth to heaven; and escape means becoming as much like God as possible; and a man becomes like God when he becomes just and pious, with understanding...* In God, there is no sort of wrong whatsoever; he is supremely just, and the thing most like him is the man who has become as just as it lies in human nature to be. And it is here that we see whether a man is truly able, or truly a weakling and a nonentity; for it is the realisation of this that is genuine wisdom and goodness, while the failure to realise it is manifest folly and wickedness.<sup>174</sup>

In the cultural world of Homer and Hesiod, as we saw in Chapter 1, assimilation to God would most readily have been understood in terms of the decision of a particular god to bestow immortality on a particular mortal. For Socrates<sup>P</sup>, however, to be god-like also entailed moral purity. Socrates<sup>P</sup> directly links the pursuit of the virtues of justice, piety and wisdom/understanding, with the *télos* of assimilation to God (ὁμοιωσις θεῷ / *homoiōsis theōi*),<sup>175</sup> since “in God, there is no wrong whatsoever; he is supremely just”. Human beings who willingly strive to become just, pious and wise, will also “become like God”, since “the thing most like him [God] is the man who has become as just as it lies in human nature to be.” Xenophon had been at pains to portray Socrates<sup>X</sup> as utterly conventional in both his religious beliefs and practices, accepting the traditional view that the gods were capable of committing evil actions. Plato, by contrast, following in the footsteps of Hesiod and the Pre-Socratic thinkers, subjected traditional Greek religion to what Pierre Hadot has described as a “purifying critique”, leading to the development of a strikingly new form of theology. Socrates<sup>P</sup> was probably *not* arguing for a form of pagan monotheism in his references to God in the singular.<sup>176</sup> Nonetheless, in portraying God as not only the guarantor of divine justice, but also as the embodiment of moral purity, Plato took an unprecedented step towards an understanding of God that would accord well with both Jewish and Christian monotheism.

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<sup>174</sup> *Theaetetus* 176a-c. Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, p. 195.

<sup>175</sup> For differing perspectives on whether ‘assimilation to God’ should be understood as merely ethical, or whether it also implied some sort of ontological change, see: John M. Armstrong, ‘After the Ascent: Plato on Becoming Like God’, in: David Sedley (ed.), *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Volume 16 (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 171-183; and Timothy A. Mahoney, ‘Is Assimilation to God in the *Theaetetus* Purely Otherworldly?’, *Ancient Philosophy*, Volume 24, Issue 2 (Fall 2004), pp. 321-338.

<sup>176</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of the ambiguities and complexities of Platonic theology, see: Gerd Van Riel, *Plato’s Gods*, Ashgate Studies in the History of Philosophical Theology (Farnham, England & Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2013, esp. Chapter 2, Section 3 ‘Gods’ or ‘the God’?, pp. 36-38.

## Conclusion

Our investigation has tended to confirm Dorion's view that the so-called 'Socratic Problem' is, in many ways, a pseudo-problem, since the search for the 'historical' Socrates in the literary texts of Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato has often been based on misconceptions about the genre of these writings and the nature of ancient philosophy itself. As a result, many modern interpreters have employed anachronistic interpretive assumptions and methodologies, which have tended to obscure both the ways in which these texts were originally intended to function, as well as the way in which they were appropriated by subsequent philosophers in the ancient Greco-Roman world.

The literary evidence that we have considered in this chapter, from Aristophanes, Xenophon, and Plato, has also confronted us with many ambiguities and tensions. Aristophanes' depiction of 'Socrates' is clearly a caricature, and yet there are at least some features of the Aristophanic 'Socrates' that can be reconciled with Socrates<sup>X</sup> and Socrates<sup>P</sup>. In particular, each depiction of 'Socrates' has a common focus on simplicity of lifestyle and dedication to learning. Aristophanes portrays 'Socrates' as a generic intellectual, to whom he attributes various seemingly contradictory features, drawn from aspects of Pre-Socratic and Sophistic teaching. Nonetheless, there is a coherence to these features, that is grounded in the two charges that Socrates had to face at his trial: (1) heterodox religious belief and practice; and (2) careless indoctrination of students.

Despite some similarities between the depictions of Socrates in the works of Aristophanes, Xenophon and Plato, we cannot avoid the fact there are also many significant differences as well. The Socrates of the *Clouds* is an absent-minded, self-absorbed, miserly charlatan, with delusions of divine grandeur, intent on defrauding fathers and manipulating their sons. By contrast, Xenophon and Plato consider Socrates to be *the* moral exemplar, living a selfless life of service to all the members of his community. Socrates<sup>X</sup> and Socrates<sup>P</sup> each model a carefully reasoned, ascetically-oriented ethical life, but they use different terminology, with different, although not altogether incompatible emphases. As we shall see in the following chapters, perhaps the most significant aspect of the ethical teaching of Xenophon and Plato revolved around the concept of 'assimilation to God', which would become a defining paradigm for most subsequent philosophical schools. This concept had a profound influence on the development of the Jewish theologian, Philo of Alexandria, and through his works, significantly influenced many early Christian thinkers as well.

## Chapter 5

### The Socratic Inheritance: Late Classical, Hellenistic and Early Roman Imperial Philosophy

#### Introduction

Alexander Nehamas, in the course of a review of Gregory Vlastos' attempts to retrieve the 'historical' Socrates, offers the following reflections about the significance, but also the ambiguity, of the Socratic *persona* for subsequent philosophy:

With the exception of the Epicureans, every philosophical school in antiquity, whatever its orientation, saw in him either its actual founder, or the type of person to whom its adherents were to aspire... For Antisthenes, Socrates was the inspiration for Cynicism; for Aristippus, the first Hedonist... Even his contemporaries, that is, were radically, passionately divided about the nature of his views, the substance of his actions, and the structure of his motives.<sup>1</sup>

According to Plutarch (45-120 CE), confusion about the nature of Socratic philosophical activity was also a common problem:

Most people imagine that philosophy consists in delivering discourses from the heights of a chair, and in giving classes based on texts. But what these people utterly miss is the uninterrupted philosophy which we see being practiced every day in a way which is perfectly equal to itself... Socrates did not set up grandstands for his audience and did not sit upon a professorial chair; he had no fixed timetable for talking or walking with his friends. Rather, he did philosophy sometimes by joking with them, or by drinking, or going to war, or to the market with them, and finally by going to prison, and drinking poison. ***He was the first to show that at all times and in every place, in everything that happens to us, daily life gives us the opportunity to do philosophy.***<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander Nehamas, 'Voices of Silence: On Gregory Vlastos' Socrates. *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, by Gregory Vlastos', *Arion*, Volume 2, Number 1 (1992), pp. 177 & 175.

<sup>2</sup> Plutarch, *Whether A Man Should Engage In Politics When He Is Old*, 26, 796d, as cited in: Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 38, emphasis added. Since much of the argument in this current chapter is directly dependent upon the theoretical assumptions of Hadot, I have chosen to reproduce Hadot's renderings of a limited number of ancient texts *where appropriate*. Chase notes the "profoundly philological" nature of Hadot's method, through which he has come to a distinctive understanding of ancient philosophy, shaped by his own translation of the ancient Greek and Latin texts. Chase indicates that "to replace [Hadot's] translations by those from some 'standard' English version would... render his thought incomprehensible". (See pp. xi-xii, for an explanation and defence of Chase's translational approach).

In Chapter 5, I will trace the ways in which literary depictions of Socrates, especially those of Xenophon and Plato, have served as philosophical and moral exemplars for various Hellenistic and Roman philosophers, and for their respective philosophical schools. In this investigation, I will examine the Platonic Academy, the Aristotelian Lyceum, the Cynics, Skeptics, Stoics and Epicureans, so as to determine the basic features of each school, as well as any elements that might have been held in common between some or all of them. In particular, I will be seeking to understand how philosophy was actually practiced by members of each school, and to what extent the *télos*, or goal that they were pursuing can be understood in terms of the concept of ‘assimilation to the divine’. As I investigate the role that the concept of ‘assimilation to the divine’ might have played in the thinking of certain Hellenistic and Roman philosophers, I will make reference once more to Roy Clouser’s work on the hidden role of religious belief in theories, and his proposals about the function of the ‘Divine’ in what he has dubbed the ‘Pagan Dependency Arrangement’.<sup>3</sup>

The discussion will be conducted within a framework extensively dependent upon the methodological assumptions of Pierre Hadot, particularly his emphasis upon ancient philosophy as a way of life.<sup>4</sup> The overall purpose of the analysis in this chapter will be to arrive at a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon of Post-Socratic philosophy, that is, as far as possible, free from the effects of the various anachronistic assumptions about the nature of ancient philosophy that we encountered in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. Hadot’s approach developed from analysis of the concept of ‘spiritual exercises’, a form of philosophical practice evident in Xenophon’s and Plato’s literary presentations of Socrates, but with roots in much earlier forms of Greek thought.<sup>5</sup> Analysis of these ancient spiritual exercises will reveal how it was that Post-Socratic philosophy actually functioned as a way of life. Later, in Chapters 6-9, we will see that the concept of spiritual exercises can help us to gain a more complete understanding of early Christian thought and practice, and, in particular, of the monastic worldview held by Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian.

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<sup>3</sup> For an overview of Roy Clouser’s methodology, see Chapter 2, pp. 17-20. For an explanation of the Pagan Dependency Arrangement, see also: Roy A. Clouser, *The Myth of Religious Neutrality: An Essay on the Hidden Role of Religious Belief in Theories*, rev. ed. (Notre Dame, IN, USA: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), pp. 44-47.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Hadot’s approach will be outlined more fully in the following sections of this chapter. For an application of Hadot’s philological methodology to specific ancient texts, see: Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *The Inner Citadel: The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1998 [French 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1992]); and Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision* (Chicago, IL, USA & London, England: The University of Chicago Press, 1993 [French 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1963]).

<sup>5</sup> See: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp.19-20, for a discussion of the manner in which the incantations of the Muses, as found in Hesiod’s *Theogony*, allowed people to forget their misfortunes, and to attain ‘cosmic vision’, thus providing “a sketch of what would later become philosophical spiritual exercises”.

## Pierre Hadot, Spiritual Exercises, and the Nature of Ancient Philosophy

In ancient philosophical practice, spiritual exercises often took the form of cognitive therapy, purifying and redirecting the thoughts and actions of a philosopher. ‘Spiritual exercises’ can refer to practices which are physical (such as dietary restrictions), discursive (involving dialogue, or meditation on spoken words or written texts), or intuitive (involving contemplation). Hadot’s emphasis on the ‘psychagogic value of discourse’<sup>6</sup> (i.e. the power of words to influence thought and behaviour) developed from interaction with other scholars’ work on the form and function of spiritual exercises in ancient philosophy. Paul Rabbow (1867-1956), a German classical scholar and author of *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike*,<sup>7</sup> examined the forms of spiritual exercises practiced in the Epicurean and Stoic schools of philosophy, in a work that “had the merit of pointing out the continuity which exists between ancient and Christian spirituality, but... may have limited itself too exclusively to the rhetorical aspects of these spiritual exercises.”<sup>8</sup> Ilsetraut Hadot, née Marten (b. 1928), the author of *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung*,<sup>9</sup> “resituated the Stoic philosopher’s work within the global perspective of ancient philosophy.”<sup>10</sup> Pierre Hadot later encountered the work of two other scholars who were independently pursuing a similar approach, André-Jean Voelke (1925-1991)<sup>11</sup>, and Juliusz Domański (b. 1927).<sup>12</sup> Hadot also had a mutually influential relationship with Michel Foucault (1926-1984), although Hadot was quite critical of Foucault’s understanding of ancient philosophy as ‘care for the self’, which Hadot described as a form of ‘dandyism’.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On the ‘psychagogic value of discourse’ see: Pedro Laín Entralgo (Leland Joseph Rather & John M. Sharp, trans.), *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 1970).

<sup>7</sup> Paul Rabbow, *Seelenführung: Methodik der Exerzitien in der Antike* [Spiritual Guidance: Methods of Spiritual Exercise in Antiquity] (Munich, Germany: Kösel, 1954).

<sup>8</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. ix.

<sup>9</sup> Ilsetraut Hadot, *Seneca und die griechisch-römische Tradition der Seelenleitung* [Seneca and the Greco-Roman Tradition of Spiritual Guidance], *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie*, Band XIII (Berlin, Germany: Walter De Gruyter, 1969).

<sup>10</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. ix.

<sup>11</sup> See: André-Jean Voelke, *La philosophie comme thérapie de l’âme: Études de philosophie hellénistique* [Philosophy as Therapy of the Soul: Studies of Hellenistic Philosophy] (Paris, France: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1993).

<sup>12</sup> See: Juliusz Domański, *La philosophie: Théorie ou manière de vivre? Les controverses de l’Antiquité à la Renaissance* [Philosophy: Theory or Way of Life? Controversies from Antiquity to the Renaissance], *Pensée antique et médiévale* (Fribourg, Switzerland & Paris, France: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996).

<sup>13</sup> See: Thomas Flynn, ‘Philosophy as a way of life: Foucault and Hadot’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Volume 31, Numbers 5-6 (2005), pp. 609-622; Orazio Irrera, ‘Pleasure and transcendence of the self: Notes on ‘a dialogue too soon interrupted’ between Michel Foucault and Pierre Hadot’, *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Volume 36, Number 9 (2010), pp. 995-1017; and (in Italian), Stefano Righetti, ‘Pierre Hadot e Michel Foucault: two readings on self-care in the ancient philosophy’, *Montesquieu.it*, Number 2 (December 2010), pp. 143-155.



In the course of his attempt to rediscover the nature of ancient philosophy, and the ways in which it differs from the understanding and practice of modern philosophy, Hadot remarks that, “if one wishes to understand things, one must watch them develop, and must catch them at the moment of their birth, since philosophy is a historical phenomenon, which arose at a particular point in time, and has evolved up to the present.”<sup>14</sup> Therefore, with regard to the word *philosophía*, and related terms in Greek, Hadot points out that:

The words belonging to the *philosophia* family did not in fact appear until the fifth century B.C., and the term *philosophia* itself was not defined until the fourth century B.C., by Plato. Aristotle, however, and with him the entire tradition of the history of philosophy, applied the word “philosophers” to the first Greek thinkers, who appeared at the beginning of the sixth century, in the colonies of Asia Minor, at the periphery of the Greek zone of influence.<sup>15</sup>

In Chapters 2, 3, and 4, we saw that the use of the term ‘philosophy’ to refer to Greek thinkers prior to Socrates is both anachronistic and misleading. We have little reliable evidence to suggest that the Pre-Socratic thinkers applied the term *philosophía*, or any of its cognates, to themselves or to their work.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the post-Aristotelian use of words from the *philosophía* family to describe Pre-Socratic thinkers has led to further anachronisms, such as: (1) the tendency to portray at least some of these thinkers as members of ‘schools’, who (allegedly) interacted closely with each other, and even with members of other ‘schools’; and (2) the tendency to assume that the task of each Pre-Socratic thinker was to be the creator of a philosophical system, often with a particular focus on the domain of metaphysics, rather than epistemology or ethics. Hadot draws attention to the effects, on modern university students, of such misguided readings of ancient philosophy:

They get the impression that all the philosophers they study strove in turn to invent, each in an original way, a new construction, systematic and abstract, intended somehow or other to explain the universe... These theories... give rise... to doctrines or criticisms of morality, which... draw the consequences... of the general principles of the system, and thus invite people to carry out a specific choice of life and adopt a certain mode of behaviour. ***The problem of knowing whether this choice of life will be efficacious is utterly secondary and accessory; it doesn’t enter into the perspective of philosophical discourse.***<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 2. Cf. Aristotle, *Politics*, I, 2, 1252a24.

<sup>15</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 9.

<sup>16</sup> There is some ancient but controversial evidence in relation to Pythagoras and Heraclitus. For the ancient usage of words from the *philosophía* family, see: Hadot (Chase, trans.) *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 15-21.

<sup>17</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 2, emphasis added.

Hadot maintains that, in Socratic and post-Socratic Greek thought, the choice of a way of life was not something that arose at the *end* of the process of philosophical activity, but rather at the *beginning*.<sup>18</sup> In his view, the choice of a way of life did not so much emerge as a natural and logical consequence of a previously established system, but instead it tended to determine the nature of the doctrines to be held, and the manner in which those doctrines would be taught. In other words, philosophical discourse, whether it was spoken or written, actually emerged from a choice that had *already been made*; discourse was not the cause of a subsequently adopted choice of a philosophical way of life. Furthermore, the choice of a particular way of life was not one made by an individual in isolation, but required membership in a group or community, i.e. a philosophical ‘school’, in which the chosen way of life could be lived out most effectively. The decision to enter upon a philosophical way of life, therefore, was an *existential* decision, requiring an individual to undergo a ‘conversion’, which, in turn, required a complete change of lifestyle.

The ‘existential option’ adopted by a philosophical practitioner would necessarily imply a distinctive understanding of the world in which the way of life was to be lived out, and the task of philosophical discourse was then to reveal, clarify, and defend not just the existential option itself, but also the worldview that it entailed. Philosophical discourse developed from the original existential option, but it also led back to it. Philosophical discourse also sought to compel a response from masters and disciples, through the use of reason and persuasion, so that the members of a particular philosophical school would continually return to, and re-engage with, the basic existential option that defined the nature of the group to which they now belonged. Philosophy was, above all, a way of life, but one which was also indissolubly linked to a specific form of philosophical discourse. Therefore, ***ancient philosophical discourse can only ever be understood correctly with reference to the specific way of life that it expressed and supported.*** This view of philosophical discourse also entails that it would be a profound error to place philosophical discourse, and the philosophical way of life from which it arises, in opposition to each other, as though ‘discourse’ corresponded to ‘theory’,<sup>19</sup> and ‘way of life’ corresponded to ‘practice’. In fact, as we shall see later in this chapter, discourse was often highly ‘practical’, insofar as it could elicit a change in perception and/or behaviour from a listener or reader.

<sup>18</sup> See: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 1-6.

<sup>19</sup> Hadot makes a distinction between the French word *théorique* (derived from Greek *theōrikós*), meaning ‘speculative; having no relation to reality or practice’, and *théorétique* (derived from Greek *theōrētikós*), meaning ‘relative to pure knowledge or speculation’. Chase has rendered *théorique* as ‘theoretic’, suggesting a parallel with the second definition given in the Oxford English Dictionary, i.e. “Contemplative, as opposed to active or practical”. Chase has rendered *théorétique* as ‘theoretical’.

## Socrates, His Early Disciples, and the Origins of the Philosophical Schools

The intimate relationship between the initial choice of a philosophical way of life, and the subsequent development of philosophical discourse is clear in the literary representations of Socrates that we have already examined in Chapter 4. In this section, we will focus on some other representations of the life and thought of the ‘mythical’ Socrates, and will outline the elements of Socrates’ identity that Antisthenes and Aristippus, two prominent disciples from the first generation of his followers, considered to be the most worthy of emulation. Before doing so, however, it is worth noting some parallels between the life and experience of Socrates the Athenian and Jesus of Nazareth<sup>20</sup> that shed light on the relationship between way of life and discourse, and also provide a useful orientation to an investigation of the origins of the philosophical schools. Socrates and Jesus conducted their public careers in small areas, gathered disciples, but never wrote any books. Each of these figures had a tremendous impact in the ancient world, and continues to have a lasting influence in the modern world. After their ‘martyric’ deaths,<sup>21</sup> the disciples of both men produced literary accounts of their lives, such as Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* and the Platonic dialogues, or the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. These disciples also established communities, or ‘schools’, from which to spread the message about their respective founders. However, as we shall see, the differences between the schools of the ‘Socratics’ could be even greater than the differences between the various early religious communities that claimed the legacy of Jesus.

Antisthenes of Athens (c.445-c.365 BCE)<sup>22</sup> was one of the older disciples of Socrates, and had previously studied rhetoric with Gorgias the Sophist. Antisthenes was said to have been the teacher of Diogenes of Sinope (412-323 BCE) who is considered by many to be the founder of the Cynic school, through whom the Stoics also traced their ancestry.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See: Frédéric Lenoir, *Socrate, Jésus, Bouddha: Trois maîtres de vie* (Paris, France: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2009); Anne Baudart, *Socrate et Jésus: Tout les sépare... tout les rapproche* (Paris, France: Le Pommier, 1999); Paul W. Gooch, *Reflections on Jesus and Socrates: Word and Silence* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 1997); and Karl Jaspers (Ralph Mannheim, trans.), *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus: The Paradigmatic Individuals* (Eastford, CT, USA: Martino Publishing, 2011 [1962]).

<sup>21</sup> Socrates and Jesus went to their deaths voluntarily, as a ‘witness’ (i.e. a martyr) to a certain set of values and beliefs. The form and function of Christian martyrdom will be explored more fully in Chapter 7.

<sup>22</sup> The main ancient sources for the thought of Antisthenes are: Xenophon’s *Memorabilia* and *Symposium*; and Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*. For recent scholarly treatment of Antisthenes, see: Susan H. Prince, *Antisthenes of Athens: Texts, Translations and Commentary* (Ann Arbor, MI, USA: University of Michigan Press, 2014); and Luis E. Navia, *Antisthenes of Athens: Setting the World Aright*, Contributions in Philosophy, Book 80 (Santa Barbara, CA, USA: Praeger Publishers, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> See: Luis E. Navia, *Diogenes the Cynic: The Man in the Tub*, Contributions in Philosophy, Book 67 (Santa Barbara, CA, USA: Praeger Publishers, 1998), later reissued as Luis E. Navia, *Diogenes the Cynic: The War Against the World* (Amherst, NY, USA: Humanity Books, 2005). Navia (p. 100) argues that lineages from Antisthenes, through Diogenes and Crates, to Zeno (the founder of Stoicism) were a later invention.

Little is known about Antisthenes' life,<sup>24</sup> apart from his asceticism and his sense of humour. He carried a wallet and staff, which were later to become distinctive markers of Cynic identity. In a manner heavily reminiscent of the Xenophonic Socrates, Antisthenes avoided all luxuries, voluntarily adopted a life of poverty, and wore a ragged cloak, which he doubled over so that he could sleep in it. Antisthenes made use of the Sophistic distinction between *nómos* (convention) and *phúsis* (nature), often cleverly ridiculing the unthinkingly conformist beliefs and behaviour of the citizens of Athens as they went about their daily business. Antisthenes' philosophical interests were in the area of ethics, rather than metaphysics or epistemology, and he pursued the practice of virtue by means of a rigorously ascetic life. Julie Piering has suggested that the foundational elements of Antisthenes' ethical teaching can be summed up in the following statements:

- (1) Virtue can be taught.
- (2) Only the virtuous are noble.
- (3) Virtue is itself sufficient for happiness,  
since it requires "nothing else except the strength of Socrates"  
(Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers* 6.11).
- (4) Virtue is tied to deeds and actions,  
and does not require a great deal of words or learning.
- (5) The wise person is self-sufficient [i.e. practices *autárkeia*]
- (6) Having a poor reputation is something good, and is like physical hardship.
- (7) The law of virtue, rather than the laws established by the polis,  
will determine the public acts of one who is wise.
- (8) The wise person will marry in order to have children with the best women.
- (9) The wise person knows those who are worthy of love, and so does not disdain to love.

Some elements of Antisthenes' ethical teaching match those of Socrates<sup>P</sup>, such as his beliefs about the nature of virtue, the priority of deeds over words, and the role of *érōs* (love) in the pursuit of a philosophical life. However, other aspects of Antisthenes' teaching differed markedly from Socrates<sup>P</sup>. Antisthenes' unequivocally affirmed virtue as the *only* basis for happiness, separated legality from morality, adopted a strong aversion to physical pleasures, and was very anti-theoretical. Aspects of Antisthenes' approach, such as his avoidance of pleasure, embrace of poverty, and prioritising of practical reason, later came to influence the development of the Cynic and Stoic schools of philosophy very significantly.

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<sup>24</sup> The following summary is derived from: Julie Piering, 'Antisthenes (c.446-366 B.C.E.)', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource* <http://www.iep.utm.edu/antisthe/> Accessed on Sunday October 12, 2014 @ 4:40 pm.

Aristippus of Cyrene (c.435-356 BCE),<sup>25</sup> another of the older disciples of Socrates, was the founder of the Cyrenaic school of philosophy,<sup>26</sup> which influenced the development of the Epicurean school, as well as the thought of the later Greek Skeptics. Aristippus shared Antisthenes' aversion to the social conventions of Athens, but Aristippus rejected Antisthenes' severe ascetic lifestyle. In fact, Aristippus was a hedonist, who seems to have taught that the philosophical life should aim at, and be centred around, the pursuit of physical pleasure. In *Memorabilia* Book 2, Xenophon presents a hostile analysis of Aristippus' hedonistic choice of life, indicating that Aristippus did not believe that a person should *ever* delay the gratification that immediate pleasures might bring, for the sake of pleasures that he may, or may not, be able to enjoy at some time in the future. Many later writers were also extremely critical of the developed positions of the Cyrenaic school. However, these positions may not have been promulgated by Aristippus of Cyrene himself, but rather by his grandson, also named Aristippus, who is credited with contributing to the systematisation of Cyrenaic beliefs and practice, especially in the areas of epistemology and ethics.<sup>27</sup>

Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Philosophers*, our main source for the life and teaching of Aristippus, records several scandalous stories about him. These stories indicate that Aristippus indulged his physical appetites by sleeping with courtesans, and by eating fine food and drinking seasoned wines. Tim O'Keefe believes that these stories are probably false; nonetheless, they are likely to provide an accurate reflection of the contempt that many other philosophers and non-philosophers felt towards Aristippus' pursuit of sensual pleasure (as well as his decision to accept payment for his teaching, just as the Sophists had done). Aristippus was said to have taught that "what is best is not abstaining from pleasures, but instead controlling them, without being controlled".<sup>28</sup> Thus, whilst Aristippus' single-minded devotion to pleasure may have led outsiders to believe that he was *enslaved* by his passions, he seems to have thought that his willingness to do whatever was necessary to acquire pleasure conferred on him a certain *freedom*, making him a master of himself.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The following summary is derived from: Tim O'Keefe, 'Aristippus (c.435-356 B.C.E.)', *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource* <http://www.iep.utm.edu/aristip/> Accessed on Monday October 13, 2014 @ 11:55 am.

<sup>26</sup> For recent book-length treatment of the Cyrenaic school, see: Kurt Lampe, *The Birth of Hedonism: The Cyrenaic Philosophers and Pleasure as a Way of Life* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 2014); and Ugo Zilioli, *The Cyrenaics* (Durham, England: Acumen Publishing, 2012).

<sup>27</sup> See: Voula Tsouna, *The Epistemology of the Cyrenaic School* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

<sup>28</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 2.75.

<sup>29</sup> See: Kristian Urstad, 'Aristippus and Freedom in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*', *Praxis*, Volume 1, Number 2 (Autumn 2008), pp. 41-55.

## Between Gods and Men: The Intermediate, ‘Erotic’ Status of the Ideal Philosopher

The brief survey of the teaching of two of Socrates’ early disciples, provided in the previous section, reveals some of the wide diversity of philosophical teaching and practice that emerged from within the Socratic circle. Antisthenes drew upon an ascetic understanding of Socrates, such as that found in the works of Xenophon, whereas Aristippus seems to have been inspired more by the carefree ‘hedonist’ portrayed in the works of Plato. Nietzsche, by contrast, referred to Socrates as ‘the true eroticist’ (*dem wahrhaften Erotiker*), drawing attention to the curious way in which Socrates, in Plato’s *Symposium*, is identified with *Erōs*, the god (or *daímōn*) of love.<sup>30</sup> In what follows, we will briefly explore Plato’s characterisation of the intermediate ‘erotic’ status of the ideal philosopher, and the nature of the relationship between the φιλόσοφος (the philosopher, i.e. the one who loves and seeks after wisdom) and the σοφός (the sage, i.e. the one who truly possesses wisdom).

In Plato’s *Symposium* 203b-204a, Diotima makes a distinction between the gods and ignorant people, which is predicated on their respective relationships to wisdom. The gods do not love wisdom, or desire to become wise, because they are *already* wise and thus *already* possess wisdom. Ignorant people, by contrast, do not want to become wise, or to possess wisdom, since they are content with themselves, although they are neither beautiful nor good nor intelligent. Curiously, Diotima also hints that there might be a category of mortal beings who are wise like the gods, when she makes the parenthetical remark that “no one else who is already wise loves wisdom.” This is the type of person who came to be known in later philosophy as the *sophós*, or sage, because this person possesses wisdom, and therefore does not need to love it or seek it. The *philosophos*, or lover of wisdom, is not a sage. However, he also differs from ignorant people, because he is *not* content with his ignorance, but recognises his lack of beauty, goodness and intelligence, and seeks to overcome his poverty through the pursuit of wisdom. Gods and sages do not ‘do philosophy’, since they are already wise, and ignorant people do not ‘do philosophy’, since they are content, and largely unaware of their own ignorance. The philosopher (the lover of wisdom) is thus an *intermediate* being, between those who are wise (gods and sages) and those who are senseless (the ignorant). The philosopher is aware of his ignorance, and seeks to remedy this lack through the pursuit of wisdom. Thus, like *Erōs*, Plato’s ideal philosopher also loves and seeks after beauty and goodness as a way of life.

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<sup>30</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, section 13, as cited in: Hadot, (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 41, emphasis added.

## Plato, Platonism and the Academy<sup>31</sup>

The Platonic Academy became a model community for most subsequent philosophical schools, providing an environment within which the various spiritual exercises could be taught and practiced. Seneca (4 BCE – 65 CE), in *Moral Epistles* 6.6, commented upon the superiority of this kind of communal life over philosophical written discourse:

*The living word and life in common will benefit you more than written discourse.* It is to current reality that you must go, first because men believe their eyes more than their ears, and then because the path of precepts is long, but that of examples is short and infallible. Cleanthes [the Stoic] would not have imitated his master Zeno if he had been merely his auditor; but he was involved in his life, he penetrated his secret thoughts, and he was able to observe first hand whether Zeno lived in conformity with his own rule of life. **Plato, Aristotle, and that whole crowd of sages which ended up going in opposite directions – all derived more profit from Socrates' morals than from his words.** It was not Epicurus' school which made great men of Metrodorus, Hermarchus, and Polyaeus, but his companionship.<sup>32</sup>

Plato's *Seventh Letter*, to which we also referred in the previous chapter, makes it clear that Plato did *not* think of the philosophical life as a withdrawal from the world (such a description might be more appropriately applied to the school of Aristotle than that of Plato, as we shall see below). In fact, Plato's philosophical community was intended to be a place of training for future politicians, who were being prepared for extensive participation in public life. Within the Academy, Plato's students and colleagues learned first to rule over themselves, so that they could then rule appropriately over others. The death of Socrates, under the political and legal arrangements then current in Athens, had led Plato to believe that the only way in which flawed socio-political systems could be overhauled was by means of philosophical education, tailored to the needs and aptitudes of suitable men (and women also, such as Axiothea of Philasia and Lasthenia of Mantinea).<sup>33</sup> Thus, the Academy could be thought of as a microcosm of Plato's ideal society, i.e. the Academy was a model of the ideal life in a future enlightened city, within which spiritual exercises were practiced as a form of training for leadership.

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<sup>31</sup> For an overview of introductory literature on Plato and Platonism, see the beginning of Chapter 4.

<sup>32</sup> See: Seneca (Richard Mott Gummere, trans.), *Ad Lucilium epistulae morales* (3 volumes), Loeb Classical Library, (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1917); as cited in Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 56-57, emphasis added.

<sup>33</sup> See: Mary Ellen Waithe (ed.), *Ancient Women Philosophers, 600 B.C.-500 A.D.*, A History of Women Philosophers, Volume 1 (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1987), pp. 83, 92, 205-209.

## Spiritual Exercises in the Platonic Community

There is a sense in which one could say that life within the Academy was the primary spiritual exercise of the Platonic community. However, Hadot indicates that there were also several specific practices that characterised the Platonic way of life, including: training in the mathematical sciences; dialectics, or training in the art of philosophical dialogue; and ‘the separation of the soul from the body’, a spiritual exercise known as the ‘practice of death’.

Study of mathematical sciences such as geometry, for which the Academy was renowned, was an integral part of the philosophical training process (cf. *Republic* 522-534). However, these sciences were not to be practiced for the sake of greater knowledge of the sensible world, as Socrates’ discussion with Glaucon in *Republic* 526e indicates, but rather so that the practitioners would turn their attention towards the ideal, non-sensible world:

What we need to consider is whether the greater and more advanced part of it [i.e. *geometry*] **tends to make it easier to see the form of the good**. And we say that anything has that tendency if it compels the soul to turn itself around towards the region in which lies the happiest of the things that are, the one the soul must see at any cost... **if geometry compels the soul to study being, it’s appropriate**, but if it compels it to study becoming, it’s inappropriate.<sup>34</sup>

Dialectics was a second spiritual exercise that was an essential part of philosophical training, since the ability to reason and to argue effectively were skills that were critically important for anyone who was intending to exercise a leadership role within the public life of an ancient Greek city-state like Athens. Nonetheless, dialectics were not to be pursued for the purposes of personal self-aggrandisement (as was facilitated and even encouraged by some of the Sophists that we considered in Chapter 3); instead, these skills of thinking and discussion were to be thought of as “a spiritual exercise which demanded that the interlocutors undergo an *askēsis*, or self-transformation.”<sup>35</sup> In his discussion of dialectics in *Republic* 537ff, Socrates recommends that training in this skill only be given to suitable candidates when they reach maturity at the age of 30, at which point the instructors can “test them by means of the power of dialectic, **to discover which of them can relinquish his eyes and other senses**, going on with the help of truth to that which by itself is.”<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, pp. 1143, emphasis and words in square brackets added.

<sup>35</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 62.

<sup>36</sup> Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, pp. 1152, emphasis added.



A third spiritual exercise that was practiced within the Platonic community was the so-called ‘practice of death’, which is referred to in *Phaedo* 64a, in a dialogue which deals directly with the final events before the death of Socrates. Socrates addresses Simmias and Cebes, explaining why it is that he is unafraid to face death:

I want to make my argument before you, my judges, as to why I think that a man who has truly spent his life in philosophy is probably right to be of good cheer in the face of death and to be very hopeful that after death he will attain the greatest blessings yonder. I will try to tell you, Simmias and Cebes, how this may be so. I am afraid that other people do not realise that ***the one aim of those who practice philosophy in the proper manner is to practice for dying and death.*** Now if this is true, it would be strange indeed if they were eager for this all their lives and then resent it when what they have wanted and practiced for a long time comes upon them.<sup>37</sup>

As we observed in Chapter 4, the Platonic Socrates defines death as the separation of the soul from the body. The spiritual exercise of the ‘practice of death’, therefore, means that the philosopher will seek to refrain, as much as possible, from the pursuit of bodily pleasures, such as food, drink, and sex, and will also avoid the wearing of distinguished clothes, shoes and other bodily adornments. The pursuit of such ascetic freedom will allow the soul to pursue knowledge of the ideal, non-sensible world, unhindered by the limitations imposed upon the soul by the weaknesses and passions of the body.

In addition to the three main forms of Platonic philosophical practice outlined above, there are a number of other spiritual exercises that appear within the Platonic dialogues. In *Republic* 571-572, within the context of a discussion about the kinds and numbers of our desires, Socrates considers certain evil passions that emerge in dreams. He recommends that a person should only go to sleep after the following preparations: firstly, strengthening the rational part of his soul with “fine arguments and speculations”; secondly, neither starving nor feeding the appetites; and thirdly, soothing the spirited part of the soul. Similarly, in *Republic* 604b-c, Socrates prepares to face misfortune in a very ‘Stoic’ manner, noting that: we often cannot know whether certain events will turn out to be good or bad in the end; worry about current events will not improve the future; human affairs are not worth taking seriously anyway; and grief prevents the exercise of deliberation which might lead us to make better decisions about our current and future behaviour.

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<sup>37</sup> Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, p. 55, emphasis added.

## Aristotle and His Philosophical Relationship to Plato and Socrates

Aristotle (384-322 BCE)<sup>38</sup>, born in Stagira in north-eastern Greece, came to Athens in 367 BCE, at the age of 17, so that he could become a student at Plato's Academy. He remained there for about twenty years, until Plato's death in 347 BCE.<sup>39</sup> In 338 BCE, Aristotle became a tutor to Alexander the Great (356-323 BCE), and then in 335 BCE, Aristotle established his own philosophical school in Athens, called the Lyceum.<sup>40</sup> Aristotle was not born until 15 years after the death of Socrates, so his main source of knowledge about Socrates is likely to have been Plato, although it is possible that he may have acquired additional information from other disciples of Socrates, as well as from other members of the Academy. In any case, Aristotle says very little, at least directly, about either the 'historical' Socrates, or the 'literary' Socrates found within the Platonic dialogues. However, insofar as Aristotle engaged with and critiqued the philosophical ideas of Plato,<sup>41</sup> there is a sense in which Aristotle was also engaging with Socrates himself. Aristotle's greatest ethical work, the *Nicomachean Ethics*, can be seen as just such an interaction. As Ronna Burger observes, the *Nicomachean Ethics* is one of the most influential works in the entire Western philosophical tradition, although many scholars have been puzzled by its structure:

The very arrangement of the text and the problems posed by it might lead one to wonder whether there is any underlying argument that makes the work a coherent whole... Wherever the path of the *Ethics* finally leads, the question to which it responds sets Aristotle on a course following in the footsteps of Socrates. Socratic inquiry... is ultimately directed to the question, What is the good life for a human being?... the *Ethics* looks like *the* Socratic work in the Aristotelian corpus; whether it is a Socratic manner in which the *Ethics* proceeds, or a Socratic conclusion at which it arrives is far less obvious.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> For an introduction to the philosophical thought of Aristotle, see: John A. Vella, *Aristotle: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Continuum, 2008); and Christopher Shields, *Aristotle*, The Routledge Philosophers (Oxford, England: Routledge, 2007). For comprehensive, multi-author assessment, see: Claudia Barrachi (ed.), *The Bloomsbury Companion to Aristotle* (New York, NY, USA: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013); Christopher Shields (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Aristotle* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Georgios Anagnostopolous (ed.), *A Companion to Aristotle* (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> See: Christopher Shields, 'Learning about Plato from Aristotle', in: Hugh H. Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato*, (Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), p. 403.

<sup>40</sup> For a biography of Aristotle and a history of his school, see: Carlo Natali (Douglas S. Hutchinson, trans.), *Aristotle: His Life and School* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> On the nature of the philosophical relationship between Aristotle and Plato, see: Lloyd P. Gerson, *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (Ithaca, NY, USA & London, England: Cornell University Press, 2005). See also: Lloyd P. Gerson, *From Plato to Platonism* (Ithaca, NY, USA & London, England: Cornell University Press, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Ronna Burger, *Aristotle's Dialogue With Socrates: On the Nicomachean Ethics* (Chicago, IL, USA & London, England: University of Chicago Press, 2008), pp. 1-2.

Undoubtedly, there are some notable differences between the literary forms through which the respective ideas of Plato and Aristotle came to be expressed in written philosophical discourse. The distinctive literary genre adopted by Plato, the dialogical form of the *Sokratikòì lógoi*, is nowhere employed by Aristotle in his extant works, and so Aristotle does not seek to present any of his ideas by means of a literary representation of Socrates. Furthermore, whilst Plato's literary style often reflects the characteristically elusive irony of Socrates, Aristotle's writings appear to be completely lacking in this quality. Aristotle wrote in the more prosaic form of the literary treatise, which would seem to imply that Aristotelian works like the *Nicomachean Ethics* should provide a clear and direct statement of the views held by Aristotle himself, without any of the many ambiguities that can arise in the process of interpreting one of the Platonic dialogues.

It is also true that there appear to be some significant doctrinal differences between these two thinkers. In fact, Aristotle expressed some of his criticisms of Plato's ideas in such a forthright manner that it caused some ancient writers, such as Diogenes Laertius, to regard him as an ungrateful student of Plato and the Academy. In more recent times, scholars such as John Burnet have even suggested that Aristotle has fundamentally misunderstood and misrepresented the views of Plato.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, Christopher Shields believes that it would be a mistake to overemphasise some of the apparent differences between Plato and Aristotle, or to always accept Aristotle's criticisms of Plato's ideas at face value:

Aristotle's criticisms, although at times trenchant, prove less immediately decisive than some have supposed, even while they do pose deep and probing challenges to some of Plato's most distinctive and cherished theses. Consequently, if those who follow Plato will have difficulty meeting all of Aristotle's objections, those who find Aristotle's often keen observations immediately decisive will be unpleasantly surprised if they fail to give Plato his due. We learn a fair bit about Plato from Aristotle and a fair bit about Aristotle from Plato. ***From them both, individually and then again in common, we learn how philosophy may be practiced at its most lively dialectical zenith.***<sup>44</sup>

Shield's comments serve to remind us that, just as within the Academy itself, the practice of philosophy in the Lyceum also allowed considerable room for doctrinal disagreement, whilst still sharing a commitment to an understanding of philosophy as a distinctive way of life.

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<sup>43</sup> See: Shields, 'Learning about Plato from Aristotle', p. 403. This was also the view of the Neoplatonists, among whom Aristotle's writings were often used as an introduction to those of Plato. See: Richard T. Wallis, *Neoplatonism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, England: Gerald Duckworth, 1995), pp. 24-25.

<sup>44</sup> Shields, 'Learning about Plato from Aristotle', p. 416, emphasis added.

## Aristotle and The Lyceum

A common interpretation of Aristotle's philosophical approach might seem to completely undermine the possibility of treating Aristotelian philosophy as being primarily a way of life.<sup>45</sup> In *Metaphysics*, I, 982a15, Aristotle puts forward the view that the highest knowledge is knowledge that has been chosen *for itself*, so it *might* seem plausible to believe that such an understanding of knowledge does not establish any necessary relationship between the way of life that was followed by the knower, and the knowledge that he or she has obtained. However, Aristotle's comments about knowledge need to be interpreted in the light of two very important realities: (1) Aristotle spent twenty years in the Academy, and shared deeply in the dialectical form of life that was practiced in that community; (2) Aristotle subsequently established his own philosophical school, one which pursued philosophical goals that were different from those that guided the members of the Academy, but which still shared several structural features with the Platonic community.

The Lyceum, like the Academy, was clearly intended to be an institution that would continue after the death of its founder. Both communities selected their leaders by election, and both were made up of members who occupied one of two roles: the older members, who served alongside the leader as teachers within the community, and the younger members, who benefited from being taught by their elders. The Lyceum and the Academy each manifested a certain degree of equality amongst its senior members, and admission to each community was available at no financial cost. However, there was one substantial difference between the Platonic and Aristotelian communities in terms of their relationship to the city-state of Athens. As we saw earlier, Plato had an expressly political purpose in mind when he established the Academy, whereas Aristotle's community only provided limited political guidance to non-members.<sup>46</sup> Aristotle's approach reflected his view that the philosophical life was the greatest of three kinds of happiness that a man could pursue: (1) the political life; (2) the active life of practicing virtue; and (3) the philosophical life, that is, the life of the mind, devoted to θεωρία (*theōría*), or 'contemplation'.<sup>47</sup> We will explore Aristotle's 'spiritual exercise' of the theoretical/contemplative life in the following section.

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<sup>45</sup> See: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 77-90.

<sup>46</sup> See: Richard Bodéüs (Jan Edward Garrett, trans.), *The Political Dimensions of Aristotle's Ethics* (Albany, NY, USA: SUNY Press, 1993).

<sup>47</sup> For the development of the concept of *theōría*, see: Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy: Theoria in its Cultural Context* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004), esp. Chapter 4 on Plato, pp. 139-186; and Chapter 5 on Aristotle, pp. 187-252.

## Aristotle and the ‘Theoretical’, ‘Contemplative’ or ‘Reflective’ Form of Life

In Book 10.7 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the highest form of human happiness, which corresponds to ‘intelligence’, the most excellent characteristic of a human being, since it is “something divine” or “the divinest of the things in us”:

But if happiness is activity in accordance with excellence, it is reasonable that it should be activity in accordance with the highest kind... Whether, then, this is intelligence or something else, this element that is thought naturally to rule and guide, and to possess awareness of fine things and divine ones – *whether being, itself too, something divine, or the divinest of the things in us, it is the activity of this, in accordance with its own proper excellence, that will be complete happiness.* That it is *reflective* activity has been said... For this is the highest kind of activity, since intelligence too is highest of the things in us, and the objects of intelligence are the highest knowables; further, it is the most continuous, since we can engage in reflection continuously more than we can in getting things done, whatever they may be. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7, 1177a12-24).<sup>48</sup>

The pursuit of this kind of ‘theoretical’, i.e. contemplative, or reflective life, is explicitly based upon the assumption that human rationality is the aspect of a person that is most akin to the gods, and thus the Aristotelian contemplative life is a means by which a person can become “as much like God as possible” (cf. Plato, *Theaetetus* 176a-c). In Aristotle’s attempt to determine the best form of human life, and to delineate the kind of satisfaction sought through the pursuit of such a life, we can also, perhaps, detect echoes of Xenophon’s Socrates, although Aristotle attributes the highest degree of human happiness to a life spent in ‘contemplation’, rather than one spent in the pursuit of moral virtue or asceticism:

*Do you not know that I would refuse to concede that any man has lived a better life than I have up to now?* For I have realised that my whole life has been spent in piety and righteousness – a fact that affords the greatest satisfaction... You seem... to imagine that happiness consists in luxury and extravagance. *But my belief is that to have no wants is divine; to have as few as possible comes next to the divine; and as that which is divine is supreme, so that which approaches nearest to its nature is nearest to the supreme.*<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Christopher Rowe & Sara Broadie, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics. Translation, Introduction, and Commentary* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 250.

<sup>49</sup> Xenophon, *Apology* 5 & *Memorabilia* 1.6.10, as cited in: Marchant & Todd (trans.), *Xenophon: Memorabilia; Oeconomicus; Symposium; Apologia*; emphasis added.

The claim that “to have no wants is divine” is an expression of *autárkeia* (self-sufficiency), which was an essential part of the philosophical life not just for Aristotle but also for all later schools of philosophy. In *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 10, Aristotle continues:

Again, we think that pleasure must be an ingredient in happiness, and of activities in accordance with excellence it is the one in accordance with intellectual accomplishment that is agreed to be pleasantest; at any rate the love of it [*philosophia*] is thought to bring with it pleasures amazing in purity and stability; and it is reasonable that those who have attained knowledge should pass their time more pleasantly than those who are looking for it. Again, ***the talked-about self-sufficiency will be a feature of the reflective life most of all***; for both the intellectually accomplished and the just person, and everyone else, will require the things necessary for living, but given that they are adequately supplied with such things, the just person will need people to be objects of, and partners in, his just actions, and similarly with the moderate, the courageous, and each of the other types, whereas ***the intellectually accomplished will be able to engage in reflection even when by himself, and the more so, the more accomplished he is – he will do it better, presumably, if he has others to work with him, but all the same he will be most self-sufficient***. (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X.7, 1177a24-36).<sup>50</sup>

According to Aristotle, the pursuit of the highest form of human happiness requires knowledge of things within this world, solely for the joy that such contemplation brings. Thus, Aristotle’s approach differs from Plato, insofar as the pursuit of mathematical sciences within the Academy aimed primarily at knowledge of the realm of being (the supra-sensible world) beyond the realm of becoming (the sensible world). Aristotle’s approach also requires that a person has the material means to enjoy a life of leisure, free from the worries that arise from trying to earn money, so it is not compatible with the strongly ascetic tendencies of Antisthenes. Nor is it compatible with the tendencies of hedonists like Aristippus, since the single-minded pursuit of physical pleasures is a distraction from the life of the mind. The Aristotelian ‘theoretical’ life also required a greater degree of deliberate *withdrawal* from the world than that practiced by Socrates or Plato.<sup>51</sup> Plato and Aristotle exercised a considerable influence over the course of philosophical development in the Hellenistic period, but as we shall see in the following sections, many of the philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period appropriated the Socratic inheritance in widely divergent ways.

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<sup>50</sup> Rowe and Broadie, *Aristotle: Nicomachean Ethics*. p. 251.

<sup>51</sup> For an analysis of the reception of the concept of *theōria* in later philosophy, see: Thomas Benatouil & Mauro Bonazzi (eds.), *Theoria, Praxis, and the Contemplative Life After Plato and Aristotle*, *Philosophia Antiqua*, Book 131 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2012).

## The Hellenistic Schools of Philosophy<sup>52</sup>

At the dawn of the Hellenistic Period (323-31 BCE), almost all significant philosophical practice occurred in Athens<sup>53</sup> at four ‘dogmatic’ schools that were associated with: Plato and the Academy; Aristotle and the Lyceum (members of which were known as Peripatetics); Epicurus and the Garden;<sup>54</sup> and Zeno and the Stoa.<sup>55</sup> In addition to the four ‘dogmatic’ schools, there were also two other ‘non-dogmatic’ schools,<sup>56</sup> associated with: Diogenes of Sinope (the Cynics);<sup>57</sup> and Pyrrho (the Sceptics).<sup>58</sup>

The four dogmatic groups mentioned above were all established before the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, and lasted as organised entities well into the Roman Imperial Period. The dogmatic schools were permanent institutions, at which teaching and discussion could take place, in line with both the basic philosophical way of life, and with the associated forms of philosophical discourse developed by the founders and their disciples. These schools were open to the public, and most philosophers did not charge tuition fees, although a very modest daily charge was often levied on members for the general upkeep of the school.

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<sup>52</sup> Remaining sections are partly derived from Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 91-145.

<sup>53</sup> For general introductions to three major Hellenistic schools, see: Robert William Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (Oxford, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 1996); and Anthony Arthur Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy: Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., *Classical Life and Letters* (London, England: Gerald Duckworth, 1996 [1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1974]).

<sup>54</sup> For an introduction to Epicurean philosophy, see: Tim O’Keefe, *Epicureanism*, *Ancient Philosophies* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2009). For multi-author treatment, see: James Warren (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Epicureanism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

<sup>55</sup> For an introduction to Stoic philosophy, see: M. Andrew Holowchak, *The Stoics: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Continuum, 2008); and John Sellars, *Stoicism*, *Ancient Philosophies* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2006). For multi-author treatment, see: Brad Inwood (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>56</sup> The Cynics and Sceptics were not organised as formal schools, and generally did not create written philosophical discourse. So is it appropriate to call them ‘schools’? Sextus Empiricus, in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*, I, 16-17, observes that: “If it is said that a school [*hairesis*] is the adhesion to numerous dogmas that are mutually coherent... we will say that the Sceptic has no school. If, however, it is said that a school is a way of life which follows a specific rational principle, in conformity with what appears to us... then we say he has a school.” See: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 101 and p. 296, n. 24.

<sup>57</sup> For an introduction to Cynic philosophy, see: William D. Desmond, *Cynics*, *Ancient Philosophies* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2008); and William D. Desmond, *The Greek Praise of Poverty: Origins of Ancient Cynicism* (Notre Dame, IN, USA: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006). See also: Luis E. Navia, *Classical Cynicism: A Critical Study*, *Contributions in Philosophy*, Book 58 (Westport, CT, USA: Greenwood Press, 1996); and R. Bracht Branham & Marie-Odile Goulet-Cazé, *The Cynics: The Cynic Movement in Antiquity and Its Legacy*, *Hellenistic Culture and Society*, Book 23 (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>58</sup> For an introduction to Sceptic philosophy, see: Harald Thorsrud, *Ancient Scepticism*, *Ancient Philosophies*, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2009); and Robert J. Hankinson, *The Sceptics*, *The Arguments of the Philosophers* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 1995). For multi-author treatment, see: John Greco (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Skepticism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011); and Richard Bett (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Scepticism* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

Each philosophical school sought to achieve what the Platonic Socrates had described as “serenity and peace of mind” (cf. *Republic* 496e), but each school differed in its assessment of the causes of human physical, emotional, and spiritual distress.<sup>59</sup> All Hellenistic schools agreed that evil does not exist within things, but only arises from human judgements, and, on this basis, each school proposed its own distinctive therapeutic ‘remedy’.<sup>60</sup> The dogmatic schools held that value judgements needed to be transformed, whereas the non-dogmatic schools believed that value judgements should be suspended altogether. Amongst the dogmatic schools, Platonism, Aristotelianism, and Stoicism adhered to the Socratic precept that the basic innate human desire was ‘the love of the good’, but the Epicureans held that the basic innate human desire was a desire for pleasure.

With the exception of the Epicureans, philosophical training sessions in the dogmatic schools involved students in the discussion of a particular type of question, known as a thesis.<sup>61</sup> The Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic schools, in which such discussion took place, fulfilled a vital practical function for Greek and Roman society, insofar as they provided an environment within which future politicians could develop mastery in public discourse. However, Hadot notes that there is a significant difference between this dialectical approach to philosophical instruction, and the commentary tradition that became typical in the early Roman Imperial Period (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE); as we shall see in later chapters, this change in method had a profound impact upon the practice and understanding of philosophy in the Roman Empire and beyond. Alexander of Aphrodisias (fl. 200 CE), a leader of Aristotle’s school in Athens during the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, and a prolific writer of commentaries on Aristotle’s works himself, attributes these changes to the greater availability of books in the Roman Imperial Period:

This form of discourse [the discussion of ‘theses’] was customary among the ancients, and this was how they gave most of their classes; not by commenting on books, as is done now (at that time, there were no books of this kind), but by arguing for or against a thesis once it was proposed, in order to exercise their faculty of inventing arguments, basing themselves on premises admitted by everyone.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> For the Cynics, it was the constraining force of social conventions; for the Stoics, it was the pursuit of pleasure and self-interest; for the Epicureans it was false pleasures; and for the Skeptics, it was false opinions.

<sup>60</sup> See: Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics*, Martin Classical Lectures, New Series, Volume 2 (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>61</sup> An example of a thesis might be: “Is death an evil?”, or “Is pleasure the supreme good?”

<sup>62</sup> Maximilian Wallies (ed.), Alexander of Aphrodisias, *In Aristotelis Topica. Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca* 2.2, (Berlin, Germany: Reimer, 1891), p. 27, see also pp. 13-16. As cited in Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 104.



## The 'Missionary' Impulse in Hellenistic Philosophy

The Platonist and Aristotelian schools were really only suited to those with the wealth that was a necessary prerequisite for the leisure, study and research that formed such a central part of the philosophical life practiced in the Academy and the Lyceum. By contrast, the Stoics and the Epicureans sought to 'convert' as many people as possible to a philosophical life, with no regard for the normal social stratification according to wealth, gender, or class. The Stoic and Epicurean schools of philosophy placed a significant emphasis upon the simplification of the presentation and transmission of their message, due to the inherently 'missionary' spirit which they had inherited from Socrates. Therefore, Stoics and Epicureans made use of a deductive and systematic approach in their philosophical training that was *not* employed in the Platonic or Aristotelian schools. The Stoics and Epicureans sought to present their dogmas in a tightly organised logical sequence, designed in such a way as to make memorisation of the basic principles as easy as possible:

*... the goal of these systems was to gather the fundamental dogmas together in condensed form, and link them together by rigorous argumentation, in order to form a systematic, highly concentrated nucleus, sometimes reduced to one brief saying, which would thus have greater persuasive force and mnemonic efficacy. Above all, such sayings had a psychagogic value: they were intended to produce an effect on the soul of the auditor or reader.*<sup>63</sup>

The non-dogmatic schools<sup>64</sup> of the Cynics and Skeptics also sought 'converts', and displayed a degree of Socratic 'missionary zeal', albeit in a manner that was markedly different to that of the Stoics and Epicureans. Cynics, such as Diogenes of Sinope, displayed their radical understanding of the philosophical life by means of their shameless repudiation of existing social values and conventions.<sup>65</sup> Skeptics, such as Pyrrho of Elis, were not as deliberately offensive as the Stoics, and demonstrated their indifference to all things, and abandonment of all judgements, through a life characterised by unpredictable activity.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 106-107.

<sup>64</sup> Despite their lack of formal teaching or written discourse, the Cynics and Skeptics were acknowledged in the ancient world as legitimate philosophical schools, which practiced, and attracted people toward, a specific form of philosophical life. See: Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 6.103.

<sup>65</sup> See: Susan Prince, 'Socrates, Antisthenes, and the Cynics', in: Sarah Ahbel-Rappe & Rachana Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates* (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 75-92, esp. 'Diogenes of Sinope: Defacer of the Currency', on pp. 89-90.

<sup>66</sup> See: Richard Bett, 'Socrates and Skepticism', in: Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, pp. 298-311. See also: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 111-113.

## Socrates as Moral, Philosophical and Spiritual Exemplar: The Cynics

The Cynics, Skeptics, Stoics, and Epicureans each reflect certain aspects of the Socratic inheritance. In their own way, and to differing extents, the Cynics and the Stoics self-consciously appropriated Socrates as an exemplar and guide. However, the Epicureans and some Skeptics were far less inclined to lay claim to any inspiration from Socrates. As we shall see later in this chapter, the Epicureans could even be actively anti-Socratic.

The Cynics might, at first glance, appear to have little in common with Socrates, and yet there were sufficient similarities for Plato to claim that Diogenes of Sinope was actually “Socrates gone mad”.<sup>67</sup> For later writers, Diogenes became “the model Cynic and in behavioural terms he was surely the original Cynic... it is clear that Diogenes self-consciously modelled himself as a new Socrates...”<sup>68</sup> In fact, in some respects, Diogenes and his followers could claim to be the most radically authentic exponents of the Socratic inheritance, as mediated through the teaching of Antisthenes.

The Cynics certainly inherited some of the ascetic tendencies of Antisthenes, who famously stated that “I would rather go mad than have pleasure”.<sup>69</sup> However, Diogenes is said to have claimed that even Antisthenes was “too soft”, and that Socrates lived in too much luxury.<sup>70</sup> Diogenes and other Cynics advocated the most extreme repudiation of existing social values and conventions, which led to the designation of their school, derived from the Greek word meaning ‘dog-like’ (κυνικός). The Cynics showed little concern for socially-approved behaviours such as cleanliness, good grooming, or even basic politeness. They sought to ‘deface the currency’, a metaphor which represented their desire to challenge and overturn existing forms of thought and behaviour, through the use of ironic and sarcastic language, as well as the practice of deliberately offensive behaviour in public, whether done individually (e.g. Diogenes masturbating), or collectively (e.g. Crates and Hipparchia making love together). All of these efforts presupposed the *phúsis-nomós* distinction established by the Sophists (see Chapter 3) to which were added the beliefs that self-sufficiency (*autárkeia*), i.e. complete independence from material needs, as well as an ascetic refusal of luxury and vanity (*tûphos*), would lead to freedom from worry (*ataraxía*), essentially the same goal of “serenity and peace of mind” that had been advocated by the Platonic Socrates.

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<sup>67</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 6.54

<sup>68</sup> Susan Prince, ‘Socrates, Antisthenes and the Cynics’, pp. 77-78.

<sup>69</sup> Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Philosophers*, 6.3.

<sup>70</sup> See: VB 584.8-10, and VB 256, in: Gabriele Giannantoni (trans. & ed.), *Socratis et Socraticorum Reliquiae*. Collegit, disposuit, apparatus notisque instruxit, Volume 2 (Naples, Italy: Bibliopolis, 1990).

## Socrates as Moral, Philosophical and Spiritual Exemplar: The Skeptics

The Skeptic approach to philosophy bears some resemblance to that of the Cynics, insofar as it was also basically non-dogmatic. However, whilst the Cynics conveyed their philosophy primarily through their actions, some Skeptics, such as Sextus Empiricus (c.160-210 CE), did produce written discourse.<sup>71</sup> Skepticism existed in two basic forms, known as (1) Pyrrhonist Skepticism;<sup>72</sup> and (2) Academic Skepticism.<sup>73</sup> Richard Bett argues that:

The crucial point of similarity between the two outlooks was a *withdrawal from definite belief*. This may take different forms in the hands of the two schools, and of different individuals within each school... it is what is generally regarded as the hallmark of a skeptic in the ancient Greek context.<sup>74</sup>

Bett's analysis of two fragments from the writings of Timon of Phlius (c.320-c.230 BCE), a student of Pyrrho, suggests that the early Pyrrhonists did *not* regard Socrates as the founder of their Skeptic way of life.<sup>75</sup> Arcesilaus and the Academic Skeptics, due to their membership of the institution founded by Plato, are more emphatic in their identification with Plato's teacher and mentor. Arcesilaus appealed to the *aporetic* Platonic dialogues (see Chapter 4), but also paid particular attention to Plato's *Apology*, which he interpreted in a radically sceptical manner, suggesting that when Socrates claimed that 'he did not know anything', even this claim could not be known. This complete suspension of judgement, which typified both forms of Skepticism, was thought of as a kind of 'divine indifference', promising a 'godlike' freedom from concern. However, in addition to his desire to argue for the Skeptic method of achieving freedom from concern, Arcesilaus also seems to have been strongly motivated by opposition to the views of the Stoics, to which we will now turn.

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<sup>71</sup> Sextus Empiricus' works, entitled *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (Πυρρώνειοι ὑποτυπώσεις, commonly abbreviated as *PH*), and *Against the Mathematicians* (*Adversus Mathematicos*), provide us with the curious phenomenon of a dogmatic attack against all dogma.

<sup>72</sup> **Pyrrhonist Skepticism** developed from the teaching and example of Pyrrho of Elis (c. 360-c.270 BCE), who is generally regarded as the first Skeptic philosopher, and who ultimately served as the inspiration for the later development of the philosophical school of Pyrrhonism, that was founded in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE by Aenesidemus of Knossos (fl. 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE).

<sup>73</sup> **Academic Skepticism** developed under Arcesilaus (c.316-c.241 BCE), who became the sixth head (scholarch) of the Platonic Academy from 246-241 BCE, marking the beginning of the period that is now designated as the Second, or Middle Academy. Academic Scepticism, as it has become known, endured until the end of the leadership of Philo of Larissa (c.154-c.84 BCE), who was scholarch of the Academy from 110-84 BCE.

<sup>74</sup> Bett, 'Socrates and Skepticism', p. 298.

<sup>75</sup> Aenesidemus, and Sextus Empiricus, both seem to have believed that Socrates might have held sceptical views, even if Plato did not. For more detail concerning the approach of Timon, Aenesidemus and Sextus, see Bett, 'Socrates and Skepticism', pp. 298-304.

## Socrates as Moral, Philosophical and Spiritual Exemplar: The Stoics

The Stoic school of philosophy was founded by Zeno of Citium (334-262 BCE) towards the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE. Eric Brown suggests that “Socrates influenced Stoicism profoundly” and that this influence can be seen in two particular ways: (1) the Stoics made extensive use of paradoxical doctrines, including some that are clearly Socratic in origin;<sup>76</sup> (2) prominent Roman Stoics, such as Seneca (4 BCE – 65 CE), Musonius Rufus (c.20-c.101 CE), Epictetus (55-135 CE),<sup>77</sup> and Marcus Aurelius (121-180 CE), all made explicit appeals to the figure of Socrates as an exemplar.<sup>78</sup> However, Brown suggests that it might not be appropriate to distinguish so rigidly between Socratic ‘doctrine’ and ‘example’, and thus he seems, at least implicitly, to endorse Hadot’s understanding of philosophy as a way of life, which then gives rise to discourse:

*A Stoic, however, might well find something wrong with distinguishing these two ways, for it is unlikely that any Stoic encountered the Socratic paradoxes as a matter of theory, entirely cut off from Socrates’ own life. After all, Socrates did not commit any of his theorising about the paradoxes to writing, and the writings about Socrates portray him in action and thereby connect what he says (including his paradoxes) with his way of life. This suggests that reflection on what Socrates did led the Stoics to hold him up as an example to imitate and to endorse the Socratic paradoxes. So understood, there is just one inheritance, the gift of Socrates’ way of life. On this way of looking at things, **there is also something wrong with scouring particular texts to distinguish between the Stoic paradoxes that “really are” Socratic and those that are not. The question for each of the paradoxes is “Did the Stoics arrive at this by reflecting on what Socrates did?”**... the way Socrates lived expresses philosophical commitments that are there to be articulated by anyone who examines his life... it is why Stoicism enlarges our awareness not just of what philosophy can be, but also of what Socrates, the Greek and Roman ancients’ philosopher *par excellence*, was.<sup>79</sup>*

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<sup>76</sup> Brown, ‘Socrates in the Stoa’, p. 275. Cicero (106-43 BCE), in his *Stoic Paradoxes*, concentrated on six Stoic paradoxes, which he claimed were “most Socratic”: (1) only the fine is good; (2) virtue suffices for happiness; (3) vicious actions are equal and virtuous actions are equal; (4) everyone who is not a sage is insane; (5) only the sage is free; and (6) only the sage is rich. Brown suggests that “many scholars today would balk at this list” and would prefer to attribute the following paradoxes to Socrates and the Stoics: (1) no one does wrong willingly; and (2) all virtue is one. Nonetheless, Brown is willing to defend Cicero.

<sup>77</sup> Of all the Stoics, it was Epictetus who devoted the most attention to the figure of Socrates. See: Tad Brennan, ‘Socrates and Epictetus’, in: Ahbel-Rappe & Kamtekar (eds.), *A Companion to Socrates*, pp. 285-297.

<sup>78</sup> Most of the evidence for the view of the early Stoics has been lost, but from what survives it is clear that “early Greek Stoics share the commitments that do lead later Roman Stoics to invoke Socrates as an example.” See: Brown, ‘Socrates in the Stoa’, pp. 275-276.

<sup>79</sup> Brown, ‘Socrates in the Stoa’, pp. 276-277. Brown devotes the remainder of his chapter to a demonstration of the fact that Stoic reflection on Socrates’ way of life leads not only to the so-called ‘prudential paradox’ (no one does wrong willingly) and to the unity of virtue, but also to the six theses that Cicero proposed as Socratic.

Stoic appropriation of the example of Socrates, however, was *not* without some reservations. Brown notes that there are three areas in which Stoics seemed to disagree with, or at least sought to modify, Socratic thought or practice. Firstly, Socrates is portrayed in the works of Xenophon and Plato as a philosopher who was willing to question anyone, regardless of citizenship, ethnicity, age, etc. Stoics were appreciative of Socrates' 'cosmopolitan', non-discriminatory attitude, but were wary of the possible negative effects of exposing some people to dialectical examination, especially younger people. Thus, it could be said that the Stoics gave conditional approval to Socrates' example, tempered by an awareness of the detrimental impact upon Socrates' life brought about, in part, by his unrestricted dialectical practice. Secondly, Socrates seemed to think of his own philosophical life as a divinely-appointed mission, and thus as a kind of full-time career, to which he alone was called. The Stoics, by contrast, insisted that living philosophically is open to all, regardless of their station in life, and even for those who were imprisoned or in slavery. Thirdly, the Xenophonic and Platonic accounts of Socrates depict him as a philosopher who restricted himself primarily to ethical investigation, but the Stoics insisted that philosophers needed to understand the natural world to be able to have true knowledge of themselves and others, and thus to achieve psychological coherence.<sup>80</sup>

For the Stoics, the desire to achieve psychological coherence arose, in part, from Socrates' claim that: "... a good man cannot be harmed either in life or death..."<sup>81</sup> Thus, the basic Stoic 'choice' was that of the pursuit of the moral good, duty or virtue. Happiness was not thought to come from pleasure, or self-interest, but by following the rational, transcendent demands of the good. This kind of happiness was available to all, in this life. The Stoic 'experience' of life was one in which human beings are constrained by fate. Unhappiness arises from the passionate, but futile attempt to acquire things, and from the attempt to flee from miseries that cannot be avoided. Against this backdrop, the Stoics posited a radical distinction between what does, or does not, depend on us. In their view, the only thing that truly depends on us, i.e. over which we have genuine control, is the decision to do good and to live according to reason. The Stoic 'will to do good' is thought of as an unbreachable fortress, which people can construct within themselves, and which will provide freedom, independence, invulnerability, and self-coherence.

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<sup>80</sup> However, some Stoics, such as Ariston of Chios (fl. 260 BCE) opposed the Stoic scholars on the third point, whereas at least one of the other Stoic scholars believed that Socrates did have cosmological views. For more detail about Stoic response to these three points, see: Brown, 'Socrates in the Stoa', pp. 283-284.

<sup>81</sup> *Plato, Apology* 41d, as cited in: Cooper (ed.), *Plato: Complete Works*, p. 36. See also: *Plato, Apology* 30b and 28e. The discussion which follows is dependent on Hadot, pp. 127-139.

## The Stoic Worldview and Stoic Spiritual Exercises

Stoic philosophical discourse consisted of three elements (physics, logic and ethics) and it served the specific, practical requirements of the Stoic choice of life.<sup>82</sup> Stoic physics was intertwined with Stoic ethics, revealing that there are many things which depend on external, rational and necessary causes, and are not under the control of the Stoic practitioner. Human rationality, and the capacity to make rational decisions, were dependent upon the assumption that Nature, or material reality, is inherently rational. Stoic physics manifested Clouser's Pagan Dependency Arrangement, in which the Stoic *Lógos* is the 'Divine' or 'Ultimate Principle' that underpins the universe; it is fundamentally material and impersonal, and unlike later forms of Platonism, there is no religious cult or associated forms of worship. Since the *Lógos* was the 'Divine Principle', the Stoic call to become as rational and self-coherent as possible (by 'conformity to the *Lógos*') was largely *functionally equivalent* to Socrates' call to pursue 'assimilation to the divine'.<sup>83</sup>

The essence of Stoic spiritual exercises<sup>84</sup> can be summed up in the words of Epictetus, who said: "Do not try to make things happen the way you want, but want what happens to happen the way it happens, and you will be happy."<sup>85</sup> Daily practice of logical exercises sought to control inner discourse, eliminate inappropriate value judgements, and overcome human passions.<sup>86</sup> These exercises required a brutally single-minded focus on reality as it is, and not as one would want it to be. All subjective or anthropomorphic value judgements, that manifest human desires for pleasure or self-aggrandisement, must be abandoned. Similarly, the Stoic should turn to Stoic physics as a basis from which to reject a purely human perspective, and instead adopt the transcendent perspective of Universal Reason. As we shall see shortly, Epicureanism also developed a similar set of spiritual exercises, albeit derived from philosophical practice that differed markedly from that of Stoicism.

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<sup>82</sup> Indeed, Chrysippus insisted that: "One teaches physics only so that one can teach the distinction which must be established with regard to goods and evils." See: Hans von Arnim (trans. & ed.), *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, Volume III, (Stuttgart, Germany: B. G. Teubner, 1964), p. 68, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 128.

<sup>83</sup> For recent analysis of the relationship between Stoic theology and Platonism, see: Francesco Ademollo, 'The Platonic Origins of Stoic Theology', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Volume 43 (2012), pp. 217-243. Hadot notes that the form of reason attributed to human beings is *not* the 'Universal Reason', that is immanent within things, but rather it is 'discursive reason', which allows a human being to attribute meaning to the actions of Fate. In his estimation, the ability to render such judgements was the only human freedom that existed in the Stoic worldview. See: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 131.

<sup>84</sup> For details of Stoic spiritual exercises, see: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 135-139.

<sup>85</sup> *Encheiridion*, section 68, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 133.

<sup>86</sup> Parallels between Stoic, and Christian monastic, forms of spiritual exercise will be explored in Chapter 9.

## Epicureanism as a form of Anti-Socraticism and Anti-Platonism

Cicero reveals that Epicurus (341-270 BCE) was exposed to Platonism at an early age through the teaching of Pamphilus, a Platonist (cf. Cicero, *De natura deorum*, 1.72). Epicurus' grounding in the Platonic dialogues is evident in his teachings concerning pleasure and justice. Nonetheless, the school of Epicurus was generally opposed to the Socratic inheritance, especially as mediated through Plato. As Anthony A. Long remarks:

*If Plato's philosophy and Platonism were not the primary targets of Early Pyrrhonism, they clearly occupied that position in the Epicurean tradition.* Epicurus explicitly criticised the theory of atomic elements advanced in the *Timaeus*, probably as part of a sustained attack on Platonic theology and cosmology... The first generation of his followers wrote books against some of Plato's Socratic dialogues... the Epicurean Colotes also attacked the Myth of Er in Book X of Plato's *Republic*, doubtless because it endorses the soul's post-mortem existence.<sup>87</sup>

Furthermore, David N. Sedley points to *indirect* evidence of Epicurean hostility to Plato: "Few of his [Epicurus'] mature doctrines could not be explained in some sense as reactions against Platonism."<sup>88</sup> These anti-Platonic doctrines include: pleasure is the only intrinsic good; the value of virtue to a happy life is entirely instrumental; justice has no reality independent of a society's contingent norms; all perceptions are true; the primary existing things are atoms and the void; and, the soul is a perishable compound of atoms. Long also observes that Epicureanism cannot be reconciled with many other aspects of Platonism, and characterises the relationship between Epicureanism and some other major philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period as follows:

Epicurean hedonism, physicalism, and empiricism, are completely antithetical to the ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, and psychology that Plato appears to approve in those dialogues that apparently contain his most mature philosophy... *Aristotle and the Stoics... as well as Platonism were often perceived (and quite reasonably) as providing a united front against the hedonistic materialism of the Epicureans.*<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Anthony Arthur Long, 'Plato and Hellenistic Philosophy,' in: Benson (ed.), *A Companion to Plato*, p. 429, emphasis added.

<sup>88</sup> David Neil Sedley, 'Epicurus and his professional rivals', in: Jean Bollack & André Laks, *Études sur l'épicurisme antique* (Lille, France: Cahiers de Philologie, 1976), p. 133, as cited in: Long, 'Plato and Hellenistic Philosophy', p. 429.

<sup>89</sup> Long, 'Plato and Hellenistic Philosophy', pp. 429-430, emphasis added.

## Epicurean Physics as a Reaction to Platonism

Titus Lucretius Carus (99-55 BCE), a Roman poet and Epicurean philosopher, was the author of a six book Latin hexameter poem, called *De Rerum Natura*, in which he set out to demonstrate the Epicurean belief that “human beings inhabit a purely mechanistic universe that has nothing to do with intelligent design and divine providence.”<sup>90</sup> In his poem, Lucretius does not refer to Plato by name, but the cosmological ‘errors’ which he seeks to overturn correspond so closely to concepts found within the *Timaeus* that it seems likely that Lucretius was opposing “a currently fashionable way of reading it”.<sup>91</sup>

According to that account [i.e. Plato’s *Timaeus*], the world is the excellent product of a divine and benevolent creator, a living being endowed with a soul, modelled on the ideal Living Being (referring to Plato’s Forms), and destined to last forever, thanks to its creator’s goodness. By contrast, Lucretius argues at length that (1) the world is neither divine nor everlasting; (2) the gods had no motivation or model for creating it; and (3) it is too intractable and inhospitable to have been benevolently fabricated for human benefit.<sup>92</sup>

The Epicurean physics developed within Lucretius’ poem is not intended, in any sense, to be a ‘scientific theory’. It was well known in ancient times that the Epicureans were strongly opposed to the pursuit of what we would now describe as ‘scientific enquiry’.<sup>93</sup> Indeed, Epicurus is at pains to emphasise that Epicurean physics exists solely as a means by which to overcome the fear of death, as well as the fear of divine retribution, which he believed to be the cause of all the human passions, lying at the root of all human unhappiness:

*If we were not disturbed by our worries* about celestial phenomena and death, fearing (because of our ignorance of the limits of pain and desire) that the latter is something dire for us, *we would have no need of the study of nature*... There is no profit to be derived from the knowledge of celestial phenomena other than peace of mind and firm assurance, just as this is the goal of all other research.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Long, ‘Plato and Hellenistic Philosophy’, p. 430.

<sup>91</sup> David Neil Sedley, ‘Theophrastus and Epicurean Physics’, in: Johannes M. van Ophuijsen and Marlein van Raalte (eds.), *Theophrastus: Reappraising the Sources*, Rutgers University Studies in Classical Humanities, Book 8 (Piscataway, NJ, USA: Transaction Publishers, 1998), p. 349, as cited in: Long, ‘Plato and Hellenistic Philosophy’, p. 430.

<sup>92</sup> Long, ‘Plato and Hellenistic Philosophy’, p. 430, words in square brackets added.

<sup>93</sup> See: André-Jean Festugière (Cecil William Chilton, trans.), *Epicurus and His Gods* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1956), Chapter IV, ‘The Religion of Epicurus’, pp. 51-72.

<sup>94</sup> Epicurus, *Capital Maxims*, sections 11 and 12; and *Letter to Pythocles*, section 85, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 118.



## Physics, Theology and the Epicurean Worldview

Epicurean physical research was intimately linked to Epicurean theology, both of which sought to defend and uphold the Epicurean worldview. As we have seen, the ‘existential’ purpose of Epicurean physical research was to provide a firm foundation from which to overcome fear of death and fear of the gods. Epicurus taught that there was an eternal universe, comprised of nothing other than atoms and the void. Since the human body is composed of nothing but atoms, he believed that it will simply disintegrate after death, causing an individual to lose all sensory capacity. Thus, in his view, human beings do not need to fear death.<sup>95</sup>

In his letters to Herodotus and Pythocles, Epicurus develops the theological implications of Epicurean physical research, arguing forcefully for a non-interventionist and non-providential theology, in which the gods are not responsible for the creation of the universe, and do not care about the operation of the universe or about human conduct. However, this apparently negative Epicurean theology also has a more positive aspect, in that it makes room for disinterested contemplation of the gods, whose existence is strongly affirmed. Epicurus thought that the gods were the manifestation of a supremely perfect nature, characterised by happiness, indestructibility, beauty, pleasure, and tranquillity:

Epicurus’ gods are the projection and incarnation of the Epicurean ideal of life. The gods spend their lives enjoying their own perfection and the pure pleasure of existing, with no needs and no worries, in the most pleasant company. Their physical beauty is identical to the beauty of the human figure... Epicurus seems to conceive of them as independent realities who maintain their external existence because they know how to ward off what could destroy them and what is alien to them. The gods are friends of the wise, and the wise are friends of the gods. For the wise, the highest good is to contemplate the splendour of the gods. They have nothing to ask of them, yet they pray to them, in prayers of praise. Their homage is addressed to the gods’ perfection.<sup>96</sup>

Human beings can become ‘assimilated to the divine’ through a radical re-appraisal of the role of pleasure in their lives (an ‘*askēsis* of desire’), as well as through the practice of Epicurean ‘spiritual exercises’, to which we will now turn.

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<sup>95</sup> Epicurus expresses this succinctly in his letter to Menoecus, when he says: “Thus, death is nothing for us. So long as we are here, death is not, and when death is here, we are not.” *Letter to Menoecus*, sections 124-125, in: Jean-François Balaudé (trans.), *Épicure: Lettres, Maximes, Sentences* (Paris, France: Librairie Générale Française, 1994, p. 192, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 120.

<sup>96</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 121-122.

## ***Askēsis of Desire and the Epicurean Spiritual Exercises***

Epicureanism, like Stoicism, can be characterised in terms of an ‘experience’ and a ‘choice’. The Epicurean ‘experience’ is that of persons, who become aware of their existence as individuals, through the consciousness of being a *locus* for pleasure and pain:

The voice of the flesh: not to be hungry, not to be thirsty, not to be cold. ***He who possesses this state, and hopes to possess it in the future, can rival Zeus for happiness.***<sup>97</sup>

The Epicurean ‘choice’ is one that involves the deliverance of the ‘flesh’ from suffering, so that the individual can experience the only genuine pleasure, which is the pleasure of existence itself. The therapeutic purpose of Epicurean philosophy is to educate people to pursue pleasure in the most balanced and rational manner possible, through a process which can be referred to as the *askēsis* (i.e. training) of desire. This training involves a recognition that a great deal of human suffering arises from *faulty assessments* of the nature of pleasure, and of what is necessary to achieve genuine pleasure.

Reflecting aspects of previous ethical discussion in Plato’s *Philebus* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, Epicurean discourse makes a distinction between ‘stable pleasures’, which are to be sought, and ‘mobile’ pleasures’, which are to be avoided. ‘Stable pleasures’, so-called because they lead to a ‘state of equilibrium’, arise from the satisfaction of basic physical needs, such as eating and drinking, and the avoidance of excessive heat or cold. By contrast, ‘mobile pleasures’ are ‘sweet and flattering’, developing in the ‘flesh’, causing exaggerated but ultimately short-lived intensity of sensation. These ‘mobile pleasures’ are inherently insatiable, and thus lead to dissatisfaction and pain. For Epicureans, then, ‘stable pleasure’ is the ultimate good, arising from adequate satisfaction of basic physical needs. ‘Stable pleasure’ also provides peace of mind, and thus contributes to a kind of god-like self-sufficiency, or *autárkeia*, that was the goal of all Hellenistic philosophy. This state of being was described aptly by the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778):

What does one enjoy in such a situation?

Nothing external to oneself; nothing except oneself and one’s own existence.

***So long as this state lasts, one is sufficient unto oneself, like God.***<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Epicurus, *Vatican Sentences*, section 33, in: Balaudé (trans.), *Épicure: Lettres, Maximes, Sentences* p. 213, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 114, emphasis added.

<sup>98</sup> Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Les reveries du promeneur solitaire*, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 116-117.

The pursuit of ‘stable pleasure’ requires a radical re-assessment of a person’s goals and aspirations, i.e. an *askēsis* of desire, since, as Cicero suggests, the reason that most people are unhappy is that they are tormented by “immense, hollow” desires, such as those for luxury, wealth, celebrity or domination of others.<sup>99</sup> In order to pursue an Epicurean *askēsis* of desire, it is necessary to divide all human desires into three basic types:<sup>100</sup>

- (1) ***natural and necessary desires*** are those which arise from an individual’s basic bodily needs, and contribute to behaviours that sustain the life of a person, and/or prevent physical pain or death, such as eating, drinking, the wearing of simple clothing and the building of shelters so as to avoid excessive, heat, cold, noise etc.;
- (2) ***natural but unnecessary desires*** are those which lead to behaviours that are not required for the satisfaction of an individual’s basic bodily needs, such as the consumption of lavish food and drink, or the pursuit of sexual gratification;
- (3) ***unnatural and unnecessary desires*** are produced by false assessments (‘empty opinions’), and include self-aggrandising desires for riches, fame, power etc.<sup>101</sup>

Epicurean *askēsis* of desire required that a person have genuine freedom of action, but such freedom might not seem possible in a universe that consists of only atoms and the void. For this reason, Epicurus introduced his controversial doctrine of ‘the swerve’, i.e. the random deviation of atoms. This doctrine allowed for the formation of physical objects, through the collisions of atoms. More importantly, it also introduced an element of ‘chance’ into an otherwise deterministic universe, and thus was thought to provide a basis for human freedom. Lucretius described the way in which ‘the swerve’ was thought to operate:

If the spirit is not ruled by necessity in all its acts, if it escapes domination and is not reduced to total passivity, it is because of this slight deviation of atoms, in a place and a time determined by nothing.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Cicero, *On the Ends of Goods and Evils*, I, 18, 59, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 117.

<sup>100</sup> This threefold division of desires, which was previously outlined in Plato’s *Republic*, 558d, was appropriated by Epicurus in his *Letter to Menoeceus*, sections 127-128.

<sup>101</sup> The Evagrian schema of ‘Eight Generic Thoughts’ also seems to correspond, to some degree, to the second and third Epicurean categories of desire, with *gluttony* and *lust* perhaps falling into the category of *natural but unnecessary desires*, and the remaining thoughts (*avarice*, *sadness*, *anger*, *akēdia*, *vainglory* and *pride*) being both *unnatural and unnecessary*.

<sup>102</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, III, 31ff, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 120. See: Cicero, *On the Ends of Goods and Evils*, I, 16, 19 for an ancient criticism of this doctrine.

Epicurean spiritual exercises presupposed the freedom provided by ‘the swerve’.<sup>103</sup> These spiritual exercises began with intense meditation on some of the basic teachings of Epicurean philosophy, that were distilled into short formulaic statements, such as the famous ‘fourfold remedy’: “The gods are not to be feared; Death is not to be dreaded; What is good is easy to acquire; What is bad is easy to bear.”<sup>104</sup> Epicureans were also advised to read dogmatic treatises written by Epicurus and other teachers from the Epicurean school. The pursuit of the *askēsis* of desire was practiced within the context of the Epicurean community, in which members provided mutual support and encouragement to each other, in a manner similar to that of the Platonic school. Friendship, which had been praised as an essential part of the philosophical life in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, was highly valued within this Epicurean community, and was considered an important aid to the ongoing ascetic struggle.

Epicurus functioned as a ‘director of conscience’ for those who were members of ‘the Garden’, listening to their thoughts, bearing their burdens and offering wise counsel. This aspect of Epicurean life is one in which the parallels with later Christian monastic communities are particularly strong. Epicurus would encourage his disciples to admit their failings and wrongdoings, and then to accept appropriate admonition. Thus, examination of conscience, confession, and guidance towards correction, were all vital elements of Epicurean spiritual practice. Rather than appealing to the figure of Socrates, Epicurus held himself out as an exemplar of the ideal philosophical life. Seneca reports that Epicureans were advised to “Act as though Epicurus were watching you.” Epicureans responded: “We will obey Epicurus, whose way of life we have chosen.”<sup>105</sup> Disciples were known to attach great importance to visual representations of Epicurus, which were displayed in portraits and even incorporated into items of personal adornment, such as rings. Hadot suggests that this ‘assimilation to Epicurus’ was to be pursued in a relaxed, carefree manner, with the aim of participating in the foundational pleasures of the Epicurean life: the pleasure of knowledge; the pleasure of discussion; the pleasure of friendship; the pleasure of a life in common; the pleasure of becoming aware of the wonders of existence; and, above all, the pleasures of contemplating the infinity of the universe and the majesty of the gods.<sup>106</sup>

<sup>103</sup> For the profound impact of Lucretius’ radical cosmology on later thinkers, after the manuscript of *De Rerum Natura* was rediscovered and copied in the Renaissance period, see: Stephen Greenblatt, *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern* (New York, NY, USA: W. W. Norton and Company, 2011).

<sup>104</sup> The ‘fourfold remedy’ is quoted from a work of Philodemus of Gadara (c.110-c.40 BCE), an Epicurean philosopher and poet, that was recovered from the so-called ‘Villa of the Papyri’ at Herculaneum. See: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 123 and p. 299, n. 79.

<sup>105</sup> Seneca, Letters to Lucilius, 25, 5; and Alexander Olivieri (ed.), *Philodemi Peri Parresias Libellus* (Leipzig, Germany: B. G. Teubner, 1904), p. 22, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 124.

<sup>106</sup> For more detail, see: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 124-125.

## Conclusion

In the current chapter, we have seen how the ideal philosopher is considered to be a being who exists ‘between Gods and men’, aspiring to the serene, carefree existence of the immortals, whilst acknowledging, and even embracing his own mortality. In the course of this investigation, we have observed how the Socratic inheritance was mediated through the teaching and example of older Socratic disciples such as Antisthenes and Aristippus. We have taken careful note of the various ways in which the ‘literary’ or ‘mythical’ Socrates served as a moral and philosophical exemplar, and the extent to which the Socratic inheritance was appropriated, modified, or even rejected by the founders and members of the major philosophical schools of the late Classical, Hellenistic and early Roman periods. Making extensive use of a methodological framework derived from the work of Pierre Hadot, we have sought to determine how it was that ancient philosophy functioned and the role that philosophical discourse and spiritual exercises played in delineating and facilitating the various forms of philosophical life, as well as the existential choice on which they depended.

We have been reminded of the importance of approaching these ancient belief systems on their own terms, without the imposition of anachronistic conceptual categories and assumptions. Far from constituting a *rejection* of religious beliefs and practices, we have seen that ancient philosophy can be more accurately understood as a *purification* of religion, in which the existence of the gods was *not* denied, and devotion to the gods was *not* rejected. It is true that the nature and role of the gods could, at times, be radically re-conceived, perhaps no more so than in the deterministic approach of the Stoics, or the non-interventionist and non-providential theology of the Epicureans. Nonetheless, our investigation has revealed that it is a profound error to attempt to drive a post-Enlightenment inspired theoretical ‘wedge’ between a supposedly ‘rational’ philosophy, on the one hand, and a supposedly ‘irrational’ theology, on the other hand. Rather, most ancient philosophical schools regarded the gods, or as Roy Clouser would have it, ‘the divine’, as the embodiment of rationality, which human beings ought to imitate, so that, as the Platonic Socrates advised, they might “become like God, as much as possible.” Our analysis of ancient Greek theology and philosophy, found in this chapter and those which precede it, has laid a strong foundation for analysis of the role that these belief systems and structures played in the development of subsequent Christian thought and practice. In Chapter 6, then, we will consider the Christian antecedents of the monastic worldview held by Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian.

## Chapter 6

### Early Christian Theology and ‘Assimilation to the Divine’

#### Introduction

From its origins, philosophy developed as a critique of religion: a destructive critique... or a purifying critique. It was a purifying critique in the sense that *philosophy finally tends to transform religion into philosophy... by developing a theology...*<sup>1</sup>

In Chapters 1-5, we have observed the truth of Pierre Hadot’s observations above, about the ways in which the various expressions of ancient Greek and Roman thought that we have surveyed thus far can be thought of as a critique of ancient Greek religion, particularly as it had been expressed in the works of Homer and Hesiod. Critique of religion could be *destructive*, such as that expressed by some Pre-Socratic figures (e.g. Xenophanes), as well as many agnostic or atheistic Sophists. However, critique of religion could also be *purifying*, such as that found in Classical philosophy (e.g. Plato and Aristotle), Hellenistic and Early Roman philosophy (e.g. the Stoics and Epicureans) and especially in Neo-Platonism.<sup>2</sup>

In Chapter 6, we will consider how Christian belief in the doctrine of the Trinity, and in the Incarnation of Jesus Christ, emerged from a process that could be interpreted as a *purifying critique* of earlier concepts of the divine, which led, in turn, to the development of a distinctively Christian theology. We will trace how this purifying critique was reflected in early Christian theological debates, in early creedal statements, and in the teaching of the New Testament scriptures, as mediated through the writings of early Greek Christian Fathers. This analysis will facilitate an examination of the influence of the Greco-Roman philosophical concept of ‘assimilation to the divine’ on early Christian thought and practice, and a consideration of the ways in which early Christianity came to function as a philosophy, i.e. as a way of life, with a particular focus on ‘assimilation to the divine.’

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Hadot (Marc Djaballah & Michael Chase, trans.), *The Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, Cultural Memory in the Present, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stanford, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 2011), pp. 37-38, emphasis added.

<sup>2</sup> Neo-Platonism is a modern designation for a highly influential strand of later Platonic thought developed by figures such as: Plotinus (c.204-270 CE); his student Porphyry (c.204-305); Iamblichus (c.245-c.325 CE); and Proclus (412-485 CE), amongst others. Neo-Platonism had a profound influence upon the development of Greco-Roman philosophy in Late Antiquity, and elements of Neo-Platonic thought were also adopted by several early Christian thinkers. For an introduction to Neo-Platonism, see: Pauliina Remes, *Neoplatonism*, Ancient Philosophies (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2008).

A Christian view of ‘assimilation to the divine’ required careful thought about: (1) the nature of the divine; (2) the problems which might hinder or prevent ‘assimilation to the divine’; and (3) the means by which ‘assimilation to the divine’ could be facilitated. Thus, Christian theological discourse developed in debates about: **Trinitarian theology** (i.e. the nature of the relationship between God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit);<sup>3</sup> **Christology** (i.e. the ontological status and soteriological purpose of the incarnate Jesus Christ);<sup>4</sup> and **Theological Anthropology** (i.e. the nature of human beings and their relationship to the Trinity). There was also a constant focus in these debates on **Soteriology** (i.e. the ways and means by which human beings can be rescued from sin, death and the Devil, and thus achieve ‘assimilation to the divine’).<sup>5</sup> Later in this chapter, therefore, we will examine the early Greek Christian soteriological doctrine of *théōsis*, and will contrast this doctrine with various other pagan alternatives. We will conclude by considering why the Christian concept of God could not be accommodated within the religious structures of the early Roman Empire. So, let us begin our discussion, with an examination of the ways in which Christian theology developed as a purifying critique of earlier concepts of the divine.

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<sup>3</sup> **Issues of Trinitarian theology** featured strongly in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE ‘Arian Controversy’. This debate led to the summoning of the First Ecumenical Council at Nicaea (325 CE), and the proclamation of the Nicene Creed, which was later amended and supplemented at the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople (381 CE). We will examine the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed below. For an introduction to the doctrine of the Trinity, from an Eastern Christian perspective, see: Aristotle Papanikolaou, ‘The Doctrine of the Trinity: its history and meaning’, in: Augustine Casiday (ed.), *The Orthodox Christian World*, Routledge Worlds (Oxford, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 2012), pp. 398-410; and Boris Bobrinskoy, ‘God in Trinity’, in: Mary B. Cunningham & Elizabeth Theokritoff (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 49-62. See also: Elizabeth Theokritoff, ‘Creator and Creation’, in: Cunningham & Theokritoff (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, pp. 78-92. For extended multi-author treatment, see: Gilles Emery (O.P.) & Matthew Levering (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2012); and Peter C. Phan (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to the Trinity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For a history of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE debates and their aftermath, see: Lewis Ayres, *Nicaea and Its Legacy: An Approach to Fourth-Century Trinitarian Theology* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> **Issues of Christology** arose as early as the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE, but became a serious focus of attention in the early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, within the context of the ‘Nestorian Controversy’, which led to the summoning of the Third Ecumenical Council at Ephesus in 431 CE. Christological debate continued to be a focus of attention at the Fourth Ecumenical Council (Chalcedon: 451 CE); the Fifth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople: 553 CE); and the Sixth Ecumenical Council (Constantinople: 680-681 CE). There is a sense in which even the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea: 787 CE), which dealt primarily with the issue of Holy Icons, was also concerned with Christology. For an introduction to Christology and its theological implications in the area of Soteriology, see: Peter Bouteneff, ‘Christ and Salvation’, in: Cunningham & Theokritoff (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, pp. 93-106.

<sup>5</sup> **Issues of Theological Anthropology** came into sharp relief in the mid 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, especially within the context of the ‘Pelagian Controversy’. John Cassian wrote a work that dealt with aspects of both the Nestorian and Pelagian controversies, and even argued that there was a theological connection between the two heresies, since theological discourse about the human nature of Jesus Christ necessarily has a bearing on the understanding of human nature in general. For an introduction to Theological Anthropology, see: Nonna Verna Harrison, ‘The human person as image and likeness of God’, in: Cunningham & Theokritoff (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology*, pp. 78-92.

## Early Christianity and the Nature of the Divine

Genesis 1:1-5, with which the Old Testament section of the Christian Bible begins,<sup>6</sup> attributes the creation of the universe to God (ὁ θεός). The Spirit of God (πνεῦμα θεοῦ) hovered over the waters, and the first act of creation, the bringing of light into the world, was accomplished through God's spoken word (καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Γενηθήτω φῶς):

- 1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἐποίησεν ὁ θεὸς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ τὴν γῆν
- 2 ἡ δὲ γῆ ἦν ἀόρατος καὶ ἀκατασκεύαστος,  
καὶ σκότος ἐπάνω τῆς ἀβύσσου,  
καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐπεφέρετο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὕδατος.
- 3 καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός Γενηθήτω φῶς. καὶ ἐγένετο φῶς.
- 4 καὶ εἶδεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ φῶς ὅτι καλόν.  
καὶ διεχώρισεν ὁ θεὸς ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ φωτὸς καὶ ἀνὰ μέσον τοῦ σκοτοῦς.
- 5 καὶ ἐκάλεσεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ φῶς ἡμέραν καὶ τὸ σκότος ἐκάλεσεν νύκτα.  
καὶ ἐγένετο ἑσπέρα καὶ ἐγένετο πρωί, ἡμέρα μία.

The Johannine prologue, at the beginning of what is perhaps the latest of the four canonical Gospels to be found within the New Testament,<sup>7</sup> appears to be modelled on Genesis 1:1-5.<sup>8</sup> However, some subtle, yet very significant differences are evident in the latter passage. John states that “In the beginning was the Word (ὁ λόγος), and the Word was with God (ὁ θεός) and the Word was God (καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος).”<sup>9</sup>

- 1 Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν ὁ λόγος, καὶ ὁ λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν θεόν, καὶ θεὸς ἦν ὁ λόγος.
- 2 Οὗτος ἦν ἐν ἀρχῇ πρὸς τὸν θεόν.
- 3 Πάντα δι’ αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο, καὶ χωρὶς αὐτοῦ ἐγένετο οὐδὲ ἓν ὃ γέγονεν.
- 4 Ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν, καὶ ἡ ζωὴ ἦν τὸ φῶς τῶν ἀνθρώπων,
- 5 καὶ τὸ φῶς ἐν τῇ σκοτίᾳ φαίνει, καὶ ἡ σκοτία αὐτὸ οὐ κατέλαβεν.

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<sup>6</sup> Citations of the Septuagint will be taken from the standard critical edition: Alfred Rahlfs & Robert Hanhart (eds.), *Septuaginta: Editio Altera* (Berlin, Germany: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Citations of the New Testament will be taken from: Maurice A. Robinson & William G. Pierpont (eds.), *The New Testament in the Original Greek: Byzantine Textform, 2005* (Southborough, MA, USA: Chilton Book Publishing, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> The similarity of scope between the two passages is made clear by the opening words, referring to the time at which the events about to be recounted took place: in the beginning (Ἐν ἀρχῇ). The Greek word ἀρχῇ, as we saw in Chapter 1, is a term that can mean ‘source, origin, or beginning’, and was used by several of the Pre-Socratic thinkers to refer to the basic ‘principle(s)’ of the cosmos.

<sup>9</sup> The Holy Spirit is not mentioned in these early verses, but in John 6:63, words that could be understood as a possible, indirect allusion to the Genesis creation account are recorded. Jesus says: “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.” (NKJV)



In John 1:1-5, we observe the effects of the interaction between Judaism and Greek philosophy that had taken place in the centuries that intervened between the writing of the Old Testament and New Testament passages cited above. This interaction is nowhere more evident than in the many works of the Jewish theologian and philosopher Philo Judaeus (20 BCE-50 CE), also known as Philo of Alexandria. Hadot notes that, in the interpretive tradition to which Philo belonged:

the notion of an intermediary between God and the World – a mediating element called *Sophia* or the *Logos* – played a central role. Here, the *Logos* was the creative word (God said, ‘Let there be light’), which also revealed God. It is from this perspective that we must understand the famous prologue of the Gospel according to John... ***Christian philosophy was made possible by the ambiguity of the Greek word Logos.***<sup>10</sup>

*Lógos* is an extraordinarily multivalent term,<sup>11</sup> with the basic meaning of ‘word’, but it can also refer to every aspect of spoken and written discourse<sup>12</sup>, and, most importantly for philosophical purposes, can carry the meaning of ‘reason’ or ‘rational principle’. *Lógos* was a central element for Heraclitus, and for Plato, *Lógos* was the rational ordering and governing principle of the cosmos. The Stoic philosophers adapted the concept, asserting that the *Lógos* was a rational principle which pervades and sustains the universe, being immanent in all created things, and most especially in human beings. The author of the Johannine prologue appropriated the Stoic *Lógos*, presenting the man Jesus of Nazareth as the Eternal *Lógos* and as the Son of God, thus laying a foundation from which later Christian thinkers could present Christianity as a philosophy, with a form of life, and an associated discourse. In fact, the Johannine prologue came to be regarded as a philosophical text by many prominent non-Christian thinkers, including Amelius (fl. mid 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE), who was initially a devotee of the works of Numenius of Apamea, a Neo-Pythagorean philosopher from Syria (considered by some ancient figures, although *not* by Amelius, to be a forerunner of Neo-Platonism). Amelius later became a student of Plotinus (the founder of Neo-Platonism). Amelius interprets the prologue thus:

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<sup>10</sup> Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Belknap Press, 2002), pp. 237-238, emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> See: Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon, Founded Upon the Seventh Edition of Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1889), pp. 476-477.

<sup>12</sup> *Lógos* as speech or discourse can mean: ‘language’, ‘talk’, ‘saying’, ‘conversation’, ‘statement’, ‘oracle’, ‘maxim’, ‘proverb’, ‘assertion’, ‘promise’, ‘resolution’, ‘command’, ‘a speech, discourse, or oration’, ‘a report, tale, story, or fable’, ‘a narrative, or written history’, or even ‘a proposition, position, or principle’.

This, then was the *Logos*, thanks to which all engendered things were produced while he himself exists always (as Heraclitus believed) and which the Barbarian [that is, John the Evangelist] believed “was near to God” and “was God”, possessing the rank and dignity of a principle. By him absolutely everything was created; in him was the nature of the living being, of life and of being. And it fell into bodies and, donning flesh, took on human appearance; but at the same time it shows the greatness of its nature. When it is freed, it is once again made divine, and is God, as it was before it fell into the world of bodies, and before it descended into flesh and humankind.<sup>13</sup>

Justin Martyr (100-165 CE) was one of the earliest Christian writers to explicitly reconcile Christian thought with Greco-Roman philosophical discourse. He asserted that the Christian Church has the complete truth, but that elements of the truth were also evident in the philosophical schools, since the *Lógos* who revealed all truth in his incarnate life is both the Creative Word of the Christian Scriptures, and also the Divine Reason of the Stoics.<sup>14</sup> The Johannine prologue thus provided the basis for the development, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, of a form of Christian theological discourse now known as ‘*Lógos* Theology’:

Early Christian thinkers were inheritors of the ancient proclivity to personify certain governing principles and this can be seen in their development of the Hellenistic *Logos* theory as a way of expressing a biblical cosmology... They understood the *Logos* as the divine agency acting beside God the Father as the force of creation (the rational principle of all that is, and the head of all that derives from that – revelation and salvation especially.) Clement and Origen of Alexandria did much to popularise this association of biblical and sophistic thought, and other leading patristic contributors to the *Logos* school were Justin Martyr, Tertullian, and Hippolytus... In Orthodox theology... the *Logos* specifically denotes the second person of the Trinity, the eternal Lord who was incarnated on earth as the Christ, and it is the language of *Logos* theology that thus made the articulation of trinitarian theology possible. After the resolution effected by the Council of Nicaea, *Logos* theology became the church’s stable and primary means of expressing Christology, and it underpins all of the major ecumenical statements. Its high point is generally taken to be as manifested in the work of the great fathers Athanasius, the Cappadocians, Cyril of Alexandria, and Maximos the Confessor.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>13</sup> The quotation from Amelius appears in: Eusebius of Caesarea, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, XI, 19, as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 238.

<sup>14</sup> Justin Martyr put forward a doctrine of the ‘Spermatic Logos’: God made ‘seeds’ of the Logos available to all men, before the Incarnation of the Logos (i.e. Jesus Christ) took place. See: Henry Bettenson (ed. & trans.), *The Early Christian Fathers: A Selection from the Writings of the Fathers from St. Clement of Rome to St. Athanasius* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1956), pp. 9-10.

<sup>15</sup> See: John Anthony McGuckin, ‘Logos Theology’, in: McGuckin (ed.), *The Concise Encyclopedia of Orthodox Christianity* (Malden, MA, USA & Oxford, England: John Wiley and Sons, Ltd., 2014), pp. 299-301.

## Christian Theology: Discourse and Way of Life

The English term *theology* is derived from the ancient Greek words *theós*, meaning ‘God’,<sup>16</sup> and *lógos*, which, as we have seen above, can be translated into English in various ways, such as ‘word, thought, or reason’. Thus the term *theology* could be defined as ‘words, thoughts or reasoning *about* God’. This is in fact how the term *theology* is often understood by many people today: as an academic subject, often taught in a classroom setting, perhaps in a university, seminary or Bible college. Such an ‘academic’ understanding developed gradually over many centuries, especially in the universities of Western Europe.<sup>17</sup> However, the Patristic writers,<sup>18</sup> a group of mainly male<sup>19</sup> Christian authors, would have considered a predominantly academic approach to theology as one-sided, inadequate and incomplete. In addition to Christian discourse, founded upon reading, reflection and systematic analysis of the written revelation contained within the Christian Scriptures, many early Christian writers also emphasised that Christianity was first and foremost a way of life, based on a personal, experiential encounter with God, mediated through worship and prayer. Discourse and experience were both necessary, and reciprocal, components of the theological process. Thus, spoken and written discourse about God, informed, but was also informed by, experience of God.

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<sup>16</sup> Henry George Liddell & Robert Scott (eds.), *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1991 [1871]), p. 315.

<sup>17</sup> For analysis of how and why this transition took place, see: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Chapter 11, ‘Eclipses and Recurrences of the Ancient Concept of Philosophy’, pp. 253-270.

<sup>18</sup> The designation ‘Patristic’, derived from the Latin word *pater* (‘father’), is sometimes replaced by the more inclusive term ‘Early Christian Studies’. For a comprehensive introduction to Christian literature written between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries CE, see: Frances Young, Lewis Ayres & Andrew Louth (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2004). The writings of those acknowledged as ‘Church Fathers’ in the Western Christian traditions form a discrete collection, composed in Greek and Latin, beginning with the so-called ‘Apostolic Fathers’ in the late 1<sup>st</sup>-early 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries CE. For Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians, the Church Fathers’ writings are typically considered to end with Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604 CE) in the Western part of the former Roman Empire, and with John of Damascus (d. 749 CE) in the East. However, theologians in the Eastern Christian traditions (i.e. Eastern Orthodox; Ancient Church of the East; Oriental Orthodox; and Eastern Catholics) recognise many other writers as Church Fathers, beyond the standard Western chronological, geographical and linguistic limits.

<sup>19</sup> The traditional name of the academic discipline devoted to the study of these early Christian writings – Patristics – tends to conceal the spiritual and literary contribution made by women in the early Christian centuries. However, an emphasis upon chastity and perpetual virginity within early Christianity, allied with the rise of the Christian monastic movement in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, provided many opportunities for women to transcend their normal social restrictions, especially through the renunciation of marriage. As a result, women such as Melania the Elder (who greatly assisted Evagrius) came to have a particularly influential role in the Egyptian desert, as well as in regions such as Palestine and Cappadocia. See: Young, Ayres & Louth (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Early Christian Literature*, pp. 382-390; John Chryssavgis, *In The Heart Of The Desert: The Spirituality Of The Desert Fathers And Mothers* (Bloomington, IN, USA: World Wisdom Inc., 2003); Laura Swan, *The Forgotten Desert Mothers: Sayings, Lives, and Stories of Early Christian Women* (Mahwah, NJ, USA: Paulist Press, 2001); and Benedicta Ward, *Harlots of the Desert: A Study of Repentance in Early Monastic Sources*, Cistercian Studies, Number 106 (Kalamazoo, MI, USA: Cistercian Publications, 1987).

## ***Kataphatic* ('Positive') and *Apophatic* ('Negative') Theology**

*Positive*, or *kataphatic* theology (from κατάφημι: to assent) is one of two important aspects, or elements of Christian theology. According to James R. Payton, Jr., *positive* theology is based upon affirmations (i.e. positively worded statements) about God:

... positive or kataphatic theology teaches about God through affirmations, [and] it deals with what can be understood, clarified and set forth about God in propositions. Building on what God has revealed about Himself, positive theology seeks to articulate what *can* be affirmed about God and communicated in statements to others.<sup>20</sup>

Fundamental to all Christian theology is the presupposition that God has revealed true, but not exhaustive, information about Himself: (1) in creation; (2) in the Christian Scriptures; and (3), in the person, life and teachings of Jesus Christ, who is understood to be the incarnate (literally, 'enfleshed') son of God and thus the most complete revelation of God available to human understanding. Kallistos Ware emphasises that a *positive* theological method must be complemented by a *negative* approach:

... [written] theology is to a large extent *symbolic*. Yet symbols alone are insufficient to convey the transcendence and the "otherness" of God... we need to use negative as well as affirmative statements, saying what God is *not* rather than what he is. Without this use of the way of negation, of what is termed the apophatic approach, our talk about God becomes gravely misleading.

All that we affirm concerning God, however correct, falls far short of the living truth. If we say that he is good and just, we must at once add that his goodness or justice are not to be measured by our human standards. If we say that he exists, we must qualify this immediately by adding that he is not one existent object among many, that in his case the word "exist" bears a unique significance.

So the way of affirmation [i.e. *positive* theology] is balanced by the way of negation [i.e. *negative* theology]. As Cardinal Newman puts it, we are continually "saying and unsaying to a positive effect." Having made an assertion about God, we must pass beyond it: the statement is not untrue, yet neither it nor any other form of words can contain the fullness of the transcendent God.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> James R. Payton Jr., *Light From the Christian East: An Introduction to the Orthodox Tradition* (Downers Grove, IL, USA: IVP Academic, 2007), p. 72.

<sup>21</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, rev. ed. (Crestwood, NY, USA: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995), p. 14, as cited in: Payton, *Light From the Christian East*, p. 75, words in square brackets added.

*Negative*, or *apophatic* theology (from ἀπόφημι: to deny) emphasises that finite human beings cannot have comprehensive knowledge of the infinite God. It might even be thought of as a less extreme, Christian equivalent to the sceptical discourse of Sextus Empiricus. The *negative* theological approach was originally developed by Philo<sup>22</sup> of Alexandria,<sup>23</sup> in the context of his allegorical interpretation of the Septuagint.<sup>24</sup> Philo's approach later had a considerable impact upon Christian theologians linked to the famous Catechetical School in Alexandria, especially Clement (c. 150-211/216 CE),<sup>25</sup> and then Origen (c.185-c.254 CE), through the influence of Clement.<sup>26</sup> A startling example of *apophatic* theology can be seen in Clement's claim that "God stands outside every category available to human thought" (*Stromateis* 5.81).<sup>27</sup> Of course, if this claim were to be taken literally, and God were genuinely inaccessible to human reasoning, then this would be a denial of the *Logos* theology articulated above, meaning that nothing could be said about God at all. However, these kinds of *negative* theological statements need to be interpreted within the parameters established by ancient Greco-Roman philosophical discourse.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> For analysis of the thought of Philo of Alexandria, see: Torrey Seland, *Reading Philo: A Handbook to Philo of Alexandria* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: William B. Eerdmans, 2014); and, Mireille Hadas-Lebel, *Philo of Alexandria: A Thinker in the Jewish Diaspora*, Studies in Philo of Alexandria, Volume 7 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2012). For multi-author treatment, see: Adam Kamesar (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009), esp. Adam Kamesar, 'Biblical Interpretation in Philo', pp. 65-94; Cristina Termini, 'Philo's Thought within the Context of Middle Judaism', pp. 95-123, and Roberto Radice, 'Philo's Theology and Theory of Creation', pp. 124-145. On Philo's exegetical approach, see: Peder Borgen, *Philo of Alexandria: An Exegete for His Time*, Supplements to Novum Testamentum, Book 86 (Atlanta, GA, USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2005). For the influence of Hellenistic philosophy on Philo, see: Francesca Alesse (ed.), *Philo of Alexandria and Post-Aristotelian Philosophy*, Studies in Philo of Alexandria, Volume 5 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2008). For a consideration of Philo's understanding of the complex relationship between God and humanity, see: Francesca Calabi, *God's Acting, Man's Acting*, Studies in Philo of Alexandria, Volume 4 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> For an impression of life in 1<sup>st</sup> century CE Alexandria, gleaned from the treatises of Philo, see: Dorothy I. Sly, *Philo's Alexandria* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>24</sup> The Septuagint, produced in Alexandria in Egypt, is an early Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures (i.e. the 'Old Testament'). It includes later Greek books not found in the Hebrew collection, as well as Greek additions to books previously written in Hebrew (such as the books of Daniel and Esther). The interpretative approach of Philo was heavily influenced by the Greek philosophical school known to modern scholars as Middle Platonism. Middle Platonism is understood to begin with Antiochus of Ascalon (c. 130-68 BCE) and end with Plotinus (204-270 CE), the founder of a new philosophical school, known today as Neoplatonism.

<sup>25</sup> See: Annewies Van Den Hoek, *Clement of Alexandria and His Use of Philo in the Stromateis: An Early Christian Reshaping of a Jewish Model*, Supplements to Vigiliae Christianae, Book 3 (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill Academic Publishers, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> See: Joseph W. Trigg, *Origen*, The Early Church Fathers Series (Oxford, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 1998), 'Jewish Influences', pp. 11-12.

<sup>27</sup> As cited in: Christopher Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 133.

<sup>28</sup> See: Brendan Cook, *Pursuing Eudaimonia: Re-Appropriating the Greek Philosophical Foundations of Tradition*, Liverpool Hope University Studies in Ethics (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), Chapter 3, 'Pursuing *eudaimonia*: Retrieving the Greek philosophical foundations of the Christian apophatic tradition', pp. 92-132, and Chapter 4, 'The Graeco-Christian apophatic tradition', pp. 133-190.

In Greek thought ‘knowledge’ is commonly taken to imply complete or perfect knowledge. Aristotle defines it as ‘the mind’s identity with its object’ and this interpretation clearly leaves no room for a knowledge which is genuine but incomplete: St Paul’s ‘I know in part’, I Corinthians 13:12. But with negative terms the situation is reversed; if ‘knowledge’ suggests ‘complete knowledge’, then ‘unknowable’ can be taken to mean that *complete* knowledge is impossible; it need not exclude every kind of genuine apprehension. Thus to say that God is *akataleptos*, incomprehensible, suggests a comparison with the Stoic *kataleptike phantasia*, the completely certain apprehension of some perceived fact; it is not difficult to admit that God cannot be known in this fashion!<sup>29</sup>

Stead suggests that all *negative* theological language, including descriptions of God with such negative adjectives as ‘unknowable’, ‘incomprehensible’, ‘ineffable’, is a form of expression that *must* be interpreted in the light of ancient Greco-Roman epistemology. *Apophatic* language seeks to maximise “the depth of the divine mystery”, and points us towards “divine glories beyond our comprehension”, but does not “forbid us to characterise God by epithets, or analogies, which express some aspect of his being.”<sup>30</sup> *Negative* theology, therefore, is a necessary counterpart to *positive* theology:

Apophatic theology makes negations about God, that is, clarifying the things which are *not* true about God. Negative theology points *beyond* human thoughts and words, but it can only be expressed in those thoughts and words... Negative theology invites us into a relationship with God, into a fellowship with him that transcends our human capacities... Thus, negative theology does not undermine positive theology; rather, negative theology builds on positive theology... if theology is done rightly it leads to silence before God, and to serene contemplation of God... ***we must pass on from the concept of God to contemplation of God...*** Theology should not issue in doctrinal wrangling and argument, but into silence, awe, mysticism and worship.<sup>31</sup>

Later, we shall see that the distinction between *positive* and *negative* theology, outlined above, provides a firm foundation from which to assess the nature and purpose of the ascetic theory and practice of the two early Christian figures whom we shall be considering in Chapter 9: Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian.

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<sup>29</sup> Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, p. 133. Stoic conceptions of knowledge and apprehension, especially as found within the works of Epictetus (d. 135 CE), had a considerable influence upon Clement of Alexandria, who, in turn, had an influence upon Athanasius of Alexandria’s *Life of Antony* [*Vita Antonii*]. See: David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 2006), Chapter 2, ‘The New Martyr and Holy Man: Athanasius of Alexandria’s *Life of Antony*’, pp. 23-47, esp. pp. 39-41. The Athanasian demonology, and especially the Stoic emphasis derived from Epictetus via Clement, was developed quite extensively in the writings of Evagrius, and then in the works of Evagrius’s student, John Cassian.

<sup>30</sup> Stead, *Philosophy in Christian Antiquity*, pp. 133-134.

<sup>31</sup> Payton, *Light From the Christian East*, pp. 75-78, emphasis added.

Evagrius' understanding of the nature of Christian theology is captured well in the following excerpt from his work *On Prayer*: "If you are a theologian, you will pray truly. And if you pray truly, you are a theologian."<sup>32</sup> In other words, Evagrius seems to have believed that if a person really *experienced* God (through direct personal apprehension), rather than just knowing facts *about* God, this should be most readily apparent in the quality of that person's prayer. Correct belief and correct teaching about God were undoubtedly important for Evagrius, who participated forcefully in the Trinitarian doctrinal debates of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. Under the guidance of Gregory of Nazianzus (329-389 CE), Evagrius played a leading role at the Second Ecumenical Council in the defence of the Trinitarian teaching represented in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.<sup>33</sup> Nonetheless, Gregory and Evagrius each affirmed that a person needed to come to a deeper experience of God *through prayer and worship*, and thus to transcend intellectual discourse about God.<sup>34</sup>

In order to understand the theory and practice of Christian ascetic life, developed by Evagrius, and elaborated by Cassian, we need to be aware of the Christian theological worldview within which they operated. As noted earlier, we need to be conscious of the ways in which that theological worldview, and the *purifying critique* of the concept of God on which it was based, was shaped by early Christian theological debates, creedal statements, and the teaching of the New Testament scriptures, as mediated through the writings of early Greek Christian Fathers. Therefore, in the following sections, we will consider the theological assumptions of early Greek Christian theologians with regard to: the nature of God; the creation of the world and of humanity; the rebellion of Satan and the demons against God; the relationship between human beings and God; the role of humanity in God's plan for the world; and the theological and existential significance of the subsequent fall of Adam and Eve into sin and separation from God, especially as recounted in *Genesis*, chapters 1-3. We will begin by briefly considering the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and its contribution to a distinctively Christian understanding of the nature of the divine.

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<sup>32</sup> Evagrius, *On Prayer* 60, in: Robert E. Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*. Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 199.

<sup>33</sup> In the light of Evagrius's definition of a theologian (see above), it is worth observing that Gregory of Nazianzus, a primary influence upon Evagrius, is known in the Eastern Orthodox Christian tradition as St. Gregory *the Theologian*. In fact, in the Eastern Orthodox tradition, the title *Theologian* is extremely rare, and has only ever been awarded to three saints: St. John, the 1<sup>st</sup> century CE apostle of Jesus; Gregory of Nazianzus; and Symeon (949-1022 CE), abbot of the Studite monastery in Constantinople, who is known as St. Symeon *the New Theologian*.

<sup>34</sup> Evagrius and Cassian seem to have held an understanding of theology which could be summarised as follows: theology involves a method of study and ascetic practice that leads to true, but not exhaustive *knowledge about God*. This knowledge is then transcended through prayer and worship, so that a person can come into *direct relationship with God*.

## The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the Nature of the Divine

The history and teaching of the Ecumenical Councils, at which many of the most significant Christian creedal statements were produced,<sup>35</sup> have been studied by scholars from a range of backgrounds and denominational perspectives,<sup>36</sup> including those who are Eastern Orthodox,<sup>37</sup> Roman Catholic,<sup>38</sup> Anglican,<sup>39</sup> Lutheran<sup>40</sup> and Presbyterian,<sup>41</sup> amongst others. However, of all the creedal statements produced in the early Christian centuries,<sup>42</sup> the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is arguably the one most immediately relevant to establishing the basic contours of the theological worldview of Evagrius and Cassian, and in particular, their shared understanding of the nature of the divine.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> For analysis of the decision-making processes at the Ecumenical Councils, see: Ramsay MacMullen, *Voting About God in Early Church Councils* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 2006).

<sup>36</sup> For a recent multi-author perspective on the teaching of the Ecumenical Councils, see: Ben Quash & Michael Ward (eds.), *Heresies and How to Avoid Them: Why it matters what Christians believe* (London, England: SPCK, 2007), esp. Janet Martin Soskice, 'Biblical Trinitarianism: The purpose of being orthodox', pp. 122-130.

<sup>37</sup> See: John Behr, *The Way to Nicaea*, The Formation of Christian Theology, Volume 1 (Crestwood, NY, USA: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001); John Behr, *The Nicene Faith: True God of True God*, The Formation of Christian Theology, Volume 2, Part 1; and *The Nicene Faith: One of the Holy Trinity*, The Formation of Christian Theology, Volume 2, Part 2 (Crestwood, NY, USA: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004).

<sup>38</sup> See: Leo Donald Davis, S. J., *The First Seven Ecumenical Councils (325-787): Their History and Theology* (Collegeville, MN, USA: The Liturgical Press, 1990 [1983]), esp. Chapter 3, 'Council of Constantinople I, 381', pp. 81-133.

<sup>39</sup> See: Stephen W. Need, *Truly Divine and Truly Human: The Story of Christ and the Seven Ecumenical Councils* (London, England: SPCK, 2008), esp. Chapter 4, 'Of a rational soul and body: The Council of Constantinople (381 CE)', pp. 63-80; C. FitzSimons Allison, *The Cruelty of Heresy: An Affirmation of Christian Orthodoxy* (London, England: SPCK, 1993), esp. Chapter 5, *The Cappadocians*, pp. 95-104; and Gerald Bray, *Creeds, Councils and Christ: Did the early Christians misrepresent Jesus?* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 1997 [1984]), esp. Chapter 6, 'God was in Christ', pp. 144-171.

<sup>40</sup> See: Douglas W. Johnson, *The Great Jesus Debates: 4 Early Church Battles about the Person and Work of Jesus* (St. Louis, MO, USA: Concordia Publishing House, 2005), esp. Chapter 2, 'The Trinitarian Controversy: From Nicea to Constantinople', pp. 75-104.

<sup>41</sup> See: Stephen J. Nichols, *For Us and for Our Salvation: The Doctrine of Christ in the Early Church* (Wheaton, IL, USA: Crossway Books, 2007), esp. Chapter 3, 'The Triumph of Athanasius: The Battle for Christ at Nicea', pp. 55-74, and Chapter 4, 'In Their Own Words: Select Documents from the Fourth Century', pp. 75-98.

<sup>42</sup> For brief consideration of the texts and sources of early Christian creeds, see: Henry Bettenson & Chris Maunder (eds.), *Documents of the Christian Church*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011), Section II, 'Creeds', pp. 25-27. For a more detailed overview of the development of Christian creedal statements, see: Frances Margaret Young, *The Making of the Creeds* (London, England: SCM Press, 1991), esp. Chapter 1, 'The Making of the Creeds', pp. 1-15; Stuart G. Hall, *Doctrine and Practice in the Early Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Eugene, OR, USA: Cascade Books, 2011 [2005]), esp. Chapters 13-16, pp. 121-172; James Stevenson & William Hugh Clifford Frend (eds.), *A New Eusebius: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church to AD 337*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 2013), esp. Chapter 10, 'Creeds and Canons of Scripture to AD 200', pp. 136-142; James Stevenson & William Hugh Clifford Frend (eds.), *Creeds, Councils and Controversies: Documents Illustrating the History of the Church, AD 337-461*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 2013); and John Norman Davidson Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Harlow, England: Pearson Education Limited, 1972), esp. Chapter VII, 'The Creed of Nicaea', pp. 205-230, Chapter VIII, 'The Meaning and Use of the Nicene Creed', pp. 231-262, Chapter X, 'The Constantinopolitan Creed', pp. 296-331, and Chapter XI, 'The Teaching and History of C', pp. 332-367.

<sup>43</sup> As noted above, and again in Chapter 9, Evagrius supported the official Trinitarian teaching developed at the First and Second Ecumenical Councils, whilst Cassian also upheld the official Christological and Soteriological teaching promulgated at the Third Ecumenical Council.



The Greek Church Fathers were monotheists, having inherited a belief in the existence of only one God from Judaism. However, these early Christian thinkers had to wrestle with the fact that Christian Scripture and liturgical texts ascribed a status to Jesus of Nazareth<sup>44</sup> and the Holy Spirit<sup>45</sup> that might not appear to be entirely compatible with strict monotheistic belief. Throughout most of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, fierce theological argument about these issues raged, until eventually a degree of unanimity was achieved with the promulgation of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. This creed, the historical antecedents of which have been extensively debated by modern scholars,<sup>46</sup> was developed within the context of the First Ecumenical Council, held in Nicaea in 325 CE, but was later expanded at the Second Ecumenical Council, held in Constantinople in 381 CE.<sup>47</sup> An English translation of the text of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed is provided below:

01. I believe in one God, Father Almighty [OR: All-ruling],  
maker of heaven and earth, of all things both visible and invisible.
02. And I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God,  
begotten from the Father before all ages,  
light from light, true God from true God,  
begotten not made,  
consubstantial [OR: co-essential] with the Father,  
through whom all things were made.
03. Who for us men [OR: humans] and for our salvation  
came down from the heavens,  
and became incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary,  
and became man [OR: human].
04. And he was crucified for us under Pontius Pilate, and he suffered and he was buried.
05. And he rose on the third day according to the Scriptures.
06. And he ascended into the heavens, and he is seated at the right hand of the Father.
07. And he will come again with glory to judge the living and the dead,  
and his kingdom will have no end.
08. And I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the lifegiver, who proceeds from the Father,  
who with the Father and the Son is co-worshipped and co-glorified,  
who spoke through the Prophets.
09. I believe in one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church.
10. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins.
11. I look for the resurrection of the dead.
12. And I await the life of the coming age. Amen.

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<sup>44</sup> See: Athanasius of Alexandria (John Behr, trans.), *On the Incarnation* (Crestwood, NY, USA: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> See: Basil of Caesarea (Stephen Hildebrand, trans.), *On the Holy Spirit* (Crestwood, NY, USA: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2011).

<sup>46</sup> See, for example: Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds*, Chapter VII, 'The Creed of Nicaea', esp. Section 5, 'The Basis of N', pp. 227-230.

<sup>47</sup> For the significance of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed for later Christological reflection, see: John Behr, *The Mystery of Christ: Life in Death* (Crestwood, NY, USA: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2006). For contemporary Christian reflection upon the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, from an ecumenical perspective, see: World Council of Churches, *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Apostolic Faith as it is Confessed in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed (381)*, rev. ed., (Eugene, OR, USA: Wipf and Stock, 2010 [1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1991]).

The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, also known as the Symbol of Faith, falls into three main sections, dealing respectively with the characteristics and roles of: God the Father (Article 1); Jesus Christ (Articles 2-7); and the Holy Spirit (Articles 8-12). The first section affirms the existence of only one God, who is the heavenly Father and ruler over all creation. The brief statement here about God as the creator of *all things*<sup>48</sup> contrasts starkly with the vision of creation in Hesiod's *Theogony*. In Hesiod's scheme, the gods were immortal, but not eternal, coming into being alongside a pre-existing eternal material universe.<sup>49</sup> By contrast, the Christian God was thought to be immortal, as well as eternal and self-existent.

The second section of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed affirms the divinity of Jesus Christ, referring to him as 'Lord' (κύριος).<sup>50</sup> Christ is consubstantial (ὁμοούσιον, 'of one nature') with the Father, and is thus pre-existent and the co-creator of the universe. The remainder of the second section is concerned with: (1) the incarnation of Jesus Christ as a human being; and (2) his role in the salvation of humanity from sin, death and the Devil; both were thought to provide the basis for the Christian soteriological doctrine of *théōsis*, or 'assimilation to the divine', as we will see later in this chapter.

The third section of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed affirms the divinity of the Holy Spirit, who, like Jesus Christ, is referred to as 'Lord' (κύριος). The Holy Spirit's role in creation is alluded to by the use of the title 'Lifegiver' (τὸ ζωοποιόν), and, reflecting Christian liturgical usage, He is said to be "co-worshipped and co-glorified with the Father and the Son". Thus, the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, at least as it was interpreted by the Cappadocian Fathers, reflects an understanding of the divine in which: the Father is the personal *arkhē* (the source, or 'font' of divinity);<sup>51</sup> the Son (Jesus Christ) is eternally begotten of the Father; and the Holy Spirit eternally proceeds from the Father.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Christian theologians, such as Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373 CE) argued that God's creation of the entire universe was a 'creation from nothing' (*creatio ex nihilo*). See: Gerhard May (A. S. Worrall, trans.), *Creatio Ex Nihilo: The Doctrine of 'Creation out of Nothing' in Early Christian Thought* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: T & T Clark International, 2004); and, Paul Copan & William Lane Craig, *Creation Out of Nothing: A Biblical, Philosophical and Scientific Exploration* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> On the ontological status of Chaos in the *Theogony*, see: John Bussanich, 'A Theoretical Interpretation of Hesiod's Chaos', *Classical Philology*, Volume 78, Number 3 (July 1983), pp. 212-219.

<sup>50</sup> Κύριος represented the τετραγράμματον (lit., 'four letters') i.e. the Hebrew name for God, often rendered in Latin letters as YHWH, or, with the vowels supplied, as YAHWEH.

<sup>51</sup> See: J. Warren Smith, 'The Trinity in the Fourth-Century Fathers', in: Emery & Levering, *The Oxford Handbook of the Trinity*, pp. 109-122, esp. 'Phase 5: Endgame: The Eunomians vs the Cappadocians', pp. 114-116. Smith (p. 116) notes that: "For the Cappadocians... the persons are real distinctions within God. God does not merely appear as three persons in the economy of salvation but is triune from eternity."

<sup>52</sup> The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed was later modified in the Western Church, to state that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father 'and from the Son' (in Latin, *filioque*). See: A. Edward Sicienski, *The Filioque: History of a Doctrinal Controversy*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2010), esp. Chapter 1, 'The Procession of the Holy Spirit in the New Testament', pp. 17-32.

## Sin, Death and the Devil: Soteriology of the Early Church Fathers

In the first half of this chapter, we have been considering the development of the Christian concept of the divine. In this section, we will turn our focus to the problems which might hinder, or prevent, ‘assimilation to the divine’.<sup>53</sup> These problems can be briefly enumerated as: (1) sin; (2) death; and (3) Satan, or the Devil. Satan and the demons were thought to have been created as angels, in a state of *relative* perfection, i.e. with genuine free will, and the capacity to either love and serve God, or to hate and rebel against God. Adam and Eve, the first human beings, were also created as children,<sup>54</sup> in a state of *relative* perfection, with the God-given capacity to become either immortal or mortal, through the appropriate use, or the misuse of their free will. These original human beings had the opportunity to exercise their free will correctly, and then, through a process of growth, maturation and ‘assimilation to God’ (described variously in modern literature as *deification*, *divinisation*, or *théōsis*)<sup>55</sup> to reflect the totally selfless love of God, and progress towards moral perfection and immortality.<sup>56</sup> God had given the first man and the first woman only one commandment, that they should not eat from the fruit of the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.<sup>57</sup> Satan and the demons had already freely rebelled<sup>58</sup> and fallen away from God. Having been banished from heaven, they were motivated by pride, envy and hatred to wreak revenge, seeking to harm God indirectly by bringing ruin upon humanity. Thus Satan, in the guise of the serpent, tempted and deceived Eve into eating the forbidden fruit.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> The summary in this section is intended to be nothing more than an overview of basic soteriological presuppositions which informed the monastic worldview held by Evagrius and Cassian, especially insofar as some of these soteriological presuppositions differ from those that emerged in later Western Christian theology under the influence of the teaching of Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) about ‘original sin’ and predestination. The summary is largely dependent upon the published doctoral thesis of John Romanides (George S. Gabriel, trans.), *The Ancestral Sin* (Ridgewood, NJ, USA: Zephyr Publishing, 2002).

<sup>54</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons (died c. 200 CE) and Theophilus of Antioch (died c. 185 CE) both held this view. See: Romanides (Gabriel, trans.), *The Ancestral Sin*, pp. 152-153.

<sup>55</sup> After Adam and Eve’s fall into sin, an alternate process of *théōsis* became necessary.

<sup>56</sup> Theophilus of Antioch, *Epistle To Autolycus*, 2, 27: “God made man neither immortal nor mortal... but capable of being either one, in order that, should he incline toward things of immortality and keep the commandment of God, he would be rewarded by Him with immortality and become godlike. If, however, he should turn to things of death by disobeying God, he would be the cause of death to himself. For God made man free and sovereign.” Cited in: Romanides (Gabriel, trans.), *The Ancestral Sin*, p. 32.

<sup>57</sup> Genesis 2:16-17 - And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die. [All Biblical citations in English are taken from the New King James Version].

<sup>58</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Refutation and Overthrow of the So-Called Knowledge*, 4, XLI, 2, 3: “The devil was the cause of his own apostasy and that of others”. Cited in: Romanides (Gabriel, trans.), *The Ancestral Sin*, p. 79.

<sup>59</sup> Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, 16: “Man disobeyed God, having been deceived by the angel who, because of God’s many gifts to man, was jealous and cast a spell on him, thus ruining himself and convincing man to sin through disobedience of the commandments of God... Thus by his falsehood, the devil was the cause of man’s exile from Paradise”. Cited in: Romanides (Gabriel, trans.), *The Ancestral Sin*, p. 79.

The first humans' sin, known in Greek Christian theology as the *Ancestral Sin*, led to the serpent and the earth being cursed,<sup>60</sup> but, in the account in Genesis, God *never* cursed Adam, Eve or their descendants.<sup>61</sup> There is no indication that God intended to punish later, as yet non-existent, generations for the Ancestral Sin. Furthermore, the early Greek Church Fathers did *not* accept the view, later developed by the Latin writer Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033-1109), that human death was a punishment from God, but rather that death was neither administered directly by God, nor indirectly, using Satan as God's agent.<sup>62</sup> Satan was seen as a genuine enemy, who had misused his free will in order to persuade Adam and Eve to sin; their physical death was neither caused, nor desired, by God; humanity, through its willing co-operation with Satan, brought death *upon themselves*.<sup>63</sup> Genesis 2:17 refers to spiritual death, that is, the withdrawal of the pure life-giving Holy Spirit of God from Adam and Eve as a result of the impurity of their sin. Adam is said to have lived until he was 930 years old,<sup>64</sup> but without the indwelling presence of God, the bodies of Adam and Eve *became* corruptible and eventually subject to physical death.<sup>65</sup> Corruptibility and physical mortality were then passed on to their descendants, but *not* any kind of Augustinian 'original guilt'. Therefore, human death was *not* seen by the Greek Fathers as an act of God's wrath, but rather as an act of divine compassion, so that humans would not be trapped in a state in which they were eternally cut off from God.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Genesis 3:14 and 17.

<sup>61</sup> Genesis 3:16, in which God states that He will greatly multiply Eve's pain in childbearing, has been understood in Western post-Augustinian theology as a curse placed by God directly on Eve. For a modern argument that God's action should be interpreted as *a personal punishment of Eve* rather than a curse placed on all women, and for an explanation of the significance of this distinction, see: Adrien Bledstein, 'Was Eve Cursed? (or Did A Woman Write Genesis?)', *Bible Review* (February 1993), pp. 42-45.

<sup>62</sup> Basil the Great, bishop of Caesarea (c.329-379 CE), *Homily on why God is not the cause of evils*, P. G. 31, 345: "To the extent that [man] stood apart from life he also drew closer to death. For life is God, and the deprivation of life is death. Thus Adam prepared death for himself through his withdrawal from God, as it is written, 'Those who separate themselves from You are lost.' Therefore, God did not create death, but we brought it upon ourselves by our wicked purpose. Neither did He prevent the dissolution, for the reasons already stated: so that the illness would not be preserved immortal in us". Cited in: Romanides, *The Ancestral Sin*, p. 31.

<sup>63</sup> Athanasius the Great (c.293-373 CE), *De Incarnatione*, 5: "when, by the counsel of the devil, men turned away from things eternal, they returned to things of corruptibility and became themselves the cause of dissolution unto death". Cited in: Romanides (Gabriel, trans.), *The Ancestral Sin*, p. 31.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Genesis 5:5.

<sup>65</sup> See: Romanides (Gabriel, trans.), *The Ancestral Sin*, pp. 41-45.

<sup>66</sup> Irenaeus, *Refutation* 3, XXVII, 5-6: "God showed mercy to the one who had been deceived. For the same reason, He also cast him out of paradise and removed him from the tree of life, not because He begrudged him the tree of life, as some maintain, but because He had compassion toward him and did not desire that he should continue to live thus in sin eternally, or that evil should be interminable and unhealed. But He set a boundary to the sin of man, interposing death and thus causing the end of sin, putting an end to it by the dissolution of the flesh in the earth so that man, ceasing to live unto sin and dying to it, might begin to live unto God". Cited in Romanides (Gabriel, trans.), p. 100. Romanides notes that: "Elsewhere [Irenaeus] specifically says that the cause of corruptibility is Satan... and the essence of death is man's separation by sin from God."

The early Greek Christian tradition regarded the true opponents of mankind to be sin, death and most especially, the Devil. Thus, the miraculous actions of Jesus, including forgiveness of sins, the healing of the sick, the raising of the dead, and the casting out of demons, were understood to be the beginning of the final defeat of Satan. The implications of this perspective are expressed well in the Letter to the Hebrews:

Since the children have flesh and blood, Christ too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death - that is, the devil - and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.<sup>67</sup>

The reality of this cosmic warfare against Satan was a foundational presupposition: the Devil was *never* thought of as an agent of God's will, and was *always* thought to be an opponent of God and humanity. The demons were not able to inflict death upon humans directly, so they sought to lead humans into sin, so that they might separate humans from God permanently. The demons were also believed to be the ultimate cause of persecution, especially that which involved arrest, imprisonment, trial, torture, and eventually led to either denial of the faith, or, death as a Christian 'martyr'.<sup>68</sup> Despite the fervent opposition to pagan political and religious power which led some Christians to embrace martyrdom, Christians within the early Roman Empire were also heavily influenced by the various social, economic, political, religious and philosophical assumptions which contributed to a distinctive Greco-Roman worldview. These presuppositions were manifested in many different ways, through societal structures, institutions and forms of behaviour. Therefore, later in this chapter, I will consider some of the aspects of the Greco-Roman worldview that had significant effects upon Christian thought about martyrdom. Before doing so, however, we will examine the distinctive Christian understanding of 'assimilation to the divine', upon which, at least in part, Christian aspirations to martyrdom were built.

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<sup>67</sup> Hebrews 2:14-15. Likewise, 1 John 3:8 depicts the defeat of Satan, and the overthrow of his attempts to lead humans into sin, as the *main reason* for the Incarnation of Jesus Christ: "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

<sup>68</sup> Many scholars have suggested that Christian monasticism was in some sense a 'replacement' for martyrdom. I will assess these claims in Chapter 8. For various expressions of this view, see, for example: Edward Eugene Malone, *The Monk and the Martyr: The Monk as the Successor of the Martyr* (Washington, D.C., USA: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950); Aileen Hartney, *Gruesome Deaths and Celibate Lives: Christian Martyrs and Ascetics* (Exeter, Devon, England: Bristol Phoenix Press, 2005), especially Chapter 5, 'The Rise of the Holy Person in Late Antiquity', pp. 59-77; and Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, Library of New Testament Studies, Volume 307 (London, England & New York, NY, USA: T & T Clark, 2006), p. 38 and n. 126.

## The Christian Doctrine of *Théōsis*: Achieving ‘Assimilation to the Divine’

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the immortality of the Greek gods is the characteristic that most clearly distinguishes gods from humans in the works of Homer (and Hesiod):

What especially characterizes divinity in the eyes of Homer is immortality, to such a degree that for Homer the terms *theos* [“god”] and *athanatos* [“undying”, or “immortal”] are synonyms. The immortality of the gods implies an eternal youth as well as a happy life in the unchanging abode of Olympus, well above human miseries.<sup>69</sup>

Perhaps one of the most important teachings of Christian theology to be influenced, albeit indirectly, by the Greek religious thinking outlined above, is the distinctive Christian doctrine of *théōsis*, which is also known by terms such as *theopoiesis*, *deification* or *divinisation*. *Théōsis* is a teaching which appears in the New Testament writings,<sup>70</sup> as well as the writings of many Church Fathers,<sup>71</sup> and still plays a vital role in the theology of the contemporary Eastern Orthodox Church.<sup>72</sup>

The Christian teaching of *théōsis* can be expressed briefly as the belief that human beings can become assimilated to God during life, and more especially after death, through a process of moral and spiritual purification, in union with Christ and His Church. However, this teaching differs fundamentally from pagan Greek conceptions of the afterlife, in its emphasis upon the necessity of the human body to the process of *théōsis*, a process that culminates with the bodily resurrection of each Christian believer (see below).

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<sup>69</sup> Jules Gross, (Paul C. Onica, trans.), *The Divinisation of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers*, (Anaheim, CA, USA: A & C Press, 2002), p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> For the role that the doctrine of *théōsis* played in the theological anthropology and soteriology of the Pauline writings in the New Testament, see: Geurt Hendrik Van Keuten, *Paul's Anthropology in Context: The Image of God, Assimilation to God, and Tripartite Man in Ancient Judaism, Ancient Philosophy and Early Christianity*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen testament, Band 232 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2008); M. David Litwa, *We Are Being Transformed: Deification in Paul's Soteriology*, Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft, Book 187 (Berlin, Germany: Walter De Gruyter, 2012); and Benjamin Carey Blackwell, *Christosis: Pauline Soteriology in Light of Deification in Irenaeus and Cyril of Alexandria*, Wissenschaftlichen Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2, Number 314 (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

<sup>71</sup> For recent treatments of the doctrine of *théōsis* in the writings of the Church Fathers, see: Paul M. Collins, *Partaking in Divine Nature: Deification and Communion* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: T & T Clark International, 2010); Michael J. Christensen & Jeffery A. Wittung, *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 2008); and Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006).

<sup>72</sup> For an understanding of the role of *théōsis* in the contemporary Eastern Orthodox tradition, see: Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person*, Contemporary Greek Theologians, Volume 5 (Crestwood, NY, USA: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987).

## Humans Created in the Image and Likeness of God

The Christian doctrine of *théōsis* presupposes the consistent teaching of the Old and New Testaments that human beings, male and female, are created in the image and likeness of God. Genesis 1:26-27 is the *locus classicus* for this doctrine:

- 26 Then God said,  
“Let Us make man [ἄνθρωπον] in Our image [κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν],  
according to Our likeness [καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν].  
Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of heaven, over the cattle,  
and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that moves on the earth.”
- 27 So God made man [τὸν ἄνθρωπον];  
in the image [κατ’ εἰκόνα] of God He made him;  
male [ἄρσεν] and female [θῆλυ] He made them.<sup>73</sup>

In *Genesis 5:1-3*, we read of Adam begetting a son ‘according to his form’, rather than ‘according to his likeness’:

- 1 This is the book of the genesis of mankind (ἄνθρώπων)  
in the day God made Adam (τὸν Ἀδὰμ);  
whom He made in God’s image (κατ’ εἰκόνα).
- 2 He made them male and female, and blessed them;  
and the day He made them He called His name Adam.
- 3 Now Adam lived two hundred and thirty years,  
and he begot a son according to his form (κατὰ τὴν ἰδέαν αὐτοῦ),  
and image (κατὰ τὴν εἰκόνα), and named him Seth.

Later, in *Genesis 9:6*, the teaching that human beings have been made ‘in the image of God’ is used as the basis for the belief that the taking of human life will be avenged, thus implicitly affirming the intrinsic value of all human life:

- 6 “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed;  
because I made man in God’s image.”

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<sup>73</sup> Unless otherwise noted, Old Testament passages in this section are taken from: St Athanasius Academy of Orthodox Theology, *The Orthodox Study Bible* (Nashville, TN, USA: Thomas Nelson, 2008). The English translation of the Old Testament has been made directly from the Septuagint text. New Testament passages in this section are taken from the New King James Version.

The teaching about the creation of human beings ‘in God’s image’ is also affirmed in several places throughout the Deuterocanonical books. These passages, which can each be seen as a ‘theological gloss’ on Genesis 1:26-27, bring out some of the implications of the basic theological doctrine. In Sirach 17:1-3, the author notes that human beings are mortal and have a limited lifespan, despite carrying God’s authority and being created in His image:

- 1       The Lord created man from the earth, and returned him to it again.
- 2       He gave them a certain number of days and an appointed time,  
         And He gave them authority over it [i.e. the earth].
- 3       He clothed them in strength like His own, and He made them in His image.

However, in 4 Ezra 8:44, the author maintains that God created the universe specifically for the benefit of human beings:

- 44       ... man... has been formed by your hands  
         and is called your own image, because he is made like you,  
         and for his sake you have formed all things... [New Revised Standard Version]

Furthermore, in Wisdom 2:23, the author asserts that human beings have been created for immortality [*aphtharsía*; lit. ‘incorruption’]. In Wisdom 6:18-19, we see the beginnings of the outline of the doctrine of *théōsis*, insofar as love for wisdom [i.e. *philosophía*], through the keeping of the ‘laws of wisdom’, is said to be the ‘assurance of incorruption’, which brings one near to the eternal, immortal God.

- 23       For God created man for immortality and made him an image of His own eternity [*aīdiótētos*].
- 18       ... love [for wisdom] is the keeping of her laws,  
         and giving heed to her laws is the assurance of incorruption;
- 19       And incorruption brings one near to God.

In the New Testament, the doctrine of ‘creation in the image of God’ is put forward as the basis for the rejection of idolatry<sup>74</sup>, and also serves as an explanation of why slander should be considered a great evil.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Acts 17:29 – “... since we are the offspring [*génos*; literally, the race, stock, or family] of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.

<sup>75</sup> James 3:8-9 – “With it [i.e. the tongue] we bless our God and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness [*homoiōsis*] of God.



## Christ as the Image of God: Adam as the Image of Christ

Elsewhere in the New Testament, reflection upon the theological significance of the Incarnation of Jesus Christ led to further refinements of the doctrine of ‘creation in the image of God.’ These refinements took into account the ways in which earlier thinkers, like Philo of Alexandria, had made use of Old Testament passages that referred to the role of *Wisdom*:

- 25 For wisdom [*sophía*] is the exhalation [*atmís*] of the power [*dýnamis*] of God,  
and the emanation [*apórroia*] of the pure glory [*eilikrinēs dóxa*] of the Almighty;  
Therefore nothing defiled enters her.
- 26 For she is the radiance of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the operative power of God,  
and the image [*eikōn*] of His goodness [*agathótēs*].

In Colossians 1:15, it is asserted that “Christ is the image [*eikōn*] of the invisible [*aóratos*] God, the firstborn over all creation.” Thus, it seems that this author is ‘assimilating’ Jesus Christ to the personified figure of Wisdom. Similarly, the concept of ‘the radiance of eternal light’, referred to in Wisdom 7:26, seems to be present in 2 Corinthians 4:3-4, when it speaks of Christ potentially “shining” on those who have not yet responded to the gospel.

In 1 Corinthians 15, and Romans 5, the Apostle Paul develops what can be called the ‘Adam-Christ’ typology. In Romans 5:14, Adam is described as “the type [*týpos*: literally, a figure or an image] of Christ who was to come.” This typology is presented in 1 Corinthians 15:42-49, in which the similarities and differences between Adam and Christ are made clear, and in which Christ’s role in the general resurrection of the dead is revealed:

- 42 So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption.
- 43 It is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power.
- 44 It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.  
There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.
- 45 And so it is written, “The first man Adam became a living being.”  
The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.
- 46 However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.
- 47 The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.
- 48 As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust;  
and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.
- 49 And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, let us also bear the image of the heavenly Man.

## The Metaphor and the Doctrine of *Théōsis*

Norman Russell begins his magisterial examination of the doctrine of *théōsis* with some important observations about the transition from an earlier metaphorical usage of the concept, to a more dogmatic expression of *théōsis* in later Byzantine writers:

All the earlier patristic writers who refer to deification, although sometimes conscious of the boldness of their language, took it for granted that their readers understood what they meant. Clement of Alexandria was first to use the technical vocabulary of deification, but he did not think it necessary to explain it. No formal definition of deification occurs until the sixth century, when Dionysius the Areopagite declares: Deification (θέωσις) is the attaining of likeness to God and union with him so far as possible' (*EH* 1. 3, PG 3. 376A). Only in the seventh century does Maximus the Confessor discuss deification as a theological topic in its own right. The reason for this is that deification language is most often used metaphorically. The implications of the metaphor were clear to its first hearers or readers and did not need to be spelled out, the context of the utterance enabling them to construe its meaning. But by the sixth century the metaphorical sense was fading. Deification was becoming a technical term susceptible of definition. That is to say, the same truth which was originally expressed in metaphorical language came in the early Byzantine period to be expressed conceptually and dogmatically.<sup>76</sup>

Russell points out that the early Fathers used deification language in one of three ways: (1) nominally;<sup>77</sup> (2) analogically;<sup>78</sup> or (3) metaphorically. *Metaphorical usage* is more complex, and is characterised by an ethical approach and a realistic approach:

The ethical approach takes deification to be the attainment of likeness to God through ascetic and philosophical endeavour, believers reproducing some of the divine attributes in their own lives by imitation... the realistic approach, which is based on the participation model, has two aspects, one ontological, the other dynamic. The ontological aspect is concerned with human nature's transformation in principle by the Incarnation, the dynamic with the individual's appropriation of this deified humanity through the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, p. 1.

<sup>77</sup> *Nominal usage* interprets the Biblical application of the word 'gods' to human beings as a title of honour. Cf. Psalm 81:6 (Septuagint), also cited by Jesus Christ in John 10:34.

<sup>78</sup> *Analogical usage* can be seen in the way that Moses functioned as a 'god' to Pharaoh. Cf. Exodus 7:1.

<sup>79</sup> Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, pp. 2-3. Russell's use of the expression 'in principle' is "a convenient way of referring to God's action in the Incarnation before the benefits accomplished by it come to be internalised by the believer through the life of faith" (p. 2, footnote 5).

## Christian *Théōsis* Contrasted With Other Forms of Assimilation to God

The Christian teaching of *théōsis* is sometimes expressed using phraseology derived from the Bible, in which it is stated that humans can participate in, or partake of, the divine nature of God.<sup>80</sup> Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons presented this teaching in the form: “God the Logos became what we are, in order that we may become what he himself is”.<sup>81</sup> Athanasius the Great, bishop of Alexandria put it more succinctly as: “God became man, so that man might become divine.”<sup>82</sup> As indicated above, *théōsis* is predicated upon the Incarnation of Jesus Christ<sup>83</sup> and the salvific nature of the Christian sacraments.<sup>84</sup> *Théōsis* is a doctrine which presupposes that a Christian has actually died, and been raised to eternal life with Christ, through the initiatory sacrament of baptism. Baptism is believed to effect a genuine union with Christ, so that the believer becomes able to “partake of the divine nature” of Christ, and thus become assimilated to God, through a disciplined life of moral and spiritual purification, allied with participation in the other sacraments (especially the Eucharist).<sup>85</sup> Christian *théōsis* differs from pagan *deification* in many ways, not least of which is the belief that Christian *théōsis* is potentially available to *all* human beings, and *always* requires a process of purification. Furthermore, a deified Christian person is *never* considered worthy of worship, which is always reserved for the Holy Trinity alone.

Christian *théōsis* should not be confused with other superficially similar pagan beliefs, such as ἀποθέωσις. *Apothéōsis* describes the belief that a mortal being, such as a hero like Hercules, could be granted divine status after death by the gods. However, such a grant of *deification* was a favour that was bestowed upon a relatively *limited* number of humans, and was entirely at the behest of the gods. It generally had little to do with any struggle for moral attainment or spiritual purity.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> 2 Peter 1:3-4 reads:

**3** ... [Christ’s] divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of [God] who called us by glory and virtue,  
**4** by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, **that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature,** having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. [Emphasis added.]

<sup>81</sup> Irenaeus of Lyons, *Against Heresies* 5 praef., as cited in: Christensen, *Deification*, p. 23.

<sup>82</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria, *On the Incarnation of the Logos* 54, as cited in: Christensen, *Deification*, p. 23.

<sup>83</sup> The Incarnation (literally ‘enfleshment’) of Jesus Christ is the belief that the divine Son of God, the second person of the Holy Trinity, took on human form and became a divine human being, a God-man.

<sup>84</sup> Conventionally, there are 7 Christian sacraments: baptism; chrismation/confirmation; the Eucharist, or, Holy Communion; confession; marriage; ordination; and the anointing of the sick or dying.

<sup>85</sup> In Greek Christian theology, the consumption of the bread and wine of the Eucharist is understood to allow a genuine participation in the deified flesh and blood of Jesus Christ.

<sup>86</sup> For an exploration of Cicero’s highly influential views concerning *apothéōsis* and immortality, see: Spencer Cole, *Cicero and the Rise of Deification at Rome* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

Christian *théōsis* should also *not* be linked to the ancient belief that a ruler, such as a pharaoh, king or emperor, was in some sense a direct representative of the gods, who either possessed divinity during his or her lifetime, or would become divine upon death. This pagan form of *deification*, available only to rulers, had little to do with moral or spiritual purity. It formed the basis of the so-called ruler cult, which provided social, economic, political, and religious stability within the Hellenistic kingdoms and the Roman Empire, but was seen by Jews and Christians as a particularly loathsome and repugnant form of idolatry:

The new kings who succeeded Alexander were all in a sense usurpers and so looked for religious support to help legitimize their pretensions and reinforce the claims of their new dynasties. It is a feature common to virtually all the new houses that they adopted some special protector god, necessarily from among the Olympians, since they still carried the veneration which sprang from a weight of tradition. The adoption of these patron gods by Hellenistic kings frequently (though not in Macedonia) links up with the institution of ruler-cult, that is the worship of the dead and later of the living monarch (and his wife) as gods...<sup>87</sup>

The requirements of the Roman imperial ruler cult were such that it was effectively impossible for early Christians to be considered good citizens of the Roman Empire, because “the standard for even the most nominal display of good citizenship was set far in excess of what the Christians could meet.”<sup>88</sup> Christian aversion to idolatry, and especially to Roman recognition of the Roman Emperor as a god, was a trait which they shared with the Jews. But if this is the case, why were the Jews not persecuted to the same extent as the Christians?

It seems that the Romans had learned, after their conquest of Judaea in 63 BCE, that monotheistic belief prevented the Jews from participating in any of the usual signs of public Roman worship, such as offering sacrifice to the pagan gods, or later, in the imperial period, offering sacrifice to the Emperor, or having a statue of the Emperor placed in the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. Two bloody, but ultimately unsuccessful, Jewish uprisings against the Roman authorities (in 66-70 CE, and then again in 132-135 CE) demonstrated to the Romans the depth of Jewish hatred for pagan polytheism, and their firm commitment to monotheistic belief.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Frank William Walbank, *The Hellenistic World*, Fontana History of the Ancient World (London, England: Fontana Press, 1992), pp. 210 and 212. See: Chapter 12, ‘Religious Developments’, pp. 209-226.

<sup>88</sup> Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, p. 40. For a detailed overview of the functioning of the Emperor Cult, see: Simon R. F. Price, *Rituals and Power: The Roman Imperial Cult in Asia Minor* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1996), especially Chapter 9, ‘Rituals, Politics and Power’, pp. 234-248.

<sup>89</sup> See: Jörg Rupke, *From Jupiter to Christ: On the History of Religion in the Roman Imperial Period* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2014), Chapter 9, ‘Polytheism and Pluralism: Observations on Religious Competition in the Roman Imperial Age’, pp. 169-184.

## The Incompatibility of Christian and Early Roman Imperial Views of the Divine

Jewish and Christian devotion to monotheistic faith made them anomalies within the polytheistic Roman Empire. The Romans had somewhat reluctantly adopted a policy of exempting the Jewish people from the sacrifices normally required from other citizens. Instead, a State-funded sacrifice on behalf of the Emperor took place daily.<sup>90</sup> However, the Romans were not prepared to extend similar privileges to the Christians, who, like the Jews, were prepared to die for their faith, but unlike the Jews, would not kill for their faith. Jewish belief undermined the principles upon which the Empire had been built, and Christians increasingly sought to subvert these principles by dying publicly in the Romans arena as martyrs. But what were these principles?

Conquered peoples contributed their own gods to the Roman pantheon, and the Romans encouraged continued devotion to ancestral and civic deities... The only condition was that Roman gods, and particularly Roma, were also to be worshipped. Since power was associated with the gods, conquered nations had little reason to resist this view of reality; if the Romans had superior military might, their gods must also be the more powerful. Political hierarchy on earth reflected the power relations of the divinities. This was not religious faith; it was just how things were.<sup>91</sup>

Christianity clashed with the Roman religious worldview because both Christian theology and early Roman Imperial ideology presented conflicting *meta-narratives*.<sup>92</sup> Each system sought to portray the world using similar language, rituals and symbols, but had invested these with mutually incompatible meanings.<sup>93</sup> Robin Darling Young notes that:

These voices could only clash because they represented two distinct societies' divergent sacrificial systems - one customary, the other a new interpretation of an ancient and exclusive practice dedicated to making a sacrifice to the God of Israel. Each sacrificial system left no room for the other, although Roman officials and some Christians thought they could do so... [this was] an irresolvable conflict, a conflict in which two societies and their religions were to be found irreconcilable and mutually indigestible.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Paul Keresztes, *Imperial Rome and the Christians: From Herod the Great to Around 200 A.D.* (London, England: United Press of America, 1990), p. 90.

<sup>91</sup> Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, p. 54.

<sup>92</sup> A *meta-narrative* could be described as an overarching story, or set of assumptions, which seeks to encompass and explain all of reality.

<sup>93</sup> Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, p. 40.

<sup>94</sup> Robin Darling Young, *In Procession Before the World: Martyrdom as Public Liturgy in Early Christianity*, The Père Marquette Lecture in Theology 2001 (Milwaukee, WI, USA: Marquette University Press, 2001), pp. 1-2; 4.

As we saw earlier, Christians had appropriated the Greek term *kyrios*, meaning “Lord”, which had been used in the Greek translation of the Jewish Scriptures as a designation for God. However, Christians now applied this term to Jesus Christ as well, and used it as part of their fundamental affirmation of the divinity of Jesus, through the use of the expression “Jesus is Lord.”<sup>95</sup> Romans typically used the term *kyrios* (lord) when referring to many different divine figures, including the Emperor himself. Thus, for the polytheistic Romans, there were many gods, and many lords, but for monotheistic Christians there was only one God (the Father) and only one Lord (Jesus Christ). As the Apostle Paul remarked:

- 4 ... we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one.
- 5 For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth  
(as there are many gods and many lords),
- 6 yet for us there is one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we for Him;  
and one Lord Jesus Christ, through whom are all things, and through whom we live.<sup>96</sup>

But why was the Christian rejection of idolatry so threatening for the Roman authorities and people? Strangely enough, at least from a modern perspective, it was precisely because the Christians were considered to be ‘atheists’, whose refusal to worship the gods, and the emperor, was thought to threaten the stability of the Roman Empire:

In a culture where life revolved around cultic worship, abandoning civic cults would have had profound, and perhaps debilitating, social and economic implications for the Christian converts. However, more important for the Christians were the perceived implications of their actions for whole cities. Such wholesale rejection of the gods was considered to be dangerous by the residents of the cities, for it was believed that the gods could bring down their wrath upon a community, or part of a community who slighted them; ‘civic peace, the success of agriculture and freedom from earthquake or flood’ were down to ‘the benevolence of the gods’. To alienate a deity would threaten the goodwill of the god, and so Christians could be held responsible for disasters that occurred in the community... Christians, therefore, induced in their fellow townsfolk a fear of the wrath of the gods, opening themselves up to the charge of being considered *atheoi* [atheists]... This refusal by Christians to take part in the normal social and cultic activities attracted the charge of *odium humani generis* – haters of the human race – a charge frequently employed during the Neronian persecutions.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:3.

<sup>96</sup> 1 Corinthians 8:4-6.

<sup>97</sup> Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, pp. 46-47.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we have considered how Christianity can be thought of as a *purifying* critique of earlier concepts of the divine, especially through the development of *Lógos* theology and the subsequent formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. We have examined the influence of Greco-Roman philosophy on early Christian thought and practice and have observed how early Christianity itself came to function as a philosophy, i.e. as a way of life with an associated discourse. We have seen how Christian theological discourse came to be expressed in terms of *kataphatic* ('positive') and *apophatic* ('negative') aspects, which bound together the intellectual and experiential components of the knowledge of God and the living of the Christian life. We have taken note of the various means by which theological discourse developed in the early Greek-speaking Christian world, especially through reflection upon the meaning of the Christian Scriptures by the Church Fathers in their own writings, and in conciliar pronouncements, such as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed.

In our examination of the Christian doctrine of *théōsis*, we have traced the various philosophical and theological antecedents of this remarkable teaching, and have contrasted *théōsis* with other forms of 'assimilation to God', such as *apothéōsis*, or the divine ruler cult. This examination has helped us to understand the basic incompatibility of Jewish and Christian monotheism with Roman polytheism, and how the inevitable clashes that occurred due to the steadfast refusal of Christians to participate in the standard Roman rituals of citizenship (such as offering sacrifice<sup>98</sup> in the context of local civic cults, or within the context of the Emperor Cult) was the primary reason that so many Christians met their deaths through martyrdom. In Chapter 7, therefore, we will investigate the phenomenon of Christian martyrdom. We will examine the ways in which potential martyrs prepared for their confrontations with Roman Imperial authorities through long periods of ascetic training, and shall explain how this ascetic training was derived, in part, from Greek religious and philosophical models. Finally, we shall consider how Christian ascetic training for potential martyrdom might have provided a foundation for the development of Christian monasticism.

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<sup>98</sup> For a brilliant study of the importance of sacrifice to the conflicts between the Roman authorities and Christians, see: George Heyman, *The Power of Sacrifice: Roman and Christian Discourses in Conflict* (Washington D.C., USA: The Catholic University of America Press, 2007).

## Chapter 7

### Martyrdom and Ascetic Training for Virtue

#### Introduction

Several centuries before the Common Era, Antiphon the Sophist (480-411 BCE)<sup>1</sup> criticised those who do not focus sufficiently on life in the present moment:

There are people who do not live their present life; it is as if they were preparing themselves, with all their zeal, to live some other life, but not this one. And while they do this, time goes by and is lost. We cannot put life back in play, as if we were casting another roll of the dice.<sup>2</sup>

Early Christians who believed in doctrines such as “the resurrection from the dead”, and “the life of the world to come”, would almost certainly have come under the censure of a person like Antiphon, since many of them “were preparing themselves, with all their zeal, to live some other life...” However, for these zealous Christians, preparation for the next life was *the main purpose* of the present life. This preparation could take many forms, but a common element was often an emphasis upon training for virtue.<sup>3</sup> The general process and goal of such ascetic endeavour, as it had been understood by many Post-Socratic philosophers, is captured well in the words of Plotinus:

If you do not see your own beauty yet, do as the sculptor does with a statue which must become beautiful: he pares away this part, scratches that other part, makes one place smooth, and cleans another, until he causes a beautiful face to appear in the statue. In the same way, you too must pare away what is superfluous, straighten what is crooked, purify all that is dark, in order to make it gleam. And never cease sculpting your own statue, until the divine light of virtue shines within you.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> As noted earlier, in Chapter 3, there is scholarly debate as to whether Antiphon the Sophist is the same individual as the Athenian orator from the deme of Rhamnus in Attica, whose dates are given above.

<sup>2</sup> Antiphon, B LVIIIa, LII, in: Jean-Paul Dumont (ed.), *Les Présocratiques*, 21<sup>st</sup> ed., Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (Paris, France: Gallimard, 1988), p. 1,112, as cited in: Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 188.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Training for virtue’ here is understood in the ‘Xenophonic’ sense outlined in Chapter 4: *askēsis* (i.e. physical, mental, emotional and/or spiritual training) leads to *aretē* (i.e. ‘goodness’ or ‘excellence’).

<sup>4</sup> Plotinus, *Enneads*, I, 6 (1), 9, 7ff., as cited in: Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 191, emphasis added.



In Chapter 7, we will explore various aspects of Christian martyrdom, including the usage of relevant terms in the Bible and other sources, as well as modern scholars' definitions of the concept and what it entails. We will trace the origins of Christian martyrdom and will also examine the various methods of ascetic training that came to be associated with it. At this point, therefore, it is worth briefly recalling the history of Greco-Roman 'training for virtue', which exercised such a profound influence on early Christian thought and practice.

As we saw in Chapter 1, Greek *paideía* ('education' or 'socialisation') in the Archaic Period was primarily concerned with training young men to acquire a range of military abilities, through participation in arms training, gymnastic sports, horsemanship and hunting. The preeminent value for the *áristoi* was that of *philotimía*, or love of glory and honour. Hesiod subtly challenged the values and prejudices of the aristocratic elite, through his presentation of Zeus as a guarantor of divine justice, and his claim that all men could pursue *aretē* ('goodness', 'excellence' or 'virtue'). Socrates assisted with the transition from a primarily outward focus on behaviour, toward an inward focus on moral intention. This trajectory continued in the Post-Socratic philosophical schools, most of which embraced elements of the Xenophonic emphasis upon training (*askēsis*) as a means to achieve self-mastery (*enkrátēia*), patient endurance (*kartería*) and self-sufficiency (*autárkeia*):

Almost all the schools advocated the practice of *askēsis* (a Greek word meaning "exercise") and self-mastery. There was Platonic *askēsis*, which consisted in renouncing the pleasures of the flesh and in adopting a specific dietary regime, which, under the influence of Neopythagoreanism, sometimes went as far as vegetarianism. Thus *askēsis* was intended to weaken the body by means of fasting and sleeplessness, so that the individual could better live the life of the spirit. Then there was Cynic *askēsis* (also practiced by certain Stoics), which advocated enduring hunger, cold, and insults, as well as eliminating all luxury, comfort, and artifices of civilisation, in order to cultivate independence and stamina. There was Pyrrhonian *askēsis*, which trained the individual to view all things as indifferent, since we cannot tell if they are good or bad. There was that of the Epicureans, who limited their desires in order to accede to pure pleasure. And there was that of the Stoics, who corrected their judgements of objects by recognising that we must not become attached to indifferent things. ***All these schools called for a kind of self-duplication in which the "I" refuses to be conflated with its desires and appetites, takes up a distance from the object of its desires, and becomes aware of its power to become detached from them. It thus rises from a partial and particular vision to a universal perspective, be it that of Nature or that of the Spirit.***<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 189-190, emphasis added. We will briefly explore Hadot's concept of the 'universal perspective', or the 'view from above', later in this chapter.

## The Phenomenon of Christian Martyrdom

Martyrdom, in general, is a phenomenon that has often been criticised, misunderstood or misrepresented, both in ancient and contemporary scholarship. Ancient authors, such as Lucian of Samosata (c.125-after 180 CE), Marcus Cornelius Fronto (c.100-170 CE), and Epictetus (c.55-c.135 CE), demonstrated an awareness of the zeal for death that existed amongst many early Christians, but these writers regarded Christians who prepared and strove for death as “poor wretches”, who held a “deceitful hope”. They also thought that the Christian martyrs’ lack of fear, and drive for death, was a form of “madness.”<sup>6</sup>

Some modern scholars, such as Kenneth R. Morris, Geoffrey E. M. de Ste Croix (1910-2000) and Glanville L. Williams (1911-1997), have suggested that the desire for death of one of the most well-known Christian martyrs, Ignatius, bishop of Antioch (c.50-c.117 CE), may have been nothing more than “a neurotic death-wish”,<sup>7</sup> an “abnormal mentality”<sup>8</sup> or “a morbid obsession.”<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, after the traumatic events in the USA on September 11, 2001, and more recent atrocities committed by the so-called ‘Islamic State’ in countries in and beyond the Middle East, many people have come to associate the term ‘martyr’ with violent ‘jihadists’, ‘Islamists’ or ‘Muslim fundamentalists’, who seem bent on killing as many of the ‘infidels’ as possible on their way to ‘Paradise’. Osama Bin Laden, the former leader of the Muslim terrorist organisation known as Al-Qaeda, reflected this contemporary perspective well, when he said in 2007: “The happy [man] is the one that Allah has chosen to be his martyr... The Prophet Mohammed wished upon himself this status.”<sup>10</sup>

As we shall see in Chapter 7, Christian martyrdom reflected the ‘agonistic’, competitive spirit of ancient Greece, especially as it was manifested in the ascetic practices and spiritual exercises of the philosophical schools. Christian martyrdom also incorporated and built upon a number of the doctrinal presuppositions that were outlined in Chapter 6, especially the notion that the Christian life involves unrelenting warfare against Satan and the demons.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom and Cosmic Conflict in Early Christianity*, Library of New Testament Studies, Volume 307 (London, England & New York, NY, USA: T & T Clark, 2006), pp. 36-37.

<sup>7</sup> Kenneth R. Morris, ‘“Pure wheat of God” or neurotic deathwish?: A Historical and Theological Analysis of Ignatius of Antioch’s Zeal for Martyrdom’, *Fides et Historia*, Volume 26, Number 1 (Winter/Spring 1994), pp. 24-41, as cited in: Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, p. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey E. M. de Ste Croix, ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?’, *Past and Present*, Volume 26, Number 1 (1963), pp. 6-38, as cited in: Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Glanville L. Williams, *The Sanctity of Life and the Criminal Law*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York, NY, USA: Knopf, 1970), p. 254, as cited in: Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, p. 25.

<sup>10</sup> BBC News, Sunday 15 July, 2007, available online at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/6899398.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/6899398.stm) Accessed on Saturday August 9<sup>th</sup>, 2014 @ 3:30 pm.

## The Concept of the ‘Martyr’: An Analysis of Ancient Usage of the Term

In light of the confusion and misapprehension which has long surrounded the concept and practice of martyrdom, and because it is essential to have an adequate understanding of Christian martyrdom before we can move on to assess the claim that Christian martyrdom was, in some sense, ‘replaced’ by Christian monasticism, I will now examine various possible definitions of the term ‘martyr’, based upon ancient Greek usage, and will then provide a detailed analysis of the Biblical evidence.

The term ‘martyr’ itself derives from the Greek word μάρτυς (*mártus*). In different contexts, the term *mártus* conveyed some or all of the following meanings: to be a witness; to bear witness; to bear witness in favour of another; to bear witness to a thing; to testify or declare that a thing is so; to provide evidence. A related term, μαρτυρία (*martûría*), carried the meaning of ‘testimony’, or ‘evidence’.<sup>11</sup> *Mártus* and *martûría* were used particularly in a judicial setting, to describe someone giving evidence in a legal trial, which was held in the presence of the appropriate authorities. Wherever the Greek word *mártus* appears in the Old Testament<sup>12</sup> or New Testament sections of the Christian Scriptures, the word also seems to convey the basic sense of ‘witness’. The following individuals or groups are described as witnesses on behalf of God, or on behalf of Jesus Christ: the king David;<sup>13</sup> the Old Testament prophets;<sup>14</sup> the prophet Samuel;<sup>15</sup> the prophet Isaiah and all the people of Israel;<sup>16</sup> the prophet John the Baptist;<sup>17</sup> the apostles of Jesus Christ;<sup>18</sup> the apostle Paul;<sup>19</sup> the apostle Peter;<sup>20</sup> the apostle John;<sup>21</sup> two unnamed witnesses in the Book of Revelation, who “prophesy on behalf of God for one thousand two hundred and sixty days, clothed in sackcloth”;<sup>22</sup> and finally, also in the Book of Revelation, “the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands”.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Henry George Liddell, Robert Scott & Stuart Jones, *The Online Greek-English Lexicon*, entries 67248 and 67239, accessed from *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* at: <http://www.stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj> on April 27, 2015.

<sup>12</sup> The Old Testament references below are derived from the Septuagint.

<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 55:3-4.

<sup>14</sup> Hosea 12:10; Acts 10:43; Romans 3:21.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Samuel 12:5.

<sup>16</sup> Isaiah 43:10 and 12; 44:8.

<sup>17</sup> John 1:6-8, 15 and 32; 3:11 and 3:28; 5:32-33 and 36.

<sup>18</sup> Luke 24:48; John 15:27; Acts 1:8 and 22, 2:32, 3:15; 4:33; 5:32; 10:39 and 41; Acts 13:31.

<sup>19</sup> Acts 22:15, 23:11, 26:16, 26:22; 1 Corinthians 15:15

<sup>20</sup> 1 Peter 5:1.

<sup>21</sup> 1 John 1:2; 3 John 1:12; Revelation 1:2.

<sup>22</sup> Revelation 11:3.

<sup>23</sup> Revelation 20:4.

All of the individuals or groups mentioned above seem to have functioned, either by word or action, as prophets. But what was the *content* of their message? Unfortunately, most of the Biblical references listed above do not reveal what words (if any) these witnesses may have proclaimed. Nonetheless, *the resurrection of Jesus Christ* is identified as the content of the witness of various persons in Acts 1:22, 2:32, 3:15, 4:33, 5:32, 10:39-43, 26:22-23; 1 Peter 5:1; and 1 John 1:2. Furthermore, there are two other relevant passages in the New Testament which refer to the final words of Jesus Christ, when he was on trial for his life before the Roman procurator of Judaea, Pontius Pilate. These passages are particularly significant because records of Christ's trial, as well as other written descriptions of later Christian trials (in accounts known today as Martyr Acts) served as models for Christian confrontations with Roman civic or imperial authorities. In John 18:33-38, we find the following account of Christ's trial before Pontius Pilate:

- 33      Then Pilate entered the Praetorium again, called Jesus, and said to Him,  
           “Are You the King of the Jews?”
- 34      Jesus answered him, “Are you speaking for yourself about this,  
           or did others tell you this concerning Me?”
- 35      Pilate answered, “Am I a Jew? Your own nation and the chief priests have delivered You to me.  
           What have You done?”
- 36      Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world,  
           My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews;  
           but now My kingdom is not from here.”
- 37      Pilate therefore said to Him, “Are You a king then?”  
           Jesus answered, “You say rightly that I am a king.  
           For this cause I was born, and for this cause I have come into the world,  
           that I should bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.”
- 38      Pilate said to Him, “What is truth?” And when he had said this, he went out again to the Jews,  
           and said to them, “I find no fault in Him at all.” [New King James Version]

There are a number of significant points made in this passage from the Gospel of John. Firstly, Jesus accepts Pilate's suggestion that he is a king (v.37); secondly, Jesus claims that his kingdom is *not* of this world (v.36); thirdly, Jesus claims that he has servants, and that if his kingdom *were* of this world, then those servants *would* fight for him, (v.36); fourthly, Jesus states that the purpose of his life was to “bear witness to the truth”, central to which seems to be the claim that Jesus is a king (v.37), and that everyone who is “of the truth” hears his voice, and thus, presumably, will also accept the claim that Jesus is a king.

The Apostle Paul<sup>24</sup> makes an allusion to the confrontation between Jesus and Pilate (outlined above), in a final exhortation to his protégé that is found in 1 Timothy 6:11-16. In the course of this confrontation, Jesus “*witnessed* the good confession”:

- 11 But you, O man of God... pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness.  
 12 Fight the good fight of faith, [ Ἀγωνίζου τὸν καλὸν ἀγῶνα τῆς πίστεως ]  
 lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called  
 and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.  
 13 I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things,  
 and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate,  
 14 that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing,  
 15 which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate,  
 the King of kings and Lord of lords,  
 16 who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light,  
 whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen.

In v. 12, Timothy is said to have “*confessed* the good confession [ὡμολόγησας τὴν καλὴν ὁμολογίαν] in the presence of many witnesses”, whereas in v. 13, Christ was “the one *witnessing* [μαρτυρήσαντος] before Pontius Pilate the good confession”. As we have seen, Christ’s “good confession” occurred shortly before his death, in the presence of Pontius Pilate. The “good confession” seems to have been concerned with Jesus’ status as a king (John 18:37) and the nature of his kingdom (John 18:36). By contrast, Timothy’s “good confession” may have occurred at Timothy’s baptism, or perhaps at his ordination (see 2 Timothy 2:2).<sup>25</sup> Timothy’s “good confession” appears to be closely linked to the concept of eternal life (1 Timothy 6:12), which is derived exclusively from “God who gives life to all things” (v. 13), a God “who alone has immortality” (v. 16). In Chapter 1, we saw that ancient Greek poets, such as Homer and Hesiod, described immortality as the primary characteristic which distinguished the ‘undying’ pagan gods from mortal human beings. Significantly, Paul repudiates all such Greco-Roman polytheistic claims, claiming that it is the Christian God “who alone has immortality” (v.16), and who can “call” human beings to “eternal life” (v.12), thus implicitly rejecting the possibility of other forms of ‘assimilation to the divine’, such as *apotheōsis* or forms of the ancient ruler-cult.

<sup>24</sup> The so-called Pastoral Epistles (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus) have traditionally been attributed to the Apostle Paul. Many modern Biblical scholars would question that attribution, but I do not intend to pursue the matter here, since it does not materially affect the current discussion.

<sup>25</sup> Wayne A. Meeks (ed.), *The Harper Collins Study Bible: A New Annotated Edition by the Society of Biblical Literature* (New York, NY, USA: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 2,237; see note on 1 Timothy 6:12.

## Contemporary Definitions and Assessments of the Nature of Martyrdom

Based on the Biblical evidence surveyed thus far, we have seen that a Christian *mártus*, or ‘witness’ could be described as an individual who testified, in a prophetic manner, even at the risk of his or her own life, to the truths that God:

- (1) had raised Jesus Christ from the dead;
- (2) had appointed Jesus Christ to be the cosmic king; and
- (3) would raise, to eternal life, those who acknowledged Jesus Christ as king.

But how do contemporary scholars understand the concept of martyrdom, based on an analysis of the historical development of the ideologies and practices of martyrdom?<sup>26</sup> Jan Willem van Henten and Friedrich Avemarie have examined various ancient Greco-Roman, Jewish and Christian texts, and have put forward a more generic definition of a martyr: “a martyr is a person who, in an extremely hostile situation, prefers a violent death to compliance with a demand of the (usually pagan) authorities.”<sup>27</sup> Elsewhere, van Henten has suggested that a Martyr Act should follow a basic outline, in which a pagan edict leads to a clash of loyalty, between the beliefs held by a Christian or Jew and the State’s demands. The martyr then refuses to compromise his or her religious convictions, which leads to the Christian or Jew making an explicit confession of faith, and then being put to death.<sup>28</sup>

Marc Brettler has argued that it is anachronistic to describe early Jewish religiously-inspired deaths as ‘martyrdoms’, since he claims that there is no evidence of the phenomenon in the Hebrew Scriptures, although he concedes that there is some evidence in the Septuagint, in the accounts of the Maccabees.<sup>29</sup> However, Daniel Boyarin maintains that, since the boundaries between Judaism and Christianity were often unclear in the early centuries CE, it is equally anachronistic for us today to make a rigid distinction between them. In fact, Boyarin argues that the phenomenon of martyrdom itself contributed significantly to the development of new and separate identities for the Jewish and Christian communities.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> For further analysis of the ideologies and practices of martyrdom, see the discussion later in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 8, in which the relationship between martyrdom and monasticism is explored.

<sup>27</sup> Jan Willem van Henten & Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 2002), p. 3.

<sup>28</sup> Jan Willem van Henten, *The Maccabean Martyrs as the Saviours of the Jewish People: A Study of 2 and 4 Maccabees* (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill Publishers, 1997), p. 7, as cited in: Middleton, p. 10.

<sup>29</sup> See: Henten & Avemarie, *Martyrdom*, p. 3. *Mártus* does not appear with a new religious meaning until mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century CE (*Martyrdom of Polycarp* 1:1), then, in Latin c. 180 CE (*Acts of the Scillitan Martyrs* 15). An alternate rendering of the concept in Hebrew as ‘sanctification of the name’ was adopted in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE.

<sup>30</sup> See: Daniel Boyarin, *Dying for God: Martyrdom and the Making of Christianity and Judaism* (Stanford, CA, USA: Stanford University Press, 1999), esp. Chapter 4, ‘Whose Martyrdom Is This, Anyway?’, pp. 93-126.

Arthur J. Droge and James D. Tabor define the general characteristics of martyrdom and the circumstances surrounding it as follows:<sup>31</sup>

1. They reflect situations of opposition and persecution.
2. The choice to die, which these individuals make, is viewed by the authors as necessary, noble and heroic.
3. These individuals are often eager to die; indeed, in several cases they end up directly *killing themselves*.
4. There is often the idea of vicarious benefit resulting from their suffering and death.
5. The expectation of vindication and reward beyond death, more often than not, is a prime motivation for their choice of death.<sup>32</sup>

Droge and Tabor's list complements our earlier Biblically-derived definition of a Christian 'witness'. The concepts of *vicarious benefit*, and *vindication and reward beyond death* are particularly helpful as an explanation of the willingness of *some* early Christians to embrace death (remembering that the Christian community tended to inflate the actual numbers for a variety of reasons). It is also important to be aware of the central role played by the concept of honour in Greco-Roman life.<sup>33</sup> Honour was considered the most valuable thing that a person possessed, and much time and effort had to be put into its maintenance. Honour was associated with the idea of largesse or extravagance, which meant that in order to display one's honour, one had to show excessive generosity. What was true of an honourable man's wealth was even more true of his life, as Carlin Barton explains:

The Romans, like the Greeks, believed that a man possessed only what he gave away. Life was a treasure that gained value or power only when expended. The person who preserved his life at any cost was a miser, growing thin on his savings, living amid wealth with sunken emaciated cheeks, like Telesphorus of Rhodes, Seneca's paradigm of the man caged, mutilated, and reduced to filth by his commitment to life. He was a thing of dirt, his spirit caged and contracted. In contrast, ***the chosen, the voluntary, the generous death was the extreme renunciation that put a high charge on life. It was the renunciation that enhanced life, that enhanced the value of a thing being renounced. Moreover, the chosen death sacralised, empowered the person or thing or value on which it was spent.***<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Arthur J. Droge & James D. Tabor, *A Noble Death: Suicide and Martyrdom among Christians and Jews in Antiquity* (San Francisco, CA, USA: Harper San Francisco, 1992), p. 75, as cited in: Margaret Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Marc Brettler, 'Is There Martyrdom in the Hebrew Bible?', in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, pp. 3-22.

<sup>33</sup> See: Carlin Barton, 'Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds', in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, pp. 23-38.

<sup>34</sup> Barton, 'Honor and Sacredness', in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, p. 26, emphasis added.

It is clear that such an attitude towards the renunciation of one's own life had profound implications for the development of Christian martyrdom, especially because, for a Roman, the loss of honour was even more to be feared than the loss of life itself. For example, if a person had suffered a disastrous, seemingly unrecoverable loss of honour, perhaps as a soldier who had been comprehensively defeated in battle, then the only way to redeem oneself was to "be fiercer in attacking oneself than those who would destroy you."<sup>35</sup> In practice, this meant that one had to willingly accept torture and death, and even embrace them, in order to demonstrate that one had not been humbled:

It was hard to preserve one's honour. It was infinitely harder to regain it. Preserving one's honour required vigilance and bravery. Redeeming one's honour required ferocity. In particular, redeeming one's honour required a contumacious commitment to one's own annihilation. The vindication of one's honour – when it did occur – was always a savage miracle... Destruction was a superior form of sacrifice. ***Self-destruction was the supreme form of munificence, the extremes of largesse and deprivation at once.*** The Romans rarely identified with or wanted to be seen as victims, even in the direst circumstances. And so their stories of vindication of honour are designed not to elicit pity, not to reveal a victim, but to reveal an unconquered will.<sup>36</sup>

The concept of the *unconquered will* is critical to understanding the unusual bravery and determination of many Christian martyrs, whose response to suffering and degradation was based on and drew inspiration from the example of gladiatorial combatants. An unconquered will could be demonstrated through unflinching eye contact; if, however, one averted the gaze, this was interpreted as a sign of submission, defeat and loss of honour.<sup>37</sup> It was through the display of unconquered will in the public arena that a Christian could turn the shame and contempt of torture and death into something which even pagan onlookers might perceive as glorious victory. A purely voluntary embrace of death could thus be considered a powerful witness (*mártus*) to Jesus Christ and his resurrection. All of this was possible because "whatever one willed freely was honourable – even, and *especially*, degradation – because that self-abnegation was the ultimate and most solemn of sacrifices: one could give no more than the offering of one's own life."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Barton, 'Honor and Sacredness', in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, p. 28.

<sup>36</sup> Barton, 'Honor and Sacredness', in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, pp. 25 and 27. emphasis added.

<sup>37</sup> Barton, 'Honor and Sacredness', in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, p. 28.

<sup>38</sup> Carole Straw, "'A Very Special Death': Martyrdom in its Classical Context", p. 40, in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, pp. 39-57.



Roman gladiators bound themselves with an oath called the *sacramentum gladiatorum*, in which they swore “to be burned, to be bound, to be beaten and to be slain by the sword”<sup>39</sup> and Roman soldiers also swore a similar oath. Christian martyrs, therefore, resembled both Roman gladiators and Roman soldiers in their determination to honour the Christian ‘oath’ which they had taken as part of their baptism.

Tertullian (c.160-c.220 CE), an early Latin Church Father, who later joined the heretical Montanist movement, explicitly compared the words and actions of Christian baptism with the Roman military oath:

We were called to be soldiers of the living God already when we responded to the words of the sacramental oath (*sacramentum*)... When we step into the water [of baptism] and profess the Christian faith in the terms prescribed by its law, we bear public witness that we have renounced the devil and his pomp and his angels.<sup>40</sup>

In light of this evidence, it is clear that Christian martyrdom was a phenomenon which both depended upon deeply rooted Greco-Roman cultural values, but which, at the same time, sought to subvert and transcend those values. Christian martyrs displayed fearsome honour, as well as unconquered will, but they also joyfully took on the culturally despised role of victim and sacrifice, just as their Lord Jesus Christ had done, and made this a sign of glory, rather than contempt.<sup>41</sup> Christians were able to ‘re-conceptualise’ the act of confessing, and then dying for one’s faith, due to a number of different Christian theological assumptions, some of which preceded the rise of martyrdom, and others which can be seen as a response to martyrdom.<sup>42</sup> For example, martyrdom could be seen as a contest, in which the Christian was, in some sense, a soldier, but was also an athlete.<sup>43</sup> Both of these images implied that a Christian would need to undergo a period of training, in order to be able to ‘fight’, or to ‘compete’ effectively. As we shall see shortly, it was this concept of ‘training’ for martyrdom which provided some of the impetus for the growth and development of Christian ascetic practice, which, in turn, provided a theoretical and practical foundation for Christian monasticism.

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<sup>39</sup> Barton, ‘Honor and Sacredness’, in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, p. 28.

<sup>40</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 3.1; *De Spectaculis* 4.1, cited by Straw, in: Cormack (ed.), *Sacrificing the Self*, p. 55.

<sup>41</sup> Hebrews 12: 2 states that: “... Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith... for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, *despising the shame*, and has sat down at the right hand of God” [emphasis added].

<sup>42</sup> For an excellent overview of the theological assumptions lying behind the phenomenon of Christian martyrdom, see: Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, Chapter 3, ‘Towards a Theology of Radical Martyrdom’, pp. 71-102.

<sup>43</sup> See: 2 Timothy 2:3-6, in which we find the use of the soldier, athlete and farmer images.

## Christian Asceticism and Its Philosophical Antecedents

Christian martyrdom was a form of *public witness*, in which Christians transcended their criminal status. Through a display of the same unflinching tranquillity that was the goal of many of the philosophical schools, they sought to convince their pagan audience of the superiority of the Christian God over all other so-called gods. Martyrdom was also thought of as a participation in *cosmic conflict*, in which Christians sought to defeat Satan and his demons through public acknowledgement of Jesus Christ as Lord. Potential martyrs sought direct participation in Christ, and in his ultimate cosmic victory over sin, death and the devil. Most importantly, martyrdom was considered to convey a *vicarious benefit* and *vindication beyond death*, which allowed Christian martyrs to become ‘assimilated to God’ in this world, and even more so in the next:

... martyrs, by their actions, purge their own sin, buying an exemption from the eternal fire. Significantly, martyrs claim a special place in heaven, attaining a higher status, and assisting at the altar in heaven. Therefore, *martyrs did not have to wait until the end of time before being resurrected; they were already raised*. Martyrdom was considered to be a second baptism, and baptism was the washing away of sins. Therefore, *at the point of death, martyrs were sinless and at death ‘attained God’*... there was also a popular belief that martyrs could forgive the sins of others, and visiting martyrs in prison to benefit from their power was common.<sup>44</sup>

Since the potential Christian martyr was an ‘athlete’ and a ‘soldier’, he or she needed to undergo a period of preparation and training for martyrdom. This training was considered necessary so that a potential martyr would not deny the faith when the time of testing came. In Chapter 5, we saw that ascetic practice was a central element of many of the Greco-Roman schools of philosophy. In the context of training for martyrdom, Christians began to adopt elements of this pre-existing Greco-Roman philosophical approach to *asceticism*,<sup>45</sup> which was based upon even earlier developments in Greek thought and religion, especially the school created by Pythagoras,<sup>46</sup> as well as the religious mystery cult known as Orphism.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Middleton, *Radical Martyrdom*, pp. 90-91, emphasis added.

<sup>45</sup> William Klassen, ‘The Ascetic Way: Reflections on Peace, Justice, and Vengeance in the Apocalypse of John’, p. 393, in: Leif E. Vaage & Vincent Wimbush (eds.), *Asceticism in the New Testament* (New York, NY, USA & London, England: Routledge, 1999), pp. 393-410.

<sup>46</sup> Margaret C. Howatson & Ian Chilvers (eds.), *Concise Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1993), pp. 460-462.

<sup>47</sup> Howatson & Chilvers (eds.), *Concise Oxford Companion*, pp. 385-386.

Pythagoreanism was a combination of religious, mystical and philosophical concepts, including the belief for which it was most famous, μετεμψύχωσις (*metempsychōsis*), or the transmigration of souls. Pythagoras seems to have taught that the human soul was imprisoned in the body, and was destined to undergo reincarnation in many successive forms, until, by a process of purification, it could become free from the body completely. In later antiquity, an understanding of Pythagoras' teaching could be derived from various sources, including a very influential *Life of Pythagoras* written by the Neo-Platonist philosopher Iamblichus, although much of what is recorded in this and other sources is now considered unreliable. Orphism, a form of ancient mystery cult based upon poems attributed to a pre-Homeric poet called Orpheus, also placed a strong emphasis upon κάθαρσις (*kátharsis*, or purification). The Orphic emphasis upon purification, in turn, influenced the philosophy of Plato, who seems to have believed that the human soul needed to be purified in order to be able to gain truth and clarity of thought. Jules Gross suggests that Socrates' understanding of the purification of the soul, as described in Plato's *Phaedo* 79c-d, entails:

keeping the soul as separate as possible from the body, in getting it accustomed to being reduced to itself, to concentrating itself on itself by withdrawing from every contact with the body, to living, as much as it can both in the actual circumstances as well as in those which will follow, isolated and by itself, entirely detached from the body, as if it were out of its bonds.<sup>48</sup>

When we place this aspect of Plato's teaching alongside our earlier discussion in Chapters 4 and 5 about philosophy as 'practice for death', we can see that Christian asceticism had fertile Greco-Roman soil in which to grow. However, in order to be in a position to assess accurately the nature of the relationship between Christian asceticism, martyrdom, and monasticism, it is vital that we begin with a clear definition of the term *asceticism* itself, taking into account the etymology of the word.

So what exactly was Christian asceticism, and what beliefs and behaviours did it include? The English words *ascetic* and *asceticism* derive from the Greek verb ἀσκέω (*askéō*) which means "to work hard, to practice, to exercise, or to train."<sup>49</sup> Richard Valantasis has proposed a generic definition of ancient Greco-Roman asceticism which has been widely debated, but has found qualified acceptance amongst many scholars in the field.

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<sup>48</sup> Jules Gross, (Paul C. Onica, trans.), *The Divinisation of the Christian according to the Greek Fathers*, (Anaheim, CA, USA: A & C Press, 2002), p. 41.

<sup>49</sup> Liddell and Scott, p. 108.

Valantasis considers that:

Asceticism consists of performances within a dominant social environment, intended to inaugurate a new subjectivity, different social relations, and an alternative symbolic universe.<sup>50</sup>

Christian martyrdom *seems* to fit within the terms of Valantasis' definition of asceticism. Christian martyrdom was a public "performance", within a "dominant [Roman] social environment." It aimed "to inaugurate a new subjectivity" by establishing a faithful Christian as a warrior for Christ, who displayed "unconquered will" through voluntarily embracing a death considered shameful and degrading by the pagan observers. Christian martyrdom sought to establish "different social relations" by challenging and subverting Greco-Roman concepts of honour, victimhood and sacrifice. Finally, Christian martyrdom established "an alternate symbolic universe", through its rejection of pagan polytheism and the Emperor cult, and its defiant endorsement of Christian monotheistic belief.

According to Valantasis' definition, then, Christian martyrdom would *appear* to be a species of asceticism. However, Valantasis' definition of asceticism is arguably far too broad. In a specifically Christian context, it might simply be better to emphasise the etymological sense of the term *asceticism* (i.e. work, practice, exercise, training) as well as the Greek philosophical emphasis upon purification, and thus reserve the term *asceticism* for the period of training which preceded Christian martyrdom (i.e. public witness to one's faith, potentially resulting in death). In other words, this period of training could be described as one particular form of *Christian asceticism*, which served as the method by which the goals in Valantasis' definition could be achieved. *Christian martyrdom* would then be seen as the goal of this ascetic training. As we shall see shortly, the ascetic training that prepared for Christian martyrdom was approached in an increasingly systematic manner, such that, by the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, potential martyrs had an extensive literature to which they could turn for guidance, including Christian Scripture, and various accounts of previous martyrdoms, known collectively as Martyr Acts. Detailed treatises were also produced (especially in the city of Alexandria) which served as 'instruction manuals' for potential martyrs. We will briefly examine these 'instruction manuals' later in this chapter, but for now, let us consider the literary genre of the Martyr Acts, and how they were used.

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<sup>50</sup> See: Richard Valantasis, "Constructions of Power in Asceticism", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Volume 63 (1995), pp. 775-821.

## Early Christian Martyr Acts

Claudio Moreschini and Enrico Norelli<sup>51</sup> note that accounts of the arrest, trial, and execution of early Christians by the authorities are variously referred to as ‘Acts’, ‘Passions’, ‘Martyrdoms’ and ‘Legends’.<sup>52</sup> The different names given to these accounts do not necessarily correspond to specific literary forms. ‘Acts’ are not necessarily the records of a trial, although they may incorporate such material. Rather, the Latin terms ‘*Acta*’, ‘*Passiones*’, and ‘*Martyria*’ each refer to the courageous deeds of the Christian martyrs. ‘*Passiones*’ emphasises physical and emotional sufferings, whilst ‘*Martyria*’ draws attention to the act of public confession of one’s faith in the presence of one’s persecutors.

Accounts of Christian martyrdoms are commonly divided into three types: (1) accounts of interrogations before a magistrate, which are often designated as ‘*Acta*’; (2) narratives that include the arrest (and sometimes the preceding circumstances), imprisonment, torture, and execution of Christians, which are often designated as ‘*Passiones*’; (3) Legends, written long after the events described, using stereotyped elements, with the primary aim of the exaltation of the martyrs. Like ancient Greco-Roman philosophical texts, all these martyrdom accounts were primarily about *formation*, rather than *information*. None of these texts, even those based directly on the official record of events, were intended to be dispassionate, historical records of what had transpired. Rather, these martyrdom narratives served the purposes of celebration,<sup>53</sup> edification, and propaganda.

Critical analysis of the Martyr Acts was initiated by various Roman Catholic scholars in the 17<sup>th</sup> century CE, in response to Protestant concerns about the historical reliability of such texts.<sup>54</sup> There is also considerable modern uncertainty about the antecedents of the Martyr Acts, with Moreschini and Norelli maintaining that these accounts are probably not related to the so-called ‘Acts of the Pagan Martyrs’ or to the ‘*Exitus Virorum Illustrium*’.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The following summary is derived from: Claudio Moreschini & Enrico Norelli (Matthew J. O’Connell, trans.), *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature: A Literary History. Volume 2: From the Council of Nicaea to the Beginning of the Medieval Period* (Peabody, MA, USA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2005), Chapter 11, ‘The Earliest Literature on the Martyrs’, pp. 213-217.

<sup>52</sup> The term ‘Legends’ refers to narrative works that post-date Emperor Constantine (272-337 CE), and which “use every type of secondary development to extol the deeds of the martyrs” (p. 213). Due to their later provenance, these ‘Legends’ will not be considered here.

<sup>53</sup> Martyrdom accounts were often read out at the tomb of a martyr on the anniversary of his or her death.

<sup>54</sup> Examples of such critical analysis include: Jean Bolland, *Acta Sanctorum* (a 68 volume series published from 1643 onwards); and Thierry Ruinart, *Acta Primorum Martyrum* (1689).

<sup>55</sup> The ‘Acts of the Pagan Martyrs’ are 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE accounts of Alexandrians put on trial before the Roman emperor for anti-Roman and anti-Jewish activities. The ‘*Exitus Virorum Illustrium*’ are accounts of aristocrats who were persecuted by Roman emperors. Moreschini and Norelli point out that early Christians never refer to these texts, which “had too many political overtones to be of interest to Christians” (p. 214).

Moreschini and Norelli argue that Christian martyrdom accounts arise primarily from within the Jewish tradition, in which a theology of martyrdom had been developed in two ways: (1) through the application to specific individuals of the general theological claim that the nation of Israel had always persecuted and killed the prophets; (2) through the celebration of the Maccabean Martyrs, whose deaths are recorded in 2 Maccabees and 4 Maccabees. They believe that these Jewish antecedents clearly informed the writing of Christian martyrdom texts, such as the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, and the *Letter of the Christians of Lyons and Vienne*.<sup>56</sup> However, they also acknowledge that the passion of Jesus Christ, as recorded in the Gospels of the New Testament, was the primary model for narrating the martyrdoms of Christians. The earliest example of this is the account of the martyrdom of Stephen, found in the Acts of the Apostles, Chapters 6 and 7.<sup>57</sup>

As we saw above, Christian martyrs were considered to be in an especially close relationship with Jesus Christ, whom they sought to emulate. This provides the backdrop to the development of the various celebrations and rituals that would take place at the tomb of a martyr, including the public reading of the relevant martyrdom account, as well as the public reading of Christian Scripture. Moreschini and Norelli note that:

Once the martyr's testimony was completed by his death, the memory of the martyr became a permanent point of reference for the local church, but not for it alone. At the spatial level people gathered at the tomb or went on pilgrimage to it. On the temporal level the year was signposted by the *dies natales* of the martyrs; the *Depositio martyrum* that is attached to the early Christian calendar known as the Calendar of 354, gives the date of death and place of burial for each martyr. In this perspective we can see why the first acts of the martyrs appeared almost contemporaneously at various places in Christendom, in various forms, and with different ancestries and ideological characteristics. The literary genre as such was established gradually through the development of the texts and the reciprocal relations among them.<sup>58</sup>

Having considered the *form* of the various types of early Christian martyrdom accounts, let us now turn to a consideration of their *function*.

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<sup>56</sup> For a brief review of the earliest Greek martyrdom accounts, see: Moreschini & Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature, Volume 2*, pp. 215-217. This review examines: the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*; the *Letter of the Christians of Lyons and Vienna to the Christians in Asia and Phrygia*; the *Martyrdom of Saints Justin, Chariton, Charites, Euelpistus, Hierax, Paeon, Liberianus, and Their Community*; the *Martyrdom of Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice*; the *Martyrdom of Apollonius*; and the *Martyrdom of Pionius*.

<sup>57</sup> We shall see in Chapter 8 that the *Life of Antony (Vita Antonii)* can be understood, at least in part, as a variation on the Martyr Act genre.

<sup>58</sup> Moreschini & Norelli, *Early Christian Greek and Latin Literature, Volume 2*, pp. 214-215.

## Christian Martyr Acts: Identity Formation and Ascetic Training <sup>59</sup>

Nicole Kelley notes that, since the mid-1990s, there have been several important studies of the importance of martyrdom and suffering in constructions of ancient Christian identity.<sup>60</sup> Kelley's own position arises from an observation by Judith Perkins that:

... in early Christian communities, the threat of suffering (whether real or perceived) worked to create a particular kind of self. In Perkin's view, many ancient Christians came to believe that "to be a Christian was to suffer". Christian martyr acts, when understood as textual vehicles for the construction of culture and the articulation of Christian identities, emerge as one mechanism by which such selves were constructed.<sup>61</sup>

The ongoing debate about the nature and extent of persecution directed toward Christians, especially in the period before the Roman Emperor Decius, is a matter that we will briefly consider in Chapter 8. However, no matter whether the likelihood of any particular Christian being persecuted at this time was high or low, we can safely affirm the distinctive role that Christian literature about martyrdom played in the formation of Christian identity. In particular, Kelley maintains that:

... the reading and hearing of narratives about martyrdom constituted *an exercise derived from Greek philosophy, adapted to inspire a largely non-literate audience*. This exercise not only trained early Christians to be ready for death and the world to come, but also worked to shape their perceptions of the Christian way of life in the world.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The summary in the next two sections is derived from: Nicole Kelley, 'Philosophy as Training for Death: Reading the Ancient Christian Martyr Acts as Spiritual Exercises', *Church History*, Volume 75, Number 4 (December 2006), pp. 723-747.

<sup>60</sup> In addition to works that I have previously cited in this chapter, such as Young, *In Procession Before the World* (2001), and Boyarin, *Dying for God* (1999), Kelley also draws attention to: Elizabeth A. Castelli, *Martyrdom and Memory: Early Christian Culture* (New York, NY, USA: Columbia University Press, 2004); Brent D. Shaw, 'Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs', *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Volume 4 (1996), pp. 269-312; and Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London, England: Routledge, 1995). A guide to earlier literature can be found in the entry by Hans R. Seeliger, 'Martyrs, Acts of the', in: Siegmund Döpp & Wilhelm Geerlings (Matthew O'Connell, trans.), *Dictionary of Early Christian Literature* (New York, NY, USA: Crossroad Publishing, 2000), pp. 405-407.

<sup>61</sup> Kelley, 'Philosophy as Training for Death', p. 723. See: Perkins, *The Suffering Self*, p. 32. Kelley remarks that: "While Perkins concentrates on the role of suffering in creating a particular mode of Christian subjectivity, Boyarin's *Dying for God* (esp. pp. 93-126), emphasises the role of martyrdom in the production and contestation of Jewish and Christian identities" (Kelley, p. 723, n.3). We have already noted the significance of Boyarin's work above.

<sup>62</sup> Kelley, 'Philosophy as Training for Death', p. 724, emphasis added. Similarly, in Chapter 6, we saw how the Stoics 'democratised' philosophy and made it more widely available to all, regardless of their level of education.

The quotation immediately above draws attention to the fact that literacy levels in the ancient world were vastly lower than they are in modern industrialised countries. In his classic study of literacy levels in ancient Greco-Roman society,<sup>63</sup> William V. Harris has argued that, in the Roman Empire, the percentage of those who could read and write was never more than between 10 and 20 per cent of the adult population.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, with particular regard to Christians in the Roman Empire, Harry Gamble has stated that:

not only the writing of Christian literature, but also the ability to read, criticise, and interpret it belonged to a small number of Christians in the first several centuries, ordinarily not more than about 10 per cent in any given setting, and perhaps fewer in the many small and provincial congregations that were characteristic of early Christianity.<sup>65</sup>

Therefore, when a Christian martyr act was read, either publicly or privately, there was inevitably an aural aspect to that reading, since even private reading was generally done out loud.<sup>66</sup> Moreschini and Norelli have noted that these texts would also have been heard at the tombs of particular martyrs on the anniversary day of their deaths.<sup>67</sup> Listening to and reflecting upon these texts seems to have formed an integral part of the ascetic training for those who would eventually die as a result of the public confession of their faith, as is made clear, for example, in *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 18.3:

Gathering here, so far as we can, in joy and gladness, we will be allowed by the Lord to celebrate the anniversary day [ἡμέραν γενέθλιον, lit. “birth day”] of his martyrdom, both as a memorial for those who have already fought the contest, **and for the training and preparation of those who will do so one day.**<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See: William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 22 and 282-285. Kelley notes that other scholars have been critical of some of Harris’s assumptions about the nature of ancient literacy. See, for example: Elizabeth A. Clark, *Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 1999), pp. 45-47; and Harry Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church: A History of Early Christian Texts* (New Haven, CT, USA: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 4-10.

<sup>64</sup> An individual can sometimes have significantly different levels of ability in the four communicative areas: listening (comprehension), speaking, reading and writing. A bilingual individual, such as Antony the Great, might also have varying levels of communicative ability in two different languages (e.g. Coptic and Greek).

<sup>65</sup> Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, p. 5.

<sup>66</sup> Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church*, p. 203.

<sup>67</sup> In later centuries, homilies were composed and read out at the celebrations of such martyric anniversaries. See: Johan Leemans, Wendy Mayer, Pauline Allen & Boudewijn Dehandschutter, “*Let Us Die that We May Live*”: *Greek Homilies on Christian Martyrs from Asia Minor, Palestine and Syria (c. AD 350-AD 450)* (London, England: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>68</sup> Excerpts from the Martyr Acts are taken from Herbert Musurillo (ed.), *Acts of the Christian Martyrs* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1972), as cited in Kelley, ‘Philosophy as Training For Death’, pp. 725-726.



Kelley urges her readers to remember that Martyr Acts are *idealistic* accounts:

... martyr acts are rhetorical rather than documentary in nature, which means that descriptions of the martyrs and their actions should be understood as prescriptions for how things ought to be instead of descriptions of the way things are. Nevertheless, it is still possible to use the martyr stories insofar as they work to cultivate a Christian ideal and represent that ideal to their readers and hearers.<sup>69</sup>

The rhetorical nature of the Martyr Acts is clear from the use of many examples of agonistic and athletic imagery that assisted in the process of identity formation amongst early Christians.<sup>70</sup> In the *Martyrdom of Polycarp*, the eponymous hero is represented at his death “crowned with the garland of immortality and the winner of an incontestable prize.”<sup>71</sup> Papyrus/Pamphilus is described as a “noble athlete” in both the Greek and the Latin versions of the *Acts of Carpus, Papyrus, and Agathonice*; the name of the female heroine, Agathonice means ‘fine victory’, and Kelley believes that this name was deliberately chosen by the author of the account for its symbolic value. By contrast, unsuccessful martyrs are characterised in the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne* 1.11 as “**untrained, unprepared, and weak**”, unable to bear the strain of “a great conflict” (ἀγῶνος μεγάλου) [emphasis added].<sup>72</sup> Similar language and concepts, related to training for martyrdom, can also be found in other early Christian literature. In the *Sibylline Oracles* 2.34, Jesus Christ states that he will “give an immortal prize to martyrs who compete in the contest even unto death.”<sup>73</sup> In an extract from the writings of Tertullian, he offers the following words of counsel and encouragement to potential martyrs: “You are entering a noble struggle, in which the living God is the judge of the contest, the Holy Spirit is the master of the athletic association.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Kelley, ‘Philosophy as Training for Death’, p. 726, n. 15.

<sup>70</sup> See: Zeph Stewart, ‘Greek Crowns and Christian Martyrs’, in: Enzo Lucchesi & Henri Dominique Saffrey (eds.), *Mémorial André-Jean Festugière: Antiquité païenne et chrétienne* (Geneva, Switzerland: Patrick Cramer, 1984), p. 124.

<sup>71</sup> *Martyrdom of Polycarp* 17. Similar athletic imagery is used to describe martyrdom in sections 18 and 19.

<sup>72</sup> On the basis of this section of the *Letter of the Churches of Lyons and Vienne*, Robin Darling Young argues that “the persecution was expected and that the martyrs had trained for it.” See: Young, *In Procession Before the World*, p. 36.

<sup>73</sup> The English translation of this passage is found in: Stewart, ‘Greek Crowns and Christian Martyrs’, p. 122, as cited by: Kelley, ‘Philosophy as a Training for Death’, pp. 726.

<sup>74</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 3. English translation provided by Kelley, in: Kelley, ‘Philosophy as Training for Death’, pp. 726-727. In Chapter 8, we will see that the opening section of the *Life of Antony* bears a striking resemblance to Tertullian’s opening phrase: “You are entering a noble struggle”, which, in turn, was probably partially inspired by 1 Timothy 6:12.

## Christian Martyr Acts as Guidance and as Spiritual Exercises

In addition to providing a template for the formation of Christian identity, and an exhortation to ascetic training for martyrdom, the Martyr Acts served as a guide to appropriate behaviour when a Christian was arrested and put on trial. In particular, the Martyr Acts functioned as a form of spiritual exercise, which allowed the hearer/reader to regard suffering as an unexceptional aspect of the Christian life, and also empowered a Christian to adopt an attitude toward that suffering which Pierre Hadot has described as “the universal perspective” or “the view from above”.

Leonard L. Thompson points out that, in addition to the stories of the Maccabean martyrs, Jesus Christ, and Ignatius of Antioch:

the martyrologies themselves became recipes for exemplary behaviour at the trials and executions, for example, how to respond to questions, what gestures to make and what facial expressions to wear, and how to display suffering as normative, not abnormal.<sup>75</sup>

Furthermore, the martyr acts functioned not just as scripts or templates, but also as a means by which a particular set of Christian values could be portrayed and internalised. In other words, whilst the Martyr Acts provided guidance for those who might actually die for their faith, they also made it possible for all Christians who encountered and learned from these texts to cultivate the religious beliefs and behaviours exemplified by the martyrs.<sup>76</sup>

The *acta martyrum* were designed to be read and heard by later Christians, whose encounters with these texts constituted a spiritual exercise not unlike that found in late ancient philosophical circles. *The acta employ specific strategies, such as the recitation of scriptural formulae and the mimetic identification of martyrs with Jesus*, which were designed to enable the faithful to accept the possibility of suffering or martyrdom, and which resulted in the production of believers who understood suffering as a constitutive element of their identity.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Thompson, ‘Martyrdom of Polycarp’, p. 41.

<sup>76</sup> Kelley, ‘Philosophy as Training for Death’, p. 729. Kelley remarks: “The martyr acts may have helped to prepare some of their readers for an untimely death, but more often they changed their hearers’ perception of the Christian life.” Kelley’s reference here to an “untimely death”, derived from the argument of Perkins in her book ‘The Suffering Self’, is perhaps an unfortunate turn of phrase, since Kelley demonstrates later in her article that the Martyr Acts tended to reflect a providential perspective in which the timing of a martyr’s death was not “untimely”, i.e. not random, accidental, or unexpected. Rather, it was foreknown by God, and, in some texts, even deliberately chosen by God. See: Kelley, ‘Philosophy as Training for Death’, pp. 735-737.

<sup>77</sup> Kelley, ‘Philosophy as Training for Death’, p. 731, emphasis added. In Chapter 8, we will explore how these same strategies are also employed in the *Life of Antony*.

## Clement, Origen, and ‘Training Manuals’ for Martyrdom

The most influential of the early Christian treatises advocating training for martyrdom were written by fellow Alexandrians, Clement (c. 150-211/216 CE) and Origen (c.185-c.254 CE), who emphasised a distinctively Christian form of *paideía*, or education:<sup>78</sup>

[Clement] transposed the terminology of Stoic virtue, and the Middle Platonic theory of human constitution and knowledge, so that they would fit with Christian training, and he put them at the service of training for martyrdom. Along with his habitual use of a philosophical approach and terminology in his exposition of Christian teaching, Clement’s thought on the matter of the martyrs’ witness shows strong continuity with the earlier writings of Ignatius [c.50-c.117 CE] and Polycarp [c.69-c.155 CE], while it also deals with the more complex questions raised by his competitors in the church and, presumably, by the non-Christians whom he was trying to convince to give Christianity a hearing.<sup>79</sup>

Significantly, both Clement of Alexandria and Irenaeus, bishop of Lyons (died c. 202 CE) thought of Christian martyrs as being prophetic figures,<sup>80</sup> just as our previous analysis of the concept of ‘witness’ in the Septuagint and in the New Testament has indicated. Clement, in particular, held up Biblical figures such as Job and Daniel for potential martyrs to emulate, and also adopted the Beatitudes<sup>81</sup> “as a kind of scriptural charter for martyrdom.”<sup>82</sup> Origen followed Clement’s lead, producing an *Exhortation to Martyrdom* in which he gathered scriptural quotations that would encourage and inspire potential martyrs, and prepare them in a period when persecution was becoming more widespread. Origen’s collection of Biblical references is organised according to three themes with which we are now very familiar: firstly, martyrdom as an athletic contest,<sup>83</sup> secondly, martyrdom as the desirable separation of the soul from the body (i.e. the Platonic ‘practice for death’); and thirdly, martyrdom as a sacrifice.<sup>84</sup> Origen expected that potential martyrs would adopt a life of strenuous self-denial, involving physical, mental, emotional and spiritual preparation.

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<sup>78</sup> Young, *In Procession Before the World*, p. 10. Ironically, neither Clement nor Origen died as a martyr.

<sup>79</sup> Young, *In Procession Before the World*, p. 38.

<sup>80</sup> Young, *In Procession Before the World*, p. 40.

<sup>81</sup> The Beatitudes are a series of eight statements made by Jesus in his famous Sermon on the Mount, each of which begins with the word “blessed” (in Latin, *beatus*). They are found in the Gospel of Matthew 5:3-12.

<sup>82</sup> Young, *In Procession Before the World*, p. 42.

<sup>83</sup> In *Exhortation to Martyrdom* 31, Origen urges his readers to “enter the contest” of martyrdom. See: Rowan A. Greer (trans.), *Origen: An Exhortation to Martyrdom, Prayer and Selected Works* (Mahwah, NJ, USA: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 140.

<sup>84</sup> Young, p. 53.

Another aspect of the training for Christian self-denial advocated by Clement and Origen could include sexual renunciation,<sup>85</sup> which was a practice that was well established within the Christian movement by the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE. Indeed, as far back as the mid-1<sup>st</sup> century CE, in the Apostle Paul's First Letter to the Corinthian church, we see some evidence of celibacy, both male and female, being tolerated, and even encouraged. Peter Brown has argued for the importance of 1 Corinthians 7 as the pivotal text for understanding the attitudes of early Christians to sexual matters:

What was noticeably lacking, in Paul's letter, was the warm faith shown by contemporary pagans and Jews that the sexual urge, although disorderly, was capable of socialization and of ordered, even warm, expression within marriage. The dangers of *porneia*, of potential immorality brought about by sexual frustration, were allowed to hold the centre of the stage. By this essentially negative, even alarmist strategy, Paul left a fatal legacy to future ages... In the future, a sense of the presence of "Satan" in the form of a constant and ill-defined risk of lust, lay like a heavy shadow in the corner of every Christian church.<sup>86</sup>

However, Brown has perhaps overstated his case in making this chapter into the epicentre of Christian attitudes toward Christian celibacy and an (alleged) negativity towards all forms of sexual expression. One would need to look more closely at several elements in the teaching of Jesus,<sup>87</sup> which when read through the prism of Greek philosophical attitudes to purity and renunciation, also had a profound influence on Christian attitudes toward celibacy. Martyrdom was, in many ways, thought to be the ultimate form of the *imitatio Christi* (the imitation of Christ), and since Christ had led a celibate life, it followed that Christ's example would trump (at least for potential martyrs) other Biblical teaching on the positive nature of sex and marriage. We should also not discount the influence of Greco-Roman philosophical asceticism on early Christian thought and practice. The moderation that many schools prescribed reinforced tendencies towards the adoption of celibacy.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> For pagan and Christian attitudes towards a wide range of sexual matters and behaviours, see: Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean World from the Second Century AD to the Conversion of Constantine* (London, England: Penguin Books, 1988), Chapter 7, 'Living Like Angels', pp. 336-374.

<sup>86</sup> Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (London, England: Faber & Faber Limited, 1988), pp. 53-55.

<sup>87</sup> Jesus' teaching in Matthew 19:1-12 is particularly relevant. In this passage, Jesus enters a debate with certain Pharisees over the legitimacy of divorce. Jesus cites Genesis 1:27 and Genesis 2:24 as the basis for his repudiation of divorce and considered affirmation of marriage. When some of his disciples suggested that "it is better not to marry", Jesus's response seems to indicate that a life of unmarried celibacy is only suited to a few.

<sup>88</sup> See: Richard Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Chapter 1, 'Pagan asceticism: cultic and contemplative purity', pp. 9-33.

Ironically, despite their literary focus on training for martyrdom, neither Clement nor Origen actually died as a martyr. Nonetheless, as Carole Straw notes:<sup>89</sup>

Clement of Alexandria wrote from experience. In 202-203, during the persecution of Septimius Severus, he had been forced to flee to Asia Minor. In his *Miscellanies* (*Stromata*, 4.4), he discusses the perfection of martyrdom that had eluded him and compares martyrdom to the valiant death of classical heroes: “And the ancients laud the death of those among the Greeks who died in war, not that they advised people to die a violent death, but because he who ends his life in war is released without the dread of dying.”

Similarly, Origen, in his *Exhortation to Martyrdom*, wrote that:<sup>90</sup>

The love of God was a powerful antidote against the deepest tortures, more compelling than any love spell... Such is martyrdom, and so great the freedoms and confidence (*parrhesia*) before God produced, that we should ponder it deeply. Since a saint loves honour and is generous (*philotimos*) and wishes to repay the benefits bestowed upon him from God, he searches out what he can do for the Lord in return for everything he has received from Him. And he finds that nothing can be given to God from one rightly intentioned that will so equally balance his benefits as perfection in martyrdom.

Despite ancient comparisons made between the deaths of Christian martyrs and pagan heroes, such as that made above, Straw concludes that Christian martyrdom was unique, insofar as it was predicated upon a specifically Christian understanding of ‘assimilation to the divine’:

the Christian martyr will always be distinguished from the pagan on at least one essential issue: unlike the classical hero, the Christian martyr could trust the guarantor of the contract. The Christian by definition believed in the transformations promised him, and it is important to recognise the logic in the two-way nature of these transforming activities. **God became man so that man could become godlike.** And if the martyrs were honoured with a sanctity excelling the glory of Roman heroes, God was honoured as well. The obedient deaths of the martyrs therefore amplified God’s stature on the earth; they bore witness to his heavenly grandeur as Creator, and they sanctified his name. As Origen urged, “Let us then glorify God, exalting him by our own death, since the martyr will glorify God in his death” [*Exhortation to Martyrdom* 50]...<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Carole Straw, “‘A Very Special Death’: Martyrdom in its Classical Context”, p. 39.

<sup>90</sup> Origen, *An Exhortation to Martyrdom* 27 & 28, as cited in: Straw, “‘A Very Special Death’: Martyrdom in its Classical Context”, p. 48. Cf. p. 56, n. 60 & n. 61.

<sup>91</sup> Straw, “‘A Very Special Death’: Martyrdom in its Classical Context”, p. 49, emphasis added.

## Conclusion

In Chapter 7, we have examined ancient and modern views concerning the nature of Christian martyrdom, and have considered how this phenomenon is related to possible antecedent concepts and practices found within the Bible and Jewish tradition. In the Old Testament, we have seen that the martyr is fundamentally a prophetic figure. In the New Testament, we have discovered that a martyr is considered to be a ‘witness’ who testified, even at the risk of his or her own life, to the beliefs that God had raised Jesus Christ from the dead, had appointed Jesus Christ to be the cosmic king, and would raise to eternal life those who acknowledged Jesus Christ as king. We have also considered the influence of Greco-Roman cultural values, and of the various Greco-Roman philosophical schools, on the development of the Christian understanding of martyrdom. We have seen that Greco-Roman emphasis upon the value of honour and the concept of the unconquered will, when combined with a philosophical emphasis upon ascetic training for virtue, contributed profoundly towards a radical re-conceptualisation of the experience of martyric death, leading to the formation of a Christian identity based on the idea of ‘the suffering self’.

An understanding of the Christian life, in which suffering was ‘normalised’ by an appeal to the ‘universal perspective’, or ‘the view from above’, drew upon the reframing of negative events found in the spiritual exercises of the Stoic and Epicurean philosophical schools. Written texts, such as the Martyr Acts, and the ‘training manuals’ compiled by Clement and Origen, also served to articulate and reinforce the values and attitudes that a Christian would need to acquire. However, given that many Christians would *not* experience direct persecution for their faith, these written sources can also be understood through a more philosophical filter, i.e. in the light of the reality that *all* Christians would die at some point, whether violently as a martyr, or else as a result of misadventure, sickness or old age. Since all Christians faced death in some form, they could all pursue ‘martyrdom’, in the same way that the Platonic Socrates had pursued the philosophical life, i.e. as a ‘practice for death’.

In Chapter 8, we will consider the nature of the relationship between martyrdom and monasticism and will address the claim that monasticism was a ‘replacement’ for martyrdom. We will explain how the *Life of Antony* (the *Vita Antonii*) contributed to the development of the early Christian monastic worldview, and will consider the ways in which the *Vita Antonii* reflected a synthesis of Christian and non-Christian elements that contributed to the theology and practice of martyrdom.

## Chapter 8

### Martyrdom, Monasticism and Antony the Great: Greco-Roman Philosophy in the Desert

#### Introduction

Tertullian (160-220 CE)<sup>1</sup> wrote an influential treatise, called *Ad Martyras* (To the Martyrs), perhaps as early as 197 CE.<sup>2</sup> In this treatise, he provides encouragement for Christians who would potentially die for their faith, making extensive use of athletic imagery:

You are entering a noble struggle [*bonum agonem subituri estis*]  
in which the living God is the judge of the contest [*agonothetes*],  
the Holy Spirit is the master of the athletic association [*xystarches*].<sup>3</sup>

Athanasius of Alexandria (296-373 CE)<sup>4</sup> wrote the *Vita Antonii* (the *Life of Antony*) roughly 160 years later, in c.356 CE.<sup>5</sup> In athletic and ascetic language which is strikingly similar to that of Tertullian, Athanasius encourages the monks to whom he has addressed his text:

You have entered into a noble contest [*Ἀγαθὴν ἄμιλλαν ἐνεστήσασθε*] with the monks of Egypt, by choosing, through training in moral excellence, either to become their equals, or to surpass them. You, too, surely have monastic communities, and **the word ‘monk’ is not just a word for you but a way of life.**<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Quintus Septimius Florens Tertullianus was a Christian author from Carthage in the Roman province of Africa. Tertullian wrote many works in Latin, as a Christian apologist, and as a fierce critic of various heresies.

<sup>2</sup> For the original statement of the argument in favour of the generally accepted composition date in 197 CE, see: Ernst Nöldechen, *Die Abfassungszeit den Schriften Tertullians*, Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Band 5 (Leipzig, Germany: J. C. Hinrichs, 1888). For a more recent, but less well received argument, in favour of a date of composition in 202/203 CE, see: G. D. Schlegel, ‘The Ad Martyras of Tertullian and the Circumstances of its Composition’, *The Downside Review*, Volume 61 (1943), pp. 125-128.

<sup>3</sup> Tertullian, *Ad Martyras* 3. English translation in: Nicole Kelley, ‘Philosophy as Training for Death’, *Church History*, Volume 75, Number 4 (December 2006), pp. 726-727.

<sup>4</sup> Athanasius of Alexandria (later known by the monikers ‘the Great’, ‘the Confessor’, or ‘the Apostolic’), was the twentieth Bishop of Alexandria, and a vociferous opponent of the Arian heresy.

<sup>5</sup> For more information concerning the date and the circumstances surrounding the composition of the *Vita Antonii*, see the discussion below.

<sup>6</sup> *Vita Antonii*, Preface, 1, as cited in: Tim Vivian and Apostolos N. Athanassakis (trans.), *Athanasius of Alexandria: The Life of Antony. The Coptic Life and The Greek Life* (Kalamazoo, MI, USA: Cistercian Publications, 2003), pp. 50-53, emphasis added.

Both passages, one referring to martyrdom and the other referring to monasticism, make use of virtually identical agonistic terminology, describing the way of life to which each group is committed as either a “noble struggle” or a “noble contest”. Athanasius also draws attention to the importance of training for moral excellence, which was common to both forms of life. The juxtaposition of these two passages, therefore, raises the question of the precise nature of the relationship between martyrdom and monasticism in a particularly acute manner.

As we will see in the next section, many modern scholars have asserted, in various ways, that “monasticism replaced martyrdom”. Unfortunately, several of these scholars do not provide an explicit delineation of the way in which martyrdom and monasticism might be related to each other, either chronologically, conceptually or functionally. A similar lack of precision surrounds the concept of ‘replacement’. Details of the causes or mechanisms that are supposed to lie behind the replacement of martyrdom by monasticism are sometimes inadequately explained or defended, and there can also be some ambiguity as to the geographical area or time period in which the alleged replacement is thought to have taken place.

In Chapter 8, therefore, we will begin our discussion with an examination of several recent examples of the claim that “monasticism replaced martyrdom”. We will establish the context and broad parameters of each claim, and will assess which elements of each claim can be sustained. Later in the chapter, we will embark upon an examination of the *Vita Antonii*. We will consider the circumstances surrounding the composition of the text, and the understanding of the relationship between martyrdom and monasticism developed within it. After an assessment of the extent of Antony’s literacy, and the implications that his level of literacy might have for our interpretation of the text, we will then consider the various ways in which Athanasius has adapted the biographical material found within the *VA*, and how an awareness of the literary techniques, as well as the philosophical and theological preoccupations of Athanasius, might affect a modern reading of this account of Antony the Great. In particular, we will focus on the ways in which Athanasius has carefully combined Greco-Roman philosophical thought with elements of Christian thought, including concepts and terminology derived from the theology and practice of martyrdom. Our aim will be to determine whether, and to what extent, the *VA* reflects various emphases outlined in Chapters 4-7, including: the nature and role of ascetic training as a preparation for spiritual combat; the use of Holy Scripture as a means to fight the demons and overcome temptations; and ‘assimilation to God’, or *théōsis*, as a foundation for the pursuit of the monastic life.



## ‘Monasticism Replaced Martyrdom’: Mapping the Parameters of the Claim

‘Monasticism replaced martyrdom’ is a claim that has been advanced by scholars from various backgrounds. Some of these scholars have been Jews;<sup>7</sup> some have been Roman Catholics,<sup>8</sup> or Protestants.<sup>9</sup> Many of these scholars have claimed that ‘monasticism replaced martyrdom’ in a manner which suggests that, for them, it is self-evident, or a ‘known truth’, that needs little justification or explanation.

James Floyd White (1932-2004) makes the assertion that ‘monasticism replaced martyrdom’ in the most stark manner of any of the authors surveyed in this section:

A daily cycle of morning and evening prayer for ordinary people developed, only to disappear in most parts of the world in later centuries... But another pattern of daily prayer was also evolving at the same time. This began with the development of monasticism in Egypt as a means of renouncing the world and even a Church grown worldly with respectability. *Monasticism replaced martyrdom.*<sup>10</sup>

The assumptions that seem to lie behind White’s statement are: (1) monasticism was a means of renouncing the world and a worldly Church; (2) monasticism replaced martyrdom; therefore, (3) martyrdom was a means of renouncing the world and a worldly Church. White appears to be advancing a position in which the motivations that would have influenced an individual Christian to embrace a life of martyrdom, or a life of monasticism, were *functionally equivalent*.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, White’s claim that “monasticism replaced martyrdom” is probably best interpreted as *chronologically supercessionist*, i.e. monasticism *superseded*, or came after martyrdom, but monasticism was *not* a completely new or unrelated phenomenon.

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<sup>7</sup> See: Kalman J. Kaplan & Matthew B. Schwartz, *A Psychology of Hope: A Biblical Response to Tragedy and Suicide*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), pp. 34-64, esp. pp. 57-60.

<sup>8</sup> See: ‘Celibacy’, in: William J. Collinge, *Historical Dictionary of Catholicism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Historical Dictionaries of Religions, Philosophies, and Movements Series (Lanham, MD, USA: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2012), pp. 91-92; and Wallace S. Jungers, *Reflections on Early Christianity* (Bloomington, IN, USA: AuthorHouse, 2005), pp. 81-82.

<sup>9</sup> See: James F. White, *A Brief History of Christian Worship* (Nashville, TN, USA: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 53; Robert M. Solomon, ‘Contextual Spirituality’, in: Glen G. Scorgie, Simon Chan, Gordon T. Smith & James D. Smith III (eds.), *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Zondervan, 2011), p. 208; and ‘Monastery’, in: Colin Ogilvie Buchanan, *The A to Z of Anglicanism*, The A to Z Guide Series, Book 59 (Lanham, MD, USA: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2006), p. 310.

<sup>10</sup> White, *A Brief History of Worship*, p. 53, emphasis added.

<sup>11</sup> ‘Functional equivalence’ is intended to refer to a claim that, *in a certain respect identified by an author*, martyrdom and monasticism addressed the same *theological* concerns, e.g. ‘renouncing the world’ or ‘imitation of Christ’. ‘Functional equivalence’ is not intended to refer to the *social*, *cultural* or *political* domains, unless an author cited here claims (or implies) that there is equivalence in one of those domains.

Robert M. Solomon clearly affirms a *functional equivalence* of martyrdom and monasticism with respect to Christian spirituality:

The experience of Christians living in a place where their faith is a minority or where they may be persecuted would differ from that of those who live in a place where Christianity is a majority religion... In the history of Christianity, the first few centuries were characterised by periods of intense persecution. In such a situation, martyrdom was a common enough feature of Christian life and was seen by many as a sign of Christian commitment and maturity. Some sought martyrdom as a goal of spiritual formation. When Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire and was transformed from being a persecuted minority to a Christendom, *monasticism replaced martyrdom as the new ideal of Christian spirituality*.<sup>12</sup>

William J. Collinge, in a dictionary entry concerned with the history and purpose of Christian celibacy, affirms *functional equivalence* in terms of the imitation of Christ:

... Celibates (virgins) of both sexes are attested in second-century sources, and the practice of celibacy increased in the fourth century when *monasticism replaced martyrdom as the most revered form of the imitation of Christ*.<sup>13</sup>

Owen Chadwick adds support to Collinge's brief outline of the early history of celibacy:

*In Christian congregations before A.D. 300 were persons who attempted to practice a life of especial discipline, prayer and holiness...* The early Church respected the unmarried state. It encouraged the widows to refrain from second marriage. It encouraged unmarried men or women who wished to dedicate themselves to a particular life of prayer or social endeavour, to remain unmarried. *Attached to a congregation might be a group of widows, a group of unmarried women, a (smaller) group of unmarried men.* They were not separated from the worship of the liturgy, and the life of the parish. But they came to services with regularity and discipline, and undertook pastoral work in visiting the sick or distributing the alms.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Solomon, 'Contextual Spirituality', in: Scorgie, Chan, G. T. Smith & J. D. Smith III (eds.), *Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*, p. 208. Curiously, Solomon claims that this 'replacement' occurred "when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire", an event that took place on 27 February 380 CE, when the Roman Emperor Theodosius I issued a decree entitled '*Cunctos populos*', also known as the 'Edict of Thessalonica'. The reference to Christianity's transformation "from being a persecuted minority to a Christendom" suggests, however, that Solomon might have intended to refer to the *toleration* of Christianity, effected by the earlier Edict of Milan, promulgated by Roman Emperor Constantine I in 313 CE.

<sup>13</sup> Collinge, *Historical Dictionary of Catholicism*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>14</sup> Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1968 [1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1950]), p. 1, emphasis added.

Collinge states that “monasticism replaced martyrdom” in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, and implies that the practice of celibacy distinguished monasticism from martyrdom. Chadwick also seems to offer some qualified support for this point of view:

By A.D. 360 there existed ‘monasteries’ in Egypt and Syria. *These were groups of dedicated men or women, as before; but now separated physically from the life of the parish church and congregation.* They had their own church or oratory, their own worship, their own discipline and rules. How long they had existed before 360 is not known. It may be as early as 300, and perhaps earlier still. But *they were not common before 330*, for they are not mentioned in the historical writings of Eusebius of Caesarea; and Eusebius, as the great historian of the early Church, would have mentioned them if he knew them or at least if he thought them as important as they had become by 360.<sup>15</sup>

In a dictionary entry concerned with the concept of the Christian monastery, Colin Buchanan suggests that there is a *functional equivalence* between martyrdom and monasticism with respect to “modelling extreme self-surrender in the service of Christ”:

... the development of Christian monasticism is usually traced to the late third and early fourth centuries, at a time when persecution of Christians ceased. Indeed, it has been plausibly argued that, in the process of history, *monasticism replaced martyrdom in modelling extreme self-surrender in the service of Christ* and thus exercised the same romantic fascination in the church at large that martyrdom had previously done.<sup>16</sup>

Kalman J. Kaplan and Matthew B. Schwartz present a slightly more nuanced claim than those we have considered thus far: “martyrdom was replaced by ascetic monasticism, which became the major beneficiary of Christianity’s eschatological energies”. However, in making this claim, they present a tendentious reflection upon two Christian figures who contributed significantly to the discourse associated with Christian martyrdom, namely Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (c.35-c.107 CE) and Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage (d. 258 CE).

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<sup>15</sup> Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., p. 1, emphasis added. Collinge seems to suggest that an increased prevalence of celibacy in the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE was a feature that *distinguished* the monastic way of life from that of the martyr. However, as noted above, Collinge also appears to argue for a *functional equivalence* between martyrdom and monasticism, at least insofar as both were a “revered form of the imitation of Christ.” Collinge advances a *chronologically supercessionist* argument that is more sophisticated than those of White or Solomon.

<sup>16</sup> Buchanan, *The A to Z of Anglicanism*, p. 310. Buchanan attempts to bolster his claim for the *functional equivalence* of martyrdom and monasticism, by asserting that monasticism “exercised the same romantic fascination in the church at large that martyrdom had previously done.” Therefore, Buchanan also appears to be advancing a *chronologically supercessionist* argument.

Kaplan and Schwartz claim that Greek patterns of thought, rather than those derived from the Old Testament, led Ignatius to separate himself “from any interest in physical life”, and caused him to have a “pervasive and absorbing interest in death”.<sup>17</sup>

*... early Christians often showed a desire – even an active pursuit – of death. Ignatius separated himself, as did the later ascetics, from any interest in physical life: “In me there is left no desire for mundane things, but only a murmur of living water that whispers within me, ‘come to the Father’... I want no more of what men call life.”... Ignatius here clearly displays the Greeks’ pervasive and absorbing interest in death.*<sup>18</sup>

Kaplan and Schwartz then turn their attention towards Cyprian, Bishop of Carthage, who died for his Christian faith in the period of the Decian persecutions.<sup>19</sup> Kaplan and Schwartz present a portrait of Cyprian in which the degree of antagonism between non-Christians and Christians is heavily emphasised, and in which emulation of the death of Christ is put forward as the most glorious Christian calling:

*There had to be antagonism between Christ and the world; likewise, there could only be hatred between Christian and pagan.* The crucifixion had set the example of the highest possible moment toward which humans had to strive, since the world of the body is evil and should be scorned...”

Kaplan and Schwartz are clearly disturbed by the more ‘pathological’ elements in early Christian discourse. However, one might question whether they have been sufficiently sensitive to the rhetorical and ideological nature of the writings that they have cited. One could also question whether they have given sufficient weight to Christian belief in the resurrection of Christ and in the general resurrection of all believers. Thus, Kaplan and Schwartz’s implicit contrast between a ‘suicidal’ martyrdom that was later ‘replaced’ by a ‘non-suicidal’ ascetic monasticism is, arguably, a profound misreading of the evidence.

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<sup>17</sup> The “pervasive and absorbing interest in death” of the ancient Greeks is documented in: Kaplan & Schwartz, *A Psychology of Hope*, Chapter 2, ‘Suicide in Greco-Roman Thought’, pp. 14-33.

<sup>18</sup> Kaplan & Schwartz, *A Psychology of Hope*, pp. 56-57, emphasis added.

<sup>19</sup> For discussion of the nature and extent of Roman persecution of Christians *before* the reign of the Roman Emperor Decius (emperor from 249-251 CE), see: Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted?’, *Past and Present*, Volume 26, Number 1 (1963), pp. 6-38; Adrian N. Sherwin-White, ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? – An Amendment’, *Past and Present*, Volume 27 (1964), pp. 23-27; Geoffrey E. M. de Ste. Croix, ‘Why Were the Early Christians Persecuted? – A Rejoinder’, *Past and Present*, Volume 27, Number 1 (1964), pp. 28-33; Timothy D. Barnes, ‘Legislation Against the Christians’, *Journal of Roman Studies*, Volume 58 (1968), pp. 32-50. For a more recent summary of these matters, see: Olivia F. Robinson, ‘Repressionen gegen Christen in der Zeit vor Decius – noch immer ein Rechtsproblem’, *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte*, Volume 112 (1995), pp. 352-369.

Wallace S. Jungers's presentation of the basic claim that "monasticism replaced martyrdom" is a distinctive contribution to the debate, insofar as it equates 'martyrdom' and 'monasticism' as two variants of the "the supreme grace":

*Monasticism replaced martyrdom as the supreme grace. The new challenge to great souls was no longer the "red martyrdom", but the "white".* The new task of the church heroes was no longer to vanquish the enemies of God with their blood, but to vanquish the softness of the Roman Christian world by flight to the desert of solitude, mortification, and contemplation.<sup>20</sup>

Kallistos Ware does *not* make the claim that "monasticism replaced martyrdom". Rather, he notes that: "In later centuries when the Church became 'established' and no longer suffered persecution, the idea of martyrdom did not disappear, but it took other forms: *the monastic life, for example, is often regarded by Greek writers as an equivalent to martyrdom.*"<sup>21</sup> Ware points out that this understanding of the *functional equivalence* of martyrdom and monasticism is also found in several writings of the Western Church, including the *Cambrai Homily* of the 7<sup>th</sup> century CE:

Now there are three kinds of martyrdom which are accounted as a Cross to a man... White martyrdom consists in a man's abandoning everything he loves for God's sake... Green martyrdom consists in this, that by means of fasting and labour he frees himself from his evil desires, or suffers toil in penance and repentance. Red martyrdom consists in the endurance of a Cross or death for Christ's sake.<sup>22</sup>

The threefold characterisation of martyrdom in this document reflects the more common twofold division into 'red' martyrdom (confession and death for Christ) and 'white' martyrdom (monastic withdrawal from the world), but is unique in its reference to *glas* (green, or blue) martyrdom,<sup>23</sup> which is particularly associated with abstinence from food, and other ascetic endeavours, such as immersing oneself in cold water. As we shall see in the following sections of this chapter, the monastic life advocated by Antony the Great included elements of both 'white' and 'glas' martyrdom.

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<sup>20</sup> Jungers, *Reflections on Early Christianity*, pp. 81-82, emphasis added.

<sup>21</sup> Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London, England: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 14.

<sup>22</sup> John Ryan, *Irish Monasticism: Origins and Early Development* (Dublin, Republic of Ireland: Talbot Press, 1931), p. 197, emphasis added. Cited in: Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Clare Stancliffe has argued that the colour 'glas' indicates the tone of a person's face when they have undergone extreme physical austerities. See: Clare Stancliffe, 'Red, White and Blue Martyrdom', in: Dorothy Whitelock, Rosamond McKitterick & David Dumville (eds.), *Ireland in Early Medieval Europe: Studies in Memory of Kathleen Hughes* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 21-46.

## Athanasius of Alexandria and the *Vita Antonii*

St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c.296-373 CE) is famous for his staunch defence of the Trinitarian theological position articulated at the Council of Nicaea (325 CE) and his role in the subsequent battle against the Arian heresy,<sup>24</sup> but he has also been credited with the authorship of an extremely influential biographical account of an early Christian monk, known as St. Antony the Great (c.251-356 CE). In the sections that follow, we will outline the chronology of Antony's life, and examine the composition, structure, sources and purpose of the *Vita Antonii*. We will analyse the extent of Antony's literacy, and consider why this particular ability (or perhaps, lack of ability) features so extensively in the text. We will take into account both a modern historical perspective (that has emerged from recent research concerning the nature and extent of literacy and education in the ancient world), as well as the three main Antonian sources: firstly, the *Vita Antonii* [VA] itself;<sup>25</sup> secondly, the thirty-eight sayings attributed to Antony, found within the various collections of sayings of the Desert Fathers known as the *Apophthegmata Patrum*;<sup>26</sup> and thirdly, a collection of seven letters that has been attributed to Antony.<sup>27</sup> We will conclude with a consideration of the significance of the depiction of Antony as the true philosopher and as the true holy man.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> For an introduction to the writings of Athanasius, see: Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius*, The Early Church Fathers (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 2004). For a treatment of his theology, see: David M. Gwynn, *Athanasius of Alexandria: Bishop, Theologian, Ascetic, Father*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2012); Peter J. Leithart, *Athanasius*, Foundations of Theological Exegesis and Christian Spirituality (Grand Rapids, MI, USA: Baker Academic, 2011); Thomas G. Weinandy, *Athanasius: A Theological Introduction*, Great Theologians (Farnham, Surrey, England & Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate, 2007); and Khaled Anatolios, *Athanasius: The Coherence of his Thought* (London, England & New York, NY, USA: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> The VA has been transmitted in Greek, Coptic, Latin, Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, Slavonic and Ethiopic versions. For a critical edition of the Greek text of the VA, with facing French translation, see: G. J. M. Bartelink (trans.), *Athanasie D'Alexandrie: Vie D'Antoine*, Source Chrétiennes, Number 400 (Paris, France: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2011). For a recent English translation of the Greek and Coptic versions of the VA, see: Vivian and Athanassakis (trans.), *Athanasius of Alexandria: The Life of Antony. The Coptic Life and The Greek Life*. For a recent English translation of the Latin version of the VA, see: Carolinne White (trans.), *Early Christian Lives*, Penguin Classics (London, England: Penguin Books, 1998), pp. 1-70.

<sup>26</sup> There are several Greek and Latin collections of the Sayings of the Desert Fathers. For an English translation of the thirty-eight sayings of Antony, taken from the Greek version of the Alphabetical Collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see: Benedicta Ward (trans.), *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, Cistercian Studies, Number 59 (Kalamazoo, MI, USA: Cistercian Publications, 1975), pp. 1-9.

<sup>27</sup> Samuel Rubenson has reconstructed the text of the letters of Antony from versions in Coptic, Syriac, Georgian, Latin, Arabic and Greek. For an English translation, see: Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint* (Minneapolis, MN, USA: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1995), pp. 196-231.

<sup>28</sup> On the concept of the holy man in the ancient world, see: Graham Anderson, *Sage, Saint and Sophist: Holy Men and Their Associates in the Early Roman Empire* (London, England: Routledge, 1994); and Patricia Cox, *Biography in Late Antiquity: A Quest for the Holy Man*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, Volume 5 (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 1983).

## An Overview of the Chronology of the *Life of Antony*

Antony was probably born c. 251 AD in a village called Koma (modern day Qîmân al-Ariâs) near the city of Herakleopolis Magna in Egypt,<sup>29</sup> and died in 356 AD, aged around 105 years old, at Mount Kolzim in Egypt.<sup>30</sup> According to *VA* 1.1-2, Antony was the eldest son of Coptic Christian<sup>31</sup> farmers, who owned enough land to be self-sufficient, and to provide Antony with a basic education. In *VA* 1.3, we are told that Antony attended church regularly with his parents where “he listened attentively to the readings from Scripture, and kept in his heart what was profitable from them.”<sup>32</sup> The language in which these Bible readings were heard, presumably either Greek or Coptic, is not specified in the text.

After the death of his parents, c. 270 AD, when Antony was between eighteen and twenty years of age, Antony sold all of his land, placed his sister in the care of a community of Christian women, and then embraced a form of Christian ascetic life.<sup>33</sup> The precise nature of this community of Christian women is not specified in the text, but their form of ascetic life probably corresponds to that described above by Chadwick.

Antony spent the next seventeen years seeking wisdom from other ascetic practitioners and even spent a considerable period of time living in a tomb. When he was about thirty-five years old, in c. 285 AD, he left the tomb, and withdrew further into the desert, to spend the next twenty years living in an abandoned fortress.<sup>34</sup> After emerging from this desert fortress, aged about fifty-five years old, in c. 305 AD, Antony spent the next fifty or so years guiding his many monastic disciples.

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<sup>29</sup> See: Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History* I.13.2.

<sup>30</sup> For a modern biographical account of Antony, see: Peter H. Görg, *The Desert Fathers: Saint Anthony and the Beginnings of Monasticism* (San Francisco, CA, USA: Ignatius Press, 2011), pp. 1-76. For a literary analysis of the *VA*, see: David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 2006), Chapter 2, ‘The New Martyr and Holy Man: Athanasius of Alexandria’s *Life of Antony*,’ pp. 23-47. For a fascinating reflection on the historical impact and enduring relevance of the *VA*, see: James Cowan, *Journey to the Inner Mountain: In the Desert with St Antony* (London, England: Hodder and Stoughton, 2002).

<sup>31</sup> For a survey of early Egyptian Christianity, see: C. Wilfred Griggs, *Early Egyptian Christianity: From Its Origins to 451 CE*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1993).

<sup>32</sup> Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, 57. All quotations from the *VA* are taken from the English translation of the Greek *Life*, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>33</sup> For an overview of various expressions of asceticism in the Graeco-Roman world, see: Richard Finn, *Asceticism in the Graeco-Roman World*, Key Themes in Ancient History (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and James A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park, PA, USA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995). For a brief introduction to early Christian asceticism, see: J. Duncan M. Derrett, ‘Primitive Christianity as an Ascetic Movement,’ pp. 88-109; and Samuel Rubenson, ‘Christian Asceticism and the Emergence of the Monastic Tradition,’ pp. 49-57, in: Vincent L. Wimbush & Richard Valantasis (eds.), *Asceticism* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998).

<sup>34</sup> The references to the tomb, and the fortress, might also have symbolic meanings. Martyr Acts were typically read out at a tomb; Stoic philosophers sought to strengthen themselves by constructing an ‘inner fortress’.

## The Composition, Structure and Purpose of the *Vita Antonii*

Athanasius composed the *VA* at some point during the six years following Antony's death, i.e. between 356 and 362 AD. The *VA* is written in the form of a letter, which in modern scholarly editions has been divided into a preface and ninety-four paragraphs. In the preface to the *VA*, Athanasius commends certain foreign monks for entering into a "noble" contest with the monks of Egypt. The location of these foreign monks is never mentioned in the letter, but since Athanasius mentions, later in the preface, that a letter-carrier must sail to reach them, it seems likely that these monks were some distance away, possibly in the region of Palestine.

We are neither told the names of these foreign monks, nor are we given any information about their form of monastic life. The Egyptian monk Pakhomios (c.292 – 348 AD) had already helped to establish large and well integrated monastic settlements in Upper Egypt, such as that at Tabenissi, as early as c. 318-323 AD.<sup>35</sup> Nonetheless, this Pachomian form of coenobitic, communal monasticism was probably not well-established outside of Egypt at the time when Athanasius was composing his account of the life of Antony, so it seems likely that the foreign monks to whom Athanasius was writing were either solitary anchoritic monks, like Antony himself, or perhaps they were monks living in small semi-anchoritic communities, known as *lavras*, which could be found at that time in Palestine.<sup>36</sup> The foreign monks to whom the *VA* is addressed are said to have previously written to Athanasius, so as to inquire about "the way of life of blessed Antony." They had already heard some stories about the zeal of Antony and they desired to know more about this inspirational monk, so that they might follow his example.

The foreign monks asked four questions, the answers to which provide the basic structure of the *VA*. The questions were:

- (1) Who was Antony before he began his ascetic practice?;
- (2) How did Antony begin and develop his particular form of monastic discipline?;
- (3) How did Antony conclude his life?; and
- (4) Are the various accounts concerning Antony true?

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<sup>35</sup> For an overview of the life and works of Pakhomios, see: Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk*, Chapter 4, 'The Vigilant Brother: Pachomius and the Pachomian Koinonia,' pp. 78-96; and Philip Rousseau, *Pachomius: The Making of a Community in Fourth-Century Egypt*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, Volume 6 (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 1985).

<sup>36</sup> See: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, p. 53, n. 5.



Athanasius indicates in the Preface, section 3, that the purpose of his letter is to provide a “fine” model for monastic discipline. Since the season for sailing was coming to a close, and the letter carrier was pressed for time, Athanasius decided that he would write an account based on the knowledge of Antony that he already possessed. Athanasius notes that he has “paid scrupulous attention to the truth”, so that his readers will neither be unbelieving after hearing too much, nor underestimate Antony due to not hearing a sufficiently complete account of his life.

Athanasius also seems to be setting up his readers for a largely implicit comparison between Antony and Jesus Christ, which is evoked when Athanasius cautions the foreign monks not to disbelieve the accounts of Antony that they have heard from other people who knew him, and to store up in their hearts the few things that they have already heard, since what they have already heard about Antony “represents only a small part of what there is to tell.” Antony also adds that “Perhaps, if each one tells what he knows, the story may become almost worthy of the man.” We should note the allusion here to John 21:25, in which the Apostle John refers to the multitude of oral accounts concerning Jesus Christ: “And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written” [NKJV].

### **Sources of the *Vita Antonii***

Athanasius claims that his own knowledge of the events of Antony’s life was obtained from an attendant of Antony who “had poured water for Antony to wash his hands.” This description of Antony’s mysterious attendant is based upon a Biblical allusion to 4 Kingdoms 3:11 (Septuagint) = 2 Kings 3:11, which refers to the prophet Elisha, who was the disciple of the prophet Elijah. The comparison, between Elisha and Antony’s un-named attendant, is apparently intended to reassure the reader of the reliability of Athanasius’s source of information.

Could the un-named attendant who served as the main source for the *VA* have been Athanasius himself? The Coptic version of the Preface to the *VA* contains Athanasius’ parenthetical claim that he had seen Antony often and it is very likely that Athanasius *did* meet with Antony during one of Athanasius’s periods of exile from his role as Archbishop of Alexandria. Under these circumstances, it is at least plausible that Athanasius might have been able to gain sufficient knowledge from Antony to serve as the basis for the *VA*.

It is also curious that, whilst the Greek Life describes Athanasius' contact as "the monk" who had followed Antony "for a long time," the Coptic Life simply describes the source as "the person" who followed Antony "for a short time."<sup>37</sup> However, since even the Coptic Life makes an explicit distinction between the information that Athanasius knew from his own interaction with Antony, and that which he had "heard" from a third party, it would be prudent to give serious consideration to an alternate explanation proposed by Tim Vivian. Vivian has suggested that the un-named attendant of Antony was actually Bishop Serapion of Thmuis (fl. 4<sup>th</sup> century CE)<sup>38</sup> and Vivian defends this view by pointing to *VA* 91.8-9, in which Antony, at the end of his life, bequeaths one sheepskin coat each to Bishop Athanasius and to Bishop Serapion. In doing this, Antony seems to have bestowed some form of personal blessing upon both of these two bishops, and it is also likely that the reader is supposed to see this incident as a display of Antony's general support for the episcopacy. Since Serapion was a monk, who had spent considerable time with Antony, and since Serapion was also a bishop and a committed supporter of the pro-Nicene Trinitarian cause, to which Athanasius devoted most of his literary endeavours, it seems quite likely that Serapion was, in fact, the main source of Athanasius' information about Antony.

In some parts of the *VA*, and also in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, Antony appears to be a man who lacks formal education, although he is undoubtedly learned in the teaching contained within the Christian Scriptures. The account given in the *VA* might seem to suggest that Antony's knowledge of the Christian Scriptures was gathered almost entirely aurally, through frequent attendance at services held in his local parish church. However, the Antony to whom the collection of seven letters has been attributed is clearly very theologically sophisticated, so recent scholarly work by Samuel Rubenson has sought to understand how and why such apparently discordant portraits of Antony might have arisen. Rubenson has also drawn attention to the fact that these tensions arise from clashes between the *VA* and the other sources,<sup>39</sup> but also from within the *VA* itself.

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<sup>37</sup> Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. 54-55.

<sup>38</sup> Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, p. 55, n.8. See also pp. xxxiv, 39, 232-233, and 252-255. Vivian also accepts the authenticity of *A Letter by Serapion of Thmuis to the Disciples of Antony*, which was apparently written immediately after Antony's death in 356 CE. For an English translation of this letter, see: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. 37-47.

<sup>39</sup> See: Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, pp. 35-42. See also: Samuel Rubenson, 'Philosophy and Simplicity: The Problem of Classical Education in Early Christian Biography,' in: Tomas Hägg and Philip Rousseau (eds.), *Greek Biography and Panegyric in Late Antiquity*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, Volume 31, (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 110-139.

## Antony the Great: Was He Really Illiterate?<sup>40</sup>

So why might Athanasius have chosen to portray Antony as an uneducated man? Perhaps Athanasius was using a literary device from Classical Greek rhetoric, known as a *tópos*, i.e. a commonplace idea or structural element. In the *tópos* that Athanasius might have employed, a contrast is established between the true wisdom of the protagonist(s), and the false wisdom of the antagonist(s). In order to enhance this contrast, emphasis is usually placed upon the relative lack of literacy of the protagonist(s),<sup>41</sup> or the fact that they have received little or no formal education of the type approved by the cultural elite.<sup>42</sup> Athanasius may have chosen to filter the activities of Antony through this particular literary prism so as to bring Antony into greater conformity with Jesus Christ, who is depicted in the Gospels as a man who lacks formal training in the rabbinical schools of Jerusalem, but who has the ability to defeat the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the chief priests, and the scribes in theological debate.<sup>43</sup> However, as we shall see later, Athanasius's portrait of Antony is just as likely to have been shaped by other, equally significant religious and philosophical considerations, especially a desire to portray Antony as the true philosopher and holy man.

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<sup>40</sup> See: Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p. 40, n. 1. Rubenson believes that the claim in *VA* 72-73 that Antony had not "learned letters" cannot be taken literally, since this view of Antony as an uneducated man seems to be influenced by the portrait of Jesus found in John 7:15, which reads: "And the Jews marvelled, saying, How does this Man [Jesus] know letters, having never studied [μὴ μεμαθηκώς]?" [NKJV]. See also: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, p. 213, n. 407 and n. 411.

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of the extent of literacy in the Graeco-Roman world, see: William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England: Harvard University Press, 1989), esp. pp. 3-42 and 285-322. For a discussion of the concept of literacy in the ancient world, see: Pieter J. J. Botha, *Orality and Literacy in Early Christianity*, Biblical Performance Criticism (Eugene, OR, USA: Cascade Books, 2012); William A. Johnson and Holt N. Parker (eds.), *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2009); and Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London, England: Routledge, 1997).

<sup>42</sup> On ancient Graeco-Roman education, see: Robin Barrow, *Greek and Roman Education*, Inside the Ancient World (London, England: Bristol Classical Press, 2011); Mark Joyal, Iain McDougall & John C. Yardley (eds.), *Greek and Roman Education: A Sourcebook* (London, England: Routledge, 2008); Teresa Morgan, *Literate Education in the Hellenistic and Roman Worlds* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1999); and the classic text, originally published in French in 1948, Henri-Irénée Marrou (George Lamb, trans.), *A History of Education in Antiquity* (New York, NY, USA: New American Library, 1954). For education in ancient Roman Egypt, see: Edward J. Watts, *City and School in Late Antique Athens and Alexandria*, The Transformation of the Classical Heritage, Volume 41 (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2006); Rafaella Cribiore, *Gymnastics of the Mind: Greek Education in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Rafaella Cribiore, *Writing, Teachers, and Students in Graeco-Roman Egypt*, American Studies in Papyrology (Durham, NC, USA: American Society of Papyrologists, 1996).

<sup>43</sup> For confrontation between Jesus and the Sadducees, see: Matthew 22:23-33. For confrontation between Jesus, the Sadducees and the Pharisees, see: Matthew 16:1-12. For confrontation between Jesus, the Pharisees and the chief priests, see: Matthew 21:23-46. For confrontation between Jesus, the Pharisees and the scribes, see: Matthew 12:38-42, Matthew 15:1-13, and especially Matthew 23:1-39. For confrontation between Jesus and the Pharisees, see: Matthew 12:1-8, Matthew 12:22-30, Matthew 19:1-12, Matthew 22:15-22, and Matthew 22:34-46. For confrontation between Jesus and the scribes, see: Matthew 9:1-8.

So just how literate was Antony and what type of education had he received?<sup>44</sup> In *VA* 72 and 73, Antony is depicted as a man lacking in formal theological education of the sort that was provided, for example, in the Catechetical School of Alexandria, and also lacking in the philosophical training one might have received in Athens, but who nonetheless became the victor in various intellectual disputes with pagan priests and philosophers.<sup>45</sup> An incident, recorded in *VA* 72.1, has sometimes been taken to mean that Antony was completely unable to speak in Greek, since he required the services of an interpreter in order to converse with two pagan philosophers who had come to debate with him at Mount Pispir (which is referred to in the *VA* as “the outer mountain”). However, it is also possible that Antony did have at least a basic degree of fluency in spoken Greek, but that he used an interpreter, in this instance, because he was not comfortable when confronted with the sophisticated language used in pagan philosophical discourse.<sup>46</sup>

Other evidence within the *VA* could be taken to indicate that Antony’s ability to read and write in Greek, or even in his native Coptic, was actually very limited. In *VA* 1.1, we are told that Antony’s parents were “well-born and possessed enough property to be self-sufficient” and the text seems to indicate that children of Antony’s social status generally received some level of basic education. However, Athanasius also records that “when the child grew and advanced in age, *he did not continue learning his letters*, wishing to stand apart from the normal activities of children”.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>44</sup> In the ancient world, literacy existed in various and sometimes quite unexpected forms. See, for example: Malcolm Choat & Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, ‘A Church with No Books and a Reader Who Cannot Write: The Strange Case of *P.Oxy.* 33.2673,’ *Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists* 46 (2009), pp. 109-138; and G. W. Clarke, ‘An Illiterate Lector?,’ *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Volume 57 (1984), pp. 103-104. See also: Herbert C. Youtie, ‘*Bradéōs gráphōn*: Between Literacy and Illiteracy,’ *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies*, Volume 12, Number 2 (Summer 1971), pp. 239-261; Herbert C. Youtie, ‘*Agrammatos*: An Aspect of Greek Society in Egypt,’ *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Volume 75 (1971), pp. 161-176; Herbert C. Youtie, ‘*Hupographēus*: The Social Impact of Illiteracy in Graeco-Roman Egypt,’ *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Volume 17 (1975), pp. 201-221; Herbert C. Youtie, ‘Because They Do Not Know Letters,’ *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Volume 19 (1975), pp. 101-108; and T. J. Kraus, ‘(Il)literacy in Non-Literary Papyri from Graeco-Roman Egypt: Further Aspects of the Educational Ideal in Ancient Literary Sources and Modern Times,’ *Mnemosyne*, Volume 53, Number 3 (June 2000), pp. 322-342.

<sup>45</sup> See Vivian’s discussion of this theme under the heading ‘Antony the True Philosopher’, in: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. xxxix-xlvi. For a consideration of the role and importance of literacy in early Christianity, see: Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East* (Philadelphia, PA, USA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004).

<sup>46</sup> In *VA* 72.1, Antony is described as “extremely wise” and as a “perceptive and intelligent person” although “he had not learned to write.” In *VA* 73.1, some Greek-speaking philosophers came to meet Antony at the outer mountain [Mount Pispir] “thinking that they would mock him since he had not learned to write.” In *VA* 73.3, the philosophers went away “astonished because they had witnessed such great understanding in an unlettered person.” See: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. 209 and 211. Once again, we can see similarities between the astonishment felt by the philosophers in the presence of Antony, and that expressed by the opponents of Jesus in Luke 20:26, “But they could not catch Him in His words in the presence of the people. And they marvelled at His answer and kept silent” [NKJV].

<sup>47</sup> Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. 56-57, emphasis added.

We simply do not know at what age Antony began, or concluded, his period of childhood study, and we also do not know what subjects were taught, or whether this material was offered in Coptic and/or Greek.<sup>48</sup> However, on the basis of the reports of his confrontation with various pagan philosophers in *VA* 72 and 73, as well as the brief description of his early training in *VA* 1.1, one might assume that Antony's level of functional literacy in Greek (and possibly also in Coptic) was low, and that his education had been limited.<sup>49</sup> However, at other points within the *VA*, we are confronted by evidence that calls these assumptions into question. After emerging from the tomb in which he had spent twenty years, Antony became a great monastic leader, and acquired a wide network of monastic disciples (*VA* 14.1). Antony displayed an extensive knowledge of the Christian Scriptures, particularly in his lengthy discourse to his disciples (*VA* 16-44).<sup>50</sup> Antony encouraged his disciples to become familiar with the Christian Scriptures, and, in advice reminiscent of that provided by several of the Hellenistic philosophical schools, he urged them to write down their thoughts for daily analysis (*VA* 55.7-12). Antony even engaged in written correspondence with the Roman emperor Constantine, and his sons, Constantius and Constans (*VA* 81), as well as with Balacius, a pro-Arian military commander (*VA* 86).<sup>51</sup>

Some of the apparently contradictory indications as to the extent of Antony's literacy and/or education in the *VA* might have been brought about by the Athanasian tendency to take the basic biographical information that he had received from Serapion of Thmuis, and then to reconceptualise Antony in terms of figures from within the Christian Scriptures (at least some of whom were quite literate and learned).<sup>52</sup> In fact, Athanasius presents key events and teachings from Antony's monastic career in terms of the words and/or actions of Biblical figures such as: Abraham, the Apostle Paul, Daniel, David, Elijah, Elisha, Ezekiel, Jacob, Job, John the Baptist, Joshua, Judas, Laban, Mary, Samuel, and Zacharias.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Bartelink and Vivian both maintain that the various references to Antony as being 'unlettered' do *not* mean that he was illiterate, in the strict modern sense of that term (i.e. completely unable to read or write), but rather that he had not been educated in pagan wisdom. See: Bartelink, *Athanasios D'Alexandrie: Vie D'Antoine*, p. 323, n. 1. See also: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, p. 215, n. 413.

<sup>49</sup> Rubenson rejects these assumptions and argues that Antony's letters "reveal that he must not only have been literate but also possessed of some education" and that Antony "was a *man of letters*" and quite possibly "the first real Coptic author." See: Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, pp. 141 & 185; and Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, p. 215, n. 413.

<sup>50</sup> Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. 96-153.

<sup>51</sup> See: Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, p. 40, n. 1.

<sup>52</sup> See Vivian's discussion of this theme under the heading 'The Word in the Desert' in: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. xxiii-xxxv.

<sup>53</sup> Abraham (*VA* 36.3); Apostle Paul (*VA* 7.7; 7.11; 19.1-2; 22.4; 40.5; 55.4-8; 65.7-9); Daniel (*VA* 43.3; 82.2); David (*VA* 32.3; 52.1; 67.8); Elijah (*VA* Preface 4, and 7.12); Elisha (Preface 4 and *VA* 34.2); Ezekiel (*VA* 18.3); Jacob (*VA* 1.3; 44.4; 67.7); Job (*VA* 24.1-3; 42.8); John the Baptist (*VA* 20.7; 36.4); Joshua (*VA* 20.6; 43.3); Judas (*VA* 18.3; 42.8); Laban (*VA* 67.7); Mary (*VA* 36.4; 37.1); Samuel (*VA* 67.8); Zacharias (*VA* 35.6).

## Antony the Monk as the True Philosopher and Holy Man

Athanasius, in addition to ‘re-conceptualising’ Antony in terms of Jesus Christ and other specific individuals from within the Bible, also seems to have portrayed Antony in terms of at least two other general types: (1) the true philosopher (in opposition to pagan philosophy);<sup>54</sup> and (2) the true holy man (in opposition to pagan religion). We will now briefly consider these two types to which the figure of Athanasius has been assimilated.

The depiction of Antony as the true philosopher is a central image in the *VA*:

Antony is many things in the Coptic *Life*: ascetic, monk, holy man; theologian, teacher; ‘good father’ and ‘physician to Egypt’. No one role can define him or his importance to the Christian community. *Antony’s most important role, though, over against pagan Greek culture, is that of the true philosopher: Antony is the... ‘man of heart’, the wise man whose wisdom comes not from pagan philosophy but from faith in Jesus Christ.* This theme lies at the heart of the *Life*, and all the themes are connected: just as journeying to God cannot be separated from attacks by the Devil (paragraphs 65-66), just as contemplation cannot be separated from an understanding of evil, so Christian belief cannot be set apart from the beliefs of its opponents... To us in our pluralistic and relativised world, the ‘antagonistic’ framing device of the *Life* of Antony may not appear as healthy or wise, but it is there: it accurately reflects the religious situation of late antiquity and may reflect ours more than we think.<sup>55</sup>

The portrait of Antony as a philosopher begins with the depiction of his childhood, and the remark in *VA* 1.3 that: “His whole desire was, as it is written, to live at home, unaffected by the outside world”. The reference here, in the first instance, is to the Old Testament figure of Jacob in Genesis 25:27. However, the phrase “unaffected by the outside world” also seems to suggest the kind of ἀπάθεια (*apátheia*), or freedom from passion, that was the general goal of many of the Hellenistic philosophical schools and of the monastic theology of Evagrius Ponticus. Antony is also shown to be a proto-ascetic in *VA* 1.3:

Moreover, even though he lived in modest circumstances as a child, he did not pester his parents for all sorts of expensive foods, nor did he look for the pleasures associated with them. He was satisfied solely with what he had and never looked for more.

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<sup>54</sup> See, for example, the description of the philosophical ‘sage’ in: Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 220-231.

<sup>55</sup> Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. xli-xlii, emphasis added.

After his parent's death, when Antony was either eighteen or twenty years old, he entered his local parish Church on two particular occasions at which the Gospel reading for the day profoundly affected him. He sold the property that he had inherited, placed his younger sister in the care of celibate female members of the parish, and then embarked upon an ascetic life, which is described as follows in *VA* 3.1:

... from that time on he devoted himself to ascetic discipline in front of his home, watching over himself spiritually, and practicing patient endurance.<sup>56</sup>

Antony's ascetic discipline is clearly modelled on that of the Xenophonic Socrates, especially the reference to practicing "patient endurance" or *kartería*. Furthermore, despite the illiteracy that seems to have been attributed to Antony in the *VA*, Pierre Hadot believes that Antony was, in fact, a Christian philosopher and a representative of "learned monasticism":

Some of the believers in "Christian philosophy" were also practitioners of monasticism themselves: this is the movement which Louis Bouyer has called "learned monasticism". For them, "philosophy" would henceforth designate the monastic life as perfection of the Christian life. Nevertheless, this "philosophy" continued to be linked closely to such secular categories as peace of mind, the absence of passions, and "life in conformity with nature and reason". As in secular philosophy, monastic life thereafter presented itself as the practice of spiritual exercises, some of which were specifically Christian, but many of which had been bequeathed by secular philosophy. Thus, we reencounter attention to one's self, which was the fundamental attitude of the Stoics, and of the Neoplatonists as well. For Athanasius of Alexandria, such was the very definition of the monastic attitude. When, in his *Life of Antony*, he tells how the saint was converted to the monastic life, he simply says that Antony began to pay attention to himself. Athanasius also reports the words Antony addressed to his disciples on the day of his death: "Live as if you were going to die every day, devoting attention to yourselves and remembering my exhortations."<sup>57</sup>

Antony, the true practitioner of philosophy, later triumphs over those pagan philosophers who believed that philosophy is primarily about reading and commenting upon the philosophical discourse of others (cf. *VA* 72 and 73). Antony tellingly remarks to his opponents: "The person whose mind is sound... has no need of letters" (*VA* 73.3).

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<sup>56</sup> This section of the Greek text reads: αὐτὸς πρὸ τῆς οἰκίας ἐσχόλαζε λοιπὸν τῇ ἀσκήσει, προσέχων ἑαυτῷ καὶ καρτερικῶς ἑαυτὸν ἄγων. Cf. Bartelink (trans.), *Athanase D'Alexandrie: Vie D'Antoine*, p. 136.

<sup>57</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy*, p. 242.

Athanasius depicts Antony as the true holy man in several ways.<sup>58</sup> The theme emerges clearly in *VA* 8-10, when Antony spent an extended period of time living in a tomb “that lay some distance from his village”.<sup>59</sup> Antony was viciously assaulted by the demons, and was left unconscious (*VA* 8.2-3). After Antony recovered from this assault, the demons attacked again, but this time in the guise of “wild beasts and reptiles”.<sup>60</sup>

That night the demons made such a racket that the whole place seemed to be shaken apart. The demons acted as though they had torn down the four walls of the little room and seemed to be entering through them, having taken on the fantastical appearance of wild beasts and reptiles. Suddenly the place was filled with the illusory shapes of lions, bears, leopards, bulls, and poisonous snakes and scorpions and wolves, and each of them was moving about in ways appropriate to its form. The lion was roaring, wanting to leap on him; the bull acted as though it would gore him; the snake crawled forward but did not reach him; the wolf rushed at him, but then stopped. Absolutely terrible were the cacophonous ravings of all these apparitions and the howling of their voices (*VA* 9.5-7).

In the period when Antony confronted these demons (late 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE), Egyptian Christians would have considered the ancient Egyptian religion to be a particularly vile form of pagan idolatry. The appearance of the demons in animal form strongly suggests that the reader is supposed to regard them as representatives of the Egyptian pantheon.<sup>61</sup> Despite intense physical suffering, however, Antony was able to resist the attack of these animal-like apparitions, and he even mocked the demons, by pointing out that “Mimicking the forms of irrational beasts, as you do, only demonstrates your weakness” (*VA* 9.9).

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<sup>58</sup> For analysis of the responsibilities of the holy man in late antiquity, see: Claudia Rapp, *Holy Bishops in Late Antiquity: The Nature of Christian Leadership in an Age of Transition* (Berkeley & Los Angeles, CA, USA: University of California Press, 2005); Garth Fowden, ‘The Pagan Holy Man in Late Antique Society’, *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume 102 (1982), pp. 33-59; and Peter Brown, ‘The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity’, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Volume 61 (1971), pp. 80-101.

<sup>59</sup> Antony was assailed by “The Enemy”, i.e. Satan, who “was afraid that little by little Antony would turn the desert into a city of asceticism” (*VA* 8.2). In *VA* 14.7, Athanasius notes that: “... [Antony] persuaded many to choose the monastic life. And so monastic dwellings came into being in the mountains, and the desert was made a city by monks.” This final phrase became the inspiration for the title of a classic history of early Christian monasticism. See: Derwas J. Chitty, *The Desert A City: An Introduction to the Study of Egyptian and Palestinian Monasticism under the Christian Empire* (Crestwood, NY, USA: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995 [1966]).

<sup>60</sup> For an overview of the various animal-like gods and goddesses of ancient Egyptian religion, see: Richard H. Wilkinson, *The Complete Gods and Goddesses of Ancient Egypt* (London, England: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 2003); and Manfred Lurker, *An Illustrated Dictionary of The Gods and Symbols of Ancient Egypt* (London, England: Thames and Hudson, Ltd., 1980).

<sup>61</sup> Psalm 96:5 in the Septuagint rendering states: “For all the gods of the nations are demons”. Vivian notes that: “In Egypt, where the ancient gods took the form of animals, it is not surprising that Christians saw these gods as beastly demons come to haunt and terrorise them. Anubis took the form of a dog... Such animal forms would have been painted and carved on the walls of the tomb where Antony was living.” See: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, p. 81, n. 76.



The theme of Antony as the true holy man, locked in mortal combat with the pagan ‘gods’ of Egypt, continues in *VA* 11-13, when Antony emerged from the tomb, at the age of 35, and decided to set out for Mount Pispir, east of the Nile. Here he took up residence in an old abandoned fortress.<sup>62</sup> Antony remained within his μοναστήριον (*monastērion*) for a considerable period of time, “neither going out nor seeing any of those who came” (*VA* 12.4). Whilst he was there, the demons frequently attacked him, and cried out at him as well:

Those friends who came to see him, since he would not allow them to come inside, often remained outside day and night. They heard what sounded like mobs of people creating a ruckus and crashing around inside, letting loose their pitiful voices and crying out, ‘Get away from what belongs to us! What are you doing in the desert? You will not be able to endure our connivings!’ Those outside at first thought some people who had gotten inside by means of ladders were in there fighting with him, but when they knelt down to look through a hole in the wall, they did not see anyone. At that point, realising that the people inside were demons, they got scared, and started calling to Antony. (*VA* 13.1-3)

Antony, however, was now unperturbed by the demons, and his long experience of fighting successfully against them, both in the tomb and now in the Egyptian wilderness, meant that he knew how to win in this cosmic conflict against Satan and his demons:

He heard them shouting, but paid no attention to the demons, and going up to the door, he urged the people to go away and not be afraid. ‘For’, he said, ‘the demons create just such apparitions for those who are fearful. But you – cross yourselves and go away strengthened and encouraged, and leave the demons to deceive themselves’. So they went away, protected by the sign of the cross. (*VA* 13.4-5)<sup>63</sup>

Antony’s triumph over the pagan gods, and his transformation into the new Christian holy man (modelled, in some respects, on the Stoic ‘sage’) is emphasised in *VA* 14:

Antony emerged as though from some shrine, having been initiated into divine mysteries and inspired by God... When those people saw him, therefore, they were amazed to see that his body had maintained its natural condition, being neither fat from lack of exercise nor weakened from fasting and fighting with demons; they found him just as they had known him before his withdrawal. ***The character of his soul was pure... like someone guided by reason, he maintained his equilibrium and natural balance.*** [Emphasis added.]

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<sup>62</sup> The Greek word is παρεμβολή, which can be rendered as ‘barracks’, ‘encampment’, or ‘soldier’s quarters’. See: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, p. 89, n. 93.

<sup>63</sup> On the significance of the sign of the cross, see: Andreas Andreopoulos, *The Sign of the Cross: The Gesture, the Mystery, the History* (Brewster, MA, USA: Paraclete Press, 2006), esp. pp. 11-42.

## The Differing Depictions of the Demons in the *VA* and the Other Sources

In addition to the theme of Antony's supposed illiteracy, which we have explored above, there is at least one other significant anomaly in the sources, to which several scholars have drawn attention. This anomaly concerns a depiction of the demons, in the letters attributed to Antony, which differs in some important respects from the presentation of the demons found within the *VA* and the *Apophthegmata Patrum*.<sup>64</sup> The implications of these differing depictions of the demons, in the three main sources, have only begun to receive significant scholarly attention within the last decade or so. Prior to this time, it was generally assumed that, if Antony had received only a rudimentary education, then the seven letters attributed to him could not be authentic. However, if we, along with scholars such as David Brakke, Samuel Rubenson, and Tim Vivian, are prepared to entertain the possibility that Antony was sufficiently literate, and/or sufficiently well-educated, to have been able to at least dictate the seven letters to a scribe, and maybe even to physically write at least part of them down himself, then we would have access to another source of very useful information about Antony's understanding of the nature and role of the demons. This information, in turn, would not only allow us to develop a more nuanced understanding of Antony and his many and varied interactions with the demons, but would also potentially shed light on the origins of some elements of the highly developed demonology to be found within the works of Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian.

On the basis of an extensive comparison and analysis of all the extant versions of the letters attributed to Antony, Rubenson has concluded that it is, in fact, quite likely that the letters could have been composed by Antony, in the late 330s AD, when Antony would have been approaching ninety years of age. If Rubenson's dating and attribution of these letters is correct, then they would have been composed at a very late stage of Antony's life, by which time Antony, through interaction with pagan philosophers, and with other monks, could easily have encountered and assimilated the relatively complex theological views expressed within this body of correspondence. The demonology developed within the seven letters of Antony is significantly different from that found within the *Vita Antonii*, most especially in relation to the fact that the demons in the *VA* are often seen and heard by Antony, and at least heard by others, whereas the demons in the Letters of Antony are invisible and inaudible.

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<sup>64</sup> For a discussion of the role of Satan and the demons in the *VA*, see: Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. xxxv-xxxix. For the role of angels and demons within the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, see the sayings of Antony, numbers 1, 12 and 22 in: *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, pp. 1-9. For a discussion of the role of angels and demons in the Letters of St Antony, see: Rubenson, *The Letters of St. Antony*, pp. 86-88.

### Antony's Understanding of the Demons: Visible or Invisible?

According to Rubenson, Antony's doctrine in the letters is similar to that of the great Biblical exegete Origen of Alexandria (c. 185 – c. 254 AD),<sup>65</sup> who seems to have taught that souls had fallen away from God into three categories of existence, namely, angels, human beings and demons.<sup>66</sup> In this scheme, demons have fallen the farthest from God, and Origen seems to have thought that these demons were primarily invisible beings, who generally afflicted human beings through their thoughts. A similar understanding can be seen in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*, in which there are three references to the demons afflicting monks by means of their thoughts, and in which there are no physical manifestations of the demons.<sup>67</sup> In the *VA*, however, Satan and the demons are visible beings that also have the ability to interact physically with humans and the visible world. These demons converse openly with Antony (*VA* 6), seek to mislead him through miraculous apparitions (*VA* 5.5 and 6.1), tempt him with silver and gold (*VA* 11 and 12) and can physically torment him, as they take on human forms (*VA* 5.4 and 6.1) or even animal forms (*VA* 9). Vivian, noting the vividness of the portrait of Satan in the *VA*, has even made the observation that “if Antony were not such a strong Christ-inspired character, the Devil would steal the show.”<sup>68</sup>

If we are prepared to consider, on the basis of the letters, that Antony might have thought of the demons as primarily invisible beings, generally attacking humans by means of their thoughts, how might we explain the decision of Athanasius to portray Satan and the demons as visible beings capable of physical interaction with the world? What literary or theological reasons might Athanasius have had for providing such confronting depictions of the forces of evil? Perhaps, it is because Athanasius wanted to provide the Antony of the *VA* with powerfully visible and audible adversaries, so that Antony's ultimate triumph, through the strength of Christ, would appear to be even more glorious.

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<sup>65</sup> For an introduction to the thought of Origen, see: Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen*, The Early Church Fathers Series (London, England: Routledge, 1998); and Ronald E. Heine, *Origen: Scholarship in the Service of the Church*, Christian Theology in Context (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2011). For Origen's use of Scripture, see: Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen: The Bible and Philosophy in the Third-Century Church* (Louisville, KY, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1983); Peter W. Martens, *Origen and Scripture: The Contours of the Exegetical Life*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2012); Elizabeth Ann Dively Lauro, *The Soul and Spirit of Scripture within Origen's Exegesis*, Bible in Ancient Christianity (Atlanta, GA, USA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2010); and Henri de Lubac, *History and Spirit: The Understanding of Scripture According to Origen* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2007; original French edition, 1950).

<sup>66</sup> For Origen's distinctive approach to cosmology and theodicy, see: Mark S. M. Scott, *Journey Back to God: Origen on the Problem of Evil* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>67</sup> See the sayings of Antony, numbers 1, 12 and 22 in: *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, pp. 1-9.

<sup>68</sup> Vivian and Athanassakis, *Life of Antony*, pp. xxxv.

Athanasius's previous works, *Contra Gentes* (*Against the Pagans*) and its companion piece, *De Incarnatione* (*On the Incarnation*), celebrate the triumph of Christian truth over pagan falsehood, and the cosmic victory of Christ over Satan, sin and death.<sup>69</sup> Therefore, in considering the depiction of the demons in the *VA*, it seems that we might need to take into account an Athanasian tendency to re-conceptualise events in Antony's life in terms of Biblical examples, especially those from the life of Christ. The cosmic battle between Satan and God, which is revealed in the afflictions of Job in the Old Testament, probably also contributes to the Athanasian literary template. Thus, just as Job suffered terrible emotional and physical blows from Satan, Antony must also undergo demonic torment. Since Christ went through a period of temptation in the wilderness by Satan, so too, Antony must go through his own 'wilderness experiences' in which he is verbally and physically harassed by the Prince of Darkness. Throughout the Gospels, Christ and his disciples continued to do battle with the demons; so too, Antony and his disciples must face ongoing demonic trials.

The process of reconceptualising a historical person in terms of earlier Biblical figures, which seems to have had such a profound effect on the structure and content of the *VA*, is not something that began with Athanasius, and it is deeply rooted in the earlier Christian tradition. This can be seen perhaps most clearly in the Gospel of Matthew, in which Jesus is presented as a new Moses.<sup>70</sup> Therefore, it is possible to question whether one should really say that *The Life of Antony* marks the beginning of the Christian hagiographic tradition, as is often claimed. In a purely formal sense, it is certainly true that the genre now known to us as hagiography begins with Athanasius's account of Antony, but in a deeper spiritual sense, hagiography necessarily looks back to, and draws its inspiration from, the four canonical Christian Gospels. Certainly, any Christian hagiographical text must depend, at least implicitly, upon identification between a holy Christian person and Jesus Christ himself, and it may well include other more or less overt comparisons to a range of Biblical figures, as is the case within the *Vita Antonii*. Therefore, scholars need to remain aware of, and sensitive to these literary and theological imperatives within hagiographic texts, which lead to the reconceptualisation of Christian saints in terms of earlier spiritual exemplars.

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<sup>69</sup> For an edition of the Greek text of both the *Contra Gentes* and the *De Incarnatione*, with an English translation, see: Robert W. Thomson, *Athanasius: Contra Gentes and De Incarnatione*, Oxford Early Christian Texts (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1971). For a more recent edition of the *De Incarnatione*, with Greek text and facing English translation, see: John Behr (trans.), *Saint Athanasius: On The Incarnation*, Popular Patristics (Crestwood, NY, USA: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2012).

<sup>70</sup> On the depiction of Jesus as a new Moses, see: Michael P. Theophilos, *Jesus as New Moses in Matthew 8-9: Jewish Typology in First Century Greek Literature*, Gorgias Studies in Philosophy and Theology (Piscataway, NJ, USA: Gorgias Press, 2012). For parallels between the teaching of Moses and Jesus, see: Joey Green (ed.), *Jesus and Moses: The Parallel Sayings* (Berkeley, CA, USA: Ulysses Press, 2002).

## Conclusion

Our survey of several recent examples of the claim that ‘monasticism replaced martyrdom’ has revealed that, in every case, the claim can best be interpreted to mean that martyrdom, i.e. confession and then death for one’s faith, was a form of life that was gradually *superseded* by the monastic form of life during the course of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE, when active, widespread persecution of Christians by the Roman imperial authorities gradually diminished. This *chronological supercession* took place, from perhaps 300 CE onwards, as organised forms of celibate, ascetic Christian life, that had previously existed *within* parish structures, began to be established *outside* parish structures. Monasticism continued to replace martyrdom in the period between the promulgation of the Edict of Milan in 313 CE (at which time the Christian religion was granted toleration within the Roman Empire by Constantine I) and the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 CE (when the Christian religion was established as the official religion of the Roman Empire by Theodosius I).

We have also seen that the manner in which the claim “monasticism replaced martyrdom” has been advanced could potentially cause the reader to infer, quite incorrectly, that the ‘replacement’ being discussed entailed that monasticism was an entirely different and separate phenomenon from that of martyrdom. Conceptually, there are certainly some features that distinguish the two forms of life. Firstly, martyrdom was distinguished from monasticism by its goal of potential violent death at the hand of the Roman imperial authorities, as opposed to the ‘practice for death’ found within monasticism, in which it was recognised that death came to all Christians eventually, if not by violent means, then from misadventure, sickness, or old age. Secondly, training for martyrdom required sexual chastity, as was the case for all faithful Christians, but did *not* require the sexual celibacy that was a defining feature of the monastic way of life (Collinge). However, the authors we have surveyed speak of an essential *functional equivalence* between the two forms of life, expressed in terms of: “renouncing the world and even a Church grown worldly with respectability” (White); “the ideal of Christian spirituality” (Solomon); “the most revered form of the imitation of Christ” (Collinge); “extreme self-surrender in the service of Christ” (Buchanan); “the major beneficiary of Christianity’s eschatological energies” (Kaplan and Schwartz); and “the supreme grace” (Jungers). Both Jungers and Ware also employ the categories of “red martyrdom” (i.e. death for the faith) and “white martyrdom” (i.e. monasticism) to reinforce the essential continuity between the two forms of life, both in terms of ‘training for virtue’ and ‘practice for death’.

Our analysis of the *Life of Antony* has revealed the many ways in which this text functions as a Martyr Act, as well as a Greco-Roman philosophical treatise. In Chapter 7, we saw that a Martyr Act fulfilled the purposes of celebration, edification, and propaganda. In a similar fashion, as the reader gathers outside Antony's tomb (*VA* 8-10), the *Life of Antony* also fulfils the function of celebration. The text has edified many: "his fame spread everywhere, and everyone who saw him marvelled at him, and even those who had never seen him longed to be near him" (*VA* 93.2). Perhaps most importantly, by means of this text, "[Antony] persuaded many to choose the monastic life" (*VA* 14.7). Antony is depicted as a type of Jesus Christ, but Athanasius has also chosen to portray Antony as the type of the rational and unperturbed 'True Philosopher', and as the pious and heroic 'True Holy Man'. In both instances, Antony demonstrates that, through the power given to him by Christ, he is able to overcome earthly and unearthly adversaries, whether they be pagan priests and pagan philosophers, or Satan and his demonic forces. The *Life of Antony*, therefore, provides a powerful literary template for those who would seek to follow a similar path of 'assimilation to God', by means of ascetic training for moral excellence, as well as through appropriate management of the thoughts, and successful combat against the demons.

In Chapter 9, we will turn to an analysis of the lives of Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian. We will consider the academic and spiritual education of each individual, and will seek to identify the main philosophical and theological figures and influences that contributed towards the monastic worldview that is represented in their extant writings. In particular, we will examine Evagrius's teaching about the Eight Generic Thoughts, and its counterpart in Cassian's teaching about the Eight Principal Vices. Our aim will be to understand how the teaching about the Eight Thoughts/Eight Vices functioned within the body of theological discourse developed by each of these two Christian monks, and to examine the ways in which this theological discourse was dependent upon concepts and terminology derived from earlier forms of Greco-Roman religious and philosophical thought and practice.

## Chapter 9

### The Monastic Worldview of Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian

#### Introduction

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, Socrates of Constantinople (c.380-after 439 CE) made an intriguing reference to Evagrius Ponticus in his *Church History*.<sup>1</sup> After describing Evagrius as the disciple of Macarius the Great (300-391 CE) and Macarius of Alexandria (d. 395 CE), Socrates stated that it was from these two senior Egyptian monks that Evagrius had acquired “*the philosophy of deeds*, whereas formerly he had been a philosopher only in word.”<sup>2</sup> Evagrius, before journeying into the Egyptian desert, had already admitted to “a certain longing which stole into me for the divine dogmas and for the philosophy concerning these”, and then, in an allusion to the Biblical book of Genesis, he had asked in a rhetorical fashion, “Who would become a Laban for me, free me from Esau, and guide me [παιδαγωγῶν] to *the highest philosophy*.” In the very next section of Evagrius’ text, known as either the *Epistula Fidei*, or *On the Faith*,<sup>3</sup> he states that Gregory of Nazianzus (330-390 CE)<sup>4</sup> had become the guide for whom he had been seeking.<sup>5</sup> As Jeremy Driscoll has observed, “With these two texts” [i.e. those of Socrates and Evagrius] “the question of Evagrius’ relation to ancient philosophy can be posed.” In Chapter 9, therefore, we will investigate the role that ancient philosophy played in the development of the monastic worldview held by Evagrius Ponticus and his associate, John Cassian, with particular reference to the work of Pierre Hadot.

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<sup>1</sup> Socrates of Constantinople, also known as Socrates Scholasticus, was the author of a *Church History* that covered events in the period from 305 CE to 409 CE.

<sup>2</sup> Socrates Scholasticus, *Church History*, 4.23 [*Patrologia Graeca* Volume 67, section 516A], as cited in: Jeremy Driscoll (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, Ancient Christian Writers, Volume 59 (New York, NY, USA & Mahwah, NJ, USA: The Newman Press, 2003), p. 196, emphasis added.

<sup>3</sup> The treatise bears the full title *An Apology to the Caesareans for His Withdrawal, and a Treatise on Faith*. Formerly attributed to Basil of Caesarea, it appears as Letter 8 in: Roy J. Deferrari (trans.), *St. Basil: The Letters*, Volume 1, Loeb Classical Library, Volume 190 (Cambridge, MA, USA: Harvard University Press, 1926), pp. 46-93. The quotation above, from the *Epistula Fidei*, is found on p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> Gregory, bishop of Nazianzus, also known as Gregory the Theologian, was one of the three so-called Cappadocian Fathers, along with the brothers Basil, bishop of Caesarea (c.329-379 CE) and Gregory, bishop of Nyssa (c.335-c.395). Basil and Gregory Nazianzen are each known to have exerted a significant influence on the intellectual development of Evagrius, as we shall see below. For similarities between the thinking of Evagrius and Gregory Nyssen, see: Kevin Corrigan, *Evagrius and Gregory: Mind, Soul and Body in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century*, Ashgate Studies in Philosophy and Theology in Late Antiquity (Farnham, Surrey, England & Burlington, VT, USA: Ashgate Publishing, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Evagrius Ponticus, *On the Faith*, section 1, lines 11-14, as cited in: Driscoll (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, p. 196.

Looking firstly at Evagrius, and secondly at Cassian, we will provide an outline of the ancient sources that are relevant to our investigation, and will construct a biographical sketch of each of these two great monastic thinkers. These sketches of the lives of Evagrius and Cassian will allow us to become more familiar with the historical, philosophical and theological context within which their monastic worldview developed, and will draw attention to the many important figures who provided them with intellectual and spiritual guidance. We will also briefly survey the extant writings of each author, and make some tentative suggestions about the dating, provenance and genre of their works.

Later in the chapter, we will turn our attention towards the structure and content of the Evagrian teaching concerning the Eight Generic Thoughts, as outlined in various works from the Evagrian ascetic corpus,<sup>6</sup> especially the Πρακτικός (*Praktikós*).<sup>7</sup> We will then consider how this teaching was adapted by Cassian in the *Institutes*,<sup>8</sup> and also in his Fifth Conference.<sup>9</sup> Our analysis in this chapter will include a survey of the influence of Origen of Alexandria on the thinking of Evagrius, and on those who most closely influenced his ascetic thought and practice. We will examine the differing modern assessments of the significance of ‘Origenism’ for an accurate understanding of the nature of Evagrian thought and practice. We will also trace the adaptation of Origen’s threefold scheme of spiritual progress, patterned on the Biblical books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, as it was transformed by Evagrius into his distinctive monastic pattern of spiritual development towards knowledge of the Holy Trinity, understood in terms of levels known as πρακτική (*praktikē*), γνωστική (*gnōstikē*), and θεολογική (*theologikē*). We will conclude the chapter with an overview of another Evagrian work, the *Ad Monachos*,<sup>10</sup> and will observe the ways in which this text illuminates the connections between Greco-Roman philosophy and Christian theology. In the light of Pierre Hadot’s understanding of ancient philosophy, we will demonstrate how the Evagrian/Cassianic monastic worldview was manifested as a way of life, with associated philosophical discourse, in the form of Christian spiritual exercises.

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<sup>6</sup> For an English translation of the ascetic corpus, see: Robert E. Sinkiewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>7</sup> For an English translation of the *Praktikós*, see: Sinkiewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, pp. 91-104; and John Eudes Bamberger (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer*, Cistercian Studies Series, Number 4 (Kalamazoo, MI, USA: Cistercian Publications, 1981), pp. 12-42.

<sup>8</sup> For an English translation, see: Boniface Ramsey (trans.), *John Cassian: The Institutes*, Ancient Christian Writers, Volume 58 (New York, NY, USA & Mahwah, NJ, USA: The Newman Press, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> For an English translation, see: Boniface Ramsey (trans.), *John Cassian: The Conferences*, Ancient Christian Writers, Volume 57 (New York, NY, USA & Mahwah, NJ, USA: The Newman Press, 1997). Conference 5, ‘On the Eight Principal Vices’, is found on pp. 177-210.

<sup>10</sup> For an English translation of the *Ad Monachos*, see: Driscoll, *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, pp. 41-66; and Sinkiewicz, *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, pp. 115-135.



## Sources for the Life of Evagrius

The main source<sup>11</sup> for the life of Evagrius is a work called the *Historia Lausiaca*,<sup>12</sup> which was written by Palladius<sup>13</sup>, a disciple of Evagrius,<sup>14</sup> in 419/420 CE.<sup>15</sup> The *Historia Lausiaca* contains character sketches of around 60 monks and nuns whom Palladius had either personally encountered or heard about in “the Egyptian desert and Libya, in the Thebaid and Syene, the Tabennesiotes<sup>16</sup>, and those in Mesopotamia, Palestine, and Syria, and in the West, those in Rome and Campania and points near by.”<sup>17</sup> Robert T. Meyer describes the *Historia Lausiaca* and the *Vita Antonii* as “the two most important source documents for the history of early monasticism in Egypt”,<sup>18</sup> because Palladius and Athanasius had direct knowledge of many of the persons and places of which they wrote. Palladius states that his purpose in writing the *Historia Lausiaca* was to draw attention to:

the wonderfully virtuous and ascetic life of the holy fathers, monks and anchorites of the desert. *It is written for the emulation and imitation of those who wish to succeed in the heavenly way of life* and to take the journey which leads to the kingdom of heaven. It is written also to commemorate women far advanced in years and illustrious *God-inspired mothers* who *have performed feats of virtuous asceticism in strong and perfect intention, as exemplars and models* for those women who wish to wear the crown of self-abnegation and chastity.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Other sources for the life of Evagrius include: The Coptic *Life of Evagrius*; Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 4.23; Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica* 6.30; Gennadius, *De Viris Illustribus* 11; the *Historia Monachorum In Aegypto* 20.15; various sayings in the *Apophthegmata Patrum*; as well as letters of Gregory of Nazianzus, Basil of Caesarea and Jerome of Stridonum. See: William Harmless & Raymond R. Fitzgerald, ‘The Sapphire Light of the Mind: The *Skemmata* of Evagrius Ponticus’, *Theological Studies*, Volume 62 (2001), p. 499, n. 3. See also: Luke Dysinger, *Psalmody and Prayer in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus*, Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Robert T. Meyer (trans.), *Palladius: The Lausiaca History*, Ancient Christian Writers, Volume 34 (New York, NY, USA & Mahwah, NJ, USA: Paulist Press, 1964). The name of this work reflects the fact that it was dedicated to Lausus, the royal chamberlain at the court of the Roman Emperor Theodosius II (401-450 CE). Lausus is described as “one of the finest of men, one who was most learned in my opinion, of peaceable habits, religiously disposed in heart and mind, and charitable to the poor.” (Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, p. 17).

<sup>13</sup> Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, p. 5, points out that the details of Palladius’ life are known only from a few remarks made by contemporaries, and from details found in his two known writings, the *Historia Lausiaca* and the *Dialogus de vita sancti Joannis Chrysostomi*. See: Edward Cuthbert Butler (trans.), *The Lausiaca History of Palladius: A Critical Discussion Together with Notes on Early Egyptian Monachism*, Texts and Studies: Contributions to Biblical and Patristic Literature, Volume 6 (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1898 and 1904 [Originally in 2 volumes]). See: Volume 1, p. 2f, and pp. 173-183; and Volume 2, pp. 237-247.

<sup>14</sup> See: Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 7. Palladius later became bishop of Helenopolis.

<sup>15</sup> See: Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, p. 23. In the *Prologue*, Palladius tells Lausus that he “decided to set forth for you an account of my entire experience. It was the thirty-third year of my being in the company of the brethren and of my own solitary life, my twentieth year as bishop, and the fifty-sixth year of my life as a whole.”

<sup>16</sup> The Tabennesiotes were the followers of the Pachomian tradition at Tabennesi, near Dendera, in Egypt.

<sup>17</sup> Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, pp. 23-24.

<sup>18</sup> Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, p. 17, emphasis added. In the *Vita Antonii* of Athanasius, and in the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius, the concept of monastics as exemplars for *all* the Christian faithful is a central feature.

Palladius' account refers to persons known from other early monastic sources, such as the anonymous *Historia Monachorum In Aegypto*<sup>20</sup> and in the various collections of monastic sayings known as the *Apophthegmata Patrum*<sup>21</sup> or *Verba Seniorum*.<sup>22</sup> Meyer concedes that in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the reliability of the *Historia Lausiaca* was questioned. However, the *Historia Lausiaca* is generally considered by contemporary scholars to be a reliable source "but with due recognition given the fact that there are some passages marked by hyperbole, and that Palladius accepted some stories from others (including possibly, in some cases, stories in written form) which are dubious."<sup>23</sup>

The Coptic *Life of Evagrius*, another important source, is structurally very similar to the Greek text in Chapter 38 of the *Historia Lausiaca*, but provides more detail about Evagrius' interior life and ascetic practice. Tim Vivian has suggested that Palladius might have been the author of the Coptic material,<sup>24</sup> but since the author, provenance, and historical reliability of the Coptic *Life of Evagrius* are in question, Augustine Casiday has expressed reservations about relying upon its testimony.<sup>25</sup> He notes that Emile Amélineau<sup>26</sup> argued that the Coptic material served as an original source for Palladius's account, but that this position "was subject to searching criticism" from Dom Cuthbert Butler.<sup>27</sup> Regardless of its historical reliability, however, the Coptic *Life* is an important witness to the reception of Evagrian thought, so reference will be made to it in this chapter when appropriate.

<sup>20</sup> See: Norman Russell (trans.), *Lives of the Desert Fathers: The Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*, Cistercian Studies, Number 34 (Kalamazoo, MI, USA: Cistercian Publications, 1981).

<sup>21</sup> See: Benedicta Ward (trans.), *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, Cistercian Studies, Number 59 (Kalamazoo, MI, USA: Cistercian Publications, 1975).

<sup>22</sup> See: Benedicta Ward (trans.), *The Desert Fathers: Sayings of the Early Christian Monks* (London, England: Penguin Books, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, pp. 7-8. It must also be noted that the Greek text, from very early times, existed in a long and a short redaction, which are entirely contradictory in parts. Dom Cuthbert Butler, who is responsible for the critical edition of the *Historia Lausiaca*, notes that: "So popular was it that no respect whatever was felt for its text: it was re-written, re-arranged, enlarged, shortened, paraphrased, combined with kindred works, without any scruple. Thus every known process of corruption – revision, interpolation, redaction, intermixture of texts – has had free play among the MSS. both of the Greek texts and the versions." The versions to which he refers here are the various translations into Syriac, Armenian, Coptic, Ethiopic, Arabic and Old Sogdian. For a discussion of these versions, see: Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, pp. 8-11.

<sup>24</sup> Tim Vivian believes that Palladius wrote the material found in the longer Coptic text, and that the Greek text has suffered from later editorial intervention due to the First Origenist Controversy. For a discussion of the relationship between the Greek and Coptic texts, see: Tim Vivian (trans.), *Four Desert Fathers: Pambo, Evagrius, Macarius of Egypt and Macarius of Alexandria*, Coptic Texts Relating to the *Lausiaca History* of Palladius, Popular Patristics Series (Crestwood, NY, USA: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2004), pp. 46-49.

<sup>25</sup> Augustine Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology of Evagrius Ponticus: Beyond Heresy* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 20, n. 27 provides a brief orientation to discussion of some of the differing positions with regard to the Coptic *Life of Evagrius*.

<sup>26</sup> Emile Amélineau (trans.), *De Historia Lausiaca Quatenus Sit Hujus Ad Monachorum Aegyptiorum Historiam Scribendam Utilitas: Adjecta Sunt Quaedam Hujus Historiae Coptica Fragmenta Inedita* (Paris, France: E. Leroux, 1887), pp. 1-72.

<sup>27</sup> Butler (trans.), *The Lausiaca History of Palladius*, Volume 1, pp. 107-155, especially pp. 131-148.

## The Life of Evagrius and the Sources of His Ascetic Theology

Evagrius was born in Ibora<sup>28</sup> (modern day Iverönü, in Turkey), a town in a region called Helenopontus, which was in the Roman province of Cappadocia. Ibora was probably not far from Annisa, where Macrina the Younger (324-379 CE) had entered the monastic life, later to be followed by Basil the Great (c.330-379 CE). In *Historia Lausiaca* 38.1, it is said that Evagrius died in the Egyptian desert at the age of 54.<sup>29</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* 38.13 also mentions that Evagrius died after receiving communion on the Feast of Epiphany [i.e. January 6]. However, there is no record of Evagrius in connection with the departure of ‘Origenist’ monks from Egypt in 399/400 CE, brought about by the Paschal letter of Theophilus, Bishop of Alexandria, issued on or close to Sunday April 15<sup>th</sup>, 399 CE.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, on the basis of the (somewhat questionable) assumption that Evagrius had been a central figure in the early stages of the First Origenist Controversy, most scholars have concluded that Evagrius died c.399 CE, aged 54, and thus was probably born c.345 CE.

Evagrius was the son of a χορεπίσκοπος (*chorepiskopos*, a ‘country-bishop’), that is, a bishop who had episcopal oversight of a rural district, but generally had more limited powers than a regular bishop.<sup>31</sup> Augustine Casiday believes that since the father of Evagrius was a *chorepiskopos*, it is “overwhelmingly likely that his family would have moved in circles that overlapped with those of Basil’s family.”<sup>32</sup> Evagrius might have been named after his father,<sup>33</sup> who possibly owned an olive grove, and seems to have been a nobleman with sufficient wealth to provide alms for the local poor.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Vivian, *Four Desert Fathers*, p. 74. The Coptic text reads “Iberia”, not “Ibora”. In the ancient world, there were two Iberias: one was the Spanish peninsula, but the other was the land south of the Caucasus, northeast of Armenia, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The second Iberia was an area near Pontus, roughly coinciding with modern-day Georgia. Therefore, the Georgian Orthodox Church claims Evagrius as a saint and as its first monk. See: Henri Leclercq, ‘Ibora’ in: Ferdinand Cabrol & Henri Leclercq (eds.), *Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie* (Paris, France: Letouzey et Ané, 1907-1953), Volume 7, pp. 4-9.

<sup>29</sup> In the Coptic *Life of Evagrius* 1 and 10, Evagrius is said to have died at the age of 60. Based on the assumption that Evagrius died c.399 CE, then Evagrius would have been born in 339/340 CE. For discussion about the uncertainty surrounding the exact year of Evagrius’ death, see: Antoine Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert: Évagre le Pontique* (Paris, France: Vrin, 2004), p. 63, n. 6. See also: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 9 & 10, and p. 9, n. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 8, n. 6. The promulgation of this letter brought conflict between the so-called ‘Anthropomorphite’ and ‘Origenist’ monks to a head.

<sup>31</sup> Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, p. 200, n. 340. A *chorepiskopos* might only be entitled to confer minor orders, and was directly responsible to the bishop in the provincial capital, who was known as the metropolitan. See: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>32</sup> Augustine Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, *The Early Church Fathers* (Oxford, England: Routledge, 2006), p. 7. Casiday also suggests that “it is entirely possible that Evagrius would have encountered Basil... as a student.” See also: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 9-10, and p. 9, n. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 13 draws attention here to: Gregory of Nazianzus, *Letter 6*.

<sup>34</sup> For details, see: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 12.

There is some evidence in the writings of Evagrius to suggest that he had received an education in philosophy and rhetoric, and had some understanding of mathematics, medicine and astronomy, thus indicating that he might have come from a wealthy background.<sup>35</sup> Evagrius is likely to have received his education in Neocaesarea, a city near Iborra. In 375 CE, Basil of Caesarea had been invited there, by the local people, to teach. If Evagrius completed the standard curriculum of studies common in this period, he may have studied in Neocaesarea from approximately 352/353 CE<sup>36</sup> until he was ordained as a *lector*, or *reader*, by Basil. Basil became bishop of Caesarea in 370 CE<sup>37</sup> and died on January 1<sup>st</sup>, 379 CE.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, it is possible that Evagrius served with Basil for up to nine years in total.

On the basis of an ancient tradition, Casiday suggests that Basil might have been the person who brought Evagrius into the monastic life.<sup>39</sup> Whether this was the case or not, however, it can be regarded as certain that Basil had a decisive influence on the early theological thinking of Evagrius, based on the evidence of the *Epistula Fidei*, a letter which was once attributed to Basil himself. This letter, which was traditionally listed as number 8 in the Basilian collection,<sup>40</sup> has since been shown to be perhaps the earliest known work from Evagrius.<sup>41</sup> The *Epistula Fidei* also reflects the influence upon Evagrius of Basil's friend, Gregory of Nazianzus. Gregory Nazianzen had been asked by Bishop Meletios of Antioch and his synod to go to Constantinople in 379 CE, after Basil's death, in order to oversee a mission to restore Nicene orthodoxy in that city.<sup>42</sup> Evagrius' decision to go to Constantinople at around this same time marked a significant turning point in his life.

<sup>35</sup> Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 6. Dysinger mentions that "his literary style and occasional citations in his writings suggest that he was familiar with pagan classics and classical rhetoric." Wolfgang Lackner has shown that two citations from pagan authors which appear in works of Evagrius are also found in Clement of Alexandria's *Stromateis*, which raises the possibility that Evagrius was directly influenced by the ascetic teaching of Clement, including Clement's teaching concerning preparation for Christian martyrdom, which was addressed earlier, in Chapter 7. See: Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 9, n. 7.

<sup>36</sup> Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 15. See also: Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 9, n. 8.

<sup>38</sup> Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, p. 200, n. 342.

<sup>39</sup> Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 16 & n. 16; Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 7 and p. 204, n. 16. This view was first put forward by Babai the Great (c.551-628 CE). Although there is no direct evidence to support this view, it has since been endorsed by a number of scholars. For details, see: Guillaumont, *Un philosophe au désert*, pp. 26-27. It should be noted that Guillaumont himself did not support this view.

<sup>40</sup> The letter is now also referred to as Evagrius' *Syriac Letter 63*. See: Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, pp. 46-47; Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 16 & n. 17. For the Greek text of this letter, with English translation and commentary, see: Deferrari (trans.), *St. Basil: The Letters*, Volume 1, pp. 46-93.

<sup>41</sup> Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 10, n. 11. Gabriel Bunge has argued that the *Epistula Fidei* was composed in the first half of 381 CE, whereas Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 31, suggests that it was written c.379-380 CE.

<sup>42</sup> John McGuckin, *Saint Gregory of Nazianzus. An Intellectual Biography* (Crestwood, NY, USA: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), p. 240. Gregory's cousin Theodosia gave him a villa in Constantinople to use as his residence. Gregory dedicated part of this villa as the Church of Anastasia, and it was at this church that Gregory delivered the now famous *Theological Orations*.

Evagrius may have reached Constantinople shortly after Gregory, and was probably invited to the capital by Gregory, in order to assist him in the theological debates that arose between the pro-Nicene and anti-Nicene factions in Constantinople. At some time between 379 CE and 381 CE, Gregory, who was now effectively the bishop of Constantinople for the pro-Nicene faction, ordained Evagrius to the diaconate. Gregory, assisted by Evagrius, participated in the Second Ecumenical Council, held in Constantinople in 381 CE. However, Gregory later resigned his position as bishop, and as episcopal chairman during the Council, and left Constantinople. Gregory was replaced as bishop of Constantinople by Nectarius; Evagrius remained in the capital as a deacon, serving under Nectarius.

Evagrius' rhetorical ability and theological orthodoxy is emphasised in *Historia Lausiaca* 38.2: "in the great synod at Constantinople he [Gregory] left him [Evagrius] to the blessed bishop Nectarius as one most skilful in confuting all the heresies. He [Evagrius] flourished in the city, confuting every heresy with youthful exuberance."<sup>43</sup> Similarly, in the Coptic *Life* 4 we read:

...truly he [Evagrius] was a wise person, being in possession of himself and without passions,<sup>44</sup> and was a deacon of steadfast character. Indeed, he himself attended Constantinople with our fathers the bishops at the time of the synod that took place in Constantinople, and he was victorious over all the heretics. Thus this Evagrius and Nectarius<sup>45</sup> the bishop debated with each other face to face, for truly Evagrius was very protective of the Scriptures and was well equipped to refute every heresy with his wisdom. He was therefore well known throughout Constantinople for having combatted the heretics with forceful and eloquent language.

Casiday notes that: "The Trinitarian arguments in Evagrius' *Letter* 63 [i.e. the *Epistula Fidei*] indicate that he was familiar with several orations that Gregory delivered in Constantinople in 379 and 380."<sup>46</sup> Indeed, McGuckin has proposed that Evagrius assisted Gregory in the composition of his famous *Theological Orations*, pointing to the denser apologetic and more elaborate citation of opponents' texts as evidence for this view.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Meyer, *Lausiaca History*, p. 111.

<sup>44</sup> The phrase "without passions" is perhaps an allusion to Evagrius' later teaching about *apátheia*, a term derived from Stoic philosophy. Its use here is somewhat ironic, as Evagrius soon had to leave Constantinople precisely because of Evagrius' intensely passionate feelings for a woman who was married to another man.

<sup>45</sup> The reference here to Nectarius, which is *not* found in the Greek text of the *Historia Lausiaca*, might actually be intended as a reference to Nestorius, who was bishop of Constantinople at the time of the Third Ecumenical Council, held in Ephesus in 431. Nestorius was, in fact, condemned as a heretic at this council. However, Evagrius could not have contended with Nestorius there, since Evagrius had died roughly 30 years earlier!

<sup>46</sup> See: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 17 and notes 19, 20 & 21.

<sup>47</sup> McGuckin, p. 278, n. 271.

Evagrius' orthodoxy, especially with regard to Christological disputes, is also emphasised in a story which features in the *Coptic Life* 29, about a successful confrontation between Evagrius and three heretical demons. The demons disguised themselves as servants of the Church, and visited Evagrius on the pretext of discussing the subject of faith in the Scriptures. The first demon introduced himself as a Eunomian, and the second as an Arian. The third demon did not specify which particular heresy he supported, but his discussion with Evagrius suggests that he was an Apollinarian. Whether or not one believes that the story above actually happened, it indicates that the author of the *Coptic Life* regarded Evagrius as a staunch *defender* of the orthodox Christological position that he had learned directly from Basil and Gregory of Nazianzus. Furthermore, as Dysinger emphasises, even if Evagrius had become familiar with what some might have regarded as the more questionable elements of Origenist thought, during his period of instruction with Basil and Gregory, nonetheless, he would have received "a highly critical and selective approach to Origen's teachings."<sup>48</sup> This is a point which we must bear in mind, in light of persistent but unmerited claims that Evagrius was "more Origenist than Origen",<sup>49</sup> particularly with regard to his Christology.

Evagrius had clearly developed a powerful reputation in Constantinople, but this was almost to prove his downfall.<sup>50</sup> The *Coptic Life* 5 records that: "The whole city praised him greatly. After all this learning... on account of his pride and arrogance, he fell into the hands of the demon who brings about lustful thoughts for women, as he told us later after he had been freed from this passion." This passage is significant because it seems to indicate that the author knew Evagrius (thus perhaps supporting Vivian's view that the author of the *Coptic Life* was Palladius), and also because it reflects an aspect of Evagrius' ascetic teaching, that there is a particular demon responsible for each of the passionate thoughts. Evagrius had fallen in love with the wife of a member of the nobility, and she, likewise, was in love with Evagrius. They apparently did *not* consummate their relationship, as Evagrius was constrained by his conscience, and by the thought of the heretics, who would gloat at his shame, if the relationship were to be discovered. After fervent prayer, Evagrius had a dream in which he was arrested by angels, disguised as soldiers of the prefect. One of the angels changed form and appeared as a friend of Evagrius, persuading Evagrius to swear that he would leave Constantinople and be concerned for the salvation of his soul. Upon waking, Evagrius packed his belongings and departed for Jerusalem by ship.

<sup>48</sup> Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 11. For details, see: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 13-15, esp. p. 14.

<sup>49</sup> Hans Urs Von Balthasar, 'The Metaphysics and Mystical Theology of Evagrius,' *Monastic Studies*, Volume 3 (1965), pp. 183-184, cited in: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 158.

<sup>50</sup> Vivian, *Four Desert Fathers* p. 75, n. 30: Evagrius will pay for "his pride and arrogance" (par. 5)."

Coptic *Life* 8 records that Evagrius was “joyfully welcomed” in Jerusalem by Melania the Elder (c.342-c.410 CE).<sup>51</sup> It is unclear what connection, if any, existed between Evagrius and Melania before this time, but both she, and her monastic associate Rufinus of Aquileia (c.344-410 CE),<sup>52</sup> became firm friends and supporters of Evagrius. During the time that he spent in Palestine, probably during 382 CE, Evagrius promptly forgot about his promise to “be concerned for the salvation of his soul.” In fact, Coptic *Life* 8 informs us that “the Devil hardened his heart as in the time of Pharaoh” and that “on account of his boiling youthfulness and his very learned speech, and because of his large and splendid wardrobe (he would change clothes twice a day), he fell into vain habits and bodily pleasure.” *Historia Lausiaca* 38.8 states that he “returned to his old way of life, changing his clothes and manner of speech”, perhaps suggesting a return to a pre-monastic mode of existence, if indeed he had been a monk when he arrived in Palestine.

*Historia Lausiaca* 38.8, describing Evagrius as being “intoxicated with vainglory”,<sup>53</sup> explains how God brought a six-month fever upon him, which “wasted away his flesh which had been his great impediment.”<sup>54</sup> Melania the Elder, concerned by the duration and intensity of Evagrius’ illness, asked him to reveal the true cause of his affliction. After her prayers for his recovery were answered, she then persuaded Evagrius to assume (or perhaps resume) the monastic life. Evagrius received a monastic habit, either from Melania, or from Rufinus,<sup>55</sup> on Pascha Sunday, April 9<sup>th</sup>, 383 CE. Evagrius left Jerusalem and walked to the mountains of Nitria in Egypt, where he entered the monastic settlement of Pernouj.<sup>56</sup> At Nitria, Evagrius entered one of the fifty individual residences, and came under the supervision of a priest, known as an *abba* (i.e. a monastic ‘father’).<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Melania was the daughter of a Roman consul, from the patrician Antonia clan, and was the widow of a Roman prefect. She had settled in Jerusalem, where she and Rufinus established a double (i.e. male and female) monastery on the Mount of Olives, and provided patronage for translation work from Greek into Latin. She was committed to promoting Nicene orthodoxy and was familiar with the writings of Origen, as well as several significant exegetes of his work (including Pierius, an Alexandrian catechist; an otherwise unknown Stephen; Gregory Nazianzen; and Basil of Caesarea). See: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 20-21; and Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 9.

<sup>52</sup> Tyrannius Rufinus, or Rufinus of Aquileia, was a monk, historian and translator. He translated several important theological works from Greek into Latin, including Origen’s *Peri Archon*, known in Latin as *De Principiis* (*On First Principles*). See: Francis Xavier Murphy, *Rufinus of Aquileia (345-411): His Life and Works* (Washington, DC, USA: The Catholic University of America Press, 1945).

<sup>53</sup> Vainglory is the seventh of the Evagrian Eight Generic Thoughts.

<sup>54</sup> The Greek and Coptic accounts state that God sent the fever upon Evagrius so as to avert his destruction.

<sup>55</sup> See: Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 9 and p. 205, n. 32.

<sup>56</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* 38.9 and Coptic *Life* 9. Nitria is about 50 kilometres south east of Alexandria in Egypt.

<sup>57</sup> This *abba* would have been the most senior of the eight priests at Nitria, and would have had the responsibility for common liturgical worship, preaching and the maintenance of discipline. The governing assembly of the community, known as ‘the Elders’ or ‘the Fathers’ would have included all eight priests.

Evagrius remained in the community at Nitria<sup>58</sup> for about 2 years, from 383 CE to 384/5 CE, and then went to “the desert of the Cells” (Kellia).<sup>59</sup> Apart from a number of journeys to Alexandria or other parts of Egypt,<sup>60</sup> either to learn from another important monastic figures, or to debate with pagan philosophers, Evagrius remained in Kellia for the rest of his life, from 384/385 CE until 399/400 CE.<sup>61</sup> While living at Kellia, Evagrius worked as a calligrapher, and was well-known for his “graceful Oxyrhynchus character.”<sup>62</sup> He adopted strict ascetic practices, especially with regard to food and sleep.<sup>63</sup> He studied with the younger Macarius, known as Macarius the Alexandrian,<sup>64</sup> at Kellia. Evagrius also travelled to Sketis<sup>65</sup> to study<sup>66</sup> with the older Macarius, known as Macarius the Egyptian.<sup>67</sup>

Evagrius was part of the intellectual ‘Origenist’ group at Kellia with the four so-called ‘Tall Brothers’, Ammonius,<sup>68</sup> Euthymius, Dioscorus, and Eusebius, who had been disciples of the famous Abba Pambo.<sup>69</sup> Evagrius met with the brothers of his community as a spiritual director every Saturday and Sunday night.<sup>70</sup> During his time in Kellia, Evagrius became an influential *abba* himself, due in part to the severity of his personal ascetic practice,<sup>71</sup> as well as the extensive ascetic writings<sup>72</sup> which he produced in this period.

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<sup>58</sup> The monks at Nitria lived idiorhythmically, either alone, with one other monk, or with several monks. For a brief description of daily life at Nitria, see: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>59</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* 10 and *Coptic Life* 10. Kellia was another monastic community, located about 18 kilometres south of Nitria. For a brief description of daily life at Kellia, see: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 24-25.

<sup>60</sup> *Historia Monachorum in Aegypto* 20.15. See: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 81-84.

<sup>61</sup> This period of time is referred to in *Historia Lausiaca* 10 as 14 years, but in the *Coptic Life* 10 it is 16 years.

<sup>62</sup> *Historia Lausiaca* 10. This is a reference to Evagrius’ handwriting, which was “sharp-snouted”. See: Meyer, *Lausiak History*, p. 201, n. 350.

<sup>63</sup> See: Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, p. 13, and Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 15. Evagrius ate only once per day, had an extremely limited diet, and also severely restricted his intake of water. This extreme austerity damaged his digestive tract and also led to painful urinary tract stones, eventually causing him, in the last two years of his life, to partially modify his diet. He also restricted himself to only four hours sleep per night, spending the rest of his time in prayer, contemplation, study of Scripture, and the writing of his ascetic works, in which he “categorised the works of the demons.” (*Coptic Life* 15.)

<sup>64</sup> For the *Life* of Macarius the Alexandrian, see: *Historia Lausiaca* 18.

<sup>65</sup> Macarius the Egyptian had established the monastic community at Sketis, which is about 58 kilometres south west of Nitria. John Cassian spent time at Sketis, and may have met Evagrius there. See: Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 13, n. 28.

<sup>66</sup> Evagrius also visited John of Lycopolis in the Thebaid region of Egypt, and may have visited Didymus the Blind, who lived near Alexandria. See: Dysinger, *Psalmody*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>67</sup> For the *Life* of Macarius the Egyptian, see: *Historia Lausiaca* 19.

<sup>68</sup> For the *Life* of Ammonius, see: *Historia Lausiaca* 10.

<sup>69</sup> Dysinger, *Psalmody*, p. 14. For the *Life* of Pambo, see: *Historia Lausiaca* 11.

<sup>70</sup> *Coptic Life* 17.

<sup>71</sup> In addition to the restrictions which he imposed upon himself with regard to food and sleep, the *Coptic Life* records a number of instances where Evagrius adopted extreme measures to overcome specific instances of demonic attack. In *Coptic Life* 22, he overcame the attack of the demon of fornication by spending the whole night standing naked, praying in the cistern of water, “until his flesh became as hard as a rock.” Similarly, in *Coptic Life* 23, he overcame the demon of blasphemy by spending forty days outdoors, “until his body was covered with vermin like the body of an irrational animal.”

<sup>72</sup> Details of Evagrius’ writings will be discussed in the following sections.



## The Dating, Provenance, Production and Transmission of Evagrius' Works

Evagrius' ascetic works were written in Greek, during his time at Kellia in Egypt, over a roughly 15 year period, from perhaps 384/385 CE, until his death in 399/400 CE. The first dissemination point of these works was probably in Palestine, at the double monastery of Melania the Elder and Rufinus of Aquileia, on the Mount of Olives. The second dissemination point was probably Constantinople, after several 'Origenist' monks had fled there to seek protection from John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople (r. 397-407 CE, with interruptions due to being sent into exile). The third dissemination point was Mount Athos, in northern Greece, where Evagrian works were copied and preserved by the monks who settled there from the 10<sup>th</sup> century CE onwards.<sup>73</sup> However, due to Evagrius' posthumous condemnation for heresy at the Fifth Ecumenical Council, which was held in Constantinople in 553 CE, many copies of his works, in their original Greek, were subsequently destroyed or lost.<sup>74</sup>

During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century CE, scholars began the difficult task of identifying and collating genuinely Evagrian works. Critical editions of some Evagrian works were produced, and translations into a number of modern European languages (especially English, French, and German) were made. Today, the contours of the Evagrian corpus are fairly well established, but a number of significant textual problems still remain. Furthermore, identification of some works as genuinely Evagrian has also been quite contentious, especially with regard to the work known as the *Kephalaia Gnostica*, which only survives complete in two different and incompatible versions in Syriac.<sup>75</sup> Casiday reminds us that:

Even though modern philological and text-critical work on Evagriana is guided by standards of practice that can justly be considered scientific, that work is also necessarily bound up with critical work of a synthetic nature: *to judge whether some text is Evagrius' or not, we need a sense for what counts as Evagrian. Answers tend to diverge...*<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> This section is partially derived from a brief overview of the transmission history of the Evagrian works, in: Sinkiewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, pp. vii-ix. For more extensive treatment, see: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, Chapter 2, 'Evagrius' writings', pp. 28-45.

<sup>74</sup> Some works continued to be copied in Greek, but under the names of other more 'orthodox' authors, such as Nilus of Ancyra. Evagrian works had also been translated into languages such as Syriac and Armenian.

<sup>75</sup> Antoine Guillaumont and several other scholars have concluded that S2 (the longer version) is the authentically Evagrian work, and represents the clearest indication that Evagrius was justly condemned for 'Origenist' heresy. Other scholars, such as Augustine Casiday, suggest that S1 (the shorter version) is the authentic work, and that S2 contains later heretical interpolations. For a refutation of Guillaumont's position, see: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, Chapter 3, 'Evagrius' Reputation', pp. 46-71, esp. pp. 64ff.

<sup>76</sup> Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, p. 29, emphasis added. We will consider these problems below.

## The Number and Genre of Evagrius's Ascetic Works<sup>77</sup>

The *Clavis Patrum Graecorum* is a modern series of volumes which has been produced with the aim of providing a list of all the works attributed to Church Fathers who wrote in Greek between the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 8<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. In the second volume of this series, Mauritius Geerard has assigned 32 item numbers to Evagrius, but some of these item numbers represent multiple works (e.g. the designation CPG2437 covers many individual letters). In fact, if we were to count each of the individual works of Evagrius that are currently known, then the number would be over 100. Furthermore, it is still possible that more Evagrian works could be discovered. Primarily on the basis of formal characteristics, the extant works can be assigned to four categories: letters, treatises, *scholia*, and *kephalaia*.

**Letters.**<sup>78</sup> Sixty-four letters have been preserved in the Syriac tradition, representing the largest number of Evagrian items in any of the four categories listed above. Three of the letters in the Syriac tradition are fragmentary, namely *Letters* 17, 18 and 30. Comparison with the Syriac collection has also facilitated the identification of several Greek fragments.

**Treatises.** The treatises, unlike the Evagrian letters, are *not* occasional pieces. The treatises tend to be longer and more detailed than the letters, since Evagrius is writing them for the edification of a general audience, and he cannot make the same assumptions about the level of knowledge of his readers that could be made in the case of the letters.

**Scholia.** The *scholia*, or ‘annotations’, are part of a genre that consists of explanatory comments made on a section of writing that might come from the Bible, or from another text. A *scholion* might address apparent contradictions or inconsistencies in a text, or provide explanations of unusual words, phrases, grammatical elements, or historical and geographical descriptors. Evagrius made particular use of *scholia* in the allegorical interpretation of Biblical passages.

**Kephalaia.** The *kephalaia*, or ‘chapters’, are a particularly distinctive feature of the Evagrian corpus, consisting generally of short, aphoristic reflections on aspects of the Christian life. Each *kephalaion* can be deceptively brief and simple, but individually and collectively, they often require many re-readings and much deep thought to discover the true meaning. Three particular collections of *kephalaia* represent the three levels of the Evagrian spiritual schema: the *Praktikós*; the *Gnōstikós*; and the *Kephalaia Gnōstiká*.

<sup>77</sup> This section is derived from: Casiday, ‘Reconstructing the Theology’, Chapter 2, ‘Evagrius’ writings’, pp. 28-45.

<sup>78</sup> A German translation of the entire letter corpus is found in: Gabriel Bunge (trans.), *Evagrius Pontikos: Briefe aus der Wüste*, Sophia, Band 24 (Trier, Germany: Paulinus-Verlag, 1986).

## Evagrius' Posthumous Reputation – Was He Really an 'Origenist' Heretic?<sup>79</sup>

During his years at Kellia, Evagrius was visited by five or six pilgrims a day, both monks and lay people.<sup>80</sup> Indeed, he was so highly regarded that Archbishop Theophilus of Alexandria sought to have Evagrius ordained as bishop of Thmuis, but Evagrius apparently fled to Palestine in order to prevent this.<sup>81</sup> It would seem, then, that Evagrius was destined to be recognised after his death as a great *abba*, a gifted yet humble spiritual director, a profound theoretician of the ascetic life, an inspired guide in the practice of unceasing prayer, and perhaps even as a saint. He had studied with such theological giants as Basil the Great and Gregory the Theologian, and had absorbed the wisdom of many of the leading figures in the monastic world, such as Macarius the Egyptian, Macarius the Alexandrian, the Tall Brothers, John of Lycopolis and perhaps Didymus the Blind, as well as his close friends in Palestine, Melania the Elder and Rufinus of Aquileia. However, the Second Origenist Controversy, which erupted in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century CE (roughly 150 years after Evagrius' death), would do significant damage to Evagrius' reputation for orthodoxy. Far from being recognised as a saint, Evagrius was posthumously condemned as a heretic. But was this condemnation deserved? Casiday begins his investigation of this issue by noting that:

*... every historically responsible study of Evagrius agrees that the evidence for what others thought of him, during and immediately after his lifetime, is modest and what we do have tends overwhelmingly to be favourable... we shall see that the convention for identifying Evagrius as the éminence grise of Origenists is, in the first place, historically isolable to a controversy that occurred after he was long since dead and, secondly, that the attempts to identify him as centrally important to the First Origenist Controversy (399/400-c.411) move forward in default of any evidence contemporary to Evagrius that he played such a part... For the past sixty years, scholarly consensus has grown so strong that **we easily forget how exceedingly paltry is the proximal evidence that Evagrius was an 'Origenist' in any but the most trivial sense.**<sup>82</sup>*

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<sup>79</sup> This section is primarily dependent on Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, Chapter 3, 'Evagrius' reputation', pp. 46-71.

<sup>80</sup> *Coptic Life* 18. These pilgrims contributed a substantial amount of money in donations, which was managed by Evagrius' steward, and helped to supplement the income which Evagrius received from his calligraphy.

<sup>81</sup> *Coptic Life* 19. This seems to be yet another indication that Evagrius' teaching was considered to be entirely orthodox. In fact, Dysinger notes (p. 14) that various Archbishops of Alexandria schemed at different times to ordain not just Evagrius, but also the 'Origenist' Tall Brothers as well. For analysis of the attempt to ordain Evagrius to the bishopric of Thmuis, and its implications for the interpretation of his life and teaching, see: Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 84-86.

<sup>82</sup> Casiday, *Reconstructing the Theology*, pp. 46-47, emphasis added.

Gabriel Bunge has questioned whether it is accurate to describe Evagrius as an ‘Origenist’ at all, pointing out that none of the primary sources from the period of the First Origenist Controversy mention Evagrius.<sup>83</sup> Whilst admitting that Evagrius’ name does not even appear in the records of this period, Elizabeth Clark nevertheless maintains that “the theology of Evagrius Ponticus is central to the controversy”.<sup>84</sup> In fact, Clark goes considerably further in her elevation of Evagrius than even Antoine Guillaumont, who had merely stated that: “The work of Evagrius is therefore a witness to, and to a certain extent probably a product of, the Origenism that was condemned in 400; *but it came too late for us to be able to estimate that it played an important role in the formation of this Origenism such as it was condemned*.”<sup>85</sup> Clark’s interpretation of Evagrius is ultimately dependent on Guillaumont’s view that S2, the longer version of the Syriac translation of the *Kephálaia Gnōstiká*, is in fact the authentically Evagrian version. If this was not the case, as Casiday seems to have demonstrated quite compellingly in his most recent monograph, then it is long past time for Evagrius to be ‘rehabilitated’ and his good reputation restored:

... Clark justifies with reference to Guillaumont’s work the somewhat counterintuitive claim that Evagrius’ complete and utter absence from the primary historical sources is far from a barrier to positing that he was central to the debates; rather, she argues, his absence from the records is a catalyst for further research... even a desultory reading of sources indicates that *Evagrius’ reputation had shifted unmistakably from the last decades of the fourth century to the middle decades of the sixth century. Lack of attention to those differences is problematical, since it facilitates anachronistic interpretations of Evagrius’ works* by essentialising ‘Origenism’ and thus by ploughing back the outcome of the Second Origenist Controversy into modern readings of writings by a man who played at most a walk-on part in the First Origenist Controversy.<sup>86</sup>

<sup>83</sup> Gabriel Bunge, ‘Origenismus-Gnostizismus. Zum geistesgeschichtlichen Standort des Evagrius Pontikos’, *Vigiliae Christianae*, Volume 40 (1986), pp. 24-54, especially pp. 25-26.

<sup>84</sup> Elizabeth Clark, *The Origenist Controversy: The Cultural Construction of an Early Christian Debate* (Princeton, NJ, USA: Princeton University Press, 1992), p. 44. Clark supports her claim concerning the alleged centrality of Evagrius to the First Origenist Controversy by reference to publications from three French scholars: Antoine Guillaumont & Claire Guillaumont, ‘Le texte véritable des ‘Gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique’, *Revue d’Histoire des Religions*, Volume 142 (1952), pp. 156-205; François Refoulé, ‘Évagre fut-il origéniste?’, *Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques*, Volume 47 (1963), pp. 398-402; and what Clark describes as the “definitive statement of this argument” in Antoine Guillaumont, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique et l’histoire de l’Origénisme chez les Grecs et chez les Syriens*, Patristica Sorbonensia, Volume 5 (Paris, France: Éditions du Seuil, 1962).

<sup>85</sup> A. Guillaumont, *Les “Kephalaia Gnostica” d’Évagre le Pontique*, p. 123, emphasis added in the English translation above: “L’oeuvre d’Évagre est donc un témoin, et dans une certaine mesure sans doute un produit, de l’origénisme qui fut condamné en 400; mais elle est venue trop tard pour qu’on puisse estimer qu’elle ait joué un rôle important dans la formation de cet origénisme tel qu’il fut condamné”.

<sup>86</sup> Casiday, ‘Reconstructing the Theology’, pp. 48-49, emphasis added.

## The Life of Cassian and the Sources of His Ascetic Theology

It is one of the ironies of history that, despite Evagrius' condemnation in the 6<sup>th</sup> century CE,<sup>87</sup> we have a written *Life of Evagrius* which survives in both Greek and Coptic, whereas for John Cassian, who is officially commemorated throughout the Eastern Orthodox Church<sup>88</sup> and also in one region of the Roman Catholic Church<sup>89</sup>, an official *Life* was never written. As a result, in attempting to reconstruct the chronology and events of Cassian's life, we are dependent upon: a brief sketch of Cassian's life written perhaps fifty years after the death of Cassian by Gennadius of Marseilles (*fl.* late 5<sup>th</sup> century CE),<sup>90</sup> in his continuation of a work by the monk, Jerome (c.347-420 CE) called *De Viris Illustribus* (*On the Lives of Illustrious Men*); the scattered clues which Cassian provides in his own writings; and one or two passing references in ecclesiastical documents of the early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE.

We cannot be certain about either the date of Cassian's birth, or of his death, and must proceed by inference from the few more or less fixed dates which seem to be more reliably established. We do not know the town, or the precise region of Cassian's birth, and questions have even been raised about whether we know his true name. Given the various difficulties outlined above, the entry written by Gennadius is worth quoting in full:

Cassianus, Scythian by race, ordained deacon by bishop John the Great, at Constantinople, and a presbyter at Marseilles, founded two monasteries, one for men and one for women, which are still standing. He wrote from experience, and in forcible language, or to speak more clearly, with meaning back of his words, and action back of his talk.

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<sup>87</sup> Due to the decisions of the Fifth Ecumenical Council, Evagrius has officially been considered a heretic by the Roman Catholic Church and by the Eastern Orthodox Church (with the notable exception of the Church of the Georgian nation). Nonetheless, Evagrius has been considered a saint in the Armenian Church (which commemorates him at every Liturgy and also on February 11) and also in the Coptic Church, in which the *Life of Evagrius* "was read on the fifth Sunday of Lent". See: Vivian, *Four Desert Fathers*, p. 70.

<sup>88</sup> John Cassian is commemorated in the Eastern Orthodox Church on February 29.

<sup>89</sup> See: Columba Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 21 and p. 156, n. 196. Cassian is commemorated locally at Marseilles, in France, on July 23 each year, but Stewart notes that "Cassian's role in the monastic response to Augustine's views has denied him liturgical and devotional recognition as a saint of the western church", so there is significant ambiguity within the Western Christian tradition as to the saintly status of Cassian.

<sup>90</sup> Adrian Fortescue, 'Gennadius of Marseilles', *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. Volume 6 (New York, NY, USA: Robert Appleton Company, 1909). Accessed November 18, 2014 at 5:00 pm from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06417a.htm> Nothing is known of the life of Gennadius, except what he tells us in the last of the biographies in this collection: "I, Gennadius, presbyter of Massilia, wrote eight books against all heresies, five books against Nestorius, ten books against Eutyches, three books against Pelagius, a treatise on the thousand years of the Apocalypse of John, this work, and a letter about my faith sent to blessed Gelasius, bishop of the city of Rome." Pope Gelasius reigned from 492-496 CE, so Gennadius must have lived at the end of the fifth century CE.

He covered the whole field of practical directions, for monks of all sorts, in the following works: *On Dress*, also *On the Canon of Prayers*, and the *Usage in the Saying of the Psalms*, (for these in the Egyptian monasteries, are said day and night), three books. One of *Institutes*, eight books, *On the Origin, Nature and Remedies for the Eight Principal Sins*, a book on each sin.

He also compiled *Conferences* with the Egyptian fathers, as follows: On the aim of a monk and his creed; On discretion; On three vocations to the service of God; On the warfare of the flesh against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh; On the nature of all sins; On the slaughter of the saints; On fickleness of mind; On principalities; On the nature of prayer; On the duration of prayer; On perfection; On chastity; On the protection of God; On the knowledge of spiritual things; On the divine graces; On friendship; On whether to define or not to define; On three ancient kinds of monks and a fourth recently arisen; On the object of cenobites and hermits; On true satisfaction in repentance; On the remission of the Quinquagesimal fast; On nocturnal illusions; On the saying of the apostles; “For the good which I would do, I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do”; On mortification; and finally at the request of Leo the archdeacon, afterwards bishop of Rome, he wrote seven books against Nestorius, *On the Incarnation of the Lord*,<sup>91</sup> and writing this, made an end, both of writing and living, at Marseilles, in the reign of Theodosius and Valentinianus.<sup>92</sup>

Gennadius refers to our subject as “Cassianus”, which is the name by which he was known to his contemporaries.<sup>93</sup> However, in Cassian’s own works, “Cassianus” does *not* appear, and the name “Iohannes” only appears twice.<sup>94</sup> Gennadius refers to Cassian as being “Scythian by race.” Various theories have been advanced to explain this piece of information about Cassian’s ethnic background,<sup>95</sup> with scholarly opinion now tending to favour the region known as Scythia Minor in the Roman province of Dacia Pontica. Scythia Minor, or Lesser Scythia (known in Greek as Μικρά Σκυθία) was a region surrounded by the Danube River at its northern and western edges, with the Black Sea to the east.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Unfortunately, no recent English translation of this work exists. See: Philip Schaff (ed.), *Sulpicius Severus, Vincent of Lerins, John Cassian*, Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, Series 2, Volume 11 (Edinburgh, Scotland: T. & T. Clark, 1885). For a recent French translation, see: Marie-Anne Vannier (trans.), *Traité de l’Incarnation: Contre Nestorius* (Paris, France: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1999).

<sup>92</sup> ‘Supplement to *De Viris Illustribus*’, *The Catholic Encyclopedia*, Volume 6 (New York, NY, USA: Robert Appleton Company, 1909). Accessed November 18, 2014 at 5:00 pm: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/2719.htm>

<sup>93</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 4. In the reconstruction of the chronology and events of Cassian’s life which appears in this section, I am much in debt to the work of Stewart, who is one of the few scholars writing in English who has attempted to bring together all of the disparate information about Cassian into one coherent sequence.

<sup>94</sup> *Institutes* 5.35 and *Conferences* 14.9.4

<sup>95</sup> For a brief discussion, see: Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1968 [1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1950]), p. 9. For a more recent, and more comprehensive survey of the options, see: Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>96</sup> This ancient region roughly corresponds to the modern Dobruja, which straddles the modern border area between Bulgaria and Romania.

Cassian was probably born in the early 360s CE.<sup>97</sup> The family landholdings, which were in a “pleasant and delightful” region, stretched to the edge of the wilderness, and the recesses of the forests provided “sufficient supplies of food.”<sup>98</sup> It was also a cold region<sup>99</sup> in which it was “impossible or at least highly unusual” to find any monks.<sup>100</sup> Cassian apparently grew up in an affluent and pious Christian household and had a private tutor who instructed him in the great works of classical literature.<sup>101</sup>

According to Chadwick, Cassian’s mother tongue was more probably Latin than Greek, but as an adult he was almost certainly bilingual, as his writings reveal that he was able to converse with Greek-speaking monks in their own language.<sup>102</sup> Stewart believes that Cassian’s ability to speak Latin and Greek is both the key to the success of his later monastic life, and also a clue to Cassian’s place of origin:

Cassian professed to be bringing the eastern monastic tradition to the West. His [positive] reception by the East provides at least some validation of his claim, for one sees him moving between Eastern and Western Christianity with ease. The medium was his bilingualism, and his entire achievement was built on that simple fact. While Cassian’s mastery of Latin suggests that he was a native speaker and writer, he used Greek daily for at least twenty-five years in Bethlehem, Egypt and Constantinople. One can judge his Greek only on the indications he gives within his Latin writings, but these suggest that he both spoke and read the language well. He knew his Bible in Greek and could cite Greek Christian authors. This bilingualism makes the most compelling argument for the Balkan hypothesis: in Cassian’s day, Scythia Minor was a bilingual region where he could have received a classical Latin education in an environment where Greek also had a strong presence.<sup>103</sup>

In about 380 CE,<sup>104</sup> Cassian travelled with his older friend Germanus to Palestine. Germanus was to be the constant companion of Cassian for the next 25 years. The two friends became monks and settled in a coenobitic monastery in Bethlehem, not far from the Church of the Holy Nativity. While members of this Greek-speaking monastic community in Bethlehem, they shared a common room, known as a monastic cell.

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<sup>97</sup> For a discussion of the assumptions lying behind this estimate, see: Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 141, n. 10.

<sup>98</sup> Ramsey (trans.), *Conferences* 24.1.3, p. 825.

<sup>99</sup> Ramsey (trans.), *Conferences* 24.8.5, p. 831.

<sup>100</sup> Ramsey (trans.), *Conferences* 24.18, p. 840.

<sup>101</sup> Ramsey (trans.), *Conferences* 14.12, pp. 516-517. See also: Owen Chadwick, *John Cassian*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1968 [1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1950]), p. 9.

<sup>102</sup> Chadwick, *John Cassian*, pp. 9-10.

<sup>103</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, pp. 5-6.

<sup>104</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 143, n. 30. Stewart notes that Cassian does *not* mention having met Jerome in Bethlehem, which was only a small town. Scholars generally assume that Cassian and Germanus had left Bethlehem, for Egypt, *before* Jerome settled in Bethlehem and established a monastery there in autumn 386 CE.

On one occasion, the abbot of this Bethlehem community ordered Cassian and Germanus to allow another monk, called Pinuphius, to share their cell.<sup>105</sup> The chance meeting with such an illustrious Egyptian monk inspired Cassian and Germanus to seek permission from their abbot to leave Bethlehem and travel to Egypt. Permission was granted, on the condition that they would soon return, and the two monks left for Egypt in about 385 CE.<sup>106</sup> With the exception of a brief return visit to Bethlehem after 7 years in Egypt,<sup>107</sup> Cassian and Germanus remained in Egypt from about 385 CE until 399/400 CE.<sup>108</sup>

Cassian and Germanus probably spent the best part of 15 years in Egypt,<sup>109</sup> travelling from one monastic settlement to another in the Nile Delta region near Alexandria, as well as the more remote monastic communities of Sketis and Kellia. They never travelled to the monastic communities in the Thebaid region of central and southern Egypt, but instead spent most of their time in the monastic settlement of Sketis, in the desert, west of the Nile River. The community at Sketis was led by an influential monk called Paphnutius,<sup>110</sup> and Evagrius had spent the first two years of his sojourn in Egypt there. Cassian regarded Sketis as the pinnacle of monastic perfection.<sup>111</sup>

It was at the monastic community called Kellia that Cassian probably met Evagrius, who had moved to this community from Nitria in 384/385 CE, shortly before Cassian and Germanus began their travels in Egypt. Evagrius was based at Kellia from 384/385 CE until 399/400 CE, although Evagrius also visited Sketis during this period of time, so it is possible that Cassian met him there. As Evagrius and Cassian both spent time in Sketis and Kellia, they would have studied with Macarius the Egyptian (at Sketis), and Macarius the Alexandrian (at Kellia). Thus, it would seem reasonable to suppose that the teaching of the two Macarii is the common source of the ascetic teaching of Evagrius and Cassian.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Pinuphius was a famous abbot from an Egyptian coenobitic monastery in the Nile Delta region in the north of Egypt, who had fled from his own monastery in order to preserve his humility. See: Chadwick, *John Cassian*, pp. 10-12; Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>106</sup> As with the date of arrival in Bethlehem, so too the date of departure for Egypt is based on the assumption that Cassian and Germanus left Bethlehem *before* the arrival of Jerome in autumn 386 CE.

<sup>107</sup> For discussion concerning the reasons given for this return visit to Bethlehem, and whether the visit actually occurred, see: Chadwick, *John Cassian*, pp. 15-17, and Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 8 and p. 145, n. 52.

<sup>108</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 8, supports this chronology: "The normative role of Egyptian monasticism in Cassian's imagination and teaching suggests that his sojourn in Egypt was deeply formative and therefore must have been at least several years long."

<sup>109</sup> Chadwick, *John Cassian*, p. 15, comments: "On the basis of the few hints, some writers constructed an itinerary of Cassian's travels in Egypt. But there are so many gaps, the information is so vague, that these accounts must be received with caution... The only regions which they certainly visited were Panepheysis, and Scete [Sketis] with Cellia [Kellia]."

<sup>110</sup> Paphnutius is generally considered to be an 'Origenist.' See: Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 147, n. 74.

<sup>111</sup> See: *Institutes* Preface 1, 2 and 7; *Conferences* 1.1; 3.1.1; 10.2.3; 18.15.1; and 18.16.15.

<sup>112</sup> For the influence of the two Macarii on Evagrius, see: Gabriel Bunge, 'Évagre le Pontique et les deux Macaire', *Irénikon* 56 (1983), pp. 215-227 and pp. 323-360.



There is substantial scholarly debate about the precise nature of Evagrian influence upon Cassian.<sup>113</sup> Stewart assesses that influence as follows:

*... Evagrius was the single most important influence on Cassian's monastic theology, although Cassian never mentions him by name. After the condemnation of Origenism by Theophilus of Alexandria in 400 and the subsequent success of the anti-Origenist cause, it became politically inexpedient to advertise connections with Evagrius, the great theoretician of monastic Origenism.* Even after twenty-five years, with the fiercest of the anti-Origenists dead and doctrinal controversy now focused on other issues, Cassian felt constrained to downplay his links with the Evagrian Origenism of Nitria and Kellia. Cassian systematically effaces obviously incriminating evidence of his association with Evagrius, either by selective narration (his reporting of the Anthropomorphite controversy in *Conference* 10) or by changing controversial terminology (e.g. *apatheia* becomes "purity of heart".) The impossibility of openly repaying his debt to his master must have been deeply painful to Cassian, who identified monastic tradition so closely with those who embodied it.<sup>114</sup>

After Evagrius' death and the outbreak of the First Origenist Controversy, Cassian and Germanus, as well as several other 'Origenists', such as the "Tall Brothers" from Nitria, had to flee Egypt.<sup>115</sup> Some of these 'Origenists' took refuge with John Chrysostom, who was at that time the bishop of Constantinople, whilst others went to Palestine.<sup>116</sup> During their time in Constantinople, Germanus was ordained as a priest and Cassian was ordained as a deacon.<sup>117</sup> Cassian describes John Chrysostom and his influence upon him as follows:

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<sup>113</sup> See, for example, Chadwick, *John Cassian*, p. 26. "From 385 to 399, the years covering Cassian's stay in Egypt, Evagrius was the chief theologian of the Origenist theory of the monastic life. Cassian does not say that he met Evagrius. But, by the time that Cassian wrote, the name of Evagrius was suspect for heresy." See also: Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, pp. 11-12. Thus, Evagrius has been held to be "the chief theologian of the Origenist theory of the monastic life" and "the great theoretician of monastic Origenism". These assertions, for which Chadwick and Stewart do not present any direct evidence, rest on highly questionable assumptions concerning: (1) the accuracy of the terms of the condemnation of Evagrius at the Fifth Ecumenical Council in 553 CE; and (2) the equivalence of the 'Origenism' condemned in the mid-6<sup>th</sup> century CE with that of the late 4<sup>th</sup> century CE.

<sup>114</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, pp. 11-12, emphasis added. This argument relies, in part, upon similarities of structure and argumentation in the foundational works of Evagrius (the *Praktikós*) and Cassian (*The Institutes*). However, Stewart has made a number of unsubstantiated claims about the composition of Cassian's writings: (1) that "it was politically inexpedient to advertise connections with Evagrius"; (2) that Cassian's account of the Anthropomorphic Controversy is an example of "selective narration"; and (3) that "controversial terminology" was changed so as to "systematically efface obviously incriminating evidence". Stewart's three claims rely upon the two questionable assumptions identified in the previous footnote. Furthermore, *apatheia* was, in fact, a standard philosophical term derived from Stoicism (see Chapter 5). It is true that Jerome mocked Evagrius' description of the goal of the monastic life as *apatheia*, but not due to any supposed connections with 'Origenism'. Cassian did use the Biblical term 'purity of heart', rather than Evagrius' philosophical term *apatheia*, but I would argue that this could have been because he was writing for monks in southern Gaul who were less familiar, and/or less comfortable, with philosophical terminology than were the monks of Egypt.

<sup>115</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 12.

<sup>117</sup> Gennadius, "Supplement to *De Viris Illustribus*", cited above. See also: *Institutes* 11.18.

John a marvel of faith and purity... Remember him, I say. Follow him. Think of his purity, his faith, his doctrine, and holiness. Remember him ever as your teacher and nurse, in whose bosom and embraces you as it were grew up. *Who was the teacher in common both of you and of me:* whose disciples and pupils we are. Read his writings. Hold fast his instruction. Embrace his faith and merits... He would himself commend to you this that I have written, for *it was he who taught me what I have written:* and so do not think of this as mine, so much as his: for the stream comes from the spring, and *whatever you think belongs to the disciple, ought all to be referred to the honour of the master.*<sup>118</sup>

Before Chrysostom's death in 407 CE, and as a result of Chrysostom's exile in 403/404 CE, Cassian and Germanus went to Rome to plead his case before Pope Innocent I (r. 401-417 CE).<sup>119</sup> They probably arrived in Rome in the autumn of 404 CE.<sup>120</sup> It was during this period of time that Cassian might have been ordained as a priest,<sup>121</sup> although Gennadius seems to believe that this did not occur until Cassian was in Marseilles. While in Rome, it is possible that Cassian met with Archdeacon Leo,<sup>122</sup> who later became Pope Leo the Great (r. 440-461 CE). Such a friendship *might* explain why, in 430 CE, more than twenty years later, Pope Leo the Great commissioned Cassian to write his third and final work, which was a denunciation of the heretical teaching of Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople. Cassian does not mention the death of Germanus, but it is generally assumed that his friend died after 405 CE.<sup>123</sup> Cassian probably stayed on in Rome<sup>124</sup> until the city came under attack from Alaric the Goth and his army in 410 CE,<sup>125</sup> when it is likely that Cassian began his last journey, to southern Gaul,<sup>126</sup> where all of his books were written.

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<sup>118</sup> *On the Incarnation of the Lord*, 7:31. Accessed November 18, 2014 at 5:15 pm from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/35097.htm> Chadwick, *John Cassian*, p. 31, notes that "Comparisons of the two writers have shown frequent parallels in doctrine but not a literary dependence."

<sup>119</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 13. Stewart notes that Cassian and Germanus are mentioned by name in connection with this visit in two extant documents, Palladius' *Dialogue on the Life of John Chrysostom*, and a letter from Pope Innocent I.

<sup>120</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 14 and p. 150, n. 10.

<sup>121</sup> Chadwick, *John Cassian*, p. 33, maintains that Cassian was either ordained as a *presbyter* at Rome by Pope Innocent I, or more probably, when he arrived in Gaul, by Proculus, bishop of Marseilles.

<sup>122</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 14 and p. 150, n. 120.

<sup>123</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 15, and p. 151, n. 129.

<sup>124</sup> For discussion of the possibility that Cassian and Germanus might have returned to Constantinople, or that Cassian might have gone to Antioch, see: Stewart, pp. 14-15.

<sup>125</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 15.

<sup>126</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 16. Stewart argues that for Cassian's monastic authority to have become recognised, and for Castor, bishop of Aptia Julia to have asked Cassian to write the work which would become *The Institutes*, Cassian must have arrived in Massilia (modern-day Marseilles) in the middle to late 410s CE. Massilia was established as a Greek city in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE and had become a centre of trade in the Roman province of *Gallia Narbonensis*.

Whilst in Gaul, Cassian established the male monastery of St. Victor, and a female monastery, traditionally thought to be the monastery of St. Saviour.<sup>127</sup> Cassian also participated, reluctantly, in his last great theological dispute,<sup>128</sup> shortly before the death, in 430 CE, of Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa. This dispute concerned the roles of God's grace and human free will in salvation. In 432 CE, Prosper of Aquitaine (390-455 CE), who was one of Augustine's theological supporters, wrote a critical response to Cassian's *Conference* 13, called *Contra Collatorem (Against the Conferencer)*. Prosper is uncharacteristically respectful in tone, which Stewart takes as evidence that Cassian was close to death. Therefore, it is generally believed that Cassian died in the mid 430s CE.<sup>129</sup>

We are now in a position to make a brief assessment of the impact of various teachers upon the ascetic theology of Evagrius and Cassian. We have determined that the most significant common link between the various living figures who had an influence on the ascetic teaching of Evagrius and Cassian were the two Macarii. Evagrius and Cassian received instruction from Macarius the Egyptian at Sketis in Egypt, and from Macarius the Alexandrian in Kellia. The only other major theological influence in Cassian's life of whom we are aware was John Chrysostom, who was noted for his ascetic austerities.

Evagrius and Cassian generally moved in 'Origenist' circles during their time in Egypt, and both came under the influence of a number of teachers who were familiar with the writings of Origen and favourable to aspects of his doctrine. We have seen that Evagrius probably first came into contact with the teachings of Origen through Basil the Great whilst in Cappadocia, through Gregory of Nazianzus while in Constantinople, and then through Melania the Elder and Rufinus at the double-monastery on the Mount of Olives in Jerusalem. We also know that Cassian came into contact with 'Origenist' thought through Paphnutius, the abbot of the monastic community at Sketis in Egypt, and later through Evagrius, and the Tall Brothers at Kellia in Egypt, especially Ammonius. In the next section, therefore, we will consider the nature of 'Origenist' influence on the thought of Evagrius, and how this might be better understood in the light of Pierre Hadot's approach to ancient philosophy. Later in the chapter, we will also examine Evagrius' teaching about the Eight Generic Thoughts, and investigate the extent to which Cassian adapted this teaching in his formulation of the Eight Principal Vices.

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<sup>127</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, p. 16.

<sup>128</sup> For details of this dispute, see: Stewart, pp. 19-22.

<sup>129</sup> Stewart, *Cassian the Monk*, pp. 21 and 24. The information supplied by Gennadius at the end of his entry provides an upper limit for Cassian's death of July 28, 450, when the reign of Emperor Theodosius II came to an end.

## Evagrius and the Influence of ‘Origenism’

In order to avoid anachronism and other types of error, one should not attempt to downplay the extent to which the writings of Evagrius and Cassian were influenced by philosophical influences. However, Joseph W. Trigg warns us that the mediation of those philosophical influences, via the works of Origen, can easily be misunderstood:<sup>130</sup>

We misconceive Origen’s debt to philosophy if we anachronistically see it as the adoption of a rationalistic mentality foreign or antagonistic to piety... *The Platonists’ goal was to follow their master’s exhortation in the Theaetetus to transform themselves with the help of wisdom so as to become like the divine as much as possible...* We also misconceive Origen’s debt to his philosophical formation if we see it as the adoption of philosophic doctrines alongside or instead of the doctrines of the Christian faith. Henri Crouzel has set forth the ways Plotinus and Origen share similar doctrines, demonstrating that *Origen did not accept Platonism uncritically*, but only when it was consistent with the church’s rule of faith... *for Origen*, as for all ancient lovers-of-wisdom, *philosophy was a way of life... This was a way of life which Origen*, like most other early Christians, *found profoundly compatible with the Christian faith...* As a teacher himself, Origen therefore employed the study of philosophy, understood as an exercise involving moral purification as well as intellectual training, as a necessary preparation for the study of Scripture. Implicitly presenting his own enterprise as a continuation of ancient Hebrew wisdom, Origen described the books ascribed to Solomon – Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs – as a progressive philosophical curriculum.

What Origen and Evagrius derived from Greek philosophy was *not* a fixed body of doctrine, and certainly *not* an ironclad system, but rather an orientation to life itself, which Pierre Hadot has described as the basic ‘choice’ that informs all subsequent philosophical discourse. As we saw in Chapter 6, the Platonists’ goal of transforming themselves “so as to become as much like the divine as possible” had a considerable influence on the Christian teaching of *théōsis*. However, while Christians described *théōsis* using terminology similar to that of the Platonists, Christians also held a substantially different concept of the divine to that which was held by Homer and Hesiod, or the Pre-Socratic thinkers, the Sophists, or any of the Classical, Hellenistic or Roman philosophical schools. Furthermore, whilst Platonists sought wisdom primarily in the writings of Plato, Christians devoted themselves to the understanding of the Christian Scriptures.

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<sup>130</sup> Joseph Wilson Trigg, *Origen*, The Early Church Fathers Series, (London, England: Routledge, 1998), pp. 12-13, emphasis added.

Alfons Fürst argues that Origen is the inventor of a specific kind of exegesis in which he made pervasive use of different philological techniques, such as textual criticism, the explanation of words, and the techniques of describing events, figures of speech, and style. Origen referred to non-Christian scientific knowledge (such as mathematics, geometry, astrology, physics and medicine) and he made greater use of Jewish or Rabbinic traditions than any subsequent exegete, except for Jerome. Although he was also deeply influenced by Greek philosophy, Fürst maintains that Origen always sought to remain within the bounds of the orthodox Christian thought of his time:

Origen took into consideration the established tradition of the Christian church. It is well known that he considered himself an orthodox member of the church whose only intention was to be regarded as a true disciple of Jesus Christ. In this respect he owes much more debt to previous Christian theologians than he was ready to exhibit. This debt is especially present in the case of his Alexandrian predecessor Clement, whom Origen never mentions, but whose works, to conclude from a host of allusions, he must have read.<sup>131</sup>

Origen had studied philosophy in Alexandria, at the school of Ammonios Sakkas (d. 240 CE) who would later be the teacher of Plotinus (204-270 CE). Origen's exposure to the final flowering of Middle Platonism,<sup>132</sup> caused him to adopt what was by then a traditional division of philosophy into: (1) physics; (2) ethics; and (3) dialectics [later renamed 'logic']:

The tripartite division of philosophy can be traced back to the early years of the Platonic Academy... Xenocrates, the third head of the school, first explicitly divided the subject-matter of philosophy into the three domains of physics, ethics, and logic. Plato had ranked dialectics highest... Instead of dialectics, the Stoics coined the term 'logic'... From the first century AD onwards, the original Academic division again became prevalent... due to the increasing influence of religion upon philosophy, 'dialectics' was called 'epoptics', 'contemplation'. This term originated in the mystery cult of Eleusis... This tripartite division then lay at the core of Platonic teaching until the end of antiquity... Clement of Alexandria introduced this Platonic concept into Christian theology.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Alfons Fürst, 'Origen: Exegesis and Philosophy in Early Christian Alexandria', in: Josef Lössl & John W. Watt (eds.), *Interpreting the Bible and Aristotle in Late Antiquity: The Alexandrian Commentary Tradition between Rome and Baghdad*, pp. 14-15. Origen's 'failure' to mention Clement of Alexandria presents an instructive point of comparison with Cassian's 'failure' to mention Evagrius. See note 114 in this chapter.

<sup>132</sup> See: John Myles Dillon, *The Middle Platonists: A Study of Platonism, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (London, England: Gerald Duckworth, 1977), esp. Chapter 3, 'Platonism at Alexandria: Eudorus and Philo', pp. 114-183.

<sup>133</sup> Fürst, 'Origen: Exegesis and Philosophy in Early Christian Alexandria', pp. 26-28. See also the three volume series: Richard Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200-600 AD, A Sourcebook* (Ithaca, NY, USA: Cornell University Press, 2005).

The overwhelmingly *practical* orientation of the philosophical Christianity pursued by Origen and Evagrius is reflected in the exegetical focus which they applied to three texts which, in Origen's estimation, represented three stages of the soul's mystical ascent to God:

1. **Proverbs** teaches what the Greeks call moral science, the proper manner of virtuous living that corresponds to the life of the patriarch Abraham and to what later Christians would call the "purgative" way.
2. **Ecclesiastes** presents natural science, that is, enlightened knowledge of the natures of things and of how they are to be used as God intended (corresponding to Isaac and the "illuminative" way.)
3. Finally, **the Song of Songs** is the textbook for what Origen calls *epoptics*, the contemplative science that "instills love and desire of celestial and divine things under the image of the Bride and the Groom, teaching how we come to fellowship with God through paths of love and charity" (Commentary on the Song, prologue). When the soul has completed the first two courses of study, "it is ready to come to dogmatic and mystical matters and to arise to the contemplation of divinity with pure spiritual love". This is the science of Jacob, who became Israel ("he who sees God"). It forms the "unitive", or properly mystical level.<sup>134</sup>

Evagrius creatively altered the approach of Origen outlined above. According to Evagrius,<sup>135</sup> the spiritual life can be divided into two main levels, *praktikē*, which is concerned with ascetical practice, and *gnostikē/theoretikē*, which is concerned with contemplative knowledge. The second level can be further subdivided into *physikē*, which involves the contemplation (or knowledge) of God in creation, and *theologikē*, which involves contemplation of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, in the Evagrian approach, there are three stages in total through which a Christian monk should progress. The three stages are not entirely discrete, and in practice, there will be a degree of overlap between the stages.

The first involves observation of the self, elimination of vices and acquisition of virtues. The second involves study of the Scriptures, and contemplation of creation. The third involves direct knowledge of God, achieved through the practice of pure prayer. These three stages in the ascetic life correspond to three key Evagrian texts, namely the *Praktikós*, the *Gnōstikós*, and the *Kephálaia Gnōstiká* (Gnostic Chapters). This threefold division of the spiritual life is also presupposed in the writings of John Cassian, especially within *The Institutes*, and Chapter 5 of *The Conferences*.

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<sup>134</sup> Bernard McGinn & Patricia Ferris McGinn, *Early Christian Mystics: The Divine Vision of the Spiritual Masters* (New York, NY, USA: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003), p. 29. In this threefold scheme, one can begin to see how both *kataphatic* and *apophatic* theology might function together harmoniously.

<sup>135</sup> See: Dysinger, pp. 27-29.

## The Eight Thoughts in Evagrius's *Praktikos*, Cassian's *Institutes*, and *Conference 5*

Evagrius presents an overview of his understanding of the Christian ascetic life in a foundational text, which, like several of Evagrius' texts, has come down to us under different titles in different manuscripts. In Sinkewicz's comprehensive translation of the Evagrian Greek ascetic corpus, which includes 12 works in all, the work to which I am referring is called *The Monk: A Treatise on the Practical Life*.<sup>136</sup> However, in modern scholarly literature, this work is more commonly known as the *Praktikós*.

The *Praktikós* contains Evagrius' teaching on the Eight Generic Thoughts<sup>137</sup> which in his view are caused by eight demons, who are in turn responsible for leading human beings into eight generic vices. The overcoming of these eight vices forms the heart of the ascetic approach of Evagrius. This approach also occurs in a modified form in John Cassian's *Institutes*, and in Book 5 of Cassian's *Conferences*. In this section, we will be examining Evagrius' ascetic scheme, and the role which the Eight Thoughts play within it.<sup>138</sup> A careful comparison will also be made with Cassian's teaching, in order to discern the ways in which Cassian adapted this teaching from the Egyptian desert for a new audience in southern Gaul.

The *Praktikós* is a short work, written in the characteristic *gnomic* (wisdom) style of Evagrius. This *gnomic* style was closely modelled on that of the Biblical book of Proverbs, but also on Stoic philosophical writings. It consists of very short numbered statements, typically 1-3 sentences in length, which are designed to be read many times. As we have seen above, Evagrius adapted Origen's threefold scheme based on the Solomonic wisdom texts of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs, so that the monk embarking on the first Evagrian ascetic stage was now known as a *praktikós*, or ascetic practitioner.

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<sup>136</sup> Robert E. Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus: The Greek Ascetic Corpus*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 91-114.

<sup>137</sup> Evagrius' Greek terms, and Cassian's Latin equivalents, are: (1) *gastrimargía* / *gula* [gluttony]; (2) *porneía* / *fornicatio* [fornication or sexual immorality]; (3) *philargyría* / *filargyria* OR *avaritia* [love of money, avarice or greed]; (4) *lúpē* / *tristitia* [sadness]; (5) *orgē* / *ira* [anger]; (6) *akēdia* / *acedia* [spiritual weariness]; (7) *kenodoxía* / *cenodoxia* [vainglory]; and (8) *hyperephanía* / *superbia* [pride].

<sup>138</sup> In the Greek ascetic corpus, the Eight Thoughts are particularly mentioned in: [*To Eulogios*.] *On the Vices Opposed to the Virtues* (which will be referred to as "Vices"); *On the Eight Thoughts* (which is also known as *On the Eight Spirits of Wickedness*, and will be referred to as "Eight Thoughts"); *The Monk: A Treatise on the Practical Life* (i.e. the *Praktikós*); and a work simply called *On Thoughts*. Another much more extensive Evagrian work which deals with the Eight Thoughts is known as the *Antirrhētikós*. This work, which is a compendium of Bible verses with which to combat the demons, survives in Syriac, Armenian and Georgian. Excerpts of it have been published in English translation: Michael O'Laughlin, 'Antirrheticus (Selections)', in: Vincent L. Wimbush (ed.), *Ascetic Behavior in Greco-Roman Antiquity: A Sourcebook* (Minneapolis, MN, USA: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1990), pp. 243-262. For a more recent English translation of the whole work, made from the edition of Wilhelm Frankenberg, see: David Brakke (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus: Talking Back (Antirrhētikos): A Monastic Handbook for Conquering Demons*, Cistercian Studies Series, Number 229 (Collegeville, MI, USA: Liturgical Press, 2009).

Once the monk had largely overcome the eight vices, he would be able to achieve *apátheia*, *impassibility*, or *freedom from the passions*. *Apátheia*, replaced in the writings of Cassian by the Biblically-derived phrase ‘purity of heart’ [cf. Matthew 5:8] could not be completely achieved in this life, but imperfect *apátheia* was necessary before the monk could become a *gnōstikós*, or practitioner of the contemplative life.

The *gnōstikós*, through the cultivation of *apátheia* would grow in *agápē* or selfless love, and through the practice of contemplation would come to perceive the divine presence of God in created things (*physikē*). The *gnōstikós* would then be able to develop the practice of pure prayer, by means of which he would eventually be able to “see God” (*theologikē*). This threefold division of the spiritual life, which, as we have seen, corresponds to three key Evagrian texts, the *Praktikós*,<sup>139</sup> the *Gnōstikós*<sup>140</sup> and the *Kephálaia Gnostiká*,<sup>141</sup> is alluded to in Chapter 9 of the Prologue to the *Praktikós*, where Evagrius explains the source of his teaching and the manner in which he will relay his teaching to his readers:

We are now going to discuss the practical [*praktikē*] and the gnostic [*gnostikē*] life, not as much as we have seen and heard, but what we have learned from them [the elders] to say to others. We have condensed and divided up the teaching on the practical life [*praktikē*] in one hundred chapters [*kephálaia*] and on the gnostic life [*gnostikē*] in fifty chapters [i.e. the *Gnōstikós*] in addition to the six hundred chapters [i.e. the *Kephálaia Gnostiká*]. We have kept some things hidden and have obscured others, so as ‘not to give what is holy to dogs and throw pearls before swine’ [Matthew 7:6]. But these things will be clear to those who have embarked upon the same path.<sup>142</sup>

Several modern scholars have assumed that the *Praktikós* corresponds to the teaching “which we have learned from the elders to say to others”, while, in their view, the *Gnōstikós*, and the *Kephálaia Gnostiká* supposedly corresponded to a secret, esoteric teaching, not made available to the general public.<sup>143</sup> However, the most natural reading of this passage is one in which *all three texts* contain the teaching “we have learned from them to say to others”, and this is precisely why *all three texts* have been written down!

<sup>139</sup> See: John Eudes Bamberger, *The Praktikos and Chapters on Prayer* (Kalamazoo, MI, USA: Cistercian Publications, 1972), pp. 3-11. Evagrius addresses the *Praktikós* to a monk called Anatolios, who is described as a monk of the “Holy Mountain”. Sinkewicz believes this is a reference to the double monastery on the Mount of Olives, established by Melania the Elder and Rufinus. See: Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 92.

<sup>140</sup> For analysis of the *Gnostikós* in English, see: Robin Darling Young, ‘Evagrius the Iconographer: Monastic Pedagogy in the *Gnostikós*’, *Journal of Early Christian Studies*, Volume 9, Number 1 (2001), pp. 53-71.

<sup>141</sup> The most detailed analysis of this work is available only in French. See: A. Guillaumont, *Les ‘Kephalaia Gnostica’ d’Évagre le Pontique*.

<sup>142</sup> Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 96, words in square brackets added.

<sup>143</sup> See: Casiday, *Evagrius Ponticus*, pp. 31-35, for discussion and refutation of this approach.



Within *each* of the three texts, Evagrius has kept some things hidden and has obscured others, but Evagrius tells us that this will *only* be the case for those who have *not* embarked upon the same ascetic path. In other words, according to Evagrius, the obscurity of his teaching does not lie so much in the inherent difficulty of the language, but rather in the spiritual blindness of those who have not embraced an ascetic approach to life.<sup>144</sup>

In *Praktikos* 1, Evagrius makes his threefold division of the spiritual life explicit, explaining simply that: “Christianity is the doctrine of Christ our Saviour. It is comprised of the practical (*praktikē*), the natural (*physikē*), and the theological (*theologikē*).” In *Praktikos* 2 and 3, he develops this threefold distinction, making a terminological distinction between “the kingdom of heaven” which consists of “impassibility of the soul accompanied by true knowledge of beings” (i.e. “the natural”, or *physikē*), and the “kingdom of God” which consists of “knowledge of the Holy Trinity co-extensive with the substance of the mind and surpassing its corruptibility” (i.e. “the theological”, or *theologikē*). In *Praktikos* 4, Evagrius provides a very succinct aetiology of the passions, and the means by which the passions can be overcome. Evagrius teaches that sensation gives birth to desire, and to all the passions. The only effective means to overcome the sensations which lead to desire and the passions is *anakhorēsis*, or withdrawal from worldly society.<sup>145</sup> In *Praktikos* 5, Evagrius makes the first mention of the demons, whom he says “fight directly” [literally, ‘naked’] against anchorites [i.e. solitary monks]. The demons attack non-solitary monks through the more negligent members of the monastic communities. Evagrius also makes special mention of the “embittered” character of the demons, and their extreme “malevolence”.<sup>146</sup>

In *Praktikos* 6, we find the first exposition of the teaching on the Eight Thoughts:

All the generic types of thoughts fall into eight categories in which every sort of thought is included. First is that of *gastrimargia* [gluttony], then *porneia* [fornication, or lust], third *philargyria* [love of money, avarice, or greed], fourth *lupe* [sadness], fifth *orge* [anger], sixth *akedia* [listlessness, boredom, or sloth], seventh *kenodoxia* [vainglory], eighth *hyperephania* [pride]. Whether or not all these thoughts trouble the soul is not within our power; but it is for us to decide if they are to linger within us or not, and whether or not they stir up the passions.

<sup>144</sup> The Biblical reference quoted at the end of this paragraph, Matthew 7:6, comes immediately after Jesus’ teaching that his followers should not judge (i.e. make a condemnatory assessment of) others. Jesus uses a story in which one person, who has a log in his eye, seeks to remove a speck from his brother’s eye. The hypocrisy (and the danger) of such an attempt should be obvious. In a similar fashion, Evagrius is suggesting that until a person has embarked upon the ascetic path, he will not grasp the spiritual significance of the Egyptian elders’ teaching. For those who *have* embarked on this path, “these things will be clear.”

<sup>145</sup> Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 250, n. 15.

<sup>146</sup> Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 250, n. 16, points out that “For Evagrius the great characteristic of the demonic nature was the overweening anger expressed in their wickedness.”

It is not clear why in particular there should be *Eight* Generic Thoughts.<sup>147</sup> Brakke notes that Origen had previously attempted to articulate a demonic hierarchy, had provided lists of named demons, and had explained that particular demons do specialise in producing particular vices. However, Origen nowhere provides a list of thoughts that corresponds to that of Evagrius.<sup>148</sup> Perhaps the best suggestion,<sup>149</sup> given Evagrius' intense exegetical focus, is that the number eight derives from the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 12:43-45 :

- 43 When an unclean spirit goes out of a man, he goes through dry places,  
seeking rest, and finds none.
- 44 Then he says, "I will return to my house from which I came."  
And when he comes, he finds it empty, swept, and put in order.
- 45 Then he goes and takes with him *seven other spirits more wicked than himself*,  
and they enter and dwell there; and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

Evagrius considers the demons associated with *gastrimargia* [gluttony], *philargyria* [avarice] and *kenodoxia* [vainglory] to be "those ranged first in battle",<sup>150</sup> because it was these three temptations which Jesus had to face in the desert.<sup>151</sup> By contrast, Abba Sarapion, in Cassian's *Conferences* Book 5, initially takes the view that the three temptations faced by Christ were gluttony, vainglory and pride,<sup>152</sup> basing his analysis on the account given in *Matthew*. Later in Chapter 5 of the *Conferences*, following the different account given in *Luke*, Abba Sarapion provides yet another interpretation, in which the three temptations faced by Christ correspond to gluttony, avarice and pride.<sup>153</sup> In each of the two accounts provided in the *Conferences*, Cassian uses the figure of Abba Sarapion to draw a parallel between the three temptations faced by Adam in the Garden of Eden, and the three temptations faced by Christ in the desert.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Plato lists seven sorrows and Aristotle lists eight evils. See: William M. Brashear, *Wednesday's Child is Full of Woe, or The Seven Deadly Sins and Some More Too!: (Another Apotelesmatikon: P. Med. inv. 71.58)*, Nilus, Band 1 (Vienna, Austria: Österreichische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1998), p. 48.

<sup>148</sup> David Brakke, *Demons and the Making of the Monk: Spiritual Combat in Early Christianity* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England, 2006), p. 57. Stoics recognised four passions: sadness; pleasure; desire; fear.

<sup>149</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 5.25.1, in: Ramsey (trans.), p. 202. Ramsey also draws an analogy between the eight vices and the seven nations which the Israelites had to destroy before they could enter the Promised Land. Egypt, the land from which they departed, was held to be the eighth nation, representing gluttony.

<sup>150</sup> *Thoughts* 1, in: Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, pp. 153-154.

<sup>151</sup> Matthew 4:1-11 = Mark 1:12-13 = Luke 4:1-13. Evagrius taught that the other demons march along behind these ones and in their turn take up with the people wounded by the three "front line" demons. No one can fall into a demon's power unless he has first been wounded by those in the front line.

<sup>152</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 5.6.1, in: Ramsey (trans.), p. 185.

<sup>153</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 5.6.6-7, in: Ramsey (trans.), pp. 186-187.

<sup>154</sup> This *First Adam* / *Second Adam* typology (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45 and Romans 5:12-21) can also be found in Irenaeus of Lyons' exposition of *théōsis*.

Leszek Misiarczyk argues that the order of the eight thoughts is *not* arbitrary, but is based upon the Platonic tripartite division of the soul.<sup>155</sup> According to Plato's schema, the human soul is divided into three parts: the concupiscible [*epithymetikon*], the irascible [*thymetikon*], and the rational [*logistikon*]. Misiarczyk maintains that the eight thoughts are allocated to these three parts of the soul by Evagrius as follows: concupiscible (gluttony, fornication, avarice); irascible (sadness, anger, *akēdia*); and rational (vainglory and pride).<sup>156</sup>

For Evagrius, the order of the eight thoughts is *not* completely fixed; in *Eight Thoughts* 4 and 5, the positions of sadness and anger are reversed,<sup>157</sup> and in *Vices* 8, an additional thought of jealousy is inserted between vainglory and pride.<sup>158</sup> However, when we come to the writings of Cassian, we find that the order of the eight thoughts *has* become fixed, and the terminology used has undergone a subtle but important shift. Where Evagrius could use the terms *demon*, *thought*, *passion*, and *vice* interchangeably, Cassian (and Abba Sarapion) are much more inclined to simply use the term *vice*. Evagrius speaks of "Eight Generic Thoughts";<sup>159</sup> Cassian speaks of "Eight Principal Vices."<sup>160</sup> There also seems to be a somewhat greater emphasis on the demonic realm in the writings of Evagrius.<sup>161</sup>

In Cassian's *Conferences* Chapter 5, Abba Sarapion has fixed the order of the Eight Principal Vices. An initial distinction is made between *natural vices* (gluttony and fornication) and *unnatural vices* (avarice, anger, sadness, *akēdia*, vainglory and pride).<sup>162</sup> The eight vices are also classified into four couplets, based on their methods of operation:

1. Vices requiring bodily action (gluttony and fornication)
2. Vices which are motivated from without (avarice and anger)
3. Vices which are motivated from within (sadness and *akēdia*)
4. Vices not requiring bodily action (vainglory and pride).

<sup>155</sup> Evagrius makes reference to elements of the Platonic tripartite soul in *Praktikos* 15 and 89. See: Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, pp. 100 and 111. See also: p. 250, n. 15, and p. 260, notes 89, 90 and 91.

<sup>156</sup> Leszek Misiarczyk, *Osiem logismoi w pismach Ewagriusza z Pontu [= Eight Logismoi in the Writings of Evagrius Ponticus]* (Krakow, Poland: Wydawnictwo Tyniec, 2007). See: <http://evagriusponticus.net/bibliography.htm> Accessed on Thursday November 20, 2014.

<sup>157</sup> For a discussion of the reversal of these two thoughts, see: Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, pp. 71-72.

<sup>158</sup> Since avarice, sadness and anger are each related to the desire for material objects, then vainglory, jealousy and pride could perhaps be seen as the spiritual equivalents of avarice, sadness and anger.

<sup>159</sup> *Praktikos* 6.

<sup>160</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 5.2, in: Ramsey (trans.), p. 183.

<sup>161</sup> Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 73 indicates that the terms 'demon' and 'demonic' are ubiquitous in many of Evagrius' treatises, occurring, for example, 72 times in the *Praktikos* and 98 times in *On Thoughts*.

<sup>162</sup> Abba Sarapion's scheme adapts the second and third Epicurean categories of desire: *natural but unnecessary desires* correspond to *gluttony* and *lust*, whereas *unnatural and unnecessary desires* correspond to *avarice*, *sadness*, *anger*, *akēdia*, *vainglory* and *pride*.

Abba Sarapion taught that there was a direct connection between the first six vices:

the first six [vices] – namely, gluttony, fornication, avarice, anger, sadness, and akedia – are connected among themselves by a certain affinity and, so to speak, interlinking, such that the overflow of the previous one serves as the start of the next one... Therefore, these must be fought against in a similar way and by the same method, and we must always attack the ones that follow by beginning with those that come before... But the two remaining ones, vainglory and pride... differ wholly from those first six vices and are not leagued with them since they are not only not generated by them but even arise in a contrary manner and order. For when the former have been rooted out these sprout forth all the more, and at the death of the former these spring up and grow more vigorously.<sup>163</sup>

Evagrius, whilst not holding to such a lockstep interpretation of the relationship between the eight thoughts, did support Abba Sarapion's view that vainglory and pride were the greatest dangers to monks who had successfully overcome the previous six thoughts. Evagrius emphasised the fierce competition between the demons, and described the demon of vainglory being "pursued" by the other demons. It is only when the other demons have "fallen" that vainglory "shamelessly comes forward and displays for the monk the grandeur of his virtues."<sup>164</sup> Evagrius is also far more explicit than Cassian about the role that the cultivation of the virtues should play in the attempt to overcome the vices. Evagrius lists nine vices and the corresponding virtues:<sup>165</sup> gluttony and abstinence; fornication and chastity; avarice and freedom from possessions; sadness and joy; anger and patience; akēdia and perseverance; vainglory and freedom from vainglory ("which is the working of humility"); jealousy and freedom from jealousy ("which is the guide to humility"); and finally, pride and humility.<sup>166</sup> In addition to the cultivation of the virtues, and the application of specific remedies associated with overcoming particular vices, Evagrius also makes some general suggestions based on the tripartite division of the soul: thoughts afflicting the concupiscible part of the soul should be addressed through hunger, toil, and *anakhōrēsis* (withdrawal into solitude); thoughts afflicting the irascible part of the soul should be addressed through psalmody, patience and mercy; and thoughts afflicting the rational part of the soul, causing the mind to wander, should be addressed through spiritual reading, vigils and prayer.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Cassian, *Conferences* 5.10.1 and 3, in: Ramsey (trans.), p. 189.

<sup>164</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos* 31, in: Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 103.

<sup>165</sup> Evagrius, *Vices* 1-9, in: Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, pp. 62-65.

<sup>166</sup> Lists of vices and virtues are known from the Greek and Jewish worlds and were by no means exclusive to the Egyptian monastic environment. See: Brashear, *Wednesday's Child is Full of Woe*, pp. 47-64.

<sup>167</sup> Evagrius, *Praktikos* 15, in: Sinkewicz (trans.), *Evagrius of Pontus*, p. 100.

The short descriptions of the Eight Generic Thoughts, which appear consecutively in chapters 7-14 of the *Praktikós*, are remarkable both for the vivid depictions of the craftiness and guile of the demons who plant these thoughts in the mind of the monks, and also for the depth of psychological insight displayed by Evagrius. *Rather than focusing on the “vice” itself*, Evagrius identifies the anxieties and mental distractions which the demons are able to arouse, in their attempts to provide seemingly plausible reasons for monks to abandon elements of their ascetic practice. These eight demons function as follows:

**Gluttony** [*Praktikós* 7] does not typically attack by placing thoughts of sumptuous banquets in the mind of a monk. Rather, he causes the monk to fear for his state of health. He causes the monk to reflect on the illnesses and pain suffered by other monks due to their dietary restrictions, and on the fact there are not any doctors in the desert. The demon of gluttony may even cause monks suffering from diet-induced problems to come and visit his intended victim, in order to cause him to question the appropriateness of his own fasting regime.

**Fornication** [*Praktikós* 8], knowing that limiting food and fluid intake makes a monk less susceptible to his suggestions, attacks those limiting their intake *more* violently than those who are not, trying to persuade these monks to give up their dietary austerities, and to convince them that their ascetic practice is in vain.

**Avarice** [*Praktikós* 9] works to make a monk acquisitive and selfish, by raising concerns in his mind about how he will provide for himself in his old age when he is no longer able to work, or how he will cope in the event of famine, disease or poverty.

**Sadness** [*Praktikós* 10] cause a monk to focus on the frustration he feels due to the inability to fulfil certain desires because of the ascetic way of life he has adopted.

**Anger** [*Praktikós* 11] causes a monk to focus on those who have injured him, or those whom he *believes* have injured him in some way. This demon will cause the image of the one who has hurt the monk to appear in his mind, especially during prayer, seeking to turn the fiery passion of anger, which can be short-lived, into a longer lasting, smouldering resentment.

**Akēdia, or listlessness**, [*Praktikós* 12] also known as the noonday demon, is the most oppressive of all the demons. He attacks the monk at around 10 a.m. and besieges him until 2 p.m., causing the middle of the day to seem endless. He makes the monk dislike his current location, and makes him long to be somewhere else. *Akēdia* also causes the monk to reflect upon how many long, hard years of asceticism still lie in front of him, with the hope that the monk will despair and abandon his monastic life completely.

If a monk is able to overcome the first six thoughts, he is then attacked by **Vainglory** [*Praktikós* 13] who causes the monk to desire the esteem of others for the many virtues which he believes he has cultivated. Such a monk may fall prey to fantasies in which he acquires miraculous powers, such as the ability to heal the sick, raise the dead, or most ironically of all, cast out demons. The vainglorious monk may even dream of being compelled “against his will” to take on the responsibilities (and status) of the priesthood. Vainglory seeks to fill a monk with false hopes and then abandon him to the demons of pride or sadness, or sometimes even the demon of fornication.

**Pride** [*Praktikós* 14] is the demon who can bring about the monk’s final downfall. By causing the monk to ascribe all of his achievements strictly to himself, and failing to acknowledge the constant assistance of God’s grace, the demon induces the monk to cast himself far away from God and his protection. The monk can then be attacked by the demons of anger and sadness, and sometimes even by the demons of blasphemy and idolatry. The monk might eventually fall into heresy, derangement of mind, and madness.

Evagrius’ Eight Generic Thoughts came to exert a significant influence on many later Western monastic figures, especially Benedict of Nursia (c.480-c.547 CE).<sup>168</sup> Later, they were adapted by Pope Gregory the Great (c.540-604 CE), and became known as the Seven Deadly Sins: *luxuria* (lust); *gula* (gluttony); *avaritia* (greed); *acēdia* (sloth); *ira* (wrath); *invidia* (envy); and *superbia* (pride).<sup>169</sup>

Having considered the nature and function of the Eight Generic Thoughts, we will now turn to an examination of how this teaching served as a foundation from which Christian philosophical discourse could be developed and widely promulgated. Analysis of the Evagrian treatise entitled *Ad Monachos* will allow us to discern the ways in which this work made use of the Eight Generic Thoughts as a philosophical framework, so that a monk could pursue ‘assimilation to the divine’, or *thēōsis*.

<sup>168</sup> See, for example: Marilyn Dunn, *The Emergence of Monasticism: From the Desert Fathers to the Early Middle Ages* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), especially Chapter 5, ‘The Evolution of Monasticism in the West’, pp. 82-110.

<sup>169</sup> For book-length analysis of the Evagrian Eight Thoughts, see: George Tsakiridis, *Evagrius Ponticus and Cognitive Science: A Look at Moral Evil and the Thoughts* (Eugene, OR, USA: Pickwick Publications, 2010); and Angela Tilby, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Their Origin in the Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius the Hermit* (London, England: SPCK, 2009). For a focus on anger, see: Gabriel Bunge (Anthony P. Gythiel, trans.), *Dragon’s Wine and Angel’s Bread: The Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Anger and Meekness* (Crestwood, NY, USA: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2009). For a focus on *akedia*, see: Gabriel Bunge (Anthony P. Gythiel, trans.), *Despondency: The Spiritual Teaching of Evagrius Ponticus on Acedia* (Crestwood, NY, USA: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2012). For contemporary analysis and application of the teaching about the Seven Deadly Sins, see: Solomon Schimmel, *The Seven Deadly Sins: Jewish, Christian and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 1997); and Graham Tomlin, *The Seven Deadly Sins and How to Overcome Them*, (Oxford, England: Lion Hudson, 2007).

## Christian Spiritual Exercises

Pierre Hadot, in a chapter dealing with ‘Christianity as a Revealed Philosophy’, reflects upon the ways in which Christianity appropriated certain elements from Greco-Roman philosophical thought and practice, but ‘Christianised’ these elements in the process:

... we must not forget that although Christian spirituality borrowed certain spiritual exercises from ancient philosophy, these formed part of a broader ensemble of practices which were specifically Christian. The entire monastic life always presupposes the help of the grace of God, as well as a fundamental disposition of humility, which was often manifested in bodily attitudes signifying submission and guilt, such as prostration before one’s fellow monks. The renunciation of one’s own will was realised through absolute obedience to the orders of one’s superiors. Often, training for death was linked to the remembrance of the death of Christ, and asceticism was understood as participation in the Passion... Here, the practice of the virtues takes on a completely different meaning.<sup>170</sup>

Furthermore, when Christian thinkers appropriated Greco-Roman philosophical ideas and behaviours, they made an attempt to demonstrate that these elements had already been prescribed by the Christian God in the Christian Scriptures:

...when Deuteronomy uses the expression “pay attention”, Basil concludes that the biblical book is advising the philosophical exercise of “attention to oneself”. Such attention to oneself was also called “the guard of the heart”, because of a text from Proverbs: “Above all, guard your heart.” When the Christian philosophers read the exhortation “Put yourself to the test” in Second Corinthians, this was interpreted as an invitation to examine their conscience; and when, in First Corinthians, they read “I die every day”, they understood this as the model of the exercise of death. But such allusions to texts from Scripture obviously could not prevent the Christian philosophers from describing their spiritual exercises by means of the vocabulary and concepts of secular philosophy.<sup>171</sup>

In the next section, we will see how such appropriation of Greco-Roman philosophical themes and terminology characterises the writings of Evagrius, especially in his work entitled *Ad Monachos* (*To the Monks*), which, like the *Praktikós*, *Gnōstikós* and the *Kephalaia Gnōstiká*, is written in the form of carefully structured gnomic chapters, or *kephálaia*.

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<sup>170</sup> Pierre Hadot (Michael Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?* (Cambridge, MA, USA & London, England: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 248.

<sup>171</sup> Hadot (Chase, trans.), *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, pp. 248-249.

## Evagrius' *Kephálaia* as a Form of Christian Spiritual Exercise<sup>172</sup>

Endre von Ivánka (1902-1974), a Hungarian-Austrian classical philologist and Byzantinist, has demonstrated that the *kephálaia* form, in which works such as the *Ad Monachos* have been written, is not a genre unique to Evagrius, but already existed in the ancient Greco-Roman philosophical tradition.<sup>173</sup> From the Stoic school, von Ivánka draws attention to the *Meditations* of Marcus Aurelius, and from the Neo-Platonist school, he points to Porphyry's collection of excerpts from Plotinus. The purpose of all such *kephálaia* was to act as an aid for meditation upon the basic principles of each philosophical school.

Evagrius seems to have been among the first of the Christian writers to employ the *kephálaia* genre, adapting the existing Greco-Roman philosophical model, and then conforming it to the style of the Biblical Wisdom literature of the Old Testament, especially the book of Proverbs.<sup>174</sup> Driscoll reminds us, however, that such adaptation and assimilation might well have taken place without a great deal of conscious thought or recognition on the part of Evagrius:

When [Evagrius] read the Christian scriptures and sought... to understand the wisdom contained therein according to the Greek philosophical division of ethics, nature, and contemplation, this was his way of claiming Christian faith as the only true philosophy... monasticism as true philosophy... When Christians in the early centuries made claims like these, they were not necessarily aware that they had in fact achieved a synthesis. It may have seemed to them that they had simply successfully wrested wisdom from ineligible claimants. Christians, particularly educated Christians, could not be completely aware of how much they had absorbed from their culture... I do not pretend to know Evagrius's awareness or lack of it in terms of how the Greek philosophical tradition influenced him. Yet conscious or not, it is there; and it shows itself in a particularly interesting and subtle way in *Ad Monachos*.<sup>175</sup>

In the next section, therefore, we will examine the *Ad Monachos* from the perspective of four 'rubrics', derived from Hadot's analysis of the Greco-Roman spiritual exercise genre.

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<sup>172</sup> This section is derived from: Driscoll, (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, 'Stage Three: Evagrius and Ancient Philosophy', pp. 196-214.

<sup>173</sup> Endre von Ivánka, 'ΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΑ: Eine byzantinische Literaturform und ihre antiken Wurzeln', *Byzantinische Zeitschrift*, Volume 47 (1954), pp. 285-291.

<sup>174</sup> Driscoll makes the following observations about the literary style of Evagrius' *kephálaia*: "Evagrius is singular (to date) in the creation of a very carefully designed order to his chapters and in the evenness of the composition of his literary product... If Evagrius is not an originator of chapters, apophthegmata, or gnomic literature, he does seem to be the originator of 'Centuries', that is, chapters collected in groups of one hundred". See: Driscoll (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, p. 197, n. 85 & p. 198, n. 86.

<sup>175</sup> Driscoll (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, p. 199.



## Evagrius' *Ad Monachos* as a Christian Spiritual Exercise

Evagrius' *Ad Monachos* can be assessed in terms of four 'rubrics', derived from the work of Pierre Hadot, which allow a modern reader to understand how these ancient texts functioned as a means to achieve 'assimilation to the divine'.

***Learning to Live.*** The fundamental spiritual exercise for the Stoic philosophical school was attention to oneself and to the world in which one lived. This form of focused attention, known as *prosokhē*, involved a determination to concentrate on the present moment, as a means to conquer the passions that are often triggered by reflection on past or future events. Such focused attention also prepared the practitioner to confront and deal satisfactorily with all contingencies. Similarly, the *Ad Monachos* "employed striking maxims and metaphors that involve affectivity and engage the imagination".<sup>176</sup>

***Learning to Dialogue.*** As we have seen in Chapters 4 and 5, Socrates was the great exemplar of dialogue as a form of spiritual exercise. Socratic dialogue was concerned not so much with the content of the dialogue, but rather with the identity of the persons who participated in the dialogue. It served to bring a *person* into question. The *Ad Monachos* follows in the footsteps of the Socratic tradition, insofar as the various proverbs found within it cause a person to rise to the Socratic challenge to 'Know thyself.' Driscoll explains that:

The text is not a theoretical or dogmatic exposé of either *praktikē* or knowledge... In each proverb the reader is challenged to find the truth of the proverb in himself and for himself. The challenge is issued by a master who has dialogued with himself by means of challenges posed by his own masters.<sup>177</sup>

***Learning to Die.*** 'Practice for death' was another Socratic practice that came to be the defining feature of Greco-Roman philosophy, Christian martyrdom, and Christian monasticism. In fact, the exemplary deaths of Socrates and Jesus Christ, perhaps more than any other factors, provided a conceptual 'bridge' between Greco-Roman philosophy and Christian theology. Evagrius specifically addresses the value of 'practice for death' as a means of overcoming *akēdia*, or *spiritual listlessness*, in *Ad Monachos* 54-56, expanding on his previous characterisation of the monastic life as *anakhōrēsis* in *Praktikós* 52.

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<sup>176</sup> Driscoll (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, p. 201. For a more extensive explanation of these four practices, see: Pierre Hadot (Arnold I. Davidson, ed. & trans.), *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), Chapter 3, 'Spiritual Exercises', pp. 81-125.

<sup>177</sup> Driscoll (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, p. 202.

Spiritual listlessness is not the only theme in the *Ad Monachos* which reflects the ‘rubric’ of ‘Learning to Die’. Elsewhere in the *Ad Monachos*, several *kephálaia* also reflect the emphasis upon ‘practice for death’ when dealing with the theme of temperance, or as Evagrius puts it: “not deriving evil from the flesh” (*Ad Monachos*, 21). In addition, there is a significant Neo-Platonic emphasis upon a type of ‘physics’, involving movement from the corporeals to the incorporeals, an ascent to a more complete perspective, which, as we saw in Chapter 5, Hadot has described as the ‘view from above’. Driscoll notes that:

In Neoplatonism, the progress of the spiritual journey is toward an experiential knowing of the immateriality of the soul. In Evagrian thought this is a progress by means of the death of *praktikē* in which eventually, in pure prayer, the mind, created as the image of God, “goes immaterially to the Immaterial” (Prayer 67 [PG 79:1182A]). *Ad Monachos* is a spiritual exercise designed to promote this progress, and the very design of the exercise is saying that in order to know, it is necessary to transform oneself; more specifically, it is necessary to die to the passions, to the flesh, and to this whole material world. Two traditions are saying that to know it is necessary to transform oneself. This is *praktike*’s indissoluble relation to knowledge. It is a wisdom at once Greek and Christian.<sup>178</sup>

***Learning to Read.*** This ‘rubric’ is unlike the others, in that it is *not* a description of how the text functioned for ancient readers, but rather a reminder to modern readers that, in order to understand an ancient text, we must always be conscious of the *original context* within which a text was constructed, and the *original audience* for whom it was intended. This act of contextualisation, which is a means to avoid anachronistic interpretations of any particular ancient text, is a constant theme in the works of Pierre Hadot. In particular, Hadot emphasises that ancient philosophical and Christian monastic works were produced within the context of a specific *community*, and aimed to form the members of that specific community in specific ways, in accordance with the fundamental ‘choice’, or ‘way of life’:

When we read the works of ancient philosophers, the perspective we have described should cause us to give increased attention to the existential attitudes underlying the dogmatic edifices we encounter... They are the products of a philosophical school, in the most concrete sense of the term, in which a master forms his disciples, trying to guide them to self-transformation and –realisation. Thus, the written work is a reflection of pedagogical, psychagogic, and methodological preoccupations.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>178</sup> Driscoll (trans.), *Evagrius Ponticus: Ad Monachos*, pp. 203-204.

<sup>179</sup> Hadot (Davidson, ed. & trans.), *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 104-105.

## Conclusion

In this final chapter, we have seen how Evagrius Ponticus, with the assistance of Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus, was guided towards ‘the highest philosophy’. We have observed how Evagrius was influenced by the writings of Origen, and also through the living example of various ‘disciples’ of Origen, such as: Melania the Elder and Rufinus of Aquileia; the Tall Brothers (Ammonius, Euthymius, Dioscorus, and Eusebius); and most especially, Macarius the Great and Macarius of Alexandria, through whom Evagrius acquired a ‘philosophy of deeds’, rather than simply a philosophy of words. We have also noted that John Cassian was similarly inspired by the teaching of the two Macarii whilst he was in Egypt, and later, when in Constantinople, came under the influence of John Chrysostom.

‘The highest philosophy’, to which Evagrius aspired, combined various Greco-Roman philosophical concepts and practices with Christian concepts and practices derived from the Bible. Evagrius outlined the essence of this monastic worldview in the *Praktikós*, the *Gnōstikós*, and the *Kephálaia Gnostiká*. These works corresponded to three spiritual levels: *praktikē*, which is concerned with ascetical practice; *physikē*, which involves the contemplation (or knowledge) of God in creation; and *theologikē*, which involves contemplation of the Holy Trinity. These three Evagrian spiritual levels drew their immediate inspiration from Origen, but were ultimately derived from Middle Platonism.

We also noted several other explicit or implicit borrowings from earlier philosophical traditions: from Plato, Evagrius appropriated the concept of the tripartite soul, in which the soul is divided into the concupiscible [*epithymetikon*], the irascible [*thymetikon*], and the rational [*logistikón*]; from Stoicism, he adopted the concept of *apátheia*, making this the goal of the Christian monastic life; and from Epicureanism, he seems to have borrowed the distinction between *natural but unnecessary desires* and *unnatural and unnecessary desires*. We saw that Leszek Misiarczyk has claimed that Evagrius’ ‘Eight Generic Thoughts’ were assigned to parts of the tripartite Platonic soul: concupiscible (gluttony, fornication, avarice); irascible (sadness, anger, *akēdia*); and rational (vainglory and pride). However, our own analysis has suggested that Cassian’s ‘Eight Principal Vices’, and perhaps Evagrius’ ‘Eight Generic Thoughts’, appear to have been divided up in the light of the second and third categories of desire found within the Epicurean schema: *natural but unnecessary desires* (gluttony and lust); and *unnatural and unnecessary desires* (avarice, sadness, anger, *akēdia*, vainglory and pride).

The most striking differences between the presentation of the ‘Eight Generic Thoughts’ in the writings of Evagrius Ponticus, and the ‘Eight Principal Vices’ in the writings of John Cassian, seem to be concerned less with theological approach, or even literary style *per se* (although the brief *gnomic* utterances of Evagrius and the extensive chapters of Cassian could hardly be more different), but more with differences in the languages and settings in which the works were written, and with the different communities of monks for whom the works were written. Evagrius, on the one hand, wrote as a clinician or a therapist for the soul, generally employing terse, epigrammatic Greek. He laid out a clear, succinct spiritual regimen, which he had personally synthesised and developed in the laboratory of the Egyptian desert. Evagrius wrote mainly for Egyptian monks, who were already living an advanced ascetic life. Cassian, on the other hand, wrote in lengthy Latin prose, for communities in the western Roman province of Gaul, made up of would-be monastics who had never been to Egypt. In his monastic writings, Cassian tried to recreate monastic life as he remembered it in Egypt, but he wrote of a time and a community which no longer existed, in order to inspire monks who lived in a different location, characterised by a markedly different political and theological climate.

In our analysis of Cassian’s appropriation of the Evagrian theological approach, we have noted that Cassian retained the ‘Eight Generic Thoughts’, but renamed them as the ‘Eight Principal Vices’. Cassian thus seems to have effected a subtle shift of emphasis, from thinking to behaviour, which was then more strongly emphasised in the Seven Deadly Sins schema of Pope Gregory the Great. Cassian also chose to express the goal of the monastic life using the Biblical phrase ‘purity of heart’, rather than the Stoic concept of *apátheia*. Despite such relatively superficial changes, however, we have argued that there was an essential continuity between the works of Evagrius and Cassian, in which both writers helped to develop a Christian monastic worldview of lasting significance. Using the ‘Eight Generic Thoughts’ / ‘Eight Principal Vices’ as a theoretical framework, Evagrius and Cassian developed a distinctively Christian approach to philosophy, which facilitated the practice of ‘spiritual exercises’ and the pursuit of ‘assimilation to the divine’. Through the insights of Pierre Hadot, we have also been able to show that Christian monasticism, as it was developed by Evagrius and Cassian, was not intended to be a fundamentally new endeavour, but was believed to be the setting forth of Christianity as the ‘true philosophy’, and the ideal ‘way of life’, and was thus a fitting culmination to several centuries of earlier Greco-Roman thought.

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has traced the origins and development of the monastic worldview held by Evagrius Ponticus and John Cassian, by locating this worldview within the broader context of the development of ancient Greco-Roman thought, from the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, up to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century CE. We have employed the historical and methodological framework of Pierre Hadot, especially as it was articulated in his study called *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, and then supplemented and augmented his work with reference to insights from the fields of sociology (Joseph M. Bryant) and philosophy of religion (Roy A. Clouser; James W. Sire; Francis Schaeffer; C. S. Lewis; and Adam Drozdek.) Against this backdrop, we have seen how Greco-Roman theology and philosophy emerged from various ‘purificatory’ and ‘destructive’ critiques of Greco-Roman religion.

Hadot’s radical reinterpretation of ancient philosophy revealed that it was originally thought of as the product of a basic ‘choice’, ‘decision’ or orientation to life, which gave rise to distinctive forms of behaviour, speech or writing, and called upon others to understand and adopt the same form of life. When combined with elements drawn from early Christian thought and practice, ancient philosophy provided the framework and inspiration for a creative synthesis, especially within the monastic praxis developed by Evagrius and Cassian. The monastic worldview of Evagrius and Cassian drew deeply upon the models of philosophical life developed within the post-Socratic philosophical schools, especially practical activities known as ‘spiritual exercises’, that were designed to enhance and transform a person’s perception and state of being. Suitably adapted, these spiritual exercises became a central element within the monastic thought and practice of Evagrius and Cassian, as well as many of their Christian contemporaries and successors.

Our analysis of ancient Greco-Roman thought has revealed the critical role played by differing concepts of the divine, and by differing interpretations of the Socratic call to pursue a life oriented towards ‘assimilation to the divine’. Identification and abandonment of faulty interpretative methodologies that have arisen since the European Enlightenment allowed us to see that, in order to understand ancient Greco-Roman thought correctly, we must not impose an artificial division between what is described today as ‘religion’ and ‘science’. Even the most agnostic or atheistic of the Sophists wrote and thought within categories clearly derived from Homer and Hesiod; indeed, the epistemological and ethical approaches of all the ancient thinkers that we have surveyed were so influenced by traditional religious conceptions that their work becomes largely incomprehensible without this perspective.

In Chapter 1, we saw that Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* provided a theological and ethical framework that informed all subsequent Greco-Roman thought. Homer's aristocratic warrior ethos, exemplified by Achilles and Odysseus, and characterised by wisdom and martial prowess, remained at the heart of Greco-Roman education (*paideía*) and training (*askēsis*) from the Archaic Period in Greece, until the late Roman Imperial Period. Homer's works suggested that aristocratic heroes could achieve a form of 'reputational immortality', through the memory of their glorious words and deeds. Hesiod's *Theogony* provided an intricate and compelling portrait of the origins and relationships of the gods, and allowed for the possibility that some human beings might become 'assimilated to the divine' through *apothéōsis*. Hesiod's *Works and Days* shed light on the origins of humanity and evil, and sought to 'democratise' ethical endeavour, by suggesting that *aretē* (moral excellence) was potentially available to all who would work to achieve it, and not just the aristocratic elite.

In Chapter 2, we rejected the modern tendency to refer to the thinkers surveyed here as 'philosophers', and questioned the accuracy and utility of the designation 'Pre-Socratic'. Adam Drozdek's comprehensive analysis of ancient Greek thinkers revealed that they were all extensively influenced by ancient Greek religious ideas and practice. In fact, we discovered that each of these thinkers was primarily engaged in a process of theological rationalism, brought about by intense ethical reflection on the nature and role of the gods. James W. Sire's 'worldview analysis', supplemented by insights from C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer and Gregory Vlastos, facilitated the analysis of the teachings of the Pre-Socratic thinkers, allowing the derivation of possible ethical implications of their work. Despite the fragmentary nature of much of the surviving evidence, we were able to discern that at least some Pre-Socratic schemes seem to have allowed that a person might achieve what Hadot has described as the 'view from above', and, in this limited sense, to become like the gods.

In Chapter 3, we critiqued 19<sup>th</sup> century attempts to impose a 'linear chronology' upon the Pre-Socratic thinkers and the Sophists, on the basis that such schemes were faulty in their fundamental neglect of the centrality of religious modes of thought, and also smuggled in anachronistic assumptions about the ways in which discussion and promulgation of ideas were conducted in the Late Archaic and Early Classical periods. We saw that some Sophists, such as Protagoras, were relatively conservative in their religious views; others, such as Thrasymachus and Callicles, the so-called 'immoralists', promoted agnostic or even atheistic religious perspectives, and were correspondingly more nihilistic and antinomian in their epistemological and ethical approaches as well.

In Chapter 4, we examined three literary portraits of Socrates, as found in the works of Aristophanes, Xenophon and Plato, in an attempt to address the so-called Socratic Problem, i.e. the problem of the historical Socrates and his teaching. We discovered that Socrates exercised a tremendous influence over his followers and his detractors, but that the peculiar nature of his life and death, as well as the inherently fictional nature of the various surviving accounts of his words and teachings, tended to militate against the retrieval of precise information about the nature of his philosophical commitments. Whilst Aristophanes depicted Socrates as a generic ‘intellectual’, who combined many of the worst traits of the Pre-Socratics and Sophists, we did discern a common tendency in the works of Xenophon and Plato to depict Socrates as the ultimate moral exemplar, a view which prevailed amongst most of the later philosophical schools.

In Chapter 5, we saw that the Socratic influence could lead to radically different forms of life. Amongst Socrates’ older disciples, for example, we observed the extreme asceticism of Antisthenes, and the extreme hedonism of Aristippus. Later schools tended to embrace their own versions of ‘Socrates’, primarily derived from speculative engagement with the literary depictions of ‘Socrates’ found within the works of Xenophon and/or Plato. Some major schools, such as the Skeptics, were very sparing in their acknowledgement of the Socratic inheritance, and other schools, such as the Epicureans, actively defined themselves in opposition to many of the key Socratic ethical insights. However, we also discerned that there was an underlying similarity of approach between these schools. Each school was based on a fundamental ‘decision’ or ‘choice’ of life, and each articulated, defended, or even proselytised on behalf of that ‘choice’, as a means to pursue goals such as ‘assimilation to the divine’ or ‘conformity to Nature/Reason’, and thus to become better servants of all humanity.

In Chapter 6, we found that early Christianity could be perceived as a ‘purifying’ critique of earlier Christian and non-Christian concepts of the divine, especially through the development of *Lógos* theology and the subsequent formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. An examination of the influence of Greco-Roman philosophy on early Christian thought and practice revealed how early Christianity itself functioned as a philosophy, i.e. as a way of life with an associated discourse, expressed in terms of *kataphatic* (‘positive’) and *apophatic* (‘negative’) aspects. We drew attention to the incompatibility of Christian monotheistic thought and practice with Roman polytheism. We also traced the antecedents of the Christian doctrine of *théōsis*, and contrasted it with other forms of ‘assimilation to God’, such as *apothéōsis*, or the divine ruler cult.

In Chapter 7, we examined ancient and modern conceptions of Christian martyrdom, and outlined the ways in which this phenomenon was derived from concepts and practices found within the Bible and the broader Jewish tradition. We saw that in the Old Testament, the martyr was a prophetic figure, and that in the New Testament, the martyr was a ‘witness’ who testified to belief in the resurrection of Jesus Christ as the cosmic king. We also considered the influence of Greco-Roman cultural values, and of the various Greco-Roman philosophical schools, on the development of the Christian understanding of martyrdom. Our analysis of Christian martyrdom revealed that it was increasingly viewed as a form of life that involved philosophically-derived concepts and behaviours, such as ‘training for virtue’ and ‘practice for death’. Christian martyrdom also came to be associated with several forms of written discourse (such as Martyr Acts, or martyr’s ‘training manuals’) which were modelled upon earlier Greco-Roman spiritual exercises that facilitated a ‘view from above’.

In Chapter 8, we considered the nature of the relationship between martyrdom and monasticism, and addressed the claim that monasticism was a ‘replacement’ for martyrdom. We saw that martyrdom, i.e. confession and then death for one’s faith, was a form of life that was gradually *superseded* by the monastic form of life during the course of the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE. We explained how the *Life of Antony* (the *Vita Antonii*) contributed to the development of the early Christian monastic worldview, and also demonstrated the ways in which the *Vita Antonii* reflected the synthesis of Christian and non-Christian elements that contributed to the theology and practice of martyrdom. In particular, we argued that the *Vita Antonii* could be read and understood as a modified Martyr Act, which functioned as a Christian spiritual exercise for the encouragement of monastics and non-monastics.

In Chapter 9, we outlined the Christian and Greco-Roman antecedents of the monastic worldview of Evagrius and Cassian. A careful consideration of the evidence for the claims that Evagrius was an Origenist ‘heretic’ revealed that there is little substance to the case. Furthermore, we saw that what Origen, Evagrius and Cassian derived from ancient Greco-Roman philosophy was *neither* a fixed body of doctrine, *nor* an ironclad system, but rather a particular orientation to life itself. That orientation led to the production of a substantial body of written discourse by Evagrius and Cassian, which built upon the threefold scheme of spiritual progress developed by Origen, but also incorporated the distinctive teaching about the Eight Generic Thoughts/Eight Principal Vices. Analysis of the Evagrian work entitled *Ad Monachos* revealed how the Evagrian/Cassianic scheme could be encapsulated in a text that functioned as a Christian spiritual exercise, and thus facilitated ‘assimilation to the divine’ and progress toward the ultimate goal of the Christian life: knowledge of the Holy Trinity.



Our investigation has tended to confirm Francis Schaeffer's claim that "philosophy and religion deal with the same basic questions."<sup>1</sup> Joseph Bryant's sociological analysis has revealed that it is essential to address the answers which different thinkers have provided to these questions with a clear focus on their social, cultural, intellectual and spiritual context. None of the ancient philosophical schools possessed 'systematic' bodies of doctrine that came fully-formed from heaven (notwithstanding the reverential treatment afforded to the writings of Plato and Aristotle in Late Antiquity). Rather each school developed responses to specific practical, pastoral and pedagogical needs, in specific times and places. Most of these responses were *not* 'systematic' in the modern sense of the word, and nor were they intended to be. Indeed, it has taken several chapters of 'systematic' analysis to demonstrate just how 'unsystematic' some forms of ancient Greco-Roman thought really were!

Catherine Osborne's analysis of the 'First Principles' story of the Pre-Socratic thinkers developed from a desire "to highlight how we create stories that reflect our own preconceptions, in this case about what philosophy should be like."<sup>2</sup> Our investigation has revealed that some modern accounts of ancient Greco-Roman thought, based upon the 'First Principles' story, are anachronistic and unreliable. By contrast, our own diachronic analysis has demonstrated the explanatory value of Pierre Hadot's thesis that ancient philosophy and theology can be understood as a 'purificatory' critique of religion. This orientation towards ancient Greco-Roman thought has helped to clarify the nature of the monastic worldview of Evagrius and Cassian, and has also helped to reveal why modern scholarly attempts to understand the thought and practice of Evagrius and Cassian in terms of "a highly specific intellectual system" are so fundamentally misguided. Rather, like the Christian monks from whom they had learnt, or the many others whom they taught and influenced, Evagrius and Cassian were primarily focused upon 'training for virtue' and 'the practice of death', so that like all true Christian philosophers, they might pursue the path of *théōsis* and achieve 'assimilation to the divine'.

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *Trilogy* (Downers Grove, IL, USA, Inter Varsity Press, 1990), p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Catherine Osborne, 'Was there an Eleatic revolution in philosophy?', in: Simon Goldhill & Robin Osborne (eds.), *Rethinking Revolutions through Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 218.

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