

# Gnosticism, Platonism and the Late Ancient World

*Essays in Honour of John D. Turner*

*Edited by*

**Kevin Corrigan and Tuomas Rasimus**

in collaboration with Dylan M. Burns,  
Lance Jenott and Zeke Mazur

Gnosticism, Platonism  
and the Late Ancient World

# Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies

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VOLUME 82





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BRILL

LEIDEN · BOSTON  
2013

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gnosticism, Platonism and the late ancient world : essays in honour of John D. Turner / edited by Kevin Corrigan, Tuomas Rasimus ; in collaboration with Dylan M. Burns, Lance Jenott, Zeke Mazur. pages cm – (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean studies ; volume 82)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-22383-7 (hardback) : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-90-04-25476-3 (e-book)

I. Gnosticism. 2. Platonists. 3. Philosophy, Ancient. I. Turner, John Douglas. II. Corrigan, Kevin. III. Rasimus, Tuomas. IV. Series: Nag Hammadi and Manichaean studies ; v. 82.

B638.G595 2013

299'.932–dc23

2013015170

This publication has been typeset in the multilingual “Brill” typeface. With over 5,100 characters covering Latin, IPA, Greek, and Cyrillic, this typeface is especially suitable for use in the humanities. For more information, please see [www.brill.com/brill-typeface](http://www.brill.com/brill-typeface).

ISSN 0929-2470

ISBN 978-90-04-22383-7 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-25476-3 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

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## PREFACE

It is with great pleasure that we offer this *Festschrift* to John D. Turner on the occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday. This volume celebrates an extraordinary lifetime of scholarship. John's work has been of enormous importance not only for each of us—the editors—and the many other colleagues, students, and friends who have contributed essays, but also for the study of late antique religions in general. Beginning with his doctoral work in the late 1960s, John was among the first generation of Coptologists to study the Nag Hammadi codices as a member of the team directed by James M. Robinson at the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at Claremont, and he has since been responsible for groundbreaking critical editions and translations of Coptic texts as well as countless articles, books, and commentaries on this material. John has developed a comprehensive theory of the history of Sethian Gnosticism—on the basis of Hans-Martin Schenke's seminal work in the 1970s and 1980s<sup>1</sup>—showing that Sethian thought was not a monolithic entity, but consisted of heterogeneous materials that commingled over the course of a long and dynamic history. John also identified what he termed "Platonizing Sethianism," that is, a philosophically-inspired sub-current of the Sethian movement represented in the closely-related tractates *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, *Marsanes*, and the *Three Steles of Seth*. Furthermore, John collaborated substantially with the *Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi* at Université Laval (Québec), on whose editorial board he also serves. He has organized several pioneering colloquia—notably the Society of Biblical Literature seminars "Gnosticism and Later Platonism" (1993–1998) and "Rethinking Plato's *Parmenides*" (2002–2007)—that served to gather a thriving international community of scholars and establish and disseminate concrete advances in the field. And last but not least, with his characteristic wisdom, erudition, and generosity, he has mentored undergraduates at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, supervised several generations of doctoral students throughout the world (some of whom have contributed to the present volume), and inspired a wide range of scholars working on Gnosticism and Platonism.

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<sup>1</sup> Schenke 1974; 1981; 1987.

Perhaps the most important aspect of John's work has been its eminent position at the forefront of an ongoing paradigm shift, so to speak, in the study of Gnosticism and Platonism. As recently as thirty-five years ago—before the full effect of the Nag Hammadi corpus' publication had been felt—it was still possible for A.H. Armstrong to assert that the influence of Greek philosophy upon Gnosticism was “not genuine, but extraneous, and, for the most part superficial.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, until recently, the majority of scholars tended to assume almost reflexively that the Gnostics were fundamentally, even *essentially*, irrational and un-philosophical, or, at most, influenced only trivially by Greek philosophy. Today, however, this attitude is no longer tenable; it is now generally recognized that any serious historical investigation into the history of philosophy in the Roman Empire must take the Gnostic evidence into account. One indication of this shift is the virtual renaissance of interest in Gnosticism that is currently taking hold of Plotinian and Neoplatonic studies on both sides of the Atlantic. To be sure, this recent shift in scholarly attitudes was foreshadowed by several colloquia devoted specifically to the topic of Neoplatonism and Gnosticism in the 1980s and 1990s,<sup>3</sup> as well as the important collaborative work of Michel Tardieu and Pierre Hadot,<sup>4</sup> but it is also due to the cumulative influence of John's many publications.

John's scholarship drew inspiration from the observations of earlier scholars who had already perceived a close relationship between Gnostic thought and academic Platonism even before the publication of the Nag Hammadi corpus.<sup>5</sup> He initially approached the Sethian texts with an acute sensitivity to philosophical nuance, and devoted much of his subsequent career to their philosophical aspects. In a series of seminal studies beginning with his 1980 essay “The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment,”<sup>6</sup> John demonstrated the substantial contribution from Greek philosophy, especially Platonism, at the very core of Platonizing Sethian thought. More importantly, however, he has suggested that the “Platonizing” Sethians themselves may have been responsible for key philosophical innovations that previous scholars

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<sup>2</sup> Armstrong 1978, 101.

<sup>3</sup> For example, the colloquia published as Runia 1984; and Wallis and Bregman 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Tardieu 1996; and Hadot 1996.

<sup>5</sup> See, *inter alia*, Jonas 1954; 1963; and 1967; De Vogel 1953; Theiler 1955; Puech 1960; Krämer 1964. Among early Nag Hammadi scholars who made similar suggestions, see esp. Sieber 1973; Tardieu 1973; Robinson 1977; and Pearson 1978.

<sup>6</sup> One might also consider, *inter alia*, Turner 1986; 2000; 2001; 2006 and 2007. For a full, up-to-date bibliography of John D. Turner, see Sidnie White Crawford's Appreciation in this volume.

had attributed to the school of Plotinus, Porphyry, and their immediate successors. These innovations include the various ontogenetic schemata that employ what John has called “dynamic emanationism” to explain the derivation of the second, intellectual principle from the hyper-transcendent first principle. One variety of dynamic emanationism in Sethian thought involves the emergence of the Barbelo Aeon in three phases corresponding to the so-called noetic (existence-life-intellect) triad, a triad implicit in the philosophy of Plotinus but later formalized by post-Plotinian Platonists (as Pierre Hadot so eloquently demonstrated).<sup>7</sup> In the conclusion of an important 1996 SBL seminar paper, John asks rhetorically:

Could it be that the gnostics themselves were the catalyst that precipitated the Middle and Neoplatonic focus upon life and vitality as a designation for the median phase in the movement from an original static unity to the manifestation of a demiurgic intellect or world soul that administers the physical world of becoming? Could certain gnostic speculations on Life have urged Plotinus and his immediate predecessors to concentrate on developing a figurative intelligible biology out of the thought of Plato and Aristotle?<sup>8</sup>

Whether or not this question can ever be answered with certainty, it has become increasingly difficult to deny that the thought of the Platonizing Sethians should be understood in close connection with the academic Platonism of the second and third centuries. Indeed, it is now largely accepted that far from the common caricature of Gnostics as mere intellectual parasites<sup>9</sup> and proponents of a vulgar Platonism,<sup>10</sup> the Platonizing Sethians were central participants in the dialogue taking place within contemporaneous academic-philosophical circles at the very cusp of the transition from Middle to Neoplatonism.

If John’s conjecture about Sethian influence on Neoplatonism is correct, we may still wonder why Greek philosophers such as Plotinus might have been concerned with the putative revelations of the Sethians in the first place. To answer this question, we suggest that one first recognize the tacit assumption underlying the question itself. That the possibility of Gnostic

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<sup>7</sup> Hadot 1960; 1965; 1968. The suggestion that the existence-life-intellect triad was itself a Sethian innovation (albeit developed out of prior Middle Platonic and Chaldaean speculation) was first made more or less simultaneously in 1973 by Tardieu (1973) and Robinson (published as Robinson 1977).

<sup>8</sup> Turner 2000, 223.

<sup>9</sup> For a critical historiography of this view, see Williams 1996, ch. 4, “Parasites? Or Innovators?,” pp. 80–95.

<sup>10</sup> One need only recall the evocative term “Proletarianplatonismus,” coined by Theiler 1955, 78 ff.

influence on academic Platonism itself is *a priori* so controversial among historians of philosophy is perhaps a result of the persistent assumption of an overly rigid demarcation not only between Greek philosophy and Gnosticism, but between the elusive categories of religion and philosophy themselves—a demarcation that is especially problematic in the case of Platonism. As John argues in a recent essay:

[T]he tendency of historians of philosophy to dissociate Gnosticism, with its metaphysical speculation and ritual and visionary practices, from what they conceive as genuine Greek, especially Platonic philosophy, owes to a contemporary understanding of what constitutes genuine philosophy that imposes too narrow a delineation not only of ancient Gnosticism and Greek philosophy, but also of the relation between religion and philosophy in general.<sup>11</sup>

John suggests that while Plato had used the imagery of mystery-religions to illustrate philosophical practice, by the first three centuries CE, Platonism itself had actually acquired the contours of a religion,<sup>12</sup> with its own revealed scripture, such as the mythical sections of the Platonic dialogues, the *Chaldaean Oracles*, and later, the *Hermetica* and *Orphica*; its own corresponding veneration of ancient spiritual authorities such as Plato himself, but also Pythagoras, Hermes Trismegistus, Orpheus, and so on; and its own form of ritual practice, namely theurgy. In the same essay, John remarks that this idea was already implied by Pierre Hadot's insight that late antique philosophical schools were characterized less by formal sets of *doctrines* than by specific *practices*, what Hadot famously referred to as “ways of life,”<sup>13</sup> thus further blurring the putative distinction between philosophical schools and religious cults. Yet nothing demonstrates the dissolution of the boundaries between religious and philosophical practice so clearly as has John's own research over the past thirty years, and especially his detailed analysis of the nearly seamless interpenetration of ritual, metaphysics, and visionary mysticism in Platonizing Sethian thought. Indeed, the totality of John's oeuvre—filled with his unique rigor, clarity, and insight—obliges us to undertake no less than a total re-evaluation of the history of Platonism in late antiquity.

This volume celebrates John's magnificent career with thirty-three essays which focus upon the fertile intersection of modes of knowledge so seemingly different as revealed scripture and Greek philosophy. It is divided into two major sections that follow the introductory Appreciation. Part I includes

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<sup>11</sup> Turner 2012, 178.

<sup>12</sup> Turner 2012, 180–181.

<sup>13</sup> See Hadot 2002, ch. 11, cited in Turner 2012, 178–179.

essays that primarily treat Sethian, Valentinian, other early Christian, Jewish and Manichaeic thought. The essays in Part II concern Platonism in its widest sense, including—in the spirit of John’s work—the interaction of academic philosophy with Gnostic and biblical thought. We hope that the broad variety of topics reflects not only John’s own vast range of interests but also his propensity to think across and beyond conventional disciplinary boundaries.

The Editors

We wish to thank, first, each of the contributors for their essays; second, Johannes van Oort and Einar Thomassen, chief editors of the Nag Hammadi and Manichaeic Studies series, for reading the manuscript and making valuable suggestions (in addition to contributing themselves to the volume); third, Mattie Kuiper and Louise Schouten at Brill for all their help; fourth, Laurie Meijers and her colleagues at TAT Zetwerk for copy-editing and preparing the proofs; fifth, Meredith Kooi for reading through the proofs with a fresh pair of eyes; and last, but not least, John’s wife Elizabeth, for providing a photo of John.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Abr.</i>	<i>De Abrahamo (On the Life of Abraham)</i>
<i>Abst.</i>	<i>De abstinentia (On Abstinence)</i>
<i>Acad. post.</i>	<i>Academica posteriora (The Posterior Academics)</i>
<i>Acad. pr.</i>	<i>Academica priora (The Prior Academics)</i>
<i>Acts Andr.</i>	<i>Acts of Andrew</i>
<i>Acts Thom.</i>	<i>Acts of Thomas</i>
<i>Ad Cand.</i>	<i>Ad Candidum (To Candidus)</i>
<i>Ad mart.</i>	<i>Ad martyras (To the Martyrs)</i>
<i>Adv. Apol.</i>	<i>Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium (Against Apollinarius)</i>
<i>Adv. Ar.</i>	<i>Adversus Arium (Against Arius)</i>
<i>Adv. Col.</i>	<i>Adversus Colotem (Against Colotes)</i>
<i>Adv. haer.</i>	<i>Adversus omnes haereses (Against all heresies)</i>
<i>Aet.</i>	<i>De aeternitate mundi (On the Eternity of the World)</i>
<i>A.J.</i>	<i>Antiquitates judaicae (Jewish Antiquities)</i>
<i>Allogenes T</i>	<i>Book of Allogenes (CT,4)</i>
<i>An.</i>	<i>De anima (The Soul)</i>
<i>ANF</i>	<i>The Ante-Nicene Fathers. Edited by Alexander Robertson and James Donaldson, 1885–1887. 10 volumes. Repr. Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1994.</i>
<i>An. post.</i>	<i>Analytica posteriora (Posterior Analytics)</i>
<i>An. procr.</i>	<i>De animae procreatione in Timaeo (On the Generation of Soul in the Timaeus)</i>
<i>Anth. Plan.</i>	<i>Anthologia Planudea (Planudean Anthology)</i>
<i>Antr. nymph.</i>	<i>De antro nympharum (On the Cave of the Nymphs)</i>
<i>Ap. John</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
<i>Apoc. Ab.</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Abraham</i>
<i>Apoc. Adam</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Adam</i>
<i>1 Apoc. Jas.</i>	<i>(First) Apocalypse of James</i>
<i>2 Apoc. Jas.</i>	<i>(Second) Apocalypse of James</i>
<i>Apoc. Paul</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Paul</i>
<i>1 Apol.</i>	<i>Apologia I (First Apology)</i>
<i>Arg. Orph.</i>	<i>Argonautica Orphica (The Orphic Argonautica)</i>
<i>Ascen. Isa.</i>	<i>Ascension of Isaiah</i>
<i>Autol.</i>	<i>Ad Autolyicum (To Autolyicus)</i>
<i>Aut. Teach.</i>	<i>Authoritative Teaching</i>
<i>Bapt.</i>	<i>De baptismo (Baptism)</i>
<i>Bapt. hom.</i>	<i>Homiliae de baptismo (Baptismal Homilies)</i>
<i>2 Bar.</i>	<i>2 Baruch</i>
<i>Barn.</i>	<i>Barnabas</i>
<i>BCNH</i>	<i>Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi (Les Presses de l'Université Laval; Peeters)</i>

BG	Berlinus Gnosticus (= Berlin Codex 8502)
CAG	Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca
C. Ap.	<i>Contra Apionem</i> ( <i>Against Apion</i> )
Cat.	<i>Categoriae</i> ( <i>Categories</i> )
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
Cels.	<i>Contra Celsum</i> ( <i>Against Celsus</i> )
CGL	The Coptic Gnostic Library (Brill)
Chald. Or.	<i>Chaldaean Oracles</i>
Char.	<i>Charmides</i>
Cher.	<i>De cherubim</i> ( <i>On the Cherubim</i> )
Civ.	<i>De civitate Dei</i> ( <i>The City of God</i> )
CMC	The Cologne Mani Codex
Cod. Bruc. <i>Untitled</i>	<i>The Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex</i>
Coh. ad gr.	<i>Cohortatio ad graecos</i> ( <i>Exhortation to the Greeks</i> )
Comm. Eph.	<i>Commentarius in Epistulam ad Ephesios</i> ( <i>Commentary on Ephesians</i> )
Comm. Jo.	<i>Commentarii in evangelium Joannis</i> ( <i>Commentary on the Gospel of John</i> )
Conf.	<i>Confessionum libri XIII</i> ( <i>Confessions</i> )
Conf. ling.	<i>De confusione linguarum</i> ( <i>On the Confusion of Tongues</i> )
Congr.	<i>De congressu eruditionis gratia</i> ( <i>On the Preliminary Studies</i> )
Contempl.	<i>De vita contemplativa</i> ( <i>On the Contemplative Life</i> )
Contra Gal.	<i>Contra Galilaeos</i> ( <i>Against the Galileans</i> )
Corp. Herm.	<i>Corpus Hermeticum</i>
CSCO	Corpus scriptorum christianorum orientalium
CSEL	Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum
CT	Codex Tchacos
Decal.	<i>De decalogo</i> ( <i>On the Decalogue</i> )
De decem dub.	<i>De decem dubitationibus circa providentiam</i> ( <i>Ten Questions On Providence</i> )
Deipn.	<i>Deipnosopistae</i> ( <i>Philosophers at Dinner</i> )
Dem.	<i>Demonstrationes</i> ( <i>Demonstrations</i> )
De mysteriis	<i>De mysteriis Aegyptiorum</i> ( <i>On the Mysteries</i> )
De regr. an.	<i>De regressu animae</i> ( <i>On the Return of the Soul</i> )
Descr.	<i>Graeciae description</i> ( <i>Description of Greece</i> )
Det.	<i>Quod deterius potiori insidari soleat</i> ( <i>That the Worse Attacks the Better</i> )
Deus	<i>Quod Deus sit immutabilis</i> ( <i>That God Is Unchangeable</i> )
Dial.	<i>Dialogus cum Tryphone</i> ( <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i> )
Dial. Sav.	<i>Dialogue of the Savior</i>
Did.	<i>Didaskalikos = Epitome doctrinae platonicae</i> (= <i>Handbook of Platonism</i> )
Disc. 8–9	<i>Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth</i>
Ebr.	<i>De ebrietate</i> ( <i>On Drunkenness</i> )
Ecl.	<i>Eclogae prophetae</i> ( <i>Extracts from the Prophets</i> )
Elenchos	= <i>Refutatio omnium haeresium</i> ( <i>Refutation of All Heresies</i> )
El. Theol.	<i>Elements of Theology</i> (= <i>Institutio theologica</i> )

1 <i>En.</i>	1 <i>Enoch</i>
2 <i>En.</i>	2 <i>Enoch</i>
<i>Enarrat. Ps.</i>	<i>Enarrationes in Psalmos (Enarrations on the Psalms)</i>
<i>Ench.</i>	<i>Encheiridion (Manual)</i>
<i>Encomium</i>	<i>Encomium on the Four Bodiless Living Creatures</i>
<i>Enn.</i>	<i>Ennead</i>
<i>Ep.</i>	<i>Epistulae morales (Moral Epistles)</i>
<i>Ep. Her.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Herodotum (Letter to Herodotus)</i>
<i>Epid.</i>	<i>Epideixis tou apostolikou kerygmatos (Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching)</i>
<i>Epit.</i>	<i>Epitome doctrinae platonicae (Handbook of Platonism)</i>
<i>Ep. Pet. Phil.</i>	<i>Letter of Peter to Philip</i>
<i>Ep. Pyth.</i>	<i>Epistula ad Pythoclem (Letter to Pythocles)</i>
<i>Eth. nic.</i>	<i>Ethica nichomachea (Nichomachean Ethics)</i>
<i>Exc.</i>	<i>Excerpta ex Theodoto (Excerpts from Theodotus)</i>
<i>Exeg. Soul</i>	<i>Exegesis on the Soul</i>
<i>Fat.</i>	<i>De fato (On Fate)</i>
<i>Fin.</i>	<i>De finibus (On Ends)</i>
<i>Fug.</i>	<i>De fuga et inventione (On Flight and Finding)</i>
<i>Fund.</i>	<i>Contra epistulam Manichaei quam vocant Fundamenti (Against the Letter of Manichaeans That They Call "The Basics")</i>
GCS	Die griechischen christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten Jahrhunderte
<i>Gen. an.</i>	<i>De generatione animalium (Generation of Animals)</i>
GNO	<i>Gregorii Nysseni opera.</i> Edited by Werner W. Jaeger et al. 10 volumes. Leiden: Brill, 1921–2009.
<i>Gos. Mary</i>	<i>Gospel of Mary</i>
<i>Gos. Phil.</i>	<i>Gospel of Philip</i>
<i>Gos. Thom.</i>	<i>Gospel of Thomas</i>
<i>Gos. Truth</i>	<i>Gospel of Truth</i>
<i>Hab.</i>	<i>Discourse against Habib</i>
<i>Haer.</i>	<i>Adversus haereses (Against Heresies)</i>
<i>Haer. fab. comp.</i>	<i>Haereticarum fabularum compendium (Compendium of Heretical Fables)</i>
<i>h. Cer.</i>	<i>Hymnus in Cererem (Hymn to Demeter)</i>
<i>HEpi</i>	<i>Hymni de epiphania (Hymns on the Epiphany)</i>
<i>Her.</i>	<i>Quis rerum divinarum heres sit (Who Is the Heir?)</i>
<i>Herb.</i>	<i>De virtutibus herbarum (On the Virtues of Plants)</i>
<i>Herm.</i>	<i>Adversus Hermogenem (Against Hermogenes)</i>
<i>Herm. Mand.</i>	<i>Shepherd of Hermas, Mandate</i>
<i>Hist. eccl.</i>	<i>Historia ecclesiastica (Ecclesiastical History)</i>
<i>HNativ.</i>	<i>Hymni de nativitate (Hymns on the Nativity)</i>
<i>Holy Book</i>	<i>Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit (Gospel of the Egyptians)</i>
<i>Hom.</i>	<i>Homiliae (Homilies)</i>
<i>Hom. Ep.</i>	<i>Homily on the Epiphany</i>
<i>Hom. Luc.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Lucam (Homilies on Luke)</i>
<i>Hom. Matt.</i>	<i>Homiliae in Matthaëum (Homilies on Matthew)</i>

<i>Hom. Nat.</i>	<i>Homilia in Nativitatem (Homily on Nativity)</i>
<i>Hyp. Arch.</i>	<i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i>
<i>Eugnostos</i>	<i>Eugnostos the Blessed</i>
<i>Il.</i>	<i>Ilias (Iliad)</i>
<i>In Alc.</i>	<i>In Alcibiadem (Commentary on [Plato's] Alcibiades I)</i>
<i>In Cael.</i>	<i>In de Caelo (Commentary on Aristotle's Heavens)</i>
<i>In Categ.</i>	<i>In Categoriais (Commentary on Aristotle's Categories)</i>
<i>In Crat.</i>	<i>In Cratylum (Commentary on Plato's Cratylus)</i>
<i>In de an.</i>	<i>In de anima (Commentary on Aristotle's Soul)</i>
<i>In de int.</i>	<i>In de Interpretatione (Commentary on Aristotle's Interpretation)</i>
<i>In Eucl.</i>	<i>In Euclidem (Commentary on the First Book of Euclid's Elements)</i>
<i>In Hipp. Nat.</i>	<i>In Hippocratis de Natura Hominis (On Hippocrates' On the Nature of Man)</i>
<i>In Isag.</i>	<i>In Porphyrii Isagogen (Commentary on Porphyry's Isagoge)</i>
<i>In Met.</i>	<i>In Metaphysica (Commentary on Aristotle's Metaphysics)</i>
<i>In Parm.</i>	<i>In Parmenidem (Commentary on Plato's Parmenides)</i>
<i>In Phys.</i>	<i>In de Physica (Commentary on Aristotle's Physics)</i>
<i>In Remp.</i>	<i>In rem publicam (Commentary on Plato's Republic)</i>
<i>Interp. Know.</i>	<i>Interpretation of Knowledge</i>
<i>In Tim.</i>	<i>In Timaeum (Commentary on Plato's Timaeus)</i>
<i>Intr. ar.</i>	<i>Introductio arithmetica (Introduction to Arithmetic)</i>
<i>James T</i>	<i>(First) Apocalypse of James (CT<sub>2</sub>)</i>
<i>LCL</i>	<i>Loeb Classical Library</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	<i>Legum allegoriae (Allegorical Interpretation)</i>
<i>Legatio</i>	<i>Legatio pro Christianis (Embassy for the Christians)</i>
<i>Lib.</i>	<i>De Libero Arbitrio (Free Will)</i>
<i>Lit. Frag.</i>	<i>Liturgical Fragments</i>
<i>LSJ</i>	<i>A Greek-English Lexicon. Edited by Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott. Revised and Augmented throughout by Sir Henry Stuart Jones. With a Revised Supplement. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.</i>
<i>Mart.</i>	<i>Exhortatio ad martyrium (Exhortation to Martyrdom)</i>
<i>Math.</i>	<i>Adversus mathematicos (Against the Mathematicians)</i>
<i>Metam.</i>	<i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Metaph.</i>	<i>Metaphysica (Metaphysics)</i>
<i>Mete.</i>	<i>Meteorologica (Meteorology)</i>
<i>Migr.</i>	<i>De migratione Abrahami (On the Migration of Abraham)</i>
<i>Mos.</i>	<i>De vita Mosis (On the Life of Moses)</i>
<i>M. Perp.</i>	<i>Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas</i>
<i>Nat.</i>	<i>De rerum natura (On the Nature of Things)</i>
<i>Nat. d.</i>	<i>De natura deorum (On the Nature of the Gods)</i>
<i>Nat. h.</i>	<i>Naturalis historia (Natural History)</i>
<i>Nat. hom.</i>	<i>De natura hominis (On the Nature of Man)</i>
<i>NHC</i>	<i>Nag Hammadi Codex</i>
<i>NIV</i>	<i>The New International Version</i>
<i>Noct. att.</i>	<i>Noctes atticae (Attic Nights)</i>
<i>Norea</i>	<i>Thought of Norea</i>

<i>Od.</i>	<i>Odyssea (Odyssey)</i>
<i>Odes Sol.</i>	<i>Odes of Solomon</i>
<i>On Anoint.</i>	<i>On the Anointing</i>
<i>On Bap. A</i>	<i>On Baptism A</i>
<i>On Bap. B</i>	<i>On Baptism B</i>
<i>On Euch. A</i>	<i>On the Eucharist A</i>
<i>On Euch. B</i>	<i>On the Eucharist B</i>
<i>Opif.</i>	<i>De opificio mundi (On the Creation of the World)</i>
<i>Or.</i>	<i>Orationes (Orations)</i>
<i>Orat.</i>	<i>Oratio ad Graecos (Address to the Greeks)</i>
<i>Orig. World</i>	<i>On the Origin of the World</i>
OTP	<i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Edited by James H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. New York, 1983.
<i>Paed.</i>	<i>Paedagogus (Christ the Educator)</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	<i>Panarion (Medicine Chest)</i>
<i>Paraph. Shem</i>	<i>Paraphrase of Shem</i>
<i>Parm.</i>	<i>Parmenides</i>
PG	<i>Patrologia graeca</i> [= <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca</i> ]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 162 vols. Paris: Garnier Frères, 1857–1886.
PGL	<i>A Patristic Greek Lexicon</i> . Edited by Geoffrey W.H. Lampe. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.
PGM	<i>Papyri Graecae Magicae: die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> . Edited by Karl Preisendanz. 2 vols. Leipzig: Teubner, 1928–1931.
<i>Phaed.</i>	<i>Phaedo</i>
<i>Phaedr.</i>	<i>Phaedrus</i>
<i>Phileb.</i>	<i>Philebus</i>
<i>Philoc.</i>	<i>Philocalia</i>
<i>PHP</i>	<i>De Placitis Hippocratis et Platonis (On the Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato)</i>
<i>Phys.</i>	<i>Physica (Physics)</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia latina</i> [= <i>Patrologiae cursus completus: Series latina</i> ]. Edited by Jacques-Paul Migne. 217 vols. Paris, 1844–1864.
<i>Plant.</i>	<i>De plantatione (On Planting)</i>
<i>Pol.</i>	<i>Politicus (Statesman)</i>
<i>Praem.</i>	<i>De praemiis et poenis (On Rewards and Punishments)</i>
<i>Praep. ev.</i>	<i>Praeparatio evangelica (Preparation for the Gospel)</i>
<i>Prax.</i>	<i>Adversus Praxean (Against Praxeas)</i>
<i>Princ.</i>	<i>De principiis (First Principles)</i>
<i>Prob.</i>	<i>Quod omnis probus liber sit (That Every Good Person Is Free)</i>
<i>Procl.</i>	<i>Vita Procli sive de felicitate (The Life of Proclus, or, Concerning Happiness)</i>
<i>Procl. Plat.</i>	<i>Prolegomena in Platonis philosophiam (Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy)</i>
<i>Prot. Jas.</i>	<i>Protevangeliium of James</i>
<i>Prov.</i>	<i>De providentia (On Providence)</i>
PTS	<i>Patristische Texte und Studien</i>



<i>Pud.</i>	<i>De pudicitia (Modesty)</i>
<i>QE</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Exodum (Questions and Answers on Exodus)</i>
<i>QG</i>	<i>Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesim (Questions and Answers on Genesis)</i>
<i>Ref.</i>	<i>Refutatio omnium haeresium (= Elenchos) (Refutation of All Heresies)</i>
<i>Res.</i>	<i>De resurrectione (The Resurrection of the Dead)</i>
<i>Resp.</i>	<i>Respublica (Republic)</i>
<i>Rust.</i>	<i>De re rustica (Agriculture)</i>
<i>Sacr.</i>	<i>De sacrificiis Abelis et Caini (On the Sacrifices of Cain and Abel)</i>
<i>SC</i>	Sources chrétiennes
<i>Schol. in Eisag.</i>	<i>Scholia in Porphyrii Eisagogen (Scholia on Porphyry's Isagoge)</i>
<i>Schol. in Phaedr.</i>	<i>In Platonis Phaedrum scholia (Scholia on Plato's Phaedrus)</i>
<i>Scorp.</i>	<i>Scorpiace (Antidote for the Scorpion's Sting)</i>
<i>Secret Book</i>	<i>Secret Book of John (= Apocryphon of John)</i>
<i>Sel. Gen.</i>	<i>Selecta in Genesim (Selections on Genesis)</i>
<i>Sent.</i>	<i>Sententiae ad intelligibilia ducentes (Sentences)</i>
<i>Socr.</i>	<i>De deo Socratico (The God of Socrates)</i>
<i>Somn.</i>	<i>De somniis (Dreams)</i>
<i>Somn. Scip.</i>	<i>In somnium Scipionis (Commentary on the Dream of Scipio)</i>
<i>Soph.</i>	<i>Sophista (Sophist)</i>
<i>Soph. Jes. Chr.</i>	<i>Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>
<i>Spec.</i>	<i>De specialibus legibus (On the Special Laws)</i>
<i>SRJ</i>	<i>Secret Revelation of John (= Apocryphon of John)</i>
<i>Steles Seth</i>	<i>Three Steles of Seth</i>
<i>Steph.</i>	<i>Encomium in St. Stephanum protomartyrem (Encomium on Stephen the Protomartyr)</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	<i>Stromata (Miscellanies)</i>
<i>SVF</i>	<i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta. Edited by Johannes von Arnim. 4 vols. Leipzig, 1903–1924.</i>
<i>Symp.</i>	<i>Symposium</i>
<i>Teach. Silv.</i>	<i>Teachings of Silvanus</i>
<i>Testim. Truth</i>	<i>Testimony of Truth</i>
<i>Theaet.</i>	<i>Theaetetus</i>
<i>Theog.</i>	<i>Theogonia (Theogony)</i>
<i>Theol. arith.</i>	<i>Theologumena arithmeticae (Theology of Arithmetic)</i>
<i>Theol. Plat.</i>	<i>Theologia Platonica (Platonic Theology)</i>
<i>Thom. Cont.</i>	<i>Book of Thomas the Contender</i>
<i>Three Forms</i>	<i>Three Forms of First Thought (= Trimorphic Protennoia)</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>
<i>T. Levi</i>	<i>Testament of Levi</i>
<i>Top.</i>	<i>Topica (Topics)</i>
<i>Trad. ap.</i>	<i>Traditio apostolica (The Apostolic Tradition)</i>
<i>Treas.</i>	<i>Book of Treasures</i>
<i>Treat. Res.</i>	<i>Treatise on the Resurrection</i>
<i>Treat. Seth</i>	<i>Second Treatise of the Great Seth</i>

<i>Trim. Prot.</i>	<i>Trimorphic Protennoia</i>
<i>Tri. Trac.</i>	<i>Tripartite Tractate</i>
<i>Tüb. Theos.</i>	<i>Tübingen Theosophia</i>
<i>Tusc. disp.</i>	<i>Tusculanae disputationes (Tusculan Disputations)</i>
<i>Val.</i>	<i>Adversus Valentinianos (Against the Valentinians)</i>
<i>Val. Exp.</i>	<i>A Valentinian Exposition</i>
<i>Vit. Ant.</i>	<i>Vita Antonii (Life of Anthony)</i>
<i>Vit. Is.</i>	<i>Vita Isidori (Life of Isidorus)</i>
<i>Vit. phil.</i>	<i>Vitae philosophorum (Lives of Eminent Philosophers)</i>
<i>Vit. Plot.</i>	<i>Vita Plotini (Life of Plotinus)</i>
<i>Zost.</i>	<i>Zostrianos</i>



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JOHN DILLON graduated in Classics from Oxford in 1963, and gained a Ph.D. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1969, after which he joined the faculty of the Department of Classics at Berkeley, where he remained until 1980, serving as Chairman of the Department from 1977–1980. He then returned to Ireland, to assume the Regius Professorship of Greek at Trinity College Dublin, where he remained until his retirement in 2006. He is the author or editor of a series of books in the area of Greek Philosophy, in particular the history of the Platonic tradition, including *The Middle Platonists* (Cornell University Press, 1977, second ed. 1996); *Alcinous, The Handbook of Platonism* (trans., with commentary, Clarendon, 1993); *Iamblichus: De Anima* (with John Finamore, Brill, 2002); *The Heirs of Plato: A Study of the Old Academy, 347–274 B.C.* (Oxford University Press, 2003); and three collections of essays, *The Golden Chain: Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (1991), *The Great Tradition: Further Studies in the Development of Platonism and Christianity* (1997), and *The Platonic Heritage* (2012), all with Variorum.

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MARK EDWARDS completed his doctoral thesis, "Plotinus and the Gnostics" in 1987, and has been lecturer in Patristics in the Faculty of Theology, University of Oxford, since 1993. He is the author of *Neoplatonic Saints* (Liverpool University Press, 2000); *Culture and Philosophy in the Age of Plotinus* (Duckworth, 2006); *Gnostics, Christians and Philosophers in Late Antiquity* (Variorum Reprint, 2012); and *Image, Word and God in the Early Christian Centuries* (Ashgate, 2012).

LORENZO FERRONI is a Post Doctoral Fellow at the Federal University of São Paulo, Brasil (UNIFESP). He has published on Plato's textual tradition, Plotinus, and archaic Greek lyric poetry. His recent works include *Plotin: Œuvres complètes: Tome I: Volume I: Introduction—Traité 1 (I 6): Sur le beau* (ed. with Jean-Marc Narbonne and Martin Achard, Les Belles Lettres, 2012), the *editio princeps* of some Platonic compendia prepared by Maximus Planudes (Patron, forthcoming in 2013), and several philological essays on Plotinus' treatise 33 (*Enn.* II 9).

WOLF-PETER FUNK is an independent scholar, retired from Université Laval, Québec, Canada. His publications cover various aspects of Coptic texts and language. He is co-editor of the *Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi* (Les Presses de l'Université Laval; Peeters) and chief editor of the Coptic Manichaean codices in the papyrus collection of the Berlin museum.

BENJAMIN GLEEDE is Research Fellow of ancient Church history at Zürich University. His recent works include *The development of the term ἐννόστατος from Origen to John of Damascus* (Brill, 2012) and *Platon und Aristoteles in der Kosmologie des Proklos: Ein Kommentar zu den 18 Argumenten für die Ewigkeit der Welt bei Johannes Philoponos* (Mohr-Siebeck, 2009).

LANCE JENOTT is a Post Doctoral Research Fellow at the University of Oslo, Norway. His publications include studies of early Egyptian monasticism, the

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KAREN L. KING is the Hollis Professor of Divinity, Harvard University's oldest endowed professorship (1721). She is the author of numerous books and articles on the diversity of ancient Christianity, women and gender studies, and religion and violence, including *What is Gnosticism?* (Harvard University Press 2003); *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (Polebridge, 2003); *The Secret Revelation of John* (Harvard University Press 2006); and "Christianity and Torture" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (Oxford, forthcoming 2013).

ALAIN LERNOULD is Research Fellow at the National Center of Scientific Research (CNRS-UMR 8163, "Savoirs, Textes, Langage," Université de Lille). He has published *Physique et Théologie, Lecture du Timée de Platon par Proclus* (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2001), and, more recently, *Études sur le Commentaire de Proclus au premier livre des Éléments d'Euclide* (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2010). He is currently working in collaboration with Carlos Steel (KUL-Leuven) on a critical edition and translation in French of Proclus' Commentary on Euclid. Also forthcoming: *Plutarque: Sur le visage qui apparaît dans le disque de la lune (De facie): Traduction avec introduction, notes et trois études de synthèse* (Presses Universitaires du Septentrion).

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ZEKE MAZUR is a Post Doctoral Fellow in the Department of Philosophy at Université Laval, Québec, Canada, and a member of the “Projet Plotin” under the direction of Jean-Marc Narbonne. His Ph.D. dissertation (University of Chicago, 2010) was entitled “The Platonizing Sethian Gnostic Background of Plotinus’ Mysticism.” His research and publications have focused on Plotinus and the Gnostics as well as other aspects of the relationship between religious praxis and academic philosophy in late antiquity.

JEAN-MARC NARBONNE, (Ph.D. in Philosophy, Paris-Sorbonne, 1988) is Professor of Philosophy at Université Laval, Québec, Canada. He is responsible for the new edition and translation of Plotinus in the Collection des Universités de France (Budé), of which the first volume has been published (*Plotin: Œuvres complètes, Tome I, vol. 1*, Belles Lettres, 2012). He has published extensively on the Neoplatonic tradition, including *Plotinus in Dialogue with the Gnostics* (Brill, 2011); *Levinas and the Greek Heritage* (Peeters, 2006); *Hénologie, ontologie et Ereignis: Plotin—Proclus—Heidegger* (Belles Lettres, 2001); and *La métaphysique de Plotin* (Vrin, 2001).

LOUIS PAINCHAUD is Professor of history and literature of early Christianity, and the director of the program of religious studies at the Faculté de théologie et de sciences religieuses of Université Laval, Québec, Canada. He is also director of the Groupe de recherche sur le christianisme et l’Antiquité tardive (GRECAT) and of the Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi (BCNH). He has published many critical editions and French translations of the Nag Hammadi Coptic writings in the BCNH series. His last contribution is *L’Interprétation de la gnose* (with Wolf-Peter Funk and Einar Thomassen, Les Presses de l’Université Laval; Peeters, 2010). He is currently preparing critical editions and French translations of the *Gospel according to Philip* (NHC II,3) and the *Gospel of Judas* (CT,3).

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and Steeve Bélanger, *Laval Théologique et Philosophique*, Numéro Thématique, forthcoming 2013).

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(Brill, 2005), and *Les Évangiles apocryphes* (Plon, 2007). She has edited *The Gospel of Judas in Context: Proceedings of the First Conference on the Gospel of Judas held in Paris Sorbonne, 27th–28th October 2006* (Brill, 2008) and *Gnosis and Revelation: Ten Studies on Codex Tchacos* (Olschki, 2009), and co-edited *Les textes de Nag Hammadi: Histoire des religions et approches contemporaines: Actes du Colloque international tenu à l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 11–12 décembre 2008* (with Jean-Pierre Mahé and Paul-Hubert Poirier, AIBL, 2010), and *"In Search of Truth": Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism: Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty* (with Jacob A. van den Berg, Annemaré Kotzé and Tobias Nicklas, Brill, 2011).

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JOHANNES VAN OORT is Professor of Patristics and Gnosticism at Radboud University Nijmegen, Netherlands, and extra-ordinary Professor of Patristics at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. He has published some 25 books and many scholarly articles, mainly on Patristics (Augustine) and Manichaeism. Among his newly published books are *Augustine and Manichaeism in the Latin West* (ed., paperback edition Brill, 2012); *Zugänge zur Gnosis* (ed., with Christoph Marksches, Peeters, 2012); and *Jerusalem and Babylon: A Study of Augustine's City of God* (paperback edition Brill, 2013). Recently he was presented with the Festschrift *"In Search of Truth": Augustine, Manichaeism and Other Gnosticism: Studies for Johannes van Oort at Sixty* (Brill, 2011).

MICHAEL WILLIAMS is Professor of Comparative Religion and Near Eastern Languages and Civilization at the University of Washington, Seattle. Among his earlier publications is *Rethinking "Gnosticism": An Argument for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton University Press, 1996). He has written articles in recent years on various topics related to Nag Hammadi studies, and his current book project is a study of the implications of heterodox cosmologies for social behavior in selected traditions and communities from late antiquity to the modern era.



JOHN D. TURNER:  
AN APPRECIATION

Sidnie White Crawford

John Douglas Turner was born on July 15, 1938 in Glen Ridge, New Jersey. His mother, Dorothy Holdsworth Turner, was a concert pianist, and his father, Warren Osman Turner, worked at AT & T and Bell Labs. John had an older brother, Rory, and a sister, Marjorie, although Marjorie died before he was born. John's mother died prematurely in 1950.

In 1952, John entered boarding school at Trinity Pawling in Pawling, N.Y. There his scientific curiosity, so prominent in his later scholarship, became evident. Known to his friends as "The Chemist," John was famous for having built a still in his dorm room. He also developed an early remote control that enabled him to turn on his radio while lying in his bed. In one example of an experiment gone awry, John and his roommate were heating fulminated mercury on the radiator in their dorm room. It exploded, demolishing the window and its surrounding frame.

John was also a successful athlete in high school. He ran track, achieving a 4 minute and 27 second mile, as well as playing on the football and swim teams.

In 1956 John entered Dartmouth College in Hanover, N.H., from which his father had graduated in 1920. Although he intended to major in engineering, he discovered that he was drawn more to theory and less to practical application, and ended up majoring in Mathematics and Philosophy. While at Dartmouth he also took what he has spoken of as the "most profound" class of his college career, a music appreciation course. This class opened for John a life-long love of serious classical music.

John also continued his athletic endeavors at Dartmouth on the swim team, specializing in the butterfly stroke and winning several medals. He was active in the Episcopal Church on campus, which gave him the opportunity to meet Paul Tillich when he was a visiting speaker.

John belonged to the Army ROTC at Dartmouth, so following his graduation in 1960 he joined the Army, serving until 1961. His army experience had a profound effect on him, because for the first time he experienced "people who were really struggling." This experience led him to begin to consider the ministry as a career.



Following his army stint, John worked as an actuary at R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company, and sold cars for a brief time. During this period he met and married his first wife, Irene McCain, who was an accomplished organist, pianist and choral conductor. It was Irene who encouraged him to begin singing, and nurtured his talent. As a result John became an accomplished bass-baritone whose love of singing continues to be a vital part of his life today. Irene and John had one daughter, Angela, born in California in 1969.

In 1962 John entered Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Va., intending to seek ordination in the Presbyterian Church. While at Union, he participated in the civil rights movement, traveling to Mississippi to register African-Americans to vote. Perhaps even more importantly, at Union he discovered a love of ancient languages, beginning his study of Greek and Hebrew. John earned a B.D. in 1965 and Th.M. in 1966, writing a thesis on "The Eschatological Discourse of Mark 13." However, he decided that his studies had opened up too many doubts for him concerning Christian doctrine, and he eventually refused ordination.

Wishing now to pursue a Ph.D. in early Christianity, he entered Duke University's Religion program, where he met the teacher who had the greatest impact on his development as a scholar, Orval Wintermute. Wintermute introduced John to the study of Coptic; John would later return the favor by working with students to digitize Wintermute's Coptic grammar. When John was casting around for a dissertation topic, Wintermute suggested that he contact James Robinson at the Claremont Graduate School and volunteer to work on the newly discovered Nag Hammadi documents. John moved out to California and became a member of the original team who edited and translated the Nag Hammadi texts. He earned his Ph.D. from Duke in 1970 with a dissertation entitled, "The Book of Thomas the Contender from Codex II of the Cairo Gnostic Library from Nag Hammadi (CG II, 7): The Coptic Text with Translation, Introduction and Commentary." Wintermute would later say that John's dissertation defense was "the best defense of a dissertation I've ever seen."

In 1971 John joined Robert Funk to found a Religious Studies department at the University of Montana at Missoula. While at Missoula, John took voice lessons and began a solo career, enjoying solo roles in Mendelssohn's *Elijah* and Handel's *Messiah*, among others. He also had the opportunity to sing with the famous choral conductor Robert Shaw in several summer festivals.

John left Missoula in 1976 to become the first (and only) Cotner Professor of Religion at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. Cotner College had been a Disciples of Christ seminary in Lincoln that had recently closed. When it closed, the trustees used part of the endowment to establish the

Cotner College professorship at the land-grant university. John came to Lincoln, therefore, to establish Religious Studies at UNL. His initial appointment and tenure home was in the History department; he later transferred to the Classics department, where the faculty shared his love of ancient languages. In 1984, he was promoted to Professor of Classics and History. The university has recognized his outstanding scholarship by awarding him the system-wide Outstanding Research and Creative Activity award in 2003, and appointing him to the Charles J. Mach University Professorship in 2003.

John established an interdisciplinary program in Religious Studies with a minor in 1978, which he chaired until the Department of Classics and Religious Studies created a major in 2004. As the Cotner Professor he also worked with the Cotner Commission to bring distinguished Religious Studies scholars to Lincoln. The guests he has hosted include Martin Marty, Elaine Pagels, Amy-Jill Levine, Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Marcus Borg, Craig Evans, Karen King, and Renita Weems. He also mentored several undergraduates from UNL on to outstanding academic careers, including Dirk Obbink, who received a B.A. in Classics in 1978 and an M.A. in 1980. Obbink is now Fellow and Tutor in Greek in Christ Church College, Oxford, and curator of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri collection in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford. John's widely acknowledged expertise in Coptic has led him to lead for several summers an advanced Coptic seminar, hosting graduate students from across the country, including Princeton and Yale.

John Turner's scholarly career is practically synonymous with the decipherment, publication and interpretation of the Nag Hammadi texts. Of the seventy-three articles and book chapters listed on his *curriculum vitae*, all but three have to do directly with Nag Hammadi and/or Gnosticism, from the earliest, "A New Link in the Syrian Judas Thomas Tradition" (1972), to the latest, "Coptic Renditions of Greek Metaphysics: The Platonizing Sethian Treatises *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*" (2012). His first full-length monograph was a revision of his dissertation on the Book of Thomas the Contender, published by the SBL Dissertation Series in 1975. His latest, an edited volume with Christian H. Bull and Liv Ingeborg Lied, is titled *Mystery and Secrecy in the Nag Hammadi Collection and Other Ancient Literature: Ideas and Practices: Studies for Einar Thomassen at Sixty* (Brill, 2012). John is a central figure representing Gnostic studies in the United States and abroad. Since the year 2000, he has given twenty-nine public lectures on the Nag Hammadi codices and/or Gnosticism. He serves on the editorial boards of *Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi* and the *Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies* series. He has organized or participated in thirteen colloquia or other academic events concerning Gnostic texts in the United States, Québec, Paris, Cairo,

Brazil and Italy. He is a member of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies, the International Association for Coptic Studies, the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, and the Society for Coptic Archaeology (as well as the Society of Biblical Literature and Studiorum Novi Testamentum Societas). What explains this career-long fascination with Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism? In John's own words:

[I] left for Claremont, California to write my dissertation and join a team of 20-odd young American scholars recently assembled by James Robinson, at the time America's most prominent and entrepreneurial scholar of Early Christianity. The aim was to break the European scholarly monopoly on the Nag Hammadi Codices by publishing Coptic transcriptions and English translations of all 54 treatises contained in these 13 codices as soon as possible. Within five years we were able to send throughout the Western world mimeographed transcriptions and translations of all 54 treatises to scholars who had until now been unable to access them. I thrived in this new environment of original research and collaboration with colleagues from across the country and still others from France, Germany, and Switzerland whom I came to know in the course of several trips to Cairo to reconstruct and conserve the often heavily damaged papyrus leaves; I even managed a term of study at Hebrew University with Hans Jacob Polotsky, the world's foremost Coptologist. In only eight years we released to the public at large a complete, one-volume English translation of all thirteen codices, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*. Thus, I became a scholar of Coptic literature and the Nag Hammadi Codices, eventually developing a specialization in a hitherto unknown religious movement known as Gnostic Sethianism and even more particularly in its fascinating relationship to the development of Platonic philosophy in the first four centuries of our era.

[In 1991] I began a lasting association with the Nag Hammadi project at Université Laval in Québec City as visiting research professor and eventually member of the editorial board of the Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi, the French language project to produce critical editions, concordances, and monographs on the entire Nag Hammadi Library. It was during seven summers there that I produced major introductions and commentaries to three more Nag Hammadi treatises from Codices VIII, X, and XI, as well as a compendious 2001 monograph on these materials, *Sethian Gnosticism and the Platonic Tradition*.

In that work, I was able to demonstrate that the principle of dynamic emanation—by which Plotinus attempted to derive the intelligible realm of Platonic Forms in the divine Intellect from a supreme and unique One—is to be found already in the four Platonizing Sethian treatises from Nag Hammadi (*Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, and *Marsanes*) at the beginning of the period of Plotinus' philosophical maturity, suggesting that these treatises were an important source for his philosophical thinking. It was also during the early third century that the principal Platonic dialogue of refer-

ence for metaphysical issues shifted from the *Timaeus* to the *Parmenides*. Under the influence of a powerfully emergent interest in Neopythagorean cosmologies that endeavored to derive the world of multiplicity from a single first principle during the second century, the eight “hypotheses” of the second half of the *Parmenides* became regarded as a virtual “revelation” of the structure and deployment of transcendent reality. In this metaphysical environment, Platonist thinkers composed expositions and lemmatic commentaries in an attempt to uncover the metaphysical realities concealed in these “hypotheses.” But at a Paris colloquium in 2003 I was able to show that the final fragment of this *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary* contains nearly the same doctrine of dynamic emanation as is expounded by the pre-Plotinian Platonizing Sethian treatises *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. This meant that the doctrine of the *Commentary* is not only pre-Porphyrrian but must be even pre-Plotinian, i.e., Middle Platonic rather than Neoplatonic. All of this work on the relation of Gnostic and Platonic thought has in effect unintentionally catapulted me into a new field of study, that of the history of later Greek philosophy. So I finish this lengthy explanation with a question: have I stayed in the field of Gnosticism and Nag Hammadi, or have I moved away from it? At this point, I’m not sure what the answer should be.

Those of us who are privileged to know and work with John Turner know that he wears all of his academic accolades and his scholarly reputation lightly. A kind and self-effacing man, he gives freely of his time to younger colleagues, graduate students, and undergraduates, as well as to his home institution and his community of Lincoln. Married to Elizabeth Sterns in 1992, he helped to raise Elizabeth’s daughter Sarah, and is a happy participant in the activities of the extended Sterns clan. He is a long-time member of the Lincoln Civic Choir, sings in the First Presbyterian Church choir, and for many years was an enthusiastic member of the Secret Seneca Society, which meets every Friday afternoon at O’Rourke’s Bar and Grill. He is the respected and beloved senior faculty member in the Classics and Religious Studies department at UNL.

It is a great privilege for me, on behalf of my department colleagues, to contribute this Appreciation of John D. Turner to the Festschrift in his honor.

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PART I

GNOSTICISM AND OTHER RELIGIOUS  
MOVEMENTS OF ANTIQUITY



A DISTINCTIVE INTERTEXTUALITY:  
GENESIS AND PLATONIZING PHILOSOPHY  
IN *THE SECRET REVELATION OF JOHN*

Karen L. King

*This essay is dedicated to John D. Turner on the celebratory occasion of his seventy-fifth birthday, in appreciation for his many distinguished contributions to the field of Gnostic studies, and in personal gratitude for his support as a teacher and colleague—not least for introducing me to the Nag Hammadi manuscripts over thirty-five years ago.*

It has long been recognized that Sethian<sup>1</sup> protology and cosmology draw heavily upon both Platonizing philosophy and Jewish Scripture, in particular Genesis (LXX). In his groundbreaking study of *Sethian Gnosticism and The Platonic Tradition*, John Turner notes “the unmistakable impact of Platonic cosmology upon the Sethian myth of the primordial creation and anthropogony, especially from Plato’s *Timaeus*, whose protological authority stood alongside, and perhaps even above, that of the book of Genesis.”<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I would like to take up this point, focusing on one Sethian writing, *The Secret Revelation (Apocryphon) of John (SRJ)*, which has the distinction of being the first Christian work known to us to formulate a comprehensive narrative of theology, cosmology, and salvation.<sup>3</sup> In constructing its own

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<sup>1</sup> The literature here referred to as “Sethian” was initially characterized by scholars as belonging to a wide range of heretical Christian literature or to a distinctive religion called “Gnosticism.” Schenke argued persuasively, however, for a more restricted grouping which included *SRJ* and which he called “Sethian” (Schenke 1974; 1981). While others have offered alternative methods for determining what surviving ancient materials might properly be grouped together and indeed have suggested restricting the term “Gnostic” to this group, eschewing “Sethian” as an appropriate designation (see Layton 1995; Rasimus 2009; Brakke 2010), *SRJ* now is widely read as part of this distinctive group of literature (for lists of the textual material included under these rubrics, see Schenke 1981, 588–589; King 2003, 157; Brakke 2010, 50–51). I prefer the term “Sethian Christianity” (see King 2013, 294–301, review of Brakke), which is also that used by Turner. All of these terminological usages are represented in the scholarly literature on *SRJ* cited in this essay, but this terminological issue does not impact the analysis of this study, which focuses upon the intertextual reading of Genesis and Platonizing philosophy in *SRJ*.

<sup>2</sup> Turner 2001, 250.

<sup>3</sup> Composed in the second century CE in Greek, quite possibly in Alexandria in Egypt, *SRJ* survives in four fourth-fifth century CE manuscripts, which represent three Coptic versions



distinctive narrative, scholars have demonstrated that *SRJ* draws upon a variety of materials, prominent among them not only Genesis 1–9 (LXX) and Platonizing philosophy, but also the Gospel of John, Jewish Wisdom literature, and ancient astrology. In this brief essay, however, I want to focus primarily on Genesis and Platonizing philosophy, building upon and elaborating the excellent studies of Turner and others in order to illumine new dimensions of *SRJ*'s distinctive intertextual reading of these materials.

The earliest studies of *SRJ* recognized that it drew characters, images, and themes from Genesis 1–9 (LXX).<sup>4</sup> The portrait of the creator God, his actions in forming the heavens and creating Adam and Eve, along with references to the trees of the garden, the birth of Seth, and the attempt to destroy humanity by flood, among other citations and allusions, show unmistakable knowledge of the primordial history of Genesis. Indeed, George MacRae wrote: "In a sense we may say that the very intention of the Gnostic myth is to provide a 'true,' esoteric explanation of the Genesis story itself."<sup>5</sup> Pearson nuanced this incisive point in important and insightful ways by demonstrating persuasively that *SRJ*'s interpretation of Genesis not only demonstrates direct knowledge of Genesis itself (LXX), but it draws heavily upon later Hellenistic Jewish traditions of Genesis exegesis, such as are seen in Philo of Alexandria and *1 Enoch*.<sup>6</sup>

Early studies were also concerned with the question of the nature and origin of "Gnostic dualism," and in this light scholars explored possible con-

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replete with notable variants: Berlin Codex (BG 19.6–77.7), Nag Hammadi Codex (NHC) II (1.1–32.10); NHC III (1.1–40.11); and NHC IV (1.1–49.28). For the Berlin Codex, see the edition of Till and Schenke 1972, 78–193. A critical synoptic edition of the four versions is given in Waldstein and Wisse 1995. Citations here are from the English translation of King 2006, 26–81. In the references, "*SRJ* BG" refers to the Berlin Codex version; "*SRJ* II" refers to the Nag Hammadi Codex II version; *SRJ* without reference to a particular version asks the reader to consult/compare all versions. For a list of cross references between the numbering in King and the manuscript page and line numbers of the individual Coptic manuscripts, see King 2006, 363–387. For discussion of the tendential interests of the different versions, see Barc and Painchaud 1999, 244–257.

<sup>4</sup> Already in the earliest edition of the version in the Berlin Codex, Till and Schenke noted a variety of parallels (1972; see especially the textual notes and the list of Bible citations on p. 366). Similarly in the first edition of the longer version in Nag Hammadi Codex II, Søren Giversen noted parallels between *SRJ* and Genesis (see Giversen 1963a). In an article published the same year, he also offered an expanded list of references to the BG version given by Till, but only gives references with verbal correspondences to Genesis (LXX), not to passages that "recount the same events as in Genesis without any actual resemblance in wording" (Giversen 1963b, 66–67).

<sup>5</sup> MacRae 1970, 99.

<sup>6</sup> See Pearson 1990, 33–35; 1988, 647–651; see also Stroumsa 1984; Turner 2001, 234–238.

nections with philosophical dualism.<sup>7</sup> For example, studies were offered which discussed a possible connection of *SRJ*'s portrait of the monadic Invisible Spirit with the Platonic description of the transcendent deity (e.g., with reference to the *Parmenides*, *Republic*, or later Middle and Neoplatonism).<sup>8</sup> They considered what impact the Platonic demiurge and “the younger gods” in the *Timaeus* may (or may not) have had on shaping the figure of Yaldabaoth and his minions, especially as the *Timaeus* was being interpreted in the first centuries CE.<sup>9</sup>

Both directions of research—Genesis interpretation and Platonizing philosophy—have continued, becoming increasingly nuanced both in marking commonalities and genealogical relations (forward as well as backward in time<sup>10</sup>) and in delineating crucial differences between *SRJ* and these varied materials.

While such studies were often initially undertaken as exercises in source criticism, focusing on discrete materials (biblical or philosophical materials) rather than aimed directly at analyzing their intertextual relations as such, almost inescapably scholars began to discuss the ways in which biblical and philosophical ideas, terms, and themes were interwoven together. Exegetes frequently noted the “distortions,” “reversals,” “selectivity,” or “revisionary character” of *SRJ*'s use of these materials for its own ends. And in examining those ends, they began to think about the intertextual reading of the *Timaeus* with Genesis, that is, about how the particular patterns of their combinations and contrasts not only articulate the *SRJ*'s views of theology, cosmology, anthropology, and human salvation, but expose the very “logic” of such philosophical and narrative thinking.

Three general patterns in this move toward intertextual analysis can be identified for heuristic purposes here. In the first, Platonizing philosophy is held largely to concern the transcendent sphere, while the Genesis retelling is considered to begin in earnest only with the story of the creation of the lower world by the creator god, Yaldabaoth, and his minions, the archons/authorities. This pattern tends to see the revisionary exegesis

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<sup>7</sup> *SRJ* is often treated in conjunction with other Nag Hammadi (particularly Sethian) treatises, among which especially *Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*, and *Marsanes* receive focused attention as “Platonizing Gnosticism.” Such studies are important in that early work done on “Gnosticism” generally can be of interest in treating the philosophical positioning of *SRJ* (see, for example, Wallis and Bregman 1992; Turner and Majercik 2000; Turner and Corrigan 2010).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Hancock 1992; Williams 1992; 2000; Kenney 2000; Turner 2000, 181–188.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Boyancé 1967; Mansfeld 1988; Thomassen 1993.

<sup>10</sup> Rasimus, for example, argues that Sethian treatises such as *SRJ* may have been sources in the development of later Platonism (see Rasimus 2010).

of Genesis as the main import of *SRJ*, and gives relatively little attention to the Platonizing elements or treats them only briefly as philosophical elaborations already present in Jewish exegesis of Genesis.<sup>11</sup> In this pattern, the intertextual relation of the two sets of materials is perceived to be thin, with philosophy and biblical history occupying different spheres, as well as performing different narrative and ideological/theological functions. The intertextual practice of *SRJ* is frequently described as “syncretism,” and is felt less as a kind of “logic” than as a more or less successful grafting of pagan philosophy onto the biblical branch.

A second pattern focuses on the analysis of the philosophical contributions to *SRJ*'s narrative. Pleše made a brilliant contribution here by demonstrating how Plato's distinction in the *Timaeus* between being and becoming offers the overarching, unifying structure of the whole of *SRJ*'s narrative. At the beginning of *SRJ*, Christ has promised to instruct John about “what exists and what has come into being and what must come into being” (*SRJ* 3.14). As Pleše reads this sentence, Christ is framing his entire revelation as an explication of the transcendent sphere of being (“what is”), the generation of the historical, cosmic realm (“what was”), and the ultimate fate of souls (“what will be”). The Genesis narrative appears within this frame largely to elaborate the story of humanity in the cosmic realm of becoming (“what was and must be”).<sup>12</sup>

This second pattern tends to place the Platonizing elements of *SRJ* in the most prominent structural positioning, and, as in the first pattern, tends to limit consideration of the Genesis material primarily to the creation of the lower world, but in Pleše's hands it is given a greater complexity.<sup>13</sup> This can be seen in his chart, which displays the intersections not only of the two usual suspects (*SRJ* and Genesis), but also adds a third column of Plato (*Timaeus*), with the aim of showing “how the first part of Plato's account of cosmogony and the opening in chapters of Genesis are combined, and occasionally fused, in the narrative” of *SRJ*.<sup>14</sup> This reading offers

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, MacRae 1970; and Pearson 1990.

<sup>12</sup> This position was already broadly laid out in Pleše 1996, but see now Pleše 2006, esp. 43–73. He makes a number of insightful observations about the use of Genesis material in this elaboration, including the mention of waters above and below (127–128) and the appearance of the cloud in *SRJ*'s retelling of the Noah story (166–171). See also his summary of correspondences among *SRJ*, Plato's *Timaeus*, and Genesis (271–272).

<sup>13</sup> The intertextual analysis of Pleše, however, is much richer, integrating Jewish wisdom literature, the Gospel of John, and—particularly nuanced and innovative—ancient astrology, as well as Genesis and Platonizing material.

<sup>14</sup> See Pleše 2006, 271.

a significant advance in the intertextual reading of *SRJ*.<sup>15</sup> For Pleše, the revisionary rewriting strategies of *SRJ* are seen to apply both to Moses and to Plato.<sup>16</sup>

In a less developed form, a third pattern appears as scholars noted the slippage of Genesis figures and themes from the lower world into the narrative of the transcendent world (especially the figures of Adam and Seth and the theme of a “fall”). MacRae, for example, noted that figures like Adam and Seth were “doubled” in *SRJ*’s portrait of the transcendent and cosmic realms. He accounted for this phenomenon by suggesting that

Gnostic revelations of the higher world are after all projections of human knowledge and experience onto another plane, and the primary source of this knowledge in the Gnostic works we have been dealing with is the Genesis story ... Therefore, if the events of earth are held to be but shadowy copies of the realities above, we must expect to find at least some of the characters and actions of Genesis translated to the pleromatic level.<sup>17</sup>

Notably, he also suggested that the “principal source” of the “Gnostic Sophia myth,” which tells of the transgression and fall of heavenly Wisdom, was “the Genesis account of the fall of Eve.”<sup>18</sup> Thus events and figures from Genesis were acknowledged to occur occasionally in the transcendent sphere as well as in the lower cosmological realm. Others discerned in this “doubling” of Genesis’ characters, something of Platonizing dualism, and some indeed suggested that “Gnostics” (“Sethians”) were reading the first creation story in Genesis 1:1–2:3a as the generation of the divine realm, while 2:3bff. was read with regard to the lower psychic and material world.<sup>19</sup>

These readings of *SRJ* emphasize in particular two Platonizing patterns from the *Timaeus* employed in *SRJ*: First, a transcendent realm of ideas is posited of which the material cosmos is a copy; just so in *SRJ*, we find the divine Human of whom the psychic Adam is a copy. Second, a distinction is made between the transcendent Deity and the lower demiurge, who forms

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<sup>15</sup> Pleše, however, reads Jewish Wisdom literature as the “link” that “only occasionally” makes “the two dissonant voices” of Moses and Plato compatible (2006, 72–73), while I and others see this literature as more prominent.

<sup>16</sup> Pleše 2006, 273.

<sup>17</sup> MacRae 1970, 99.

<sup>18</sup> MacRae 1970, 99–101. Dahl also tied Gen 1:26–27 to the doubling of the figure of Wisdom in Gnostic myth as “a biblical warrant for a Platonic doctrine of models and copies” (1981, 708n44).

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, Turner 2001, 251; King 2006, 221; Pleše 2006, 201n56. Ancient Christians, in contrast, suggested that Plato got this idea from reading Moses’ account in Gen 1:27 and 2:7 (see, for example, Ps.-Justin, *Coh. ad gr.* 30).

humanity with the aid of “younger gods”,<sup>20</sup> just so in *SRJ*, a distinction is made between the Invisible Spirit and the Chief Archon, Yaldabaoth, who creates Adam with the aid of his archontic authorities, a group frequently seen by scholars to be a figuration of Plato’s “younger gods.”

My own recent reading of *SRJ* built on the insights of this third pattern, but took it further by arguing that the intertextual reading of Genesis in the transcendent sphere is much more extensive than had been seen, albeit still quite selective. Moreover, it is not just the so-called first creation narrative (Gen 1:1–2:3a) that is rewritten into the transcendent realm, but rather *SRJ* reads Genesis 1–6 *twice*, once with regard to the creation of the transcendent realm and again with regard to the lower world. Several examples where Christ alludes to Genesis in his discussion of the transcendent realm can be adduced to demonstrate this point:<sup>21</sup>

- In Gen 1:2–3, the spirit of God moves over the water and produces the primal light-human. (This exegetical identification of “light” and “human” is based on the LXX, in which the uninflected Greek word *phōs* can be read either as “light” or “man.”<sup>22</sup>) With regard to the lower world, Christ describes how the Light-Adam appears on the water below (*SRJ* II 15.8–13), but he also describes the genesis of Barbelo-Pronoia in terms of reflection of light and water, and she is described as both the true light and the first Man (*SRJ* 5.8–19, 25).
- In Gen 1:26–27, God creates humanity in his image and likeness, male and female. In *SRJ*, the lower world rulers attempt to create humanity in the divine image and according to their own likeness (*SRJ* II 15.12; BG reads “the likeness”; III reads “his likeness”), while in the upper realm,

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<sup>20</sup> On this point, Dillon notes that: “We meet, first of all in [*Tim*] 28Aff, a sharp distinction between the realms of Being (*to aei on*) and Becoming (*genesis*), and a Demiurge figure who uses as a model (*paradeigma*) ‘the eternal’ (*to aidion*, 29a 3) and unchanging ... As Plato presents the scenario, the Paradigm is independent of the Demiurge, being an ultimate reality, external to him, which he contemplates and copies ...” And yet “there is no suggestion in the *Timaeus* that the Demiurge is not the supreme god, though some later Platonists, such as Numenius, tried to solve the metaphysical puzzle by taking the Demiurge as a secondary god, with the Good of the *Republic* enthroned above him” (1992, 100). *SRJ* is able to use this distinction to develop its portrait of the flawed world creator as a parodic imitation of the true God by reading the demiurge in terms of Genesis’ portrait of an incompetent and jealous creator. Such a reading of Plato’s demiurge as a flawed creator who has only a warped knowledge of the transcendent Pattern above is possible *only* through the intertextual reading with Genesis, which tells of a God who intends to bring about a good creation but in fact produces a dominion of suffering and death.

<sup>21</sup> See King 2006, 221–224.

<sup>22</sup> See Quispel 1980, 6.

Barbelo-Pronoia is described as “the likeness of the light, the image of the Invisible Spirit” (BG 5.18–19); she is also “male-female” (5.24–25).

- In Gen 1, God creates everything through speech. In *SRJ*, this passage is read with a strong intertextual reference to the Gospel of John 1:1–3, which states that everything that exists has come into being through the Word (*logos*). In the lower world of *SRJ*, Yaldabaoth also creates through speech (*SRJ* 13.7),<sup>23</sup> but the theme is more predominant in *SRJ*’s description of Autogenes-Christ in the transcendent world, which explicitly states that “through the Word, Christ, the divine Autogenes created the All” (*SRJ* 7.23).
- In Gen 1:14–16, God places lights in the firmament of heaven. In *SRJ*, Autogenes-Christ brings forth the four lights of the upper world (*SRJ* 8.1–2), while in the lower world, Yaldabaoth creates the erring planetary powers and firmaments (11.1–13.16). Here the intertextual resonance with Plato goes beyond the notion of model-copy, however, in that just as Plato’s *Timaeus* suggested that the stars are the final dwelling place of human souls, so in *SRJ* the four lights are presented as the final resting place of spiritual humanity. One thinks, too, of Jesus’ promise in the Gospel of John 14:2–4 that he will prepare heavenly dwellings for his followers. To make this intertextual node yet more complex, Christ identifies the four lights as the heavenly resting place of Adam, Seth, the seed of Seth, and all those who later repent, a set of figures and sequencing that offers a heavenly image (or prototype) of the “history” of spiritual humanity below, from Adam to Seth and his descendents, up to the present Sethians, the immovable *genea* of the perfect Human (*SRJ* 9.1–14; 22.26–28; cf. Gen 5:1–4).<sup>24</sup> In this way, the reading of Genesis into the world above extends far beyond the first chapter into the entire history of salvation in the lower world.
- As we already noted above, George MacRae was the first to notice that in *SRJ* Sophia is presented as a kind of Eve figure (Gen 2:18–3:21).<sup>25</sup> Like Eve’s expulsion from paradise in Genesis, Sophia’s expulsion from the divine realm marks the beginning of human suffering and death. This is not, however, the role of Eve in the lower world, according to *SRJ*.

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<sup>23</sup> More emphasis is placed, however, upon the contrast between the virginal “reproduction” in the divine realm and the sexualized “begetting” of Yaldabaoth (see King 2011, 524–525).

<sup>24</sup> Turner notes as well that the heavenly dwellings of the Four Luminaries form “exalted counterparts of the contemporary ‘historical’ Sethians” (2001, 234).

<sup>25</sup> See MacRae 1970, 100–101.

There she figures as a savior figure who enlightens Adam and brings forth Seth as a rectification of Sophia's deficiency (*SRJ* 21.23–24). In both the higher and lower realms, Sophia-Eve is the mother of the living, that is, a fundamental link in the genealogy of the immovable *genea*.<sup>26</sup> We will say more about this below. The point here is that the story of Eve in Genesis plays a role not only in the “history” of the Sethians in the lower world, but also in the transcendent sphere.

Other examples could no doubt be offered of the intertextual working of Plato's notion of the model-copy with the primordial history of Genesis, but these are sufficient to show the variety of places in which *SRJ* gives particular characters or episodes a dual Platonic and biblical cast.

Even a quick perusal of *SRJ* in light of the most recent scholarship, however, shows that this pattern of *SRJ*'s “logic of doubling” is inadequate to grasp the complexity of *SRJ*'s intertextual reading of Genesis and Platonizing philosophy. Two reasons present themselves immediately: One reason is that *SRJ* presents not just two, but multiple levels in the unfolding of reality, and its intertextual weaving similarly operates at multiple levels. A second reason is that Christ's revelation teaches John not just about the mimetic and genealogical continuities between the realms above and below, but also their radical disjuncture. Building upon recent scholarship, notably that of Turner, these points can be illustrated by further examination of the primal Human/Adam, Father-Son pairings, and the triad of Father-Mother-Son.

To chart the resulting complexity, let us review Christ's teaching: When Christ first appears to John, he tells him that he has come to teach him about “the perfect Human” (πτελιος ηρωμε) so that he will pass this teaching on to his “fellow spirits who are from the immovable generation of the perfect Human” (*SRJ* 3.16, 18). As we have seen, this instruction is tied to knowledge about “what exists and what has come into being and what must come into being,” or as Christ elaborates, about “what is invisible and what is visible” (*SRJ* 3.14–15)—that is, the realms of being and becoming. The game is afoot—John and other people in this cosmos somehow belong to a *genea* whose eponymous ancestor is “the perfect Human.”

Who is this “perfect Human”? Christ begins by telling John about the generation of the Mother. She is the image of the Invisible Spirit (the Father), who appears when It gazes upon Itself in the light-water (*SRJ* 5.8–11). This

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<sup>26</sup> For more on the intertextual reading of Genesis and Wisdom literature, see King 2011, 528–530.

figure has a variety of epithets (Barbelo, Pronoia, Spirit, light, the Mother or Mother-Father, the androgynous aeon, et al.), but is also identified as the “primal Human” (ΠΟΥΡΟΥΕΤΙ ἦΡΩΜΕ or ΠΟΥΟΡΠ ἦΡΩΜΕ) at *SRJ* 5.25.

Later in Christ’s revelation, the primal Human is identified as the light-image that appears on the waters below, providing the model of the image of God in which Yaldabaoth and his minions form “a human being” (*SRJ* 15.6–12). The short version of *SRJ* (BG), identifies this image as belonging to “the holy perfect Father, the first Human of human form,” while the longer version (II) identifies it as the image of “the holy and perfect Mother-Father, the perfect Pronoia, the image of the Invisible One who is the Father of the All” (*SRJ* 15.6). Thus the Berlin Codex version points to a reading of Genesis in which the God whose image appears on the water below is the highest and true Deity above, while the longer version in NHC II is more consistent with the prior passage (3.25) and states that the image that appears on the water below is the image of the image of the highest Deity (that is, the image of the primal Human who is the image of the divine Father).

Already, then, we see a multiplication of levels. But before Christ even gets to this point in the story, he has already introduced another heavenly figure, Adam (ΑΔΑΜ, ΑΔΑΜΑC or ΠΑΤΕΡΑΔΑΜΑΝ) who is called the “perfect Human” (*SRJ* 9.2). Additionally, the “human being” formed by the lower gods is also named “Adam” (*SRJ* 15.19), and he is said to be created in the image of the perfect Human (*SRJ* 15.18), suggesting a link with the heavenly Adam, who was also called the “perfect Human.”

The sequence—from primal Human to perfect Human (Adamas) to image of the primal Human to the first human being (Adam)—establishes the genealogy of the immovable race of the perfect Human, about which Christ promised to tell his disciple John. It proves that his true identity, and that of his fellow spirits, is the spiritual seed of the perfect Human.

But Christ is not done yet. There is another genealogy for humanity, one that plays on making a distinction between “the image and likeness” of Gen 1:26–27. Christ tells John that the Chief Ruler (Yaldabaoth) “said to the authorities who dwell with him, ‘Come let us create a human according to the image of God and according to our likeness’ ... And each one of the authorities supplied for the soul a characteristic corresponding to the model of the image which he had seen” (*SRJ* II 15.12, 16–17). They proceed to create the psychic body in human form, and finally to cast it into matter. The upshot of Christ’s revelation here is the multiplication of the figure of the Human/Adam(as) at multiple levels of (the Platonizing unfolding of) reality:



the Invisible Spirit/Father  
 the primal Human/Barbelo-Pronoia who is the image of the Invisible  
 Spirit  
 the perfect Human/Adamas  
 the image of the perfect Human (Barbelo, heavenly Adam)  
 the human/Adam made in the image of the perfect Human and  
 according to the likeness of the lower gods, cast into the fleshly,  
 material body

Here the logic of *SRJ* implies not only the two intersections with Plato's *Timaeus* we observed above (transcendent model and cosmic-material copy or the transcendent Deity and the lower demiurge), but reflects other moves made by later writers of the first centuries CE. Let us take a closer look.

One of the most frequent sites of comparison with *SRJ*'s use of biblical and philosophical materials is the first century Jewish writer, Philo of Alexandria. As we noted above, Pearson in particular has stressed that Philo provides evidence of the kind of Jewish biblical exegesis, which drew upon current Platonism, that was employed in *SRJ*. For example, he helpfully suggests that in *SRJ*, "The heavenly Adam and Seth are Platonizing projections into the divine realm of the biblical patriarchs and recall the Platonizing exegesis of the double creation story in Genesis 1–2 such as is found in Philo of Alexandria" citing *Opif.* 66–135.<sup>27</sup> Or again, he shows that even as Philo moved in a Platonizing direction by identifying the breath that enlivened Adam as constituting his higher, noetic self in distinction from the material body of flesh, so, too, *SRJ* distinguished the divine breath from the psychic and material body formed by the world ruler and his minions.<sup>28</sup> Both, too, interpreted the problematic plural of Gen 1:26 in terms of Plato's discussion of God creating the higher portion but leaving the lower to the "younger gods" (*Tim.* 41–42).<sup>29</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Pearson 1993, 161; see also Pearson 1981, 472–504; 1984, 322–329; 1988, esp. 650. For a comparison of the use of Platonism and Genesis by Philo of Alexandria and *SRJ* on the topics of likeness to God and ethics, see King 1995, 82–97.

<sup>28</sup> See Runia 1986, 337, who argues that in *Opif.* 134–135 Philo "uses the word ψυχή to represent two different things, the lower or irrational soul in §134, the (rational) soul that receives the divine πνεῦμα in §135." See also the discussion in Runia 2001, 321–329.

<sup>29</sup> See Philo, *Opif.* 72–75; *SRJ* 15.12–18.18; 19.1–13. See also the discussion of Runia 2001, 236–244; Pearson 1990, 33–35; 1984, 323–324; Turner 2001, 251–252. For an especially illuminating discussion of the intersection of astrological melothesia with Plato's *Timaeus* and *SRJ*, see Pleše 2006, 200–210.

Runia argues, however, that Philo is inconsistent on the question of whether Gen 1:26 points to the notion of an Idea of Man. In his discussion of the creation of humanity in *Opif.* 134–135, Runia writes, “the notion of a Gnostic or proto-Gnostic Primal Man is of no direct relevance to Philo’s interpretation.” In this passage, Philo posits no Idea of Man “in the sense of a paradigmatic exemplar and part of the noetic world”<sup>30</sup> (although, as Runia notes, Philo is not entirely consistent on this point in his other writings, some of which Pearson has drawn upon<sup>31</sup>).

*SRJ*, however, does consistently present a strong distinction between the paradigmatic true Human in the noetic realm and the likeness of the lower god and his minions. The true Human is the one whose image appears on the light-water below and who provides the model the lower demiurge sees in forming the first human, in distinction from the lower gods who shape humanity in their likeness (following the narrative of Gen 2:7). Simultaneously, the Savior also identifies the Spirit breathed into Adam *through* the lower creator (but not *from* him) as the higher, immortal nature of humanity. And yet, as Pearson notes, what *SRJ* does *not* do (but Philo does) is to identify the image of God in which humanity is created in Gen 1:26 with the spirit breath of Gen 2:7. This difference shows that *SRJ* has different fish to fry than does Philo.

Runia suggests that Philo’s inconsistency stems from his sometime interest to protect his portrait of God from anthropomorphism. *SRJ*’s interest, I would argue, is rather to make a much sharper distinction than Philo does between the spiritual nature of humanity (the genealogical connection with the perfect Human and possession of the divine Spirit) from the lower psychic and material nature of humanity (the genealogical connection with the ignorant Yaldabaoth and his minions). This difference in their interests is apparent above all in their different readings of “image and likeness” in Gen 1:26. While Philo argues that both the image and the likeness in which humanity was created belong to the true God (or his Logos), *SRJ* II 15.12 divides them such that the true image of God in which humanity is created is that of the heavenly perfect Human, while the likeness refers to the

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<sup>30</sup> Runia 1986, 334–338. Runia admits that this interpretation of *Opif.* 134–135 is counter to that of most scholars, but I find his argument persuasive.

<sup>31</sup> In *Leg.* 1.31–32, for example, Philo distinguishes the heavenly man and the earthly man. Here, arguably, he is addressing a different problem (or drawing upon earlier Jewish traditions) aimed at opposing anthropomorphizing views of God. Other passages also point in this direction. See the discussion in Runia 2001, 222–224; Pearson 1984, 322–339.

flawed nature of the lower demigods.<sup>32</sup> This move is not unexpected given that the dualism of *SRJ*, which requires two creator deities (the higher true God and the lower creator), makes impossible Philo's identification of the divine actors in Gen 1:26 and Gen 2:7 as the same God. Rather, *SRJ* reads the dual nature of humanity (immortal spirit/mind/soul and lower psychic, mortal body) as the product of different sets of actors.

Let me emphasize here one side point in this context. It is this distinction in the reading of Genesis 1:26, not the imprisonment of the soul in matter *per se*, that constitutes the fundamental problem of human salvation for *SRJ*. This point is made in two regards: the differential reading of image and likeness, and the fact that image (Gen 1:26–27) and breath (Gen 2:7) are *not* identified.<sup>33</sup> Rather the spirit-breath is contrasted with the psychic body formed by the lower gods—and that is clearly distinguished from the material Adam, since the psychic Adam is cast into the region of matter *only after* he had been illuminated by the spirit-breath (*SRJ* 18.17–18; 19.1–14). To emphasize this point further, Christ tells John that a spiritual helper and guide (Epinoia-Eve) was sent to Adam to correct his deficiencies and ensure that the lower powers would *not* have power over his body, psychic or material (*SRJ* 18.19–29). It would seem that it was not enough to be formed in the image of the perfect Human; something of the spiritual substance is required. So *SRJ* reads the enlivening breath of Gen 2:7 that was infused into Adam as the divine *pneuma*, that is, the very substance of the Invisible Spirit and the world above.<sup>34</sup> This substance is the power of the Mother-Sophia stolen by her son, Yaldabaoth, and conveyed unwittingly through him into Adam (18.7–11). It is also figured as Epinoia, the spiritual Eve, hidden in Adam (18.19–29).

To return to our story of the primal Human, John Dillon has complexified the positioning of *SRJ* by looking at what he calls “a curious echo” in Plotinus. He notes that in the Sethian system,

there is the god “Man” (*Anthropos*), presented as the archetype of which the earthly man is the copy ... In the *Apocryphon of John* (*NHC* II, 1, 2; 5; 14), we find mention of “the perfect Man” or “first Man,” serving as an epithet of Barbelo, of whom, again, Adam is an image. In other treatises, such as the *Hypostasis*

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<sup>32</sup> Although III 15.12 regards Adam to have been made in the image *and* likeness of God, BG is unclear in that it eliminates the possessive pronoun altogether, and even II is inconsistent since it states at 15.18 that they created Adam as a “real being in accordance with the likeness of the perfect first Human”; nonetheless in every case, *SRJ* reads the dual nature of humanity as the product of different sets of actors.

<sup>33</sup> Note Pearson's comparison of *SRJ* with Philo on this point in 1984, 337; 1990, 36.

<sup>34</sup> For more on this point, see Schenke 1962, 38–43.

of the Archons (II, 4, 91) and *On the Origin of the World* (II, 5, 103; 107; 115) we find also an intermediate figure, the Light-Adam, who enters into the physical body prepared by the Demiurge and his agents, and thus fulfills the role of an immanent Form in Platonism. This distinguishing of three levels of man finds, I think, a curious echo in Plotinus, *Enn.* VI, 7, 6 where we have a hierarchy of grades of man, consisting of (1) a noetic of archetypal Man, (2) a Man who is a copy (*mimēma*) of the first, containing the *logoi* in copy form (*en mimēsei*), but which is still distinct from (3) the embodied man, which it illuminates (*ellampeī*), even as the first illuminates it. This sequence strikes me as being rather closer in spirit to the Gnostic doctrine than to the traditional Platonist system of Form and particular.<sup>35</sup>

This analysis helps us to see where *SRJ* has gone rather further in distinguishing levels of hierarchy, but we will need to ask as well where it posits ruptures in their unfolding.

Indeed, Turner notes that once one begins to read Genesis in terms of a Platonic doctrine of models and copies, “the actual situation rapidly becomes far more complicated.”<sup>36</sup> He points first to Waldstein’s observation that *SRJ* posits three father-son pairs: the Invisible Spirit and Autogenes; the heavenly Adam and Seth; and the terrestrial Adam and Seth.<sup>37</sup> Turner observes that in Sethian literature, each of these pairs also includes a mother figure: Barbelo (Pronoia), Prophania (not in *SRJ*, but perhaps Epinoia might fit here?), and Eve.<sup>38</sup> The resulting three triads fit relatively comfortably with the hierarchy of grades of humanity offered by Dillon’s comparison to Plotinus.<sup>39</sup> But to these we can add two further sets: Sophia and her son, Yaldabaoth, and the lower triad Yaldabaoth, Aponoia, and the material-psychoic Adam. This first set offers a pairing that is demonstrably marred by the lack of a father figure, while the lower triad offers only a parodic mirroring of the Invisible Spirit, Pronoia, and Autogenes/Christ. So, in effect, *SRJ* gives us three proper triads, unbalanced by a defective duo and a mimetic parody.

<sup>35</sup> Dillon 1992, 106.

<sup>36</sup> Turner 2001, 231.

<sup>37</sup> Turner 2001, 232, citing Waldstein 1997, 176–177.

<sup>38</sup> See Turner 2001, 232–233.

<sup>39</sup> Turner also suggests that “the Platonic tradition may [be] ... a likely source for the designation of the Sethian heavenly trinity of Father, Mother, and Child,” pointing to *Tim.* 50D which “introduces a family triad of Form as father, Receptacle as mother, and the images constituting the phenomenal world as offspring or child (ἔκγονος)” (2001, 252). He notes that the lower Sophia, too, takes on characteristics of Plato’s Receptacle, and concludes: “Such a division of the Mother figure into two levels has its analogy in the bipartitioning of the cosmic soul or logos into a higher, stable and intelligible level and a lower level in motion that occurs in certain Middle Platonic thinkers such as Plutarch and Numenius” (2001, 252; see also the nuanced discussion of Pleše 2006, 59–60).

One way of reading the logic of this multiplication is that *SRJ* is doing two things at once: providing continuity between the transcendent and lower cosmic realms, on the one hand, and contrasting above and below across a wide gulf, on the other. Thus the hierarchy of

Invisible Spirit/Barbelo/Autogenes-Christ  
 Heavenly Adam/(Epinoia?)/heavenly Seth  
 Terrestrial Adam/Eve/Seth

works to demonstrate the connection of the terrestrial *genea* of the perfect Human (the seed of Seth) with the true and perfect realm of the Human above, while the contrast between the two heavenly triads (Invisible Spirit/Pronoia/Autogenes-Christ and Adam/(Epinoia?)/heavenly Seth) with the two lower triads (Sophia/Yaldabaoth and Yaldabaoth/Aponoia/material-psychic Adam) exposes the parodic mimicry, ignorance, and imperfection of the realm of the lower world rulers. The heavenly triads form the proper model of the patriarchal household and imperial rule, over against which the deficiencies of the two triads with Yaldabaoth become apparent.

In this way, these various triads are doing (at least) two different kinds of work for *SRJ* beyond the simple fact of articulating hierarchical levels of reality with both Platonizing and biblical terms: First, they read the Platonizing story of continuity between the highest realm and human existence in terms of biblical salvation history. Second, they read the disruption of that continuity by insinuating the Genesis story of the “fall” into the processive unfolding of levels of reality.

The result is to effect a simultaneous critique and rectification of problems ancient readers found in both Plato and Genesis. Arguably, Plato bequeathed a set of difficulties concerning the relationship of the demiurge to the transcendent One, and by insisting that the world was the best possible, Plato left little room for understanding how to account for evil in the cosmos. Genesis, on the other hand, was widely felt to be problematic in its anthropomorphic representation of God, especially in attributing to the highest God deficiencies like ignorance and jealousy, but it did offer a powerful story of human mortality and suffering. And yet that story itself was insufficient to account for structural evils that lay beyond human responsibility (individual sins) or to provide justification for God’s providential rescue of justly suffering sinners. By reading the myths of Plato and Genesis together, however, *SRJ* goes far toward rectifying these problems,<sup>40</sup> as well

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<sup>40</sup> That *SRJ* is offering a solution to widely felt problems has long been recognized; see, for example, the excellent study of Williams 1996, 54–79.

as toward pursuing its own ends. Drawing upon later Platonizing theology, such as that of Numenius,<sup>41</sup> who distinguishes the demiurge from a transcendent First God, *SRJ* was able to account for the description of the creator God in Genesis as a lower deity differentiated from the true Deity, the Invisible Spirit. Yet *SRJ* did not abandon Plato's notion of continuity between God and humanity (the immortality of the soul-mind), but deployed it as *one* genealogy for humanity, albeit the one that most truly characterizes the salvation of "the immovable *genea* of the perfect Human." At the same time, reading the Genesis story of "the fall" onto a Platonizing mapping of the unfolding of the divine realm above offered a powerful explanation for the origin of evil and disorder, an explanation that both protected the goodness of God and could account, not just for human deficiency (passions and sin), but also for structural evils of injustice, including undeserved suffering.<sup>42</sup> In this way, both Genesis and Plato are necessary to articulate the crucial structuring of the order of existence in a way that allows optimally for the portrait of the world above to serve as the ideal over against which power relations in the world below may be subjected to thorough-going social critiques.<sup>43</sup>

In conclusion, an important step in the analysis of *SRJ* is the identification of *what* sources are being deployed, whether by direct literary dependence and allusion, as with Genesis and Plato's *Timaeus*, or as comparands that illustrate the thought world of *SRJ*, such as Philo or Numenius. The next step builds on this work, turning to the question of *how* such sources are being read together, that is, intertextually, and *to what ends*. This step is interested in such matters as the principles of selection, hermeneutic strategies, and logics, as well as aims and effects.

In examining *SRJ*'s use of Genesis and Platonizing philosophy, we can see not only that it works to solve certain problems in its source texts and traditions, but also how its intertextual rewriting furthers those solutions. That is, *SRJ*'s hermeneutical-philosophical attempts to address the problems of injustice and salvation are made possible only by reading Genesis and Platonizing philosophy together intertextually. Its selectivity serves those ends. And in its hermeneutic operations, we can also discern its attitude toward its source materials. As we noted above, scholars have discerned critical

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<sup>41</sup> See Pleše 2006, 55–64; King 2006, 197–198.

<sup>42</sup> For a fuller discussion of the mutual impact of Genesis and Plato, see King 2006, 240–241.

<sup>43</sup> For more on this point, see King 2006, esp. 156–173, 239–243; for a discussion of the gendered character and limits of this social critique, see King 2011.

attitudes toward Genesis (especially in its portrayal of God as an ignorant and arrogant misfit), while others have also emphasized its critical approach toward Plato. At the same time, however, these sources are the building blocks (to use Turner's term) of *SRJ*'s whole project. As Pearson puts it with regard to Genesis: "What is presented in *Ap. John*, finally, does not involve a rejection of Genesis, or a revision of its text, but 'secret doctrine', i.e., 'true knowledge.'"<sup>44</sup> The same may be said of its use of Platonizing philosophy and other traditions. It uses these materials not merely because they are at hand, but because of their prestige.

The ultimate effect of such intertextuality was to further universalizing Christian aims to reread the whole of ancient tradition, pagan and Jewish, in light of the revelation of Christ. The attitude toward its sources is thus simultaneously critical and constructive. Within the scope of Christianity, *SRJ* develops an ontological and epistemological framework that emphasizes the formation of Christian identity as recognition of belonging to the true children of God above, the people (*genea*) created in the image of the perfect Human, the seed of Seth in whom dwells the holy Spirit. And that identity is formed foundationally by resistance to the injustice, violence, and deceit of the world's powers. To that end, we see *SRJ* reading the primal history of Genesis 1–9 *twice*, once with regard to the world above and once with regard to the world below, within the framework of Platonizing ontology in which reality unfolds in multiple levels.

This essay has only begun to unravel a very few of the many intertextual webs in *SRJ*. Both by adding to the nuance and complexity of the studies drawn upon here, and by continuing to consider other important ancient resources engaged by *SRJ*, such as the Gospel of John, Jewish Wisdom literature, and astrological materials, future studies will have much to offer to our understanding of the distinctive intertextuality of the *Secret Revelation of John*.

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<sup>44</sup> Pearson 1988, 648.

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THE THREE FORMS OF FIRST THOUGHT (NHC XIII,1),  
AND THE SECRET BOOK OF JOHN (NHC II,1 AND PAR.)

Paul-Hubert Poirier

Found in only a single manuscript (NHC XIII), the treatise entitled πρωτενοια τριμορφος (πρωτένοια τρίμορφος), *Trimorphic Protennoia* or the *Three Forms of First Thought* (hereafter *Three Forms*),<sup>1</sup> is an anonymous writing that makes no reference to the real world or to known events and personalities that might allow us to situate it in some particular time or place. The only material evidence is that which can be gleaned from the Coptic manuscript itself, since its script has been dated to the first half or middle of the fourth century and its production to approximately the same period.<sup>2</sup> The *Three Forms* evokes mythic events, ideas, and themes that are well-known from the literature of the first three centuries CE and uses a vocabulary typical of the period. Therefore, comparing this treatise with texts and contexts to which it appears to be related can enable us to situate it in its literary and historical context. The aim of this essay in honour of one of the foremost editors of the *Three Forms* is to examine the relationship between this treatise and another Nag Hammadi text, namely, the *Secret Book of John* (hereafter *Secret Book*), which has come down to us in two versions—one long and one short—each of which are found in two manuscripts (NHC II,1 and IV,1 for the long version, and NHC III,1 and the BG,2 for the short version).<sup>3</sup>

Since 1973, the obvious relationship between the *Three Forms* and the *Secret Book*, the so-called “gnostic Bible,”<sup>4</sup> has been noted. The members of the “Berliner Arbeitskreis” began their presentation of the *Three Forms* by affirming that this complex and imperfectly conserved writing can be better understood as an elaboration, with added material, of Pronoia’s revelation of her triple *parousia* found at the end of the long version of *Secret Book*,

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<sup>1</sup> Editions and translations of this treatise: Janssens 1974 (*editio princeps*); Schenke 1984; Turner 1990; Poirier 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Cf., for the date of the writing, Giversen 1963, 40; for the date of the binding and cartonnage, see Barns, Browne, and Shelton 1981, 4–5 and 53–58.

<sup>3</sup> See the synoptic edition and English translation by Waldstein and Wisse 1995.

<sup>4</sup> The expression is from Tardieu 1984, 26.

the so-called final hymn.<sup>5</sup> The next year, in her introduction to the text's *editio princeps*, Y. Janssens noted the numerous parallels between the *Secret Book* and the *Three Forms*.<sup>6</sup> A simple reading of both texts confirms these first impressions. In the course of my commentary, I have highlighted all the similarities that I have observed between the *Three Forms* and the *Secret Book*. In this essay, I will revisit only those cases which prove that the two texts are related to such a degree that one likely depends upon the other.

But before we enter into the comparison of these treatises, it must be remembered that we are faced with two works that have come down to us in Coptic versions and only after a long period of transmission. This means that certain similarities between the two texts might only concern the Coptic translations and might not necessarily be traced back to the originals. Therefore, we must not assume too hastily that similar formulations in Coptic imply an analogous relationship between the lost Greek versions. In the case of the Coptic versions of *Three Forms* and *Secret Book*, particularly in its long version, the interpreter is nevertheless faced with a special situation in that the manuscripts preserving the two writings (NHC II and XIII) were copied by the same scribe. Moreover, the language used in both translations is the same.<sup>7</sup> This permits the hypothesis that the same translator could have rendered both treatises from Greek into Coptic, meaning that the same Greek expressions and turns of phrase have likely been rendered in the same way in both texts.

#### 1. THE FINAL HYMN OF THE LONG VERSION OF THE *SECRET BOOK OF JOHN* AND THE *THREE FORMS OF FIRST THOUGHT*

According to its plan and structure, this hymn,<sup>8</sup> put into the mouth of the “perfect Pronoia of the All” (II 30.12), and which Michael Waldstein has called the “Providence Monologue,”<sup>9</sup> is strikingly similar to the *Three Forms*.

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<sup>5</sup> Berliner Arbeitskreis für Koptisch-Gnostische Schriften 1973, 74: “Man kann dies komplizierte und nicht ganz vollständig erhaltene Werk am besten verstehen als eine weiter ausgestaltete und mit Material aufgefüllte Version der Offenbarungsrede der Pronoia über ihre dreifache Parusie in der Welt, wie wir sie am Ende der Langversion des AJ ... finden.”

<sup>6</sup> Janssens 1974, 341, 348–352.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., on the script of the two codices, Layton 1976, 84; Layton reaffirmed later that the scribe of Codex II “is identical with the copyist of Codex XIII” (in Layton 1989, 4). On the language, cf. Funk 1995, 133–136.

<sup>8</sup> *Secret Book* II 30.11–31.27; IV 46.23–49.8 (pp. 169–175 Waldstein and Wisse); on the final hymn, see Waldstein 1995; Barc and Painchaud 1999.

<sup>9</sup> In my opinion, this is incorrect, since the term *πρόνοια* carries the etymological sense of

It contains three parts, which describe the descents of the Pronoia according to a tripartite pattern:<sup>10</sup> the Pronoia first describes her wanderings among humanity (“I have walked [μοοσαε = περιπατεῖν]” [II 30.14, 23, 33]), then describes herself, and finally, she evokes her entry into the lower world, the outcome of her mission and her return. While the first two manifestations (II 30.13–21; 30.21–32) are described in a relatively concise manner, the third (30.32–31.25) is the subject of considerable elaboration. What we find here is essentially a wake-up call, followed by a response, a rousing, and the imposition of the five seals.

When compared to the relatively simple structure and perfect symmetry of the hymn, the *Three Forms* might seem like a particularly complex work, especially in the way that it combines the formal tri-partition of the text with the triple descent of Protennoia and the triads Father-Mother-Son, and sound (masculine)-voice (feminine)-word (masculine).

However, if we consider how the *Three Forms* presents the triple manifestation of the First Thought of the Invisible Father, there can be no doubt that the author has taken up and elaborated the final hymn of the long version of the *Secret Book*, both in terms of thematic structure (triple descent of the Pronoia → triple descent of the Protennoia) and vocabulary. To demonstrate this, let us put in parallel, following the order of the long version of the *Secret Book*'s final hymn, the elements common to both texts:

<i>Secret Book</i> (NHC II)	<i>Three Forms</i> (NHC XIII)
1 <sup>30.11–12</sup> I, then, the perfect Pronoia of the All.	35.1–7 It is [I], the Pro[tennoia, the Th]ought that exists in [the light]. It is [I], the movement that exists in [every thing, in which] all things subsist. [The first] begotten among those who [come to be. The one who exists] before every thing. That which is called by three names, and which exists alone, perfect.
2 <sup>30.13</sup> I changed myself into my seed.	36.16 A seed exists in [them]. 50.16–18 I, therefore, cannot be grasped, as well as my seed. And my seed ...

“first thought” rather than “providence.” Moreover, as A. Orbe has emphasized, the Gnostics were surely sensitive to etymology in how they ordered the sequence πρό-νοια, ἐν-νοια, ἐπι-νοια, “forethought, thought, reflection.” (Orbe 1955, 13).

<sup>10</sup> We are following here the analysis of Waldstein 1995, esp. 374–388.

<i>Secret Book</i> (NHC II)	<i>Three Forms</i> (NHC XIII)
3 <sup>30.13–14</sup> I existed at the beginning.	35.33–34 Existing [from the beginning].
4 <sup>30.14</sup> walking down every path. 30.16–17 I walked in great darkness. 30.23 I walked. 30.33 I walked again.	35.21 Walking in uprightness.
5 <sup>30.18–19</sup> I continued until I entered the prison.	36.4–5 I [went down] into Amente. 40.29–30 I descended and came to Chaos.
6 <sup>30.19–20</sup> And the foundations of Chaos shook.	43.9–10 The foundations of Amente as well as the vaults of Chaos were shaken.
7 <sup>30.21</sup> They did not know me.	50.15 They did not know me. 47.18–19 [They] did not know the one who gave me power.
8 <sup>30.21–22</sup> I returned a second time.	42.17–18 I came a second time appearing as a woman. 47.11–12 The second time, I came as the [voice] of my sound.
9 <sup>30.25–26</sup> I entered the darkness and into Amente.	36.4–5 I [came down] into Amente.
10 <sup>30.27–28</sup> The foundations of Chaos shook.	43.9–10 The foundations of Amente as well as the vaults of Chaos were shaken.
11 <sup>30.30–31</sup> Again, I fled back to my luminous root.	45.31–32 I went back up, I entered into my light. 46.25 The root of the entire Aeon.
12 <sup>30.32–33</sup> For a third time, I walked.	47.13–14 The third time, I revealed myself.
13 <sup>30.33–34</sup> I who am the light.	47.28–29 I am the light. 47.29–30 I am the light.
14 <sup>30.33–34</sup> (I), existing in the light.	35.2–3 (I am ... the Thought) that exists in [the light].
15 <sup>30.35–31.1</sup> so that I might enter the darkness and into Amente.	36.4–5 I [went down] into Amente.
16 <sup>31.2</sup> The completion of the aeon.	44.33–34 The completion of this aeon. 42.19 The end of the aeon.

<i>Secret Book</i> (NHC II)	<i>Three Forms</i> (NHC XIII)
17 <sup>31.3-4</sup> I entered into their prison.	36.4-5 I [went down] into Amente. 40.29-30 I went down and arrived at Chaos.
18 <sup>31.5-6</sup> "May the one who hears awake from deep slumber!"	35.21-23 Those who sleep, I woke them and I am the vision of those who are sleeping. 44.29-30 Now listen to me.
19 <sup>31.11-12</sup> It is I, the Pronoia of the pure light.	35.1-2 [I] am the Pro[tennoia, the] Thought that exists in the light.
20 <sup>31.16</sup> I am your root.	46.25 The root of the entire aeon.
21 <sup>31.16</sup> I am compassionate.	44.30-31 (Hear) the voice of the [your] merciful mother.
22 <sup>31.18-19</sup> (Beware ...) of the demons of Chaos.	41.5-6 The bonds of the demons of Amente, I broke them.
23 <sup>31.19</sup> (Beware ...) of those who entrap you.	41.7 (I broke) those that were tied to my limbs. 41.12 The one who entraps you.
24 <sup>31.20-21</sup> Wake from heavy sleep.	35.21-23 Those who sleep, I awoke them, and I am the vision of those who are sleeping.
25 <sup>31.23-24</sup> I will seal it in the light of the water, by the five seals.	48.29-32 They brought him to the place of the light of his fatherhood and [he received] the five seals from [the light] of the Mother, the Protennoia. 49.27-29 [The] five seals made perfect by an intellect. The one who possesses these five seals ...

These parallels can be divided into two groups, those relating to the structure of the hymn and those concerning particular elements, terms, expressions, or images. Among the first group can be mentioned no. 1 (the development by the *Three Forms* of the hymn's initial statement), 5, 9, 15 and 17 (the entry or descent "into" the prison, Amente, or Chaos), 11 (the return at the end of the second descent), 8 and 12 (the references to the second and third descents).<sup>11</sup> The more specific parallels are no. 2 (the seed), 3 (the existence

<sup>11</sup> The fact that the *Three Forms* makes no mention of the first descent is probably due to the lacuna at the beginning of p. 47.



“from the beginning”), 4 (the “walking” theme), 6 and 10 (the shaking of the foundations of Chaos), 7 (the failure to recognize Pronoia/Protennoia), 13, 14 and 19 (the light), 16 (the completion of the aeon), 18 and 24 (the waking), 20 (the root), 21 (the compassionate Pronoia/Protennoia), 22 and 23 (the demons and those who bind and entrap), and 25 (the five seals).

A parallel reading of the hymn and the *Three Forms* demonstrates that we are faced with two texts in which all of the essential elements of the first are found dispersed throughout the second, along with other material borrowed from the long version of the *Secret Book*. This is what we turn to now.

## 2. THE USE OF THE GLOSS *ETEPAI PE*

The author of the *Three Forms* has peppered the text with 21 occurrences of a particular stylistic formula, namely, the explanatory relative clause *etepai pe* (ετεπαι πε).<sup>12</sup> This relative usually corresponds to the Greek ὃ ἐστὶν ἢ τοῦτ' ἔστιν (τουτέστι).<sup>13</sup> In our text, however, it functions to introduce a gloss or equivalent to the relative antecedent *ete* (ετε).

Occurrences of the explanatory relative clause using *etepai pe prōme* must be distinguished from those using the formula *etepai pe*.<sup>14</sup> This latter usage is employed in an absolute sense or without a subject, and so cannot introduce a commentary or a gloss. Rather, it seeks to reinforce the demonstrative affecting the antecedent of *ete*. For instance, at p. 42.28, “this *very* aeon.” The *etepai pe* formula has the value of the Greek demonstrative adjective οὗτος (in this case ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος). Therefore, it has an anaphoric rather than a cataphoric value, as is the case for *etepai pe prōme*.

Here are the occurrences of the explanatory relative clause in our treatise, followed, in parentheses and translation, by the immediate context which the gloss addresses:

- (1) p. 36.18–19     ετεπαι πε πσοογν η̄νετεμ̄η̄τεγ ρλη (“I am the thought of the Father, and it is from me that the sound has emerged, *that is, the knowledge of those who have no end*”).
- (2) p. 37.4–5     ετεπαι πε πλογοσ (“Therefore, the Son (who is) perfect in every thing, *that is, the Logos*”).

<sup>12</sup> On this type of relative, see Layton 2011, 331–332, § 410.

<sup>13</sup> See the examples taken from the Sahidic New Testament given by Layton, *loc. cit.*; a nice example of this sort of gloss (which is not necessarily secondary) can be found in the *Kerygma Petri, frg. 2a*: (ὁ θεός) ὃς τὰ πάντα ἐποιήσεν λόγῳ δυνάμεωσ αὐτοῦ ... τουτέστι τοῦ υἱοῦ (ed. Cambe 2003, 151).

<sup>14</sup> *Three Forms* 42.28; 42.33; 44.34; 49.30.

- (3) p. 37.31 ετεπαῖ [πε πε̅χ̅] (“He alone came into existence, *that [is Christ]*”).
- (4) p. 37.35–36 ετεπαῖ [πε + lacuna (“These [three], I established them [alone .....] eternally, on [.....] who is living, *that [is], .....]*”).
- (5) p. 38.5–6 ετεπαῖ πε πβαλ̅ ἡπ[ογ]οειν ετρογοειν εροει εραῖ ε̅νογεοο[γ] (“And [he] will robe himself in his own light, which surrounds him, *that is, the eye of the light that illuminates me in glory*”).
- (6) p. 38.9–10 ετεπαῖ πε βαρβηλω̅ πεοογ̅ ετχ[ηκ]̅ εβολ̅ αγω̅ πατ̅ναγ̅ εροφ̅ εφρηγ̅ ἡατω[γργ] (“The Father of all the aeons, who is [me], the Thought of the Father, the Protenoia, *that is, Barbelo, the perfect, invisible, hidden, incommensurable glory*”).
- (7) p. 39.27–28 ετεπαῖ πε σαμαδ̅η̅λ̅ ιδλταβααθ̅ (“The Great Demon ... Therefore, this is the one called Saklas, *that is, Samael Yaltabaoth*”).
- (8) p. 39.30–31 ετεταῖ τε τεπινοια̅ ἡπογοεινε̅ ἡτασει̅ απ̅[γρ̅η̅] (“This innocent one who overpowered before, *that is, the Epinoia of the light that came [down]*”).
- (9) p. 41.1 ετεναει̅ νε̅ ἡω[ηρ]̅ε̅ ἡ[π]ογοειν (“In (?) those who [are] mine [.....], those who have heard [.....], *that is, the Sons of the Light*”).
- (10) p. 41.16 ετεναει̅ νε̅ ἡωηρε̅ ἡπογοειν (“I instructed those who are mine, *that is, the Sons of the Light*”).
- (11) p. 41.21–24 ετεπαῖ πε ππ̅η̅δ̅ ετωοογ̅ ε̅η̅τ̅γ̅χ̅η̅ ἡταρω̅πε̅ εβολ̅ ε̅η̅π̅μοογ̅ ἡπ̅ω̅νε̅ αγω̅ εβολ̅ ε̅η̅π̅λ̅α̅κ̅η̅ ἡ̅μ̅γ̅σ̅τη̅ρι̅ον̅ (“I am the one who descended first because of my abandoned portion, *that is, the Spirit that is found in the soul, who comes to be by the water of life and by the bath of mysteries*”).
- (12) p. 41.30–32 ετεπαῖ πε π̅με̅ε̅γε̅ ἡπαω[η]̅ ἡατω̅βε̅ αγω̅ πα̅η̅ ἡ̅π̅ο̅[γ̅ει]̅ω̅τ̅ (“I gave them fruit, *that is, the thought of the unchangeable [Aeon] and my dwelling as well as their [father]*”).
- (13) p. 42.16–17 ετεναει̅ νε̅ ἡωηρε̅ ἡπογοεινε̅ (“I am the one who produces the voice of the sound for the ears of those who have known me, *that is, the Sons of the Light*”).
- (14) p. 45.9–10 ετεταῖ τε̅ ἡε̅[π̅ρο̅θ̅]̅ε̅α̅ πεοογ̅ ἡ̅τ̅μα̅αγ̅ (“[I am] the fulfillment of all, *that is, Me[thro]ea, the glory of the Mother*”).
- (15) p. 46.19–20 ετεπαῖ πε π̅ρο̅ογ̅ ἡ̅πε̅ο̅ογ̅ ἡ̅τ̅μα̅γ̅ ἡ̅α̅το̅υ̅α̅ρ̅η̅με̅φ̅ (“It is a hidden light, that gives a fruit of life, that springs forth a water of life from the invisible, incorruptible, and incommensurable source, *that is, the sound of the glory of the Mother, which cannot be explained*”).
- (16) p. 46.22–24 ετεταῖ τε̅ τ̅η̅η̅τ̅κα̅ρ̅ω̅ς̅ ε̅ς̅ρη̅η̅̅ ἀ̅π̅τη̅ρη̅φ̅ ε̅σο̅ ἡ̅α̅το̅υ̅α̅ρ̅η̅νε̅ς̅ (“A virgin male (from) a hidden intellect, *that is, the hidden silence of the All, which cannot be explained*”).
- (17) p. 48.10–11 ετεπαῖ πε π̅με̅ε̅γε̅ ἡ̅[τ̅σο̅μ̅ ἡ̅π̅η̅δ̅]̅τ̅ικ̅η̅ ἡ̅η̅τ̅γ̅χ̅ικ̅η̅ (“[He] is [stripped] of Chaos, he who [finds himself in the] final [darkness] that is beside [.....] the complete [darkness], *that is, the thought of [the spiritual power] and the psychic*”).
- (18) p. 48.13–14 ετεπαῖ πε π̅σο̅ογ̅νε̅ ἡ̅π̅με̅ε̅γε̅ ἡ̅γ̅η̅η̅τ̅ει̅ω̅[τ̅] (“[I] clothed him in radiant light, *that is, the knowledge of the thought of the Fatherhood*”).

- (19) p. 49.14–15 ετετα[ι τ]ε τῆν ἄτακτοον ἡπικαο (“I clothed myself [as] son of the Great Parent and I was similar to him up to the fulfillment of his judgement, *that is, the ignorance of Chaos*”).
- (20) p. 49.26 ετεναῖ νε ἡτωα ἡπωτ (“These are the (things) unspeakable to every principality and archontic power, unless to the Sons of the Light alone, *that is, the decrees of the Father*”).
- (21) p. 49.27–28 ετεναῖ νε [†]†ε ἡσφραγισ ετχνηκ εβολ ριτῆογνουο (“These are the glories superior to all glory, *that is, [the] five seals made perfect by the intellect*”).

If such a frequent use of the explanatory relative clause *etepai pe* seems surprising on a stylistic level, in a hymnic or poetic text such as the *Three Forms* it serves to highlight the most significant elements of the message that the text is trying to present. In this way, glosses or relatives nos. 3 (Logos-Christ), 5 (the eye of light), 6 (Barbelo), 7 (the three names of the demiurge), 8 (the Epinoia of light), 14 (Meirothea) and 21 (the five seals) introduce material characteristic of Sethian mythology, a perspective in which our treatise ought to be situated. Other relatives recall or announce elements that appear elsewhere in the treatise. This is the case for nos. 1 (the knowledge of the ἀπέραντοι or the ἀπέραντα), 2 (the Son-Logos), 9, 10 and 13 (the sons of light), 11 (the “abandoned” Spirit), 12 (the thought of the unchangeable aeon), 15 (the sound and the glory of the mother), 16 (silence, a recurring theme in the treatise), 18 (thought and paternity), and 20 (the decrees of the Father).

As such, the function of these explanatory relative clauses is clear: their goal is to enable the reader to recognize familiar elements from the gnostic myth, or to suggest connections between internal elements of the text. But are they part of the “original” redaction of the *Three Forms*, since, such relatives, introducing glosses or terminological equivalents, are generally thought to be additions or secondary developments? In this case, we cannot answer the question without once again examining the relations between our text and the long version of the *Secret Book*.

In this version (NHC II and IV), we can count 30 occurrences of the explanatory relative clause, as opposed to the nine found in each example of the shorter version (BG and NHC III).<sup>15</sup> Therefore, we can argue that

<sup>15</sup> Here are the references, from Codex II, with their occurrence (in parentheses) in the short version (III and BG; references are indicated only when III and BG have a gloss not found in II): *Secret Book* II 1.6–7 (BG); 2.12; 4.18; 4.21; (BG 27.8–9); 4.31–32 (BG); 4.34; 6.3; 6.5; 6.9; 6.9–10; 6.16–17; 6.22 (III); 7.31; 8.5–6; (III 12.7; BG 33.16); (III 12.14–15; BG 34.6); (III 16.19–20); 10.31; 14.21–22; 18.34; 19.26–27; 21.7–8 (III; BG); 21.9–10; 21.19 (III; BG); (III 27.8; BG 56.2–3);

this constitutes a characteristic stylistic and hermeneutical device common both to the long version of the *Secret Book* and to the *Three Forms*. Moreover, four of the explanatory relatives from the *Three Forms* have exact parallels in the long version. These are:

- (3) ετεπαει [πε πεχ̄ς, “that is, the Christ,” XIII 37.31 = *Secret Book* II 7.31; IV 12.3;
- (6) ετεπαϊ πε βαρβηλω, “that is, Barbelo,” XIII 38.9 = II 6.5; IV 9.5, and II 6.22; IV 9.28–10.1;
- (8) ετεταϊ τε τεπινοια· ἠπογοεινε ἠτασει απ[ιτῆ], “that is, the Epinoia of the light that descends,” XIII 39.30–31 = II 22.5; IV 34.7–8 (without the relative ἠτασει απ[ιτῆ]);
- (19) ετετα[ιτ]ε τῆῆτατσοορη ἠπκαος, “that is, the ignorance of Chaos,” XIII 49.14–15 = II 21.7–8; IV 32.19–20 (with the variant ἠπκακε instead of ἠπκαος).

The sheer number of explanatory relatives in both texts as well as the fact that four of them are identical suggests that a link must exist between the two treatises: either one copied the other, or both depend on a common source. A third hypothesis is possible, namely, that the presence of these relatives in both texts is due to the activity of the same editor, assuming that they both circulated in the same milieu during the same time. Without ruling out this third possibility, which in any case is difficult to demonstrate, we lean towards a dependence of one upon the other, more specifically the *Three Forms*' dependence on the *Secret Book*. In support of this conclusion, in addition to the use and development of the *Secret Book*'s final hymn (see above) and the presence of mythological themes characteristic of the *Secret Book*, we can cite the fact, already mentioned, that the explanatory relatives are better suited to a didactic text such as the *Secret Book* than a hymnic composition such as the *Three Forms*. Furthermore, we must consider the function in both texts of the four common glosses. While the first two (nos. 3 and 6 from our inventory) qualify the same element, namely, Autogenes and Protennoia/Pronoia, the last two (nos. 8 and 19), seem better suited to the *Secret Book* than to the *Three Forms*. In the case of no. 8, the *Three Forms*' gloss, by adding a reference to “descent” (p. 39.31), identifies the Epinoia of light with the “Wisdom without malice, that descended” and “was conquered” (p. 40.14–16), going against the long version of the *Secret Book*, which distinguishes the Epinoia of the light, identified with the celestial Eve and teacher of Adam, from Mother-Sophia.<sup>16</sup> The author of the *Three Forms* takes a short-cut in recounting the myth of the *Secret Book* by associating

21.27–28; 21.29 (III); 22.5; (III 28.11–12; BG 57.14–15); 23.23–24; 23.28–29; 28.1–2; 28.15; 29.4; 31.4.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Tardieu 1984, 319–320; Onuki 1991.

Epinoia with fallen Wisdom. In the case of no. 19, the gloss “ignorance of Chaos” is attached in the *Three Forms* to the fulfillment of the Great Parent’s judgement, an element which it does not necessarily clarify, since in the *Secret Book* matter (ὕλη) is more appropriately qualified by the “ignorance of darkness.”

Therefore, we may conclude that, if the explanatory relatives had to be considered as secondary, they would be not secondary in the *Three Forms* but in the long version of the *Secret Book*, since everything indicates that the author or final redactor of our treatise did not resort to such a procedure on his or her own initiative, but simply transposed it from the *Secret Book*, the principal source for the structure and content of the text. This means that the transfer had to have taken place during the early Greek phase of transmission. In other words, the long version of the *Secret Book* made use of an expression such as ὃ ἐστίν or τοῦτ' ἐστίν (τουτέστι), which would have passed into the Greek *Three Forms*, an expression which the Coptic translators—or translator according to the hypothesis that both were translated by the same person—rendered by *etepai pe*. As for the *Secret Book*, since a limited number of explanatory relatives are found in both versions, we might suppose that the redactor of the long version amplified an expression already present in his model—be it the actual short version or some other text. Even if it serves to introduce glosses, this expression should not be hastily interpreted as evidence for an addition or a secondary development, or worst, deleted for the sake of a smoother translation.<sup>17</sup> It could also be understood as forming part of the scholastic genre of the treatise, as is the case for the *Tripartite Tractate* from Codex I, in which 47 occurrences of the explanatory relative are found.<sup>18</sup>

### 3. MYTHOLOGOUMENA AND COMMON ELEMENTS

In the course of a comparative reading of *Three Forms* and *Secret Book*,<sup>19</sup> numerous points of contact are revealed. Aside from those relating to the final hymn of the long version of the *Secret Book* and the recurrence of the *etepai pe* formula, there are a certain number of common mythological themes or particular expressions. We will examine here only those which are most important and which imply a close relationship between the two texts.

<sup>17</sup> As is the case in Meyer 2007.

<sup>18</sup> For the references, see Cherix 1995, s. v. παῖ, 529–542.

<sup>19</sup> See my commentary in Poirier 2006.

First of all, let us consider the mythological episodes common to both treatises, but which the *Three Forms* evokes more allusively, as if the readers are expected to know:

- At p. 37.3–7, the generation of the only-begotten Son is mentioned in a single phrase (“Therefore, the Son perfect in every thing, that is the Logos, who came to be by this sound, who came from on high, and who is the light ...”), while the same motif is more fully developed in the *Secret Book*.<sup>20</sup>
- The anointing of Christ by the Protennoia (p. 37.30–33) evokes an episode explicitly described in the *Secret Book*.<sup>21</sup>
- The reference to the establishment of four illuminating aeons in *Three Forms* (p. 38.30–39.7) is so abbreviated that it is only intelligible if one has in mind the account from the *Secret Book*. That the *Three Forms* depends on the *Secret Book* here rather than on another account of the illuminators theme (such as the *Holy Book*) is suggested by the reference in both texts to the “establishment” of luminaries in their respective aeons.
- The *Three Forms* provides only a glimpse of the cosmogony of the demiurge (p. 39.13–40.29), which the *Secret Book* describes over several pages.<sup>22</sup> In this way, the reference to the creation of the aeons on the model of the true Aeons (p. 40.4–8) relies on a passage from the long version of the *Secret Book* (II 12.34–13.5) describing this activity.
- A few lines suffice, at 40.24–29, to describe the creation of man by the demiurge, while the *Secret Book* presents a fuller account.<sup>23</sup>
- The “five seals” theme appears four times in the *Three Forms* (p. 48.31–32; 49.26–28 and 28–32; 50.10–12). These seals are administered “by the means of the [light] of the Mother, Protennoia” (p. 48.31–32), just as in the final hymn of the long version of the *Secret Book*, where the Pronoia herself seals the one she has awoken from the sleep of ignorance.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> *Secret Book* II 6.10–18; IV 9.11–23; III 9.10–19; BG 29.18–30.9 (pp. 40–41 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>21</sup> *Secret Book* II 6.18–33; IV 9.23–10.12; III 9.19–10.9; BG 30.9–31.5 (pp. 40–43 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>22</sup> *Secret Book* II 9.25–25.16 (pp. 58–145 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>23</sup> In *Secret Book* II 15.1–13; IV 23.14–24.2; III 22.3–18; BG 48.10–49.9 (pp. 86–89 Waldstein and Wisse); then in II 19.15–33; IV 29.24–30.18; III 23.19–24.14; BG 51.1–52.1 (pp. 112–115 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>24</sup> *Secret Book* II 31.22–24; IV 49.2–4 (p. 173 Waldstein and Wisse).

The *Three Forms* also shares with *Secret Book* several expressions or characteristic formulas, which are presented here in their order of appearance in the text:

- The triad formed by the Father, Mother, and Son (p. 37.22), although attested elsewhere, is found twice in the *Secret Book*, first in the triple self-proclamation by which the revealer presents himself to John at the beginning of the treatise,<sup>25</sup> then in the passage where the Perfect Man blesses the Invisible Spirit along with “Autogenes and the three aeons, Father, Mother, and Son, the perfect power.”<sup>26</sup> The “three aeons” of the *Secret Book* must be compared to the “three dwellings” (p. 37.21) in which the Father, Mother, and Son are found.
- The assertion that the sound which comes into existence after the thought of Protennoia possesses a Logos that “has three masculinities and three powers and three names” (p. 37.25–27) is paralleled very closely in the *Secret Book*, when Barbelo is said to be “the Mother-Father, the First Man, the Holy Spirit, the Thrice-Male, the Triple-Powered, the Triple-Named.”<sup>27</sup>
- The self-proclamation by which the Protennoia calls herself the “image of the Invisible Spirit” (p. 38.11) has its counterpart in the long version of the *Secret Book*, at II 4.34–35: “(the Pronoia of the All is the perfect power), that is, the image of the Invisible Spirit.”<sup>28</sup>
- The same expression found on p. 38.11, “the image of the Invisible Spirit,” occurs twice in the long version of the *Secret Book* applied to Barbelo.<sup>29</sup>
- The *Three Forms* attributes three names to the demiurge: Saklas, Samael, and Yaltabaoth (p. 39.26–28). Even though these names are attested elsewhere, only the long version of the *Secret Book* specifies that “the archon who is weak has three names: the first name is Yaltabaoth, the second Saklas, and the third Samael.”<sup>30</sup> It is also worth noting that our treatise, along with the *Secret Book* of Codex II,

<sup>25</sup> *Secret Book* II 2.13–15; IV 3.7–8; BG 21.19–21 (pp. 18–19 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>26</sup> *Secret Book* II 9.9–11; III 13.14–17; BG 35.17–20 (pp. 54–55 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>27</sup> *Secret Book* II 5.6–9; IV 7.21–23 (p. 35 Waldstein and Wisse); the short version (III 7.23–8.3; BG 27.19–28.2) contains slight variants (p. 34 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. *Secret Book* II 6.4: “(the pentad of the aeons of the Father, which is the First Man), the image of the Invisible Spirit.”

<sup>29</sup> Particularly in *Secret Book* II 4.34–35 (p. 33 Waldstein and Wisse), then in II 6.4; IV 9.3–4 (p. 39 Waldstein and Wisse); cf. II 14.21–22; IV 23.28–29 (p. 85 Waldstein and Wisse), where one finds “the image of the Invisible, who is the Father of the All.”

<sup>30</sup> *Secret Book* II 11.15–18; IV 17.23–18.2 (pp. 69–71 Waldstein and Wisse).

attests to the spelling Yaltabaoth as opposed to the more common Yaldabaoth.<sup>31</sup>

- In the *Three Forms*, Epinoia-Wisdom is described twice as being “without malice” or innocent (p. 39.29 and 40.15), which also resembles the long version of the *Secret Book*, in which we read that “our sister Wisdom (is) the one who descended (completely) innocent.”<sup>32</sup>
- The statement on p. 40.2, “a blessing was brought upon her,” which marks the beginning of the description of Epinoia in the long version of the *Secret Book*, concerning the repentance of Sophia, who is likewise blessed by the entire Pleroma.<sup>33</sup>
- The stereotypical formula from p. 43.9–10: “The foundations of Amente as well as the vaults of Chaos were shaken,” which is found in the final hymn of the long version of the *Secret Book* (cf. *supra*, no. 10), appears elsewhere in this version in a form almost identical to that used in our treatise: “The foundations of the Abyss were shaken.”<sup>34</sup>
- The androgyny of Protennoia, affirmed at p. 45.2–3: “I am androgynous, [I am mother, I] am father,” echoes the long version of the *Secret Book*, which also calls the Pronoia of All “the mother-father” and the “androgynous.”<sup>35</sup>
- At p. 45.6–7, Protennoia presents herself as “the womb [.....] . of (?) the All,” which, despite a lacuna, is very close to the long version of the *Secret Book*, which states that Barbelo “has become the womb of the all.”<sup>36</sup> In both texts, the qualifier “womb” is related to the status of Protennoia or Pronoia as mother and father (XIII 45.3) or Metropator (II 5.6–7).
- Finally, at p. 46.12, the light is said to “proceed,” or “was the first to emerge” (αϕῤῥωρητῆ ἡεῖ εἶβολ), an expression which can be found in the description of the Power in the long version of the *Secret Book* and which ends with the following title: πῶρητῆ ἡεῖ εἶβολ, “the first to emerge” or “the one who has proceeded.”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> This variant could certainly be explained by the common shift between the voiced and non-voiced dental, even during the translation process, but given the similarities of language and script of Codices II and XIII, this may not be coincidental. The same variation in the name of the archon (Yaltabaoth/ Yaldabaoth) occurs in *Hyp. Arch.* (II 95.11 and 96.4) and in *Orig. World* (II 100.19 and 100.24).

<sup>32</sup> *Secret Book* II 23.20–22 (p. 135 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>33</sup> *Secret Book* II 14.2–4; IV 22.2–4 (p. 83 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>34</sup> *Secret Book* II 14.26; IV 23.4–5 (p. 87 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>35</sup> *Secret Book* II 5.6–7, 9; IV 8.21, 23–24 (p. 35 Waldstein and Wisse).

<sup>36</sup> *Secret Book* II 5.5 (p. 33 Waldstein and Wisse); Codex IV is lacunous at this spot.

<sup>37</sup> *Secret Book* II 5.11; IV 7.26 (p. 35 Waldstein and Wisse).



Nevertheless, it should be remembered that unlike the *Secret Book* and especially the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NH III,2; IV,2), the *Three Forms* makes no mention of the character of Seth, although perhaps he has been replaced by the seed (p. 36.16; 50.18).

We could discuss additional similarities between the *Three Forms* and the long version of the *Secret Book*, but those highlighted here and the resulting observations—namely, the reworking of the *Secret Book's* final hymn by our treatise, incorporation of the exegetical glosses introduced by *etepai pe* characteristic of the long version, borrowing of mythological material and expressions typical of the long version—are sufficient to establish a literary relationship between the *Three Forms* and the *Secret Book* to the extent that the former seems to be dependent on the latter. The author of the *Three Forms* appropriated the final hymn from the long version of the *Secret Book* and rewrote it integrating various cosmogonic and anthropogonic episodes from the *Secret Book*, although in a more allusive manner that presupposes the readers' familiarity with the myth.<sup>38</sup>

The comparison of the structure of the *Three Forms* with that of the final hymn of the long version of the *Secret Book* demonstrates that the structure of our treatise is both simple and complex; simple in terms of the organization of the text into three parts relating to the manifestations of Protennoia, but complex in terms of the numerous reformulations and developments that disrupt the balance of the whole, such as passages in the first-person plural (p. 36.33b–37.3a and 42.22–23) and the fact that the three descents do not strictly correspond to the treatise's three discourses.

This explanation speaks to the way in which the treatise was composed, that is, on the basis of the long version of the *Secret Book's* final hymn, in combination with references to the myth and other material borrowed from other gnostic or contemporary sources.<sup>39</sup> Still, another explanation is possible, an explanation that perceives a more or less complex redactional history. This is the direction taken by John D. Turner in his literary history of the Sethian movement, in his edition of the text, as well as in his monograph

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<sup>38</sup> My conclusion, then, contradicts that of Waldstein, who suggested that “*Trim. Prot.* (NHC XIII) appears to know the Providence Monologue without knowing *The Apocryphon of John* as a whole” (Waldstein 1995, 388n48); closer to my position is Williams 2005, in relation to the reference to Jesus at 50.12, though his remark is valid for the *Three Forms* as a whole: “Once again we have an underlying mythic narrative that is assumed rather than fully recounted, and it is clear that this assumed narrative is something similar to elements of what we find also in the *Apocryphon of John*” (46).

<sup>39</sup> Especially the negative theological vocabulary, the speculations on the voice and the sound, the *descensus ad inferos*, and the theory of the aeons.

dedicated to Sethian Gnosticism and its relation to the Platonic tradition.<sup>40</sup> According to Turner, to make a complex hypothesis simple, the treatise is originally based on a three-part, first-person singular aretalogy, with the addition of three successive layers: the doctrinal passages, the “explicitly” baptismal passages, and the Christological passages.

In support of Turner’s reconstruction would be the fact that the different strata distinguished by him correspond more or less with the identifiable parts of the text, which have their own thematic unity or which constitute the breaks. But, if we except the two places mentioned above where there is an abrupt switch to the first-person plural, then none of the passages that Turner attributes to the various layers of redaction necessitates a long redactional history. The presence of each of them can be explained very well by the general economy of the text and the fact that, while based specifically on the final hymn of the long version of the *Secret Book* along with other elements from this text, the *Three Forms* integrates traditional material borrowed from various sources. While it is clear that the blocks distinguished by Turner display different doctrinal, baptismal, or Christological concerns, this does not mean that they represent different layers of redaction. The fact that from start to finish the text displays both the thematic and stylistic influence of the *Secret Book* suggests a short and relatively uniform redactional history. As such, the rough-edges of the text—remembering of course that several passages are missing or illegible—can be attributed to the author and his redactional method. This means that the redactional history of the treatise begins where that of the long version of the *Secret Book* ends.

In my view, the *Three Forms* reveals itself to be a reworking, in the form of a revelation discourse, of the final hymn and myth from the long version of the *Secret Book*, with other traditions such as the *descensus ad inferos* mixed in.<sup>41</sup> As for the structure of the final hymn, the author of the treatise has developed this in two ways, first, by combining its three-part structure with the triad of Father, Mother, and Son borrowed from the *Secret Book* itself,<sup>42</sup> and second, by using the triad of sound, voice, and word, borrowed from speculations among contemporary logicians and grammarians. This enabled the author, by identifying the Son with the word, to engage in a polemical interpretation of the Johannine prologue not found in the final hymn.

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<sup>40</sup> Turner 1986, 63–71, 74; 1990, 375–384; 2001, 142–151; 2005, 405–412.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Poirier 1983 and 2010.

<sup>42</sup> *Secret Book* II 2.13–15; BG 21.19–21 (pp. 18–19 Waldstein and Wisse); and II 9.10–11; BG 35.18–19; III 13.15–16 (pp. 54–55 Waldstein and Wisse).

If the *Three Forms* is basically a text that integrates material from various sources, it does so in a way that constantly makes use of the reader's memory and competence. This is particularly the case for several of the mythological themes from the *Secret Book* which our treatise alludes to in a way so succinct that they could only be understood if the reader already knew the more elaborate version, be it the anointing of Christ by Protennoia (p. 37.30b–38.10), the founding of the four illuminators (p. 38.30b–39.7a) or the creation of man by the demiurge (p. 40.24–29). From this point of view, without being too strict about the meaning of this term we could say that the way in which the *Three Forms* reveals a deliberate intertextuality, is by effecting a composite elaboration of the Pronoia-Barbelo figure from the *Secret Book* as father, mother, and son, and sound, voice, and word.

The *Three Forms* is a work whose composition and redaction are later than those of the long version of the *Secret Book*, on which it obviously depends. The date attributed to it, therefore, depends on that of the long version. This issue has been variously treated<sup>43</sup> and I will not enter into this debate. Theoretically, the *Three Forms* could have been composed at any time between the production of the long version in its Greek form and the translation of our treatise from Greek into Coptic. If this *terminus ante quem* is relatively easy to fix, let us say in the middle of the first half of the fourth century, the *terminus post quem* is more difficult to evaluate. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suggest that the Greek redaction of the *Three Forms* was no later than the first half of the third century, if we consider the sources used by the text, such as the long version of the *Secret Book* and other traditional material, to come from the end of the second century or later.

At any rate, the treatise had to have been composed in an environment where the *Secret Book* and related works were being read and commented on, an environment open to various religious and philosophical influences, apparently Christian, but of a “gnostic” character. This could be somewhere in the eastern Mediterranean, Egypt, or Syria, but a Western location such as Rome could not be excluded, since both Irenaeus (in Lyons) and Porphyry (in Rome) attest to the circulation of Sethian books in the West, while there is no firm attestation of them in the East before the production of the Nag Hammadi Codices themselves.<sup>44</sup> As for the manuscript that has preserved

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<sup>43</sup> Cf., for instance, Tardieu 1984, 45 (ca. 250 CE); Logan 1996, 55 (ca. 240 CE); and Turner 2001, 220 (ca. 180 CE).

<sup>44</sup> We can apply to the *Three Forms* what D. Dimant said of certain apocryphal and pseudepigraphical texts, “conceived as written compositions, and ... produced in a literate

the Coptic version of the treatise, it can be situated more precisely. Its script, language, and even codicology indicate the same environment that transmitted the long version of the *Secret Book* from Nag Hammadi Codex II. In addition, the presence of so many identical formulations in both texts suggests that both passed from Greek into Coptic in the same environment.

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milieu" (Dimant 1988, 381). I thank Lance Jenott for having drawn my attention to the possibility of a Western location for the production of the *Three Forms*.

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EMISSARIES OF TRUTH AND JUSTICE:  
THE SEED OF SETH AS AGENTS OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE

Lance Jenott

Scholars usually describe Sethian Christians as people who sought to sever ties with society because of their world-rejecting ethos.<sup>1</sup> Giovanni Filoramo, for example, concludes that “to define oneself as the ‘seed of Seth’, ‘the unwavering race’, ‘the race that knows no sovereign’, earthly or heavenly, implied, at least, theoretically, a group that was more rigid and compact internally, in total retreat from the surrounding world.” For Filoramo, the Sethians not only demonstrated their retreat from the world doctrinally, in their denigration of the creator and allegedly pessimistic attitude toward the cosmos, but also enacted it socially in their community organization and relationships with outsiders; he contrasts “the more ambiguous, flexible encounter of the Valentinians with the world” with the Sethians’ “rigid, intolerant, exclusive conception of salvation typical of the average Gnostic conventicle, which was closed to the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Such generic formulations about Gnostics maintain that their anti-cosmic attitude was rooted in the belief that the world was created by divine beings (angels, demons, heavenly rulers, etc.) other than the true God, and

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<sup>1</sup> I will speak of Sethian Christians (or simply Sethians) since I think the term Gnostic is too ambiguous to be used as a helpful label for only one group of Christians. Although some scholars have attempted to define the Gnostics as a single ancient “school of thought” (e.g., Bentley Layton, Alastair Logan, David Brakke), I believe that it is still better to avoid the term if for no other reason than the fact that its conventional modern usage refers to a much larger variety of religious movements and therefore too easily obscures which groups and texts are meant. And since a variety of ancient Christians *other* than those more narrowly defined as “the Gnostic school of thought” by Layton et al. used the term Gnostic as a self-descriptor, it remains problematic for modern scholars to retain the term in reference to only one group. Besides, so many misleading clichés have been associated with the term Gnostic for so long that it is productive to use other labels. The potential hermeneutical benefits of replacing old labels with new ones should be clear to readers familiar with recent trends in New Testament studies, where many researchers now prefer to speak of Jesus’ early followers as members of “the Jesus movement” rather than as Christians. The new term helps free the people and texts under view from misleading and anachronistic conceptions.

<sup>2</sup> Filoramo 1990, 174.



that these malicious creators ensnare people into their illusory creation and afflict them with anguish throughout a meaningless life that leads nowhere but death. Although the souls of the Gnostics fell into this cesspool of a life through a cosmic tragedy, they have come, by divine revelation, to know the truth about themselves and the world; they take comfort in the fact that they alone among humanity are saved by their unique nature. Thus they feel alienated from the world and seek to remove themselves from it, looking forward to the day when their escape will be complete.<sup>3</sup>

Yet this picture of an exclusive cult “in total retreat from the surrounding world” does not fit with the evidence we have for some of the Sethians’ this-worldly activities and social concerns in third-century Rome. As Rudolph correctly observes, Sethians practiced a kind of “city religion” by living, teaching, and proselytizing in major urban centers of the Roman empire.<sup>4</sup> In fact some Sethians appear to have *sought out* relationships with the uninitiated from both ends of the social spectrum; they made friends with esteemed philosophers such as Plotinus on the one hand, and preached to the very poorest of people (τοὺς φαυλότατους) on the other.<sup>5</sup> As a number of scholars have observed, Plotinus’ Sethian friends even carried on a sort of healing ministry among the sick in Rome which, far from teaching them to hate their bodies, sought to cure them from diseases. That is, physical, bodily health was something valued by these Sethian evangelists.<sup>6</sup>

The same Sethians appear very concerned—in fact too concerned in Plotinus’ opinion—about real issues of social justice as well, including economic disparity, power relations between haves and have-nots, and the unfair treatment of criminals. Plotinus insinuates that they object “to wealth and poverty, and the fact that everyone does not have an equal share in such things,” that “those who have acquired more have an advantage” and that “those in power have an advantage over private persons.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore,

<sup>3</sup> Jonas 1963, 42–47.

<sup>4</sup> Rudolph 1984, 291.

<sup>5</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.3–4; 18.17; 5.9. I follow the Greek text in Henry and Schwyzler 1964, vol. 1. Thanks to Porphyry’s detailed explanation of when Plotinus wrote his various treatises (*Vit. Plot.* 4–6), we can securely date *Enn.* 2.9 to around 263–268 CE. As far as we know, Plotinus wrote it in the city of Rome where he lectured regularly. For a chronological arrangement of Plotinus’ compositions, see the helpful table in Armstrong 1966, xxxvii. For a brief overview of Plotinus’ life and works, see Wallis 1995, 37–47.

<sup>6</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 14. See the contribution by Williams in this volume and idem 1996, 133–134; King 2006, 152–153.

<sup>7</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.1–5.

Plotinus goes on to chastise them for complaining about the treatment of criminals: “It is agreed that there are judgments and punishments here (*δικας εἶναι ἐνθάδε καὶ κολάσεις*). How, then, is it right to blame a city for giving each one what he deserves?”<sup>8</sup>

Plotinus’ picture of the Sethians’ healing the sick and talking about social ills is a far cry from typical formulations about their total disinterest in society. Kurt Rudolph, for example, concludes that,

Gnosis, at least according to the present state of our knowledge, took no interest of any kind in a reform of earthly conditions but only in their complete and final destruction. It possessed no other “revolutionary” programme for altering conditions, as they appeared to it, than the elimination of earthly structures in general and the restoration of the ideal world of the spirit that existed in the very beginning.<sup>9</sup>

To the contrary, taking the evidence from Plotinus as a starting point, I argue that Sethians saw themselves as a holy people with a mission in the world—a people sent by divine providence<sup>10</sup> to work toward the improvement of worldly conditions and the rectification of injustice, disorder, and deficiency. If the Sethians had no organized “programme for altering conditions,” as Rudolph maintains, they nevertheless were troubled enough by some of those conditions to perform healings among the masses and debate questions about injustice with leading intellectuals like Plotinus. Indeed, the apocalypse of *Zostrianos*—one of the Sethian apocalypses known to Plotinus and his students—depicts its eponymous prophet returning to

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<sup>8</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.17–19. The Sethians’ criticism of unjust practices in the criminal-justice system could be seen as a response to the growing use of judicial violence (*saevitia*) for punishments in the third century, including an increase of crimes “on the books” for which one could receive capital punishment. See MacMullen 1990; Bauman 1996, 3–8, 35–49, 141–160. Fresh memories of persecution may also have prompted the Sethians’ complaints; as Dylan M. Burns has recently suggested, some Sethians may have suffered martyrdom during the persecutions under emperors Decius (r. 249–251) and Valerian (r. 253–260) just a few years before Plotinus wrote his critical treatise. See Burns 2011, Appendix B, “Sethian Crowns, Sethian Martyrs?”

<sup>9</sup> Rudolph 1984, 264–265. Rudolph’s reading of Gnostic myth as a political criticism of Roman authority popularizes the thesis already set forth by Kippenberg (1970), who finds that “Der antike Gnostizismus kennt keine legitime Ordnung und Macht ... Dass das Verhältnis des Demiurgen zum Menschen ein Herrschaftsverhältnis ist, hinter dem die Struktur des Imperium Romanum durchschimmert, sei ein ein paar Systemen verifiziert ... Der Mensch, der unter dieser Macht lebt, ist zur Rebellion aufgerufen” (219–220). Karen King also elaborates upon Kippenberg’s thesis (King 2006, 157–173).

<sup>10</sup> I use the term “providence” in lower case to refer to the general idea of divine guidance acting in history, and not to the more specific personification of *πρόνοια* (“Providence”) who sometimes appears in Sethian writings.

the world after a life-saving revelation in order to openly proclaim a message of salvation. Zostrianos' sermon even includes a hopeful promise for people experiencing suffering, that the kind Father will not abandon them "even when you are ill-treated."<sup>11</sup> Despite the fact that the prophet Zostrianos is a purely fictional character, the missionary outlook that his apocalypse assumes hardly suggests that its author and readers would have seen themselves as closed-off to the surrounding world or not troubled by social problems related to human suffering.

In this essay, I survey a further group of Sethian writings—the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*—that depict the "seed of Seth" as a divinely appointed people, bearers of the holy spirit, who were sent into the world to rectify corruption by promoting truth and justice. I suggest that the kind of social work performed by the Sethian evangelists whom Plotinus knew may have been inspired, at least in part, by their mythological self-understanding as agents of providence.<sup>12</sup> But before turning to the texts, I begin with a discussion about how mythical writings like these contributed to the formation of new identities for those who joined Seth's holy race by "resocializing" them into a new vision of the world and their special purpose in it.

### 1. BECOMING "THE SEED OF SETH": RESOCIALIZATION INTO A NEW SELF-IMAGE

In his studies of moral transformation among early Christians, Wayne Meeks highlights the process of "resocialization" and "relearning" that ritual initiates underwent as they appropriated new symbols, metaphors, and myths from the groups they joined. As the initiate learned about the community's authoritative narratives (e.g., biblical stories about the God of Israel, how he cares for his chosen people, and the salvation brought by Jesus) he or she was re-educated into a different explanation of the world and its history. Converts learned to understand themselves through new metaphors such

<sup>11</sup> *Zost.* 130–132, trans. John D. Turner, in Meyer 2007, 582–583.

<sup>12</sup> There is of course no evidence that the Sethian Christians whom Plotinus knew were reading *Ap. John*, *Holy Book*, or *Apoc. Adam*, though Porphyry does mention that they had in their possession "many treatises" (συγγράμματα πλείστα [*Vit. Plot.* 16]). Nevertheless, this Sethian self-understanding can be found in a number of their writings, and fits well with what Plotinus says about the activities and social concerns of his Sethian friends.

as “slaves of God” and “the holy ones,” and often through kinship metaphors that strengthened their sense of belonging to a unique family or people, as for example the “children of God,” “children of Abraham,” “brothers and sisters,” even a “third race” in contrast to gentiles and Jews. Furthermore, as myths provided moral examples that formed the basis for ethical reflection and action, they inculcated “communities of character” in which people began to see themselves as actors in God’s drama and strove to live out the values embedded in the story.<sup>13</sup>

Meeks’ emphasis on the transformation of one’s self-image through learning the stories of a religious community applies to the formation of a unique Sethian self-understanding as well. Among Sethians, as for many other Christians, ritual baptism played a central role in the transformative process. In his detailed study of Sethian baptismal rites, John Turner describes how the initiate was led through various symbolic acts and invocations, including the renunciation of worldly life, the evocation of spiritual powers, multiple immersions in water, anointing, investiture, and enthronement. Using Arnold van Gennep’s tripartite schema for delineating rites of passage—separation, liminality, and reincorporation—Turner describes the final phase of Sethian initiation as “a ritual incorporation into an elect group, the ‘seed of Seth,’ and into a new state of awareness, the advent of a new cosmic situation such as the defeat of hostile cosmic powers and the dissolution of chaos.”<sup>14</sup>

Sethian mythology resocialized initiates into a new identity as the children of Seth by teaching them the community’s unique stories about the race’s divine origins, its ongoing struggle with evil, and special role in world history. Baptismal initiates were presumably educated about such stories orally by teachers and other members, as well as textually by reading or hearing the community’s writings. As scholars have observed, some of our extant Sethian literature evinces such ritual settings where the community’s stories would have been taught: the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* has been described as “the mythological justification of a well-defined ritual of baptism.”<sup>15</sup> The book first sets forth a lengthy Sethian catechism that includes a theogony, cosmogony, anthropogony, and a sweeping account of

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<sup>13</sup> Meeks 1986, 11–17; 1993, 8–13. Meeks adopts the phrase “communities of character” from the contemporary Christian theologian Hauerwas (1981), whose work emphasizes the role that story (myth), particularly the biblical story, plays in the formation of Christian ethics.

<sup>14</sup> Turner 2006, 944; cf. van Gennep 1909.

<sup>15</sup> Schenke 1981, 600.

salvation history, then concludes with ritual doxologies and gestures performed during a complex baptismal rite.<sup>16</sup> Another Sethian writing, the *Three Steles of Seth*, involves a communal liturgy, spoken in the first person plural, which praises various divine figures in the Sethian pantheon. The process of resocialization for new initiates most likely started in catechetical lessons, was confirmed in baptism, and was then strengthened afterward by repeated communal prayers and the recitation of the community's myths.

Scholars have already discussed some of the unique metaphors for self-understanding encouraged by Sethian texts; for example, the way the Sethians characterized themselves as the “kingless” and “immoveable” race signifies their ethical ideal of *apatheia*—freedom from passions—through which they sought health, psychological stability, and spiritual liberation from the capricious movements of demons potentially at work in their bodies.<sup>17</sup> The stories in Sethian literature I am most interested in here, however, are those which encouraged members to see themselves as a people with a divinely appointed mission, sent by providence to help others in the world, to promote truth and justice, and to work toward the correction of deficiency. The figure of Seth himself, the primordial patriarch of their race, is telling in this regard, as already in the narrative of Genesis he represents a new beginning for humanity after the tragedy of Cain and Abel (Gen 4:25). In what follows, I survey three Sethian stories, the *Apocryphon of John*, the *Apocalypse of Adam*, and the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit*, to see how they inculcate such a self-image in their readers by the way they portray the origins and purpose of Seth's race in the world.

## 2. THE APOCRYPHON OF JOHN

The *Apocryphon of John* describes the birth of Seth, and the subsequent activity of his seed, as a moment of salvation for humanity orchestrated by heavenly providence. In this story, Jesus tells his disciple John the son of Zebedee about an ongoing battle waged between the benevolent heavenly powers (the Invisible Spirit working through his Providence [πρόνοια]) and

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<sup>16</sup> Turner 2006, 955–956. The stories told in the *Apocalypse of Adam* and *Trimorphic Protennoia* may have been used in baptismal settings as well, as Turner's study suggests.

<sup>17</sup> See Williams 1985, 127–129; King 2006, 138–141.

the malicious world-ruler Yaldabaoth who, along with his gang of demons, created the psychic and material bodies of Adam. The narrative follows a series of moves and counter-moves in which Providence attempts to supply Adam and his descendants with apotropaic knowledge, power, and intellect that will make them superior to the demons, while in response, the demons continue to devise machinations that lead humanity astray and keep it in subordination. As one of his many schemes for domination, the world-ruler rapes Eve and plants within her the passion of sexual desire (ἐπιθυμία);<sup>18</sup> he thereby ensures that through the process of sexual reproduction future generations of humanity will be made to serve him: “he produced through intercourse the copies of the bodies and he inspired them with his counterfeit spirit” (NHC II 24.15–31).<sup>19</sup>

However, as Karen King observes, Yaldabaoth’s implantation of sexual lust in Eve results in yet another instance of his failure to dominate humanity. His plan to pollute humanity with sexual desire and his counterfeit spirit fails when Adam and Eve’s first carnal union leads to the birth of their son Seth in the “likeness of the Son of Man,” that is, in the likeness of the heavenly Seth.<sup>20</sup> Although the two versions of the *Apocryphon* give somewhat different and obscure accounts of Seth’s birth, both relate that Seth and the subsequent reception of the spirit by his seed were acts of Providence intended as part of a broader plan to correct deficiency in the world:

The Birth of Seth in the *Apocryphon of John*

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BG 63.12–64.13

NHC II 24.34–25.16

He (Adam)<sup>21</sup> knew his essence (οὐσία —i.e., Eve) which resembled him. And Adam begot Seth, indeed in the way of the heavenly race in the aeons.

Now when Adam knew the likeness of his own foreknowledge, he begat Seth in the likeness of the Son of Man<sup>22</sup> and named him Seth after the way of the race in the aeons.

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<sup>18</sup> In the short version of *Ap. John*, Yaldabaoth implants sexual desire into Adam, not Eve.

<sup>19</sup> I follow the text in Waldstein and Wisse 1995.

<sup>20</sup> King 2006, 128–129.

<sup>21</sup> Here and below, the parenthetical glosses on the pronouns are my own and reflect the way I interpret the texts.

<sup>22</sup> I.e., the heavenly Seth; cf. *Ap. John* II 8.32–9.13 and 14.13–15.

BG 63.12–64.13

In this way the mother (i.e., Sophia) sent the one (m.—the spirit) who belongs to her. The spirit came to it (f.—the essence/Eve)<sup>23</sup> so that he might awaken the essence which is like him in the form of perfection, to awaken them (Adam and Eve)<sup>24</sup> from forgetfulness and the wickedness of the tomb.

And in this way he (the spirit) remained for a while and assisted the seed<sup>26</sup> so that when the spirit comes from the holy aeons he might establish them (i.e., members of the seed) outside the deficiency for the correction of the aeon, so that it might become a holy perfection, (and) so that it shall come to have no deficiency in it.

NHC II 24.34–25.16

Similarly, the mother (i.e., Sophia) also sent down her spirit in her likeness and as a copy of the one which is in the pleroma. For she will prepare a dwelling for the aeons which will descend. And (they were made)<sup>25</sup> to drink water of forgetfulness by the chief ruler so that they might not know whence they came.

It is in this way that the seed dwelt for a while, assisting, so that when the spirit comes from the holy aeons he will correct it and heal it from deficiency, so that the entire pleroma shall become holy and without deficiency.

Seth's birth and the arrival of the spirit through him and his seed is a significant moment in the *Apocryphon's* narrative since, as Michael Williams observes, it is the fifth and final instance in which Providence acts to "set straight" deficiency in the world.<sup>27</sup> In both versions of the story, Sophia, a manifestation of heavenly Providence, uses the opportunity of Seth's birth to send her corrective spirit into the world through the person of Seth. The spirit strives to awaken people's essence from the "tomb" in which it has

<sup>23</sup> I understand  $\kappa\alpha\varsigma$  as an indirect object anticipating  $\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha$  by prolepsis (following Williams 1985, 125).

<sup>24</sup> The plural "them" has no clear antecedent in the narrative but probably refers to Adam and Eve since they are the only two human actors at this point in the story. It may also refer to the offspring of Adam and Eve whose bodies—referred to here as "the tomb"—were begotten through the desire for sexual intercourse implanted in humanity and inspired by Yaldabaoth's counterfeit spirit.

<sup>25</sup> Although the text of both NHC II and IV reads "And *he* made them drink water of forgetfulness by the chief ruler" ( $\alpha\delta\tau\epsilon\sigma\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \dot{\nu}\omicron\gamma\mu\omicron\sigma\upsilon\gamma\ \dot{\nu}\beta\omega\delta\epsilon\ \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \epsilon\gamma\tau\dot{\iota}\ \pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\rho\alpha\rho\chi\omega\tau\eta$ ), I emend it to the passive construction  $\alpha\langle\gamma\rangle\tau\epsilon\sigma\omicron\upsilon\gamma$ . As Waldstein and Wisse (1995, 5) note that the recensions in II and IV derive from the same Coptic translation, the error (a misreading of  $\rho$  in place of  $\gamma$ ) may have been first introduced into a common ancestor from which both II and IV ultimately derive.

<sup>26</sup> Waldstein and Wisse incorrectly translate  $\pi\epsilon\sigma\pi\epsilon\rho\mu\alpha$ , "the seed," as "her seed," though the reference is clearly to the seed of Seth "in the manner of the heavenly race in the aeons."

<sup>27</sup> Williams 1985, 125–126.

been buried, that is, from the bodies produced by sexual intercourse and infused with Yaldabaoth's counterfeit spirit (BG 63.5–12; II 24.26–32). Thus Seth, and apparently his “seed” after him, serve as couriers and agents of the holy spirit working toward the gradual perfection of the world. Sophia's spirit works through the seed of Seth in order to correct deficiency in this realm (the aeon), ultimately leading to the time when it will be perfected and “shall come to have no deficiency in it.”

The version in Codex II actually enhances the agency of Seth's seed in this process of the aeon's healing and perfection by explicitly stating that “the seed dwelt for a while, assisting” (εφῆρξυπογρηει [ύπουρηγειν]), presumably aiding the spirit in its work to “correct deficiency,” and helping other people awake from their “tomb.” The *Apocryphon's* narrative therefore encourages the children of Seth to see themselves as intimately linked with Providence's healing and perfecting work by depicting them as bearers of the spirit who “assist” in the gradual improvement of the world.

### 3. THE APOCALYPSE OF ADAM

Although most of this “apocalypse” relates a vision that Adam received from three heavenly visitors, the genre of its frame narrative can be viewed as a final testament: Adam, nearing death at the ripe old age of 930 years,<sup>28</sup> communicates to Seth the revelation he received as a much younger man regarding the future history of Seth's race. He tells Seth about the persecutions his race will suffer at the hands of the malicious world-ruler (including a flood and conflagration, both based on the stories in Genesis), as well as their relationship with the other human races that shall descend from Noah's three sons—Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

Adam's *Apocalypse* has often been read as yet another product of the typical Gnostic attitude of world-hatred and alienation. According to Guy Stroumsa, the Sethians in this story are “in a word, *strangers* to the demiurge and to his powers; they belong to the holy angels in the aeons ... This *alienation* from the world and its rules, a major theme in Gnostic symbolic language, has been thoroughly analyzed by Jonas and Puech. The Gnostics kept themselves apart.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> As the incipit states: “The revelation which Adam taught his son Seth in the seven hundredth year.” This places Adam in his nine hundred and thirtieth year, the age at which he died (Gen 5:5), based on the LXX version of Gen 5:3 (“Adam lived 230 years and begat Seth”; where the Hebrew text reads 130 years). I follow the edition of MacRae in Parrott 1979, 151–195.

<sup>29</sup> Stroumsa 1984, 87 (original emphasis).



Yet Stroumsa's evaluation only captures a very narrow part of the way that the *Apocalypse of Adam* portrays the Sethians' experience in the world. They are certainly no friends of the hostile creator-god Sakla; they are portrayed as a holy people protected by angels, and even come to inhabit their own share of land in the post-diluvian era. But that alone hardly constitutes an experience of "alienation" from the world or an attempt to be "kept apart." Rather, as we shall see, Sethian readers of this book would likely have been encouraged to see themselves as a special people sent into the world to illuminate, protect, and save other races from the forces of evil.

In the brief history of the Sethian people foreseen in the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the inhabitants of the world are descendants of Adam and Eve's two sons, Seth and Cain (Abel is not mentioned, probably because he had no descendants to speak of). Although Cain is not explicitly mentioned by name, he likely appeared—or was at least alluded to—in a section of the manuscript, now damaged, which describes how Sakla sired a son with Eve (66.25–27). While Adam says that Seth's race will preserve "the life of knowledge" which came from him and Eve, the rest of the human race, presumably the descendents of Cain, will lead lives of sin and ignorance. Adam warns Seth that his race will be persecuted by Sakla since "they were strangers to him": first by the flood, then by a great conflagration (adapting the story of God's rain of fire on Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19). In the persecution by flood, Sakla attempts to destroy all humanity, perhaps implying that Cain and his descendents had not yet started to worship him at that time. In order to ensure that all of humanity serves him, Sakla preserves for himself a small contingent of people on the ark—namely Noah and his family—to whom he grants rule of the world, "like kings," provided that they worship only him.

After the flood, Sakla believes he has killed everyone else on earth, including the race of Seth, and so commands Noah that "no seed shall come from you of the people who will not stand in my presence in another glory." What Sakla does not know, however, and what the reader here learns, is that the race of Seth—those people "from another glory" who will not stand in Sakla's presence—actually survived the flood. For before the waters come upon the earth, guardian angels descend "on high clouds" to save Seth's race by evacuating them, temporarily, into the heavens "where the spirit of life dwells" (69.2–71.8).

Now according to the traditional view of world-hating, alienated Gnostics, one might expect the history of the Sethians to end here. After all, they have been "rescued" from the world of the evil creator, and rest with the spirit

of life in the heavenly realms. But this is not the end of their story, for Seth's race is sent back to the world after the flood:

Then they will become like the cloud of the great light; those people shall come, namely those who have been sent forth (ἀγνοῶσθε εἶθελ) <sup>30</sup> from the knowledge of the great realms and the angels. They shall stand before Noah and the realms; and god (i.e., Sakla) will say to Noah, "Why have you disobeyed what I told you? You created another race so that you might scorn my power." Then Noah will say, "I shall witness before your might that it was not from me that this generation of people came, nor [from my sons!]" (71.10–26)

Adam foresees that after Seth's race returns to the world after the flood, they shall enter their "own land, a holy dwelling place" where they will dwell peacefully under the protection of holy angels, and live ethically "with no foul deed in their heart." Meanwhile, Noah divides the rest of the world among his three sons, and exhorts them to obey Sakla "in fear and slavery all the days of your life" (72.1–25). Hence in the post-diluvian era, the world becomes divided into four parts, three for each of the sons of Noah who worship Sakla, and one for the descendents of Seth, who remain pure.

Although Adam does not clarify why Seth's race returns to the world, his narrative suggests that it is to continue the providential work of undermining Sakla's dominion, not only by refusing to serve him like the sons of Noah, but also by granting shelter to emigrants from among the gentiles. For as Adam goes on to explain, 400,000 people "from the seed of Ham and Japheth will come ... and enter into another land and sojourn with those men (i.e., the race of Seth) who came forth (ὄψεσθε εἶθελ) from the great eternal knowledge. For the shadow of their power will protect those who have sojourned with them from every evil thing" (73.13–20). The Sethians who were once saved from the flood now become saviors themselves by receiving and protecting others from among the sons of Ham and Japheth (the implicit criticism of Jews, the descendents of Shem, is obvious). Together with the Sethians, these gentile emigrants "overturn" all the glory, power, and dominion of Sakla, and "change (his) entire crowd" (74.13–26). That is, the gentiles who defect from Ham and Japheth's lands to the territory of the Sethians upset the geopolitical and racial boundaries established between the four races.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Other translators render the phrase "cast forth" and even "expelled" (MacRae in Parrott 1979; Meyer 2007, 349). Although the verb νοῦσθε εἶθελ sometimes translates the Greek βάλλω etc., it may also translate verbs such as ἀφιέναι and ἐξαποστέλλειν (Crum 1939, 248A). "Send forth" fits the narrative context nicely, since here Seth's seed are returning to the world in order to challenge Sakla's power and make converts from among the gentiles (see below).

<sup>31</sup> See Stroumsa 1984, 85–86 for a very different interpretation. In his view, the 400,000

Now Sakla, angered by the defectors and their Sethian protectors, decides to punish them by raining down fire, asphalt, and sulphur. Yet once again, holy angels descend to rescue the Sethians and the gentile sojourners by lifting them on clouds into the heavens where they themselves “will be like those angels” (75.9–76.5).

Again, one might expect the story to end here since all the holy people have been saved. However, providence continues to work against Sakla by attempting to draw even more people away from his crowd. Adam relates to Seth that a messianic “illuminator” shall eventually arrive (probably a reference to Jesus)<sup>32</sup> who will scorn the demonic rulers by “signs and wonders.” Sethian readers of the text would then learn that they too have a role to play in this latter-day drama of salvation, just as their ancestors had done in the era after the flood. For Adam sees that the illuminator comes “so that he might leave for himself fruit-bearing trees” whose souls “he shall redeem from the day of death” (75.8–17).

The metaphor of the “fruit-bearing tree” has obvious ethical implications,<sup>33</sup> and also suggests a sense of purpose and mission in the world. Indeed, as readers learn at the end of the revelation, the illuminator enlightens such people “in order that they might illuminate the whole realm” (82.28–83.4). Thus Sethian readers of the *Apocalypse of Adam* would be encouraged to see themselves as the messiah’s “fruit-bearing trees” who, in turn, have been appointed to bring light into the world. It is hard

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emigrants from Ham and Japheth must be the seed of Seth themselves, who “remained pure” after the flood by not serving Sakla. He then identifies their hosts, “those men who came forth from the great eternal knowledge,” with angels. Although Stroumsa considers the alternative interpretation that I advocate here, he ultimately rejects it because, in his view, “the 400,000 would have to be seen as converts to Gnosticism. Such a possibility is excluded by the rigidly racial theology of *Apoc. Adam*.” However, a number of studies on ethnicity language among early Christians (including Sethians) have convincingly shown that racial identity was a much more flexible concept than has often been assumed, so that people could in fact become members of different races. See Williams 1985, 158–185; Buell 2005. Although strictly speaking the *Apoc. Adam* does not say that the 400,000 literally “became” the seed of Seth, the idea of conversion is nevertheless not inappropriate here to describe their emigration, sojourn, and ultimate salvation with the Sethians.

<sup>32</sup> This identification is of course not made by those scholars who regard the *Apocalypse of Adam* as a product of a hypothetical pre-Christian, Jewish Gnosticism. I however follow the hypothesis that all of our Sethian writings were produced by Christian sectarians, and that the lack of explicit references to Jesus in *Apoc. Adam* is due to its pseudepigraphic frame-narrative (Adam’s vision of future events). Adam goes on to describe how the demonic forces will act wrathfully against the illuminator and “punish the flesh of that man upon whom the holy spirit came” (77.7–18).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Prov 11:30; 12:12; Mark 4:13–20; Matt 7:15–20; Luke 3:9; 6:43–44; John 15:2.

to imagine that such a self-image would be cherished by people who took no interest in improving the society they lived in.

#### 4. THE *HOLY BOOK OF THE GREAT INVISIBLE SPIRIT*

If the *Holy Book* was read as a catechism before a baptismal ritual, new initiates into the seed of Seth would learn there too about their important role in the rectification of a corrupt world. Already in its narrative of how the heavens and their denizens were created, the *Holy Book* describes the pre-incarnate seed of Seth as a people with a preordained purpose: they are destined to enter the world, which is “the image of the night” (cf. John 1:5, 9), not as alienated sojourners, but as a providential light, “the holy people of the great light coming into the world” (III 51.1–5). So when the heavenly Adam asks for a son, the heavenly Seth, he does so with an explicit view to rehabilitate and dissolve the corrupt world that he foresees shall come about in the future:

Adamas asked them (i.e., the other heavenly beings) for a son from himself, in order that he (the son) might become father of the immovable, incorruptible race, so that through it (f.—the race of Seth) silence and sound may appear, and so that through it (f.—the race) the dead aeon might arise and dissolve.<sup>34</sup>  
(III 51.6–14)

Heavenly Adam’s primordial plan, then, is that through the agency of Seth’s race, the “dead aeon”—that is, the future world which will fall under the governance of an apostate angel—shall “arise” and be “dissolved.” I take this to mean not that the world itself shall be destroyed, but rather its present state of death and corruption; hence later in the *Holy Book*’s narrative, one reads of “the reconciliation (Ϸⲟⲩⲏ) of the world” effected by the savior, heavenly Seth, who arrives in the person of the living Jesus (III 62.24–64.3).<sup>35</sup> The original purpose of the heavenly race of Seth, to serve as a light to the world, is then fulfilled later in the book’s narrative when, as we shall see, Seth sends his race into the world with the approval of the divine Father to help perfect the deficiency created there by the apostasy of its angelic ruler.

<sup>34</sup> I follow the Coptic text in Böhlig and Wisse 1975.

<sup>35</sup> The “reconciliation (Ϸⲟⲩⲏ) of the world” is in fact referred to twice in this passage (III 63.9; 63.16–17; IV 74.24; 75.3). At III 63.16–17 one reads of “the reconciliation of the world with the world,” presumably meaning that the present, corrupted world shall eventually be reunited with the heavenly world. The spelling Ϸⲟⲩⲃ, “killing,” in the parallel text at 75.3 appears to be a scribal error or more likely a variant pronunciation by the interchange of bilabials *p* and *b*.

Unlike the *Apocryphon of John's* story about the transgression of Sophia, the *Holy Book* attributes the origins of worldly corruption to the rebellion of the angel Saklas. It explains that the material world was created when beneficent heavenly powers (the angelic ministers of the god Autogenes) called forth an angel to rule over the "realm of chaos"—apparently an act of providence to subject disorder to order. Through the mediation of Sophia, the angel Saklas appears to carry out the task. It is important to note that at this point in the story there is no schism in the heavens; in fact, Saklas faithfully performs his mandate by creating the world "according to the will of Autogenes" (III 56.22–57.26).

In the *Holy Book's* story, trouble begins only "after the creation of the cosmos" when Saklas becomes arrogant and rebels against his superiors; his apostasy is marked by his proclamation, in the words of the God of Israel, that "I, I am a [jealous] God, and apart from me nothing has [come into being]."<sup>36</sup> After Saklas' boast, a mysterious voice, probably from heavenly Sophia, speaks out of heaven to correct him by revealing that "Man exists and the Son of Man"—that is, the heavenly Adam and his son Seth existed long before Saklas. Yet since the arrogant angel caught a glimpse of the voice's image, he was able to "fashion" (πλασσει) the first humans after it (III 58.23–59.9; cf. Gen 2:7). Thus the *Holy Book* does not provide a long rewriting of the Genesis story about Adam and Eve and their children, but simply implies that earthly humanity was created by Saklas and now lives under his domination.

Yet like the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the *Holy Book* tells a story about God's providential care for humanity and the eventual correction of the defects initiated by Saklas. In its typically prolix style—perhaps a deliberate way of endowing the book with a mystical aura appropriate for a ritual setting—the *Holy Book* explains that the heavenly Father thwarts Saklas and saves humanity by sending into the world the power of "Repentance (μετάνοια)," apparently as a personified being, along with the race of Seth:

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<sup>36</sup> The first part of Saklas' boast alludes to Exod 20:5 ("I am a jealous God"); the second part, however, appears to be an allusion to John 1:3 ("all things came into being through him, and apart from him not one thing came into being"), which is unique among the forms of the archon's boast preserved in related texts (*Ap. John* II 13.8 par.; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29.4). The allusion to John 1:3 is further evidence that the *Holy Book* was originally composed in a Christian milieu, contrary to the hypothesis of scholars who maintain that it was secondarily "Christianized"; see Böhlig 1969, 1–18; Hedrick 1981, neither of whom note the allusion to John.

Repentance came on account of this one (m.—the human being fashioned by Saklas). She (Repentance) received her perfection and power by the will of the Father and his approval with which he approved of the great, incorruptible, immovable race of the great, mighty men of the great Seth, so that he (the Father or Seth) might sow it (f.—the race of Seth) into the realms which were created, (and) so that through her (Repentance)<sup>37</sup> the deficiency might be perfected. For she had come forth from above to below, to the world which is the image of the night. When she came, she prayed for the seed of the ruler of this realm and the authorities that came from him—that polluted (seed) which shall be destroyed, (the seed) from the demon-begetting god—and (she prayed) for the seed of Adam, which is like the sun, and the great Seth.

(III 59.9–60.2)

Despite the difficult syntax of the passage, the sense seems to be that the Father dispatched Repentance “from above to below” around the same time that Seth’s race was “sown” into the world. The Father sends Repentance “so that deficiency might be perfected,” and so that she might pray for humanity (“the seed of Adam”), including the “polluted seed” of Saklas, as well as for the great Seth himself. In the narrative sequence of the *Holy Book*, the prayer of Repentance appears to be preparatory for the arrival (“sowing”) of the race of Seth, which was already “approved” by the Father; for as we have seen, Seth’s heavenly race was predestined to enter the world as “the holy people of the great light.”

After narrating Repentance’s preparatory prayer, the *Holy Book* goes on to describe how heavenly Seth sowed his seed into the world with the help of two other heavenly powers, namely, the angel Hormos and the female character Edokla.<sup>38</sup>

Then the great angel Hormos came to prepare, through virgins of the polluted sowing of this realm, in a rationally-begotten, holy vessel, through the holy spirit, the seed of the great Seth. Then the great Seth came. He brought his seed and sowed it in the created realms, the number of which is the amount of Sodom. Some say that Sodom is the pasture of the great Seth, which is Gomorrah; but others say that the great Seth took his plant from Gomorrah

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<sup>37</sup> One could also read the feminine pronoun here and afterward as a reference to the race of Seth instead of Repentance so that “through it (f.—Seth’s race) the deficiency might be perfected,” etc. However, this reading would become difficult at the end of the passage, where she/it prays for the seed of Adam and the great Seth. The meaning, then, seems to be that Repentance first came into the world to pray for Adam’s seed and the great Seth, after which time Seth sows his seed into the world.

<sup>38</sup> As John Turner explains in his excellent introduction to this text in Meyer 2007, 248, the *Holy Book* typically narrates the birth or creation of new beings through the parental pairing of a male and female figure. In this episode, the seed of Seth are sown into the world through the union of Edokla with either the angel Hormos or the great Seth himself.

and planted it in the second place, which he named Sodom. This is the race which came through Edokla. For she gave birth through the word to truth and justice, the origin of the seed of eternal life which dwells with those who shall persevere because of the knowledge of their emanation. This is the great, incorruptible race ... (III 60.2–61.1)

This passage has important implications for how members of Seth's race may have imagined themselves as divine emissaries who live by and promote a conduct of holiness, including sexual continence and ethical principles such as "truth and justice." The "virgins of the polluted sowing of this realm," in which the angel Hormos prepared a dwelling place for Seth's race, likely refers to people who abstained from sexual intercourse, or at least certain forms of sexuality that they regarded as "polluted," and thus were deemed worthy of receiving the holy seed when Seth sowed it into the world.<sup>39</sup>

Most significant is that the *Holy Book* marks the beginning of Seth's race ("the seed of eternal life") in world history by the birth of two ethical concepts, "truth and justice" (ἀληθεία καὶ δικαιοσύνη). Böhljig and Wisse speculate, though with little elaboration, that Truth and Justice here are "two goddesses ... personifications of ethical concepts, who form the beginning (ἀρχή) of the seed of eternal life."<sup>40</sup> Ancient Greeks were, of course, familiar with Themis as the goddess of Justice; she personified social order and divine law, and as the consort of Zeus, gave birth to Eunomia (good order), Dike (justice), and Eirene (peace).<sup>41</sup> By identifying Truth and Justice as the beginning, or even source, of Seth's race, the *Holy Book* intimately associates the holy race with the foundations of ethical principles that lie at the heart of society's well-being. Thus the appearance of Seth's race in the world initiates "the time and season of truth and justice" which coexist with and oppose the dominion of the wicked world-ruler "until the consummation of the realm and its rulers" (III 62.15–24).

These narratives about how Seth's holy race was originally sent into the world by the approval of the Father, together with the powers of Repentance, Truth, and Justice, do not sound like the kind of stories people would repeat

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<sup>39</sup> Williams 1985, 145. Sexual abstinence may also be advocated by the *Apocryphon of John* which, as we have seen, ascribes the origins of lust and sexual intercourse to the world-ruler. However, King (2006, 129) suggests that the *Apocryphon* may approve of sexual intercourse without lust conducted for the purposes of procreation, a view similar to that of other early Christian moralists like Clement of Alexandria.

<sup>40</sup> Böhljig and Wisse 1975, 188. Cf. Williams 1985, 144–145.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example, Hesiod, *Theog.* 901–906; Burkert 1985, 185.

about themselves if they had no interest in reforming unjust conditions in society. As myths help shape one's identity, new initiates into the race would internalize such stories about the origins of their ancestral people and learn to see themselves as a positive force in their society, appointed by God to promote truth and justice so that "deficiency might be perfected." Indeed, such a mythological self-understanding may have inspired the kind of healing activities, evangelizing, and concern over social issues of power, wealth, and judicial impropriety that Plotinus attributes to his Sethian friends in Rome.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Contrary to usual descriptions of Sethian Christians as alienated "Gnostics," the pattern that I have elucidated here suggests that they had a rather positive outlook about their purpose in the cosmos. Their myths inculcated within them the self-image of persons intimately linked with the establishment of truth and justice; they were couriers of the providential spirit that worked toward the rectification of deficiency; they were "fruit-bearing trees," "the holy people of the great light coming into the world" to illuminate the whole realm. This portrait, found throughout their own literature, should invite us to reconsider typical descriptions of Sethians as pessimistic social drop-outs who sought only to escape the bonds of the world into which they had fallen by some cosmic tragedy.

As a "city religion," to use Rudolph's apt phrase, the ancient people who considered themselves the seed of Seth were, in fact, much more involved in Roman society than some of their Christian contemporaries. The contrast between the Christian-anchorite mode of "world renunciation" and that of the Sethians cannot be starker: anchorites like Antony of Egypt literally fled from civilization; Sethians stayed in it, renounced its immorality and injustice, but worked to improve it. In fact Antony's view of "the world," at least as bishop Athanasius presents it, appears rather devaluing: "As we look at the world, let us not think that we have renounced anything great; for indeed, the entire earth itself is so insignificant compared to the whole of heaven."<sup>42</sup> While the Sethians regarded the present world as a corrupt place that needed improvement, Antony regarded it as a mere trifle to be transcended in exchange for the heavenly life. Of course, Antony was also

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<sup>42</sup> *Vit. Ant.* 17 (PG 26:868C).



known for helping others, adjudicating legal disputes, and healing the sick; yet he did his social work at a real distance from society, and sometimes only reluctantly; people had to seek him out, even traveling for many days to reach him; he too received the company of disciples, but only after twenty years of a self-imposed solitude, and even then eventually left them for the isolation of the outer desert.<sup>43</sup>

While Sethians apparently shared many ethical values with anchorites, such as *apatheia* and the renunciation of sexual desire,<sup>44</sup> they remained in cities where they lived, proselytized, baptized, healed, and preached morality. They idealized the person who received the holy spirit and was thereby “purified there from all wickedness and associations with evil ... without anger, envy, fear, desire, and greed.”<sup>45</sup> This portrait of the Sethian sage from the *Apocryphon of John* reflects the ideal, virtually impossible ethical lifestyle one might expect to find promoted by a religious movement whose members saw themselves as a “holy race” with a mission to improve the world. And in Plotinus’ criticism of the Sethians’ concern over economic injustice, unbalanced power relations, and the mistreatment of criminals, we may have a glimpse of some of the ways that Sethians actually mobilized their mythological self-understanding amid the social realities of third-century Rome.

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<sup>43</sup> E.g., *Vit. Ant.* 13–14, 81–87. The self-portrait of Antony in his letters, which is more historically reliable in many respects than Athanasius’ *Vita Antonii*, reflects a highly educated spiritual teacher who wrote letters with strong philosophical themes to his disciples. Nevertheless, it was Athanasius’ portrait of an uneducated anchorite seeking ever more distance from the world that inspired later generations of would-be monks. For the letters, see Samuel Rubenson 1995.

<sup>44</sup> For the comparison, see King 2006, 143–144.

<sup>45</sup> *Ap. John* II 25,27–33.

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## SETHIAN NAMES IN MAGICAL TEXTS: PROTOPHANES AND MEIROTHEOS\*

Einar Thomassen

Sethian texts display a number of mythological characters whose names and origins have so far defied efforts to give them historical and philological explanations. We are still in the dark, for example, about the provenance of such central figures as Barbelo and Yaldabaoth, despite several ingenious attempts in the past to solve the riddles of their names. This article will focus on two somewhat less prominent members of the Sethian pantheon, by exploring the possibility that their historical backgrounds may be illuminated by a small group of magical texts where their names seem to appear. It is a pleasure to dedicate this study to my friend John D. Turner, whose ground-breaking work on Sethianism has taught us so much over the years.

### 1. PROTOPHANES

Protophanes, it will be recalled, appears in the four “Platonising Sethian treatises” (*Zostrianos*, *Allogenes*, the *Three Steles of Seth*, *Marsanes*), in which the aeon Barbelo is divided into three levels, or sub-aeons: Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes. The names given to the levels suggest that this peculiar architecture of the Barbelo aeon has its origins in a more dynamic theory according to which Barbelo emerged from the Invisible Spirit and was consolidated as a distinct being through a process of three successive phases: after an initial pre-existence within the ultimate first principle as Kalyptos, Barbelo was then manifested as Protophanes, where what was hidden in Kalyptos unfolded as a unified multiplicity, before the emanation process eventually came to rest in Autogenes, who embodied independent and individual existence, turning towards his source and thereby acquiring unity while being at the same time composed of discrete spiritual forms that

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\* I wish to thank the members of the Antiquity seminar at the University of Bergen for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this essay, and in particular Hege Bakke-Alisøy, Christian H. Bull, Pål Steiner and Ingvild S. Gilhus.

would be capable of interacting with the lower and corporeal levels of being in the subsequent demiurgical process.<sup>1</sup>

The scheme has clear affinities with the Neoplatonic model of emanation through *proodos* and *epistrophē*, and is doubtlessly designed to answer the same kind of ontological problem, viz. how oneness may give rise to multiplicity and how multiplicity may remain dependent on oneness. These philosophical issues and the intricate historical relationship between Sethian and Neoplatonic schemes of ontogenesis will not be pursued here, however. Instead, I propose to take a look at Protophanes himself and the intriguing possibility that his name may appear in two magical texts that will be discussed presently.

Before that, it needs to be noted that a relationship has already been assumed to exist between the Sethian Protophanes and Phanes, the mythological figure that the ancient Orphic theogonies portrayed as the first being to be born from the primordial cosmic egg. Thus, John Turner states that the name Protophanes “seems to be inspired by the Orphic doctrine of Phanes (also called Eros, Metis and Erekepaios) who was ‘first to appear’ from the cosmic egg.”<sup>2</sup> Turner here refers to the *Argonautica Orphica*, lines 14–16, and further notes that not only Phanes’ role as the first being to appear, but also his characterization as “always two-formed” and “looking this way and that” are reflected in the mediating function of the Sethian Protophanes. Admittedly, the name Protophanes as such does not appear in the preserved fragments of ancient *Orphica*; even though Protogonos is used as another name for Phanes in the *Rhapsodies*, the combination Protophanes is not attested. On the other hand Phanes is described as Πρωτόγονος φαέθων, “shining Protogonos,”<sup>3</sup> and the fact that he carries both names is given an explanation by the statement that “he was the first who appeared in the ether” (πρῶτος ἐν Αἰθέρι φαντὸς ἔγεντο),<sup>4</sup> a phrase that is echoed in *Arg. Orph.* 16 πρῶτος γὰρ ἐφάνθη. From this to the use of Protophanes as a name for the Orphic primeval figure is a small step, and one which may plausibly have been taken within the Orphic literary tradition itself before the name came to be appropriated by the Platonising Sethians.<sup>5</sup> The passage in Synesius, *Hymn* 2.87–89, to which Turner also refers (ὕμνω δὲ γόνον τὸν πρωτόγονον καὶ πρωτοφαή), points in the same direction.

<sup>1</sup> See the summary in Turner 2001, 531–547; 2012, 180–181.

<sup>2</sup> Turner 2001, 540–541n37; see already Turner 1980, 340.

<sup>3</sup> *Frg.* 125 Bernabé = 73 Kern.

<sup>4</sup> *Frg.* 126 Bernabé = 75 Kern.

<sup>5</sup> Abramowski 1983, 119.

Now, it is a remarkable fact that the name, or at least the term, Protophanes occurs in two separate sections of the Great Magical Papyrus of Paris (*PGM IV*). The first occurrence is in a hymn invoking the assistance of a solar deity, and which is to be recited as part of a lychnomantic, or lamp divination, ritual,<sup>6</sup> during which the practitioner directs his gaze on the flame rising from the lamp (lines 939–948):

Hail, serpent, and stout lion, natural sources of fire,  
 and hail, clear water and lofty-leafed tree,  
 and you who gather up clover from golden fields of beans,  
 and who cause gentle foam to gush forth from pure mouths,  
 scarab, who drive the orb of gentle fire, self-engendered one,  
 being two-syllabled, ΑἸ, and the first-appearing one,  
 nod me assent, I pray, because your mystic symbols I declare:  
 Ἐὸ Αἰ Οὐ Αμῆρ Οοῦὸθ Ιυῖὸῆ Μαρμαραῦὸθ Λαῖλαμ Σουμάρτα.  
 Be gracious unto me, first-father, and may you yourself send strength as my  
 companion.<sup>7</sup>

The hymn is a nice piece of syncretism: it starts out by alluding, in the first two lines, to the shape-shifting, primordial deity Proteus, whom Menelaos captures and forces to help him in Book IV of the *Odyssey*,<sup>8</sup> then the scene changes to an invocation of the Horus child, who emerges from the lotus flower and causes the Nile to flood.<sup>9</sup> Finally we arrive at the Egyptian solar theological theme in the fifth and sixth lines (943–944) which commands special interest in our context:

κάνθαρε, κύκλον ἄγων σπορίμου πυρός, αὐτογένεθλε,  
 ὅστε δισύλλαβος εἶ, ΑΗ, καὶ πρωτοφανῆς εἶ

The scarab is of course Khepri, the Egyptian god of the rising sun, symbolised by the dung beetle rolling his ball. Khepri also personifies, through the etymology of his name, the very idea of coming into being; the dung beetle was believed to spontaneously generate itself in the sand. Hence the epithet αὐτογένεθλος, “self-generated”: it echoes the concept of *hpr ds.f*, often used of primal deities in Egyptian texts, but especially of Khepri.<sup>10</sup> The Egyptian

<sup>6</sup> On such rituals, see, most recently, Zografou 2010.

<sup>7</sup> Translation (slightly modified) by O’Neil in Betz 1992, 56–57. For a commentary, see Merkelbach and Totti 1990, 2–8. The hymn was also commented on by Dieterich (1891, 51–56, 96–101). Dieterich missed most of the Egyptian background for the ideas in the hymn.

<sup>8</sup> The text alludes directly to *Od.* 4.456–458; Eitrem 1926, 43–45.

<sup>9</sup> R.K. Ritner explains in a note that the beans refer to “the Egyptian bean from the Nymphean lotus mentioned in *PGM IV.110*” (in Betz 1992, 57n133). Merkelbach and Totti translate line 3: “Lotosblüte, die aufsprösst aus dem goldenen Blütenfeld” (1990, 5–6).

<sup>10</sup> See Assmann 1975.

context for the epithet is thus evident, though it is also very relevant to note that the language of divine self-generation is common in late antique Greco-Roman religious discourse generally, and in oracular texts particularly.<sup>11</sup> In the pragmatic setting of the present divinatory charm, a deity possessing the ultimate power of being able to bring forth himself is presumably especially attractive as an ally whose power may be harnessed by a magical invocation.

Besides being self-generated, the god is also described as *πρωτοφανής*. How are we to understand this term in the present context? The Orphic Phanes is hardly involved here. Rather, Egyptian mythology provides the background for this term as well. Khepri is the rising sun, and since the daily sunrise is also a chief paradigm in Egyptian religion for thinking about the cosmogony and first beginnings, his description as “first-appearing” must be intended to designate him as the *Urgott* who first came into being, radiantly emerging from, or as, the primeval mound. In this role, Khepri merges with Atum, who is the most frequent personification of the primordial sun-god in Egyptian mythology.<sup>12</sup> A passage from the Coffin Texts, later reused in the Book of the Dead, helps to illuminate the present text. In *Coffin Text* 335 (*Book of the Dead* 17), the deceased identifies himself with Atum, exclaiming:

I was *Rē* at his first appearances, I am the Great One, the self-created.<sup>13</sup>

The sun god “at his first appearances” corresponds nicely with the *πρωτοφανής* of our magical hymn.<sup>14</sup> In addition, the epithet “self-created” (*hpr ds.f*) coincides with *αὐτογένεθλε* in that text. And finally, the expression “Great One” provides an explanation, which until now has been lacking, for the mysterious expression *δισύλλαβος εἶ*, AH: the Egyptian for “Great One” is *ꜥ*, which must be what the two Greek vowels AH are representing.<sup>15</sup> This accumulation of agreements between the two texts makes it quite likely, in fact, that

<sup>11</sup> On this topic, see especially three articles by J. Whittaker (1970, esp. pp. 246–251; 1975; 1980).

<sup>12</sup> Assmann (1975, 934) sees a contrast between the two gods in that Khepri stands for cyclic renewal, whereas Atum is the *Urgott par excellence*. He also notes, however: “Wo C. dennoch Beiworte des Urgottes erhält, sind sie komplementär zu verstehen, als Bezeichnung der komplexen, Urbeginn und Gegenwart umfassenden Gottesgestalt oder als Gleichsetzung von Kosmogonie und Sonnenaufgang, Schöpfung und zyklischer Erneuerung, Urzeit und Gegenwart, oder äg. gesprochen, ‘Erstem Mal’ und ‘Tag für Tag.’”

<sup>13</sup> Trans. Faulkner 1973, 260. I am deeply grateful to Pål Steiner for directing me to this text. For a commentary, see Rössler-Köhler 1979; Allen 1988, 31–35.

<sup>14</sup> The Egyptian of the *Coffin Text* is *jnk Rꜥ m hꜥj=f tpyw*; the *Book of the Dead* has *jnk Rꜥ m hꜥw=f m šꜥ=f*.

<sup>15</sup> For this observation I record, again, my debt to Pål Steiner.

the author of the magical hymn had the seventeenth spell of the Book of the Dead, a widespread and well-known text, in mind when he made his composition.

What, then, are we to make of this in relation to the terminology of the Platonising Sethians, who let the Barbelo aeon unfold from its hidden state in Kalyptos first as Protophanes and then as Autogenes? Is the similarity coincidental? Most probably it is. Nevertheless, it is not without interest to observe that the Sethians adopted a vocabulary in their description of primal ontogenesis that would make good sense for an Egyptian familiar with traditional creation mythology and solar religion. It is not unlikely that the Sethians who introduced this vocabulary had an Egyptian background, and those Egyptians who translated and read the Sethian texts as well can easily be assumed to have seen a connection with traditional themes in their native religion. Finally, the diviner who gazed into the lamp in order to attain contact with the “first-appearing” and “self-engendered” primal being is not to be considered as engaging in a religious practice which was essentially distinct from that of the Sethians who hoped to ascend with the help of certain ritual techniques to the highest levels of divine presence. The commonality of vocabulary, even if “coincidental,” is therefore indicative of a common worldview and shared aspirations between the “magic” practitioner and the more philosophically inclined Sethian Gnostics.<sup>16</sup>

The second text is also found in *PGM IV*. It belongs to a rite of love magic that will cause a woman to be irresistibly erotically attracted to the performer. The rite is entitled “The Sword of Dardanos,” and comprises several procedures and spells all designed to conjure the power of Eros (lines 1716–1870 in the papyrus). The rite itself has attracted a certain amount of attention in previous scholarship,<sup>17</sup> as have the allusions to the myth of Eros and Psyche contained in it.<sup>18</sup> What interests us here, however, is the accompanying hymn-like spell, in which Eros is invoked as a primordial, all-powerful deity:

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<sup>16</sup> For the affinity of such magic rituals with theurgic practices, see the remarks of Zografou 2010, 282.

<sup>17</sup> A “magnetic stone,” on which are engraved the figures of Aphrodite, Psyche and Eros as well as magical formulae, is to be placed under the tongue when the spell is recited. Magical gems that correspond to the description have been found; see Mouterde 1930, esp. 3–14; Sfameni Gasparro 2003, 31; and the note by Mariangela Monaca in Mastrocinque 2003, 340–341 (with further bibliography).

<sup>18</sup> Reitzenstein 1912, 80–83 (reprinted in Binder and Merkelbach 1968, 150–154); Merkelbach 1968, 433–434; Edwards 1992.



(1748) I call upon you, author of all creation, who spread your own wings over the whole (1750) world, you, the unapproachable and unmeasurable who breathe into every soul life-giving (1755) reasoning, who fitted all things together by your power, firstborn, founder of the universe, golden-winged, whose light is darkness, who shroud reasonable (1760) thoughts and breath forth dark frenzy, clandestine one who secretly inhabit every soul. You engender an unseen fire (1765) as you carry off every living thing without growing weary of torturing it ...

(1786) I call upon you, unmoved by prayer, by your great name: [magical words] (1794) first-shining, night-shining, night rejoicing, night-engendering, witness [magical words] (1799) you in the depth [magical words] (1800) you in the sea MERMERGOU clandestine and wisest<sup>19</sup> [magical words]. (1806) Turn the soul of NN to me NN, so that she may love me ...<sup>20</sup>

The primordial, cosmic Eros called upon here has salient features in common with the Orphic Phanes. He is “firstborn,” *πρωτόγονος* (1757), the creator of all, endowed with golden, all-embracing wings, the bringer of light, though being himself hidden as well as manifested, combining within himself the opposites. One is reminded not only of the fragments of the *Rhapsodies* describing Phanes-Protogonos, but even more so of the sixth Orphic hymn to Protogonos<sup>21</sup> and the cosmic Phanes of the famous Modena relief.<sup>22</sup> There can hardly be any doubt that the Orphic figure of Phanes-Protogonos-Eros provides the model for the Eros figure invoked in this magic spell.

Among the names used to call upon him are the following (1794–1802):

πρωτοφανή, νυκτιφανή, νυκτιχαρή, νυκτιγενέτωρ, ἐπήκοε [*magical words*] βύθιε [*magical words*] πελάγιε μερμεργου κρύφιε και πρεσβύτατε

The appellation *πρωτοφανής* can easily be seen in the context of the preceding description as an allusion to the first-appearing Phanes Protogonos of the Orphic theogony. The reference to “night,” furthermore, also fits in here: the luminous birth of Phanes takes place (via the egg) on the background of the primeval darkness; Night is in fact his mother.<sup>23</sup> The epithet *νυκτιφανή*, “shining in the night,” thus refers to the event of his generation as narrated in the Orphic myth. The following two epithets, *νυκτιχαρή*, “night-delighting,”

<sup>19</sup> “Oldest” is probably the correct translation of *πρεσβύτατε* here; see below.

<sup>20</sup> Translation by E.N. O’Neil in Betz 1992, 70. I have added line numbers to facilitate reference.

<sup>21</sup> Hymn 6, rather than Hymn 58 to Eros to which the reader is referred in note 222 of Betz 1992. (Excellent commentaries on these hymns are found in Ricciardelli 2000.)

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Fauth 1995, 20–21. On the Modena relief, see Brisson 1985a, 45–46.

<sup>23</sup> *Frgs.* 106, 107, 112 Bernabé = 67, 65, 106 Kern.

and νυκτιγενέτωρ, “night-engendering,” are both *hapax legomena*, but it may not be too far-fetched to suppose that they allude to Phanes’ further involvement with Night according to the theogony of the *Rhapsodies*; there, Night is not only the mother of Phanes, but also his sexual partner and his daughter.<sup>24</sup> Naturally, the association of Eros with the night is part of his general nature, too, and makes him immediately relevant in a piece of love magic.

This text thus shows that Protophanes may be used as a name for the Orphic Phanes-Protogonos-Eros, or at least for a figure inspired by the Orphic one. What light, then, can this text throw upon the Sethian Protophanes?<sup>25</sup> The Sethian treatises themselves are not very forthcoming about the mythological background which may have inspired this figure. He has already become a fixed component of a scholastic nomenclature when we encounter him in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, stereotypically referred to as “the great male invisible perfect mind.”<sup>26</sup> Details about the process of his “first appearance” from Kalyptos are not offered.<sup>27</sup> Most promising in this regard is the single reference to Protophanes found in the *Three Steles of Seth*, in a passage describing the unfolding of the Barbelo aeon from hidden oneness at the level of Kalyptos to manifested plurality as Protophanes:

You are divided among them (i.e., the plurality of intelligible beings)  
and have become  
Protophanes, a great first-appearing male mind.  
Fatherly God,  
divine child,  
producer of multiplicity,  
in a division of all who really are,  
you appeared to them all as a rational principle.<sup>28</sup>

Some of the mythological background for these ideas in the Phanes-Protogonos-Eros figure can still be detected here in the portrayal of Protophanes as a divine child. At the same time, he is addressed as “the fatherly god” (πατρὸς θεοῦ) and thus represents a variant of the *puer senex* idea,

<sup>24</sup> *Frg.* 148 Bernabé = 98 Kern. Cf. Brisson 1985b, 393; 1987, 58.

<sup>25</sup> Lütge 2010, 147–149 has already pointed to possible points of contact between the present magical text and the Protophanes figure in *Zostrianos*.

<sup>26</sup> *Zost.* NHC VIII 13.3–4; 18.5–7; cf. 19.21–22; 40.7–9; 41.3–4; 44.27–29; 124.21–22; 129.4–6; *Allogenes* NHC IX 45.33–35; 46.23–25; 51.19–20; 58.16–18. The same is true about the three occurrences of the name in the *Untitled* tractate of the Bruce Codex.

<sup>27</sup> This situation is also explainable by the fact that these are “ascent pattern treatises” (Turner), describing the successive levels encountered by the ascending visionary, and are therefore not preoccupied with explaining how those various levels came into being.

<sup>28</sup> *Steles Seth* NHC VII 123.4–11; trans. John D. Turner, in Meyer 2007, 531.

which is also present in the magical text, where Eros is invoked as *νήπιε* (1784) as well as *πρεσβύτατε* (1785, 1802). This duality is in turn an aspect of the more general idea that this first manifested being combines within himself all opposites because he embraces everything and encompasses the plurality of creation. Unlike the Orphic figure, to be sure, the Sethian Protophanes is not androgynous, but emphatically male;<sup>29</sup> this idea represents, perhaps, a deliberate revision of the mythological model on the part of the Sethian author—in any case, the *nous*-character of the Sethian Protophanes requires him to be masculine, since intellect is considered to be essentially male.

Combining the opposites and personifying the ontogenetic transition from hidden to manifested being, Protophanes is also, paradoxically, hidden as well as appearing—“the great male *invisible* perfect mind,” as he is repeatedly named in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. This double character is also evident in the magical text, which highlights the fact that Eros is hidden and dark as well as light and fiery, antithetical properties combined in the oxymoronic epithet *μελαμφαής*, “whose light is darkness” (1758–1759, 1774); he is not only *πρωτοφανής*, but also *κρύφιος* (1762), *βύθιος* (1799) and *κρύφιος* (1800). Even if used to describe the uncontrollable, all-pervasive power of Love in the present text, the vocabulary gives the impression of having been borrowed from a different, mythological context.

The all-embracing Protophanes also exerts his influence on each of the beings he brings into existence. “[Y]ou appeared to them all as a rational principle,” says the *Three Steles of Seth* in the text quoted;<sup>30</sup> according to *Allogenes*, the Barbelo aeon, through the “image” of Protophanes, “acts within the individuals either with craft or with skill or with partial instinct” (NHC IX 51.19–25). In other words, all human activity that involves the use of reason derives from Protophanes, who is the rational principle itself, both as a hypostasis and as an individual faculty.<sup>31</sup> This, too, forms a parallel to Eros in the magical text, who is invoked as the one “who breathes into every soul life-giving reasoning” (*εις τὰς ψυχὰς πάσας ζωογόνον ἐμπνέοντα λογισμόν*, 1752–1753).<sup>32</sup> The intellectualistic tenor of this phrase clearly betrays an ori-

<sup>29</sup> As Lütge (2010, 148) remarks.

<sup>30</sup> *Steles Seth* 123.10–11: ἀκογωνιῆ εβολ ηαγ τηρογ ἰογωαδε. Turner is clearly justified in seeing ωαδε as a translation of λόγος. ἰογωαδε may also be read as an object (“he revealed to them rationality”), but the difference is not important in this context, since Protophanes is himself that which he reveals.

<sup>31</sup> For Protophanes as Mind, see Brankaer 2008.

<sup>32</sup> Noted also by Lütge 2010, 148.

gin in a context other than that of love magic.<sup>33</sup> It points in the direction of an already existing philosophical interpretation of the Orphic Phanes theme, similar to that found in later Neoplatonism, where Phanes becomes the revealer of intelligible realities,<sup>34</sup> but not otherwise attested earlier—except by the Sethian Protophanes figure. Such a philosophical interpretation of the Orphic theogony, whoever invented it, must have been a common source for the philosophising Sethians and the present magical text.

## 2. MEIROTHEOS

In the opening hymn of the *Three Steles of Seth*, the heavenly Seth praises his father, the divine Adam, proclaiming, “You are a Mirotheas, you are my Mirotheos” (NHC VII 119.11–13). The same name is in the second hymn applied to the heavenly Adam’s own father, Autogenes: “You are a Mirotheos” (120.15). This peculiar designation is found elsewhere in the Sethian corpus as well. The *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* speaks about “the Mother of the holy incorruptible ones, the great power Mirothea” (NHC III 49.3–4), who is the mother of the heavenly Adam. This mother figure further appears on three occasions in *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII 6.30; 30.14; 51.13 [restored]), and in the *Trimorphic Protенnoia*, Meirothea is used twice as a name for the First Thought Barbelo herself, in a context highlighting her role as a mother (NHC XIII 38.15; 45.9–10).

Various explanations of the name have been suggested. Whereas some scholars take the element *miro-/meiro-* to refer to  $\mu\omicron\iota\rho\alpha$ , and interpret Meirothea/-os as meaning “god of destiny,” others have proposed to relate it to  $\mu\acute{\epsilon}\rho\omicron\varsigma/\mu\acute{\epsilon}\iota\rho\omicron\mu\alpha\iota$ , thus “divine part,” or to  $\mu\acute{\upsilon}\rho\omicron\nu$ , so that the name would mean “divine anointed one.”<sup>35</sup> No consensus has been reached on the issue. The Sethian texts themselves are not very helpful when it comes to explaining the origin of the name, since it seems to be used as an already well established designation, without attention to its original etymological connotations. Moreover, no attestation of the name outside these Sethian texts has been recorded until now.

That last statement, however, is perhaps to be modified if the following text is taken into consideration. It is a silver amulet engraved with an

<sup>33</sup> Which is perhaps not the case with the analogous statement in 1762–1764: “[you] ... clandestine one who secretly inhabit every soul.”

<sup>34</sup> Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.429–430 Diehl.

<sup>35</sup> See Poirier 2006, 239–241; and John Turner’s note in Meyer 2007, 527n15.

Aramaic inscription found in Turkey and first published by André Dupont-Sommer in 1951.<sup>36</sup> It was later extensively discussed by Gershom Scholem,<sup>37</sup> and more recently republished by Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked in a collection of late antique Aramaic spells on amulets and bowls.<sup>38</sup> This is Naveh and Shaked's translation:

Ask mercy from heaven for šwnh.<sup>39</sup> In the name of Michael, Raphael, Azrael, Azriel, Ariel, the great dominion (?), you, the holy angels who stand (5) in front of the throne of the Great God. May there be extinguished the evil spirit and the shadow-spirit, and the demon, whether male or female, from šwnh son of Demetron. In the name of ... ššqwpwt wsmrwṭwš 'qrmkmry (10) swsgwn brprwngs 'str and ... under yhw. In your name, sacred God, may there be extinguished the evil spirit and the demon and the shadow-spirit and the tormentor and the destroyer. In your name God of Israel, may the words rise up to heaven at the side of the throne of the great, powerful, aweful, sacred, magnified, praised and exalted God. Those three: one who is hungry, but does not eat, one who is thirsty, but does not drink, and one who is drowsy, but does not sleep. I said to the hungry one: Why are you hungry, but you do not eat? (I said) to the thirsty one: Why are you thirsty, but you do not drink? (I said) to the drowsy one: Why are you drowsy, but you do not sleep? The three answered and said: d'n.

The text presents several problems of interpretation, some of which I shall discuss below. The main item of interest in our context, however, is found in the list of magical names and words in the middle of the spell (lines 9–10), which Naveh and Shaked, basically following Scholem at this point, transcribe as follows:

ששקופות וסמרוטוש עקמכמרי סוסגון ברפרונגס אסטר ושב

In the central part of this string of letters, some words familiar from other magical spells are distinguishable: *akramachamarei sesengen barpharanges*.<sup>40</sup> The remaining text has remained unexplained. At the beginning of the sequence, however, I now propose to divide the letters in the following manner: ששקופותוס מרוטוש. M(e)irotheos thus appears as the second word of the formula. (The first name, which also appears to have a Greek ending, I am unable to identify. Siskopotos?)

<sup>36</sup> Dupont-Sommer 1950–1951, 201–217.

<sup>37</sup> Scholem 1965, Appendix A (pp. 84–93).

<sup>38</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985, Amulet 7 (pp. 68–77, with Plate 6).

<sup>39</sup> I modify the translation of this sentence (as well as of the final sentence) in accordance with the Addendum in Naveh and Shaked 1985, 76.

<sup>40</sup> Scholem devoted Appendix B of his book (1965, 94–100) to a study of these formulae.

It is further to be noted<sup>41</sup> that Sesengenbarpharanges appears in the *Holy Book* (NHC III 64.18/IV 76.9), as the name of a deity presiding over baptism, and Barpharanges occurs in *Zostrianos* (VIII 6.12), both texts in which the name Meirothea is also attested.<sup>42</sup> This suggests that these names may all have been taken over by the Sethians from the same kind of source, viz. the vocabulary used in magical formulae.

Is it possible to go further, and answer the question why Meirotheos should be invoked in a spell like this? Perhaps it is. In line 8, where Naveh and Shaked read בר דמיטרין, and translate “son of Demetrium,” Dupont-Sommer had read ברך מיטרין, translating “Bénis une matrice.”<sup>43</sup> Scholem, on his part, in the first edition of his book wanted to read “blessed be Meta[t?]ron” at this point, but changed his mind in an addendum to the second edition, producing evidence in support of Dupont-Sommer’s interpretation.<sup>44</sup> Curiously, Naveh and Shaked in their edition of the text appear to have overlooked the note added by Scholem in the 1965 version of his book. There, Scholem explained the three she-demons described in the last part of the spell by referring to certain Latin magical formulae designed to protect the pregnant womb and in which three “sisters” need to be warded off.<sup>45</sup> The following version is typical: *Tres sorores ambulabant, una volvebat, alia cernebat, tertia solvebat.*<sup>46</sup> The motif is also known from German folklore as that of the three “Bärmutter.”<sup>47</sup> The three female demons with power over gestation and birth are evidently the three Fates, who have the destiny of the unborn child in their hands and who need to be pacified or averted.<sup>48</sup> On this interpretation, the spell as a whole is intended for the protection of the womb.<sup>49</sup> Such an interpretation also offers a marvellous explanation for the invocation of Meirotheos in the spell: Meirotheos may then be understood as a deity, or an angel, who wields power over the Fates, and over Fate in general, and that interpretation would lend support to the hypothesis that

<sup>41</sup> As the editors of this volume have pertinently reminded me.

<sup>42</sup> Barpharanges further appears in the Sethian *Untitled Text* of the Bruce Codex 51 (263 Schmidt).

<sup>43</sup> Dupont-Sommer 1950–1951, 203, 206. The Aramaic word (*mītrīn*) is derived from Greek μήτρα.

<sup>44</sup> Scholem 1965, 134–135.

<sup>45</sup> Heim 1892, 496–497, 559.

<sup>46</sup> Heim 1892, 559.

<sup>47</sup> Heim 1892, 497.

<sup>48</sup> Heim (1892, 496) notes that “*hae tres virgines certe deae fortunae vel Fatae, Μοῖραι vel Parcae iam ab Iacobo Grimm agnitae sunt.*”

<sup>49</sup> For this particular sub-category of protective magic, see in particular Aubert 1989.

the name of this figure is in fact derived from  $\mu\sigma\iota\rho\alpha$ .<sup>50</sup> Moreover, an association of this deity with the womb even seems to be retained in some of the Sethian texts: “she who is called Meirothea, the incomprehensible womb” (*Trim. Prot.* 38.14–15).

As attractive as this hypothesis is, the arguments against such an interpretation of the spell cannot be responsibly disregarded. In the first place, the reading  $\text{ברך מיטרין}$ , “blessed be a womb,” remains uncertain. Naveh and Shaked’s reading  $\text{בר דמיטרין}$ , “son of Demetrios,” is not without its problems: the correct form of the proper name is of course Demetrios, not Demetrios, and, as the two editors themselves point out, amulets normally mention the mother’s name of the subject rather than the patronymic.<sup>51</sup> The issue might have been clearer if the preceding word  $\text{šwnh}$  could be clearly identified as a personal name, but that, too, is uncertain.<sup>52</sup> Palaeographically,  $\text{ט}$  and  $\text{ד}$  are hardly distinguishable.<sup>53</sup> All in all, it remains a distinct possibility that the text speaks about a  $\text{מיטרין}$ , a womb.

A second objection is that the three sinister she-demons may not in fact refer to the three Fates of the Latin spells which Scholem adduced as parallels, but to a more general category of demons known from certain other Aramaic spells. Thus, a couple of bowls from Mesopotamia contain an invocation where the demons are addressed from the roof of a house thus: “If you are hungry, come eat! If you are thirsty, come drink! If you are dried up, come be oiled! But if you are not hungry, or thirsty, or dried up, go back the way you came, enter the house from which you went out, and the mouth from which you went out!”<sup>54</sup> This text in fact forms a closer parallel to our spell. The point of the formula here is that by declaring his readiness to provide hospitality to the demons, the exorcist succeeds in neutralising them. A special concern with the protection of the womb seems not to be involved, nor can the demons invoked be identified with the three  $\text{Μοῖρα}$ . That does not exclude the possibility that in applying this particular formula, the author of the spell on our amulet may himself have made such

<sup>50</sup> This was first suggested by Böhlig 1967, 19; also cf. Böhlig and Wisse 1975, 176.

<sup>51</sup> Naveh and Shaked 1985, 74.

<sup>52</sup> Naveh and Shaked (1985, 72) discuss, inconclusively, such possibilities as  $\text{Σαλων}$  (female), Sylvanus, Hebrew Shallum.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. the  $\text{ד}$  in  $\text{בשמך}$  in line 11 (photograph, Plate 6 in Naveh and Shaked 1985).

<sup>54</sup> Gordon 1978, 234, 236–237. The parallel with Dupont-Sommer’s lamella was pointed out by Levine 1970, 360–361. Levine as well disregarded Scholem’s addenda in the second edition of *Jewish Gnosticism* (1965). See also Naveh and Shaked 1985, 75–76, whose translation of the second of Gordon’s two texts (Iraq Museum no. 9731) is quoted here.

an identification, adapting the formula to the context of a spell designed for the protection of the womb. Naturally, such a supposition must remain hypothetical.

Whatever the case may be, however, we are left with the intriguing fact that a superhuman being named Meirotheos is invoked in this spell, providing another instance of the overlap between Sethian nomenclature and the vocabulary of magical incantation in late antiquity.

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“THIRD ONES AND FOURTH ONES”:  
SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE USE OF  
INDEFINITE ORDINALS IN *ZOSTRIANOS*

Wolf-Peter Funk

*For John, with fond memories of endless hours  
on the track of Sethian lore*

In his magisterial commentary on the tractate *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1), John Turner understandably showed some signs of frustration when he remarked on the passage 113.14–26 (and lines 14–16 in particular): “The designation ‘fourth powers’ seems totally obscure. The reference of the term ‘fourth aeon’ is completely ambiguous and the list of ideal contents that follows provides no clues to aid identification.”<sup>1</sup> Much the same could be said about other passages where groups of powers are only identified by means of indefinite ordinal numbers (from one to four) in this tractate, without any discernible referential links in their respective contexts. The lack of contextual links where they are to be expected, i.e., within the tractate itself, may justify an attempt to look for explanations of such harshly abridged terminology beyond the bounds of the tractate in question.<sup>2</sup> Far from having definitive answers to all the problems encountered, I should like to draw attention to a possible explanation that, to my knowledge, has not been hitherto envisaged.

My personal interest in solving the conundrum of those indefinite ordinals was aroused some years ago when I discovered that one of the fragments that in the *Facsimile Edition* is still found among the unplaced ones can in fact be placed with great confidence. As I saw only when I took a fresh

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<sup>1</sup> Turner 2000, 631.

<sup>2</sup> Recalling some time-honoured advice from Hans-Martin Schenke (1981, 588–589) about “texts that clearly stand apart as a relatively close-knit group,” such that “The texts of this group shed light upon one another if compared synoptically.” While the pointing out of divergencies is necessary for the reconstruction of possible historical evolution, a kind of complementary synoptical perspective may be helpful in clarifying otherwise obscure details (as Schenke demonstrated, with regard to this corpus, already in 1974).



... ρεν] ]  
 6 μερ̄ Δε [ἡν̄ρ] ενμερ̄ Δ ρ[γΟΥ]  
 7 ων̄ρ̄ εβολ̄ [ . . . . . ] . π[ . . . ]

“Also, third ones [and] fourth ones appeared [ . . . ] (or “revealed [ . . . ]”)

In spite of the fragmentary nature of the text—and the incomplete sentence—this somewhat elliptic expression, “third ones and fourth ones,” can be easily understood to mean “third powers and fourth powers,” since these newly introduced entities of line 6 are a direct textual progression from line 4, where the lacunary manuscript hardly leaves any other choice but to restore an attributive [ἡσο]μ after the indefinite numeral “second ones.” The reference to “powers” is also corroborated by the only other occurrence of a plural indefinite ordinal in this text, at 113.14–16 (the passage referred to initially), where the full attributive construction occurs as the predicate of a cleft sentence:

ρενμερ̄[ϣτ]οΟΥ Δε ἡσομ νε ετ̄ϣοοπ [ρ̄ἡ]π̄μ[ερ̄]ϣτ̄οΟΥ ἡνεων

which may be translated, “There are fourth powers which exist [in] the fourth aeon,” or “Residing [in] the fourth aeon are certain fourth powers.”<sup>6</sup> The stative nature of this predication, together with the plural, makes it sufficiently clear that the actual meaning of the ordinal number in this expression cannot be one of simple individual order or sequence but must be one of “rank.” Even though no first, second and third powers can be seen to precede this statement, the encompassing “aeons” are clearly supposed to be numbered and ranked from One to Four, and the respective “powers” that belong to these aeons are ranked accordingly. This resolves at least the purely semantic conundrum of those plural indefinite ordinals: “fourth powers” has to be understood as meaning “powers belonging to the fourth aeon” and at the same time “powers of the fourth rank.”

In nearby statements of the same section (115.18–20), the complementary “first” and “second” powers are mentioned and ascribed a certain superiority to the rest of the fourfold distinction in some respects (“rank and glory,” 115.22) though not in others (“all are eternal,” 115.20–21). As I see it, the nearest textual anchoring of this distinction is the list of names<sup>7</sup> of the

<sup>6</sup> Trying to avoid a very literal rendering such as “It is fourth powers that exist [in] the fourth aeon.”

<sup>7</sup> Thanks to the surprising publication of the shattered remains of a papyrus leaf from an erstwhile codex that contained another copy of the same version of *Zostrianos* (P. Bodmer 43, cf. Kasser and Luisier 2007), these names can now be restored with more confidence than was possible at the time of the edition of Barry et al. (2000). Notwithstanding a minor

four pairs of luminaries (in their Kalyptos version) on page 119. Due to the contemplative character of the tractate in general, and the sublime styling of the description of the Kalyptos Aeon in particular, not much can be learned here about the potential functions of these luminaries in the ensuing description (119.18–121.1); rather than assigning tangible (mythical) roles to them, this description mainly consists in a kind of variation exercise around the notions of affirmative and negative<sup>8</sup> knowing and seeing. But this does not exclude their possession of “powers.” One may therefore assume that the four aeons<sup>9</sup> to be distinguished are more or less directly related to these four (pairs of) luminaries—possibly they are even meant to be the places where the luminaries are located or are simply identical with them.

This interpretation of the relationship between aeons, luminaries, and powers in the section just discussed cannot simply be applied to the occurrence of “third ones and fourth ones” on page 34 without further ado. The two passages in question belong to two entirely different sections: the later one has the Kalyptos Aeon for its topic, while the context around page 34 is the later part of the first Ephesech revelation, which talks about the “self-generated aeons” or, in other words, about everything connected with the Autogenes Aeon. We know nothing about the spatial distance between the first and the third of the “subaeons” of Barbelo (or, more precisely, the tripartite aeonic structure below the Barbelo Aeon, as its emanations), but their internal structure has many similarities. And it is perhaps not too much of a generalization if one finds that their distinct features are connected with the distinct ontological levels they are supposed to represent, and thus with the specific metaphysical contemplation the author focuses on, whereas their similarities are mostly linked to givens of traditional Sethian lore. This does not mean, however, that these similarities can only be stated in a historical (diachronic) perspective. Rather, they appear to be a cohesive element within the text itself.

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discord in the reading of the “Dēi-” names (which are recorded as “Lēi-” by Kasser and Luisier, presumably because the base line of the initial deltas is either absent or completely abraded in their manuscript), these four, complete with their female consorts, are: Armēdōn and Armē, D(ē)iphaneus and Dēiphania, Malsēdōn and Trigenia, and Solmis and Olmis. (In Schenke 2003, 659, unfortunately, two of the earlier best guesses, now proven wrong, are printed without the protection of brackets.)

<sup>8</sup> In the latest English version (Turner 2007, 578), the negation has been lost by mistake in the case of the second luminary (read: “one that does not [know] him”).

<sup>9</sup> Note that the term “aeon,” throughout the writings of Sethian literature, is used in a rather vague manner: it may refer to just about any place in the eternal realm, from the location or station of a single being (e.g., a luminary) to a huge celestial region (such as Barbelo Aeon).

Not only is Kalyptos in large measure a reflection of the Barbelo Aeon, but all three—Kalyptos, Protophanes, Autogenes—appear to be reflections of each other (or of the unique Autogenes of traditional Sethianism). A case in point is the pattern of the four luminaries, present in all three of them. And it is probably no coincidence that the traditional four luminaries—Harmozel, Oroiael, Daveithe, Eleleth—figure prominently on the two pages (31 and 32) directly preceding the problematic debris of pages 33 and 34 (with fragment 17), here in ascending order, starting with the “fourth luminary,” Eleleth. Likewise remarkable is the recurrent appearance of the typical *Zostrianos* phraseology, “having a fourfold distinction” or “four different kinds” (ἔτρωοὺ ἑτεροφωρίαν), in the immediate vicinity of the talk about the four luminaries, four aeons, and respective powers.<sup>10</sup> All these parallel phrasings make it more than likely that, just as appears on and around page 113, also the powers defined by indefinite ordinals on page 34 are related to the respective aeons which are, or provide imaginary space for, the luminaries.

Such an interpretation of the numerically ranked powers appears to be most easily acceptable in the case of page 34, where the mention of “second,” “third,” and “fourth” powers is still readable (and the lacking “first” powers may be supposed to have featured in the preceding lacuna), and where the context provided by the preceding pages lists the traditional luminaries, not some outlandish innovations. One may simply assume, for example, that those groups of nameless powers are *Zostrianos*’ replacement for the well-named helpers or “attendants” that each of the luminaries receives in the *Holy Book* (III 52.19 = IV 64.14–23: Gamaliel, Gabriel, Samlo, Abrasax, plus consorts). By contrast, interpreting the fourth-ranking powers of the fourth aeon in the Kalyptos section (around page 113 of *Zost.*) along the same lines appears much less obvious. The commentator’s frustration with these terms is not, as it might have been on page 34, due to large lacunas in the manuscript—the preceding lines make it clear that this is the beginning of a new paragraph, and the following pages are relatively well preserved—but to the apparent lack of connectedness in the context. Therefore, even if the interpretation outlined above is accepted, there remains a puzzling question: Why are those of the fourth rank singled out for special mention? Why *would* the author do that, and why *could* he?

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<sup>10</sup> The phrase is found with regard to the Kalyptos Aeon at 115.15, with regard to the Autogenes Aeon in the final summary account at 127.17 (in both cases “four different kinds of aeons”), and with regard to the Protophanes Aeon in a slightly modified form at 125.8–9. Apart from that, it is also used with other implications of “the forms of angels” (28.18).



It is at this point that I find it hard not to recall the differentiated roles or tasks the luminaries have in more traditional Sethian doctrine (even though little or none of this is ever mentioned in *Zostrianos*).<sup>11</sup> As is well-known from the *Holy Book* and the *Apocryphon of John*, in part also supported by passages in the *Hypostasis of the Archons* and the *Apocalypse of Adam*, the first and second luminaries, Harmozel and Oroiael, had fulfilled their principal function by taking care of Adam and Seth in primordial time, whereas the third and fourth were in charge of the salvation of the “seed of Seth,” various classes of Sethian offspring, first the ancient “Proto-Sethians” and then the contemporaneous, living ones. In this perspective, clearly, there is sufficient ground for powers belonging to the fourth aeon to deserve special worship and, as the case may be, even to be recognized by the mere label of their fourth rank.

In conclusion, I would suggest that even for a mainly contemplative and metaphysically oriented writer like the one who authored *Zostrianos*, the basic soteriological coordinates of traditional (or “classical”) Sethianism must still have had some validity. Let us not forget that even the “Platonizing” Sethian treatises are basically documents of religious faith.<sup>12</sup> Whether it was actually part of the faith that the author of *Zostrianos* fully adhered to or more like a distant reminiscence for him—he knew what he was talking about when he mentioned “third ones” and/or “fourth ones” in such a terse and apparently disconnected manner. If they do not quite seem to fit in with the bewildering multiplications and amplifications to whose veracity the author personally lays claim and on whose description he focuses, then they may find their justification in earlier lore. If understood against the background of traditional Sethian creed (and its cosmic framework), these terms gain unambiguous meanings and designate entities of lasting importance. When the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah (the mythical “Proto-Sethians”) were to be rescued from the fire into their heavenly abode—the Third Aeon, presided over by Daveithe—this could not have been accomplished without the help of mighty powers, accordingly called

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<sup>11</sup> These roles (or different charges) were first pointed out by Hans-Martin Schenke (1974, 167–168, 173); see also the convenient tabular survey in Turner 2000, 544.

<sup>12</sup> Or, in other words, “however philosophic our texts may give themselves out to be, however much they may have been able to seduce students of philosophy and to challenge philosophical masters, they nevertheless remain Sethian Gnosis” (Schenke 1981, 616). This remains true even after the spectacular discoveries of direct philosophical connections made in the last two decades.

“third ones.” Likewise, if contemporaneous living Sethian believers,<sup>13</sup> in the event of their death, are to be lifted to the particular paradise that awaits them—the Fourth Aeon, presided over by Eleleth—it takes auxiliary powers to get them there, that is, powers that would aptly be called “fourth ones.” These groups of powers belonging to the third and fourth luminaries may be somewhat inferior to those belonging to the first and second as far as “rank and glory” are concerned, but their presence and activity is more immediately remembered and desired than the ones who presumably took care of Adam and Seth in mythical primordial ages. The powers of the fourth rank would especially be the ones every believer must rely upon for his or her postmortem safety. Little wonder, then, that they should still be given special attention even when the entire fourfold structure is transposed to the loftiest heights, the utterly remote level of Kalyptos.

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<sup>13</sup> Possibly reflected, even in the overly abstract categories of *Zostrianos*, by the “immortal souls” as a “fourth” class of self-generated beings at 28.30 and elsewhere. See also Turner 2000, 544.

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Plate 1: Top of Page 33 of Zostrianos NHC VIII,1

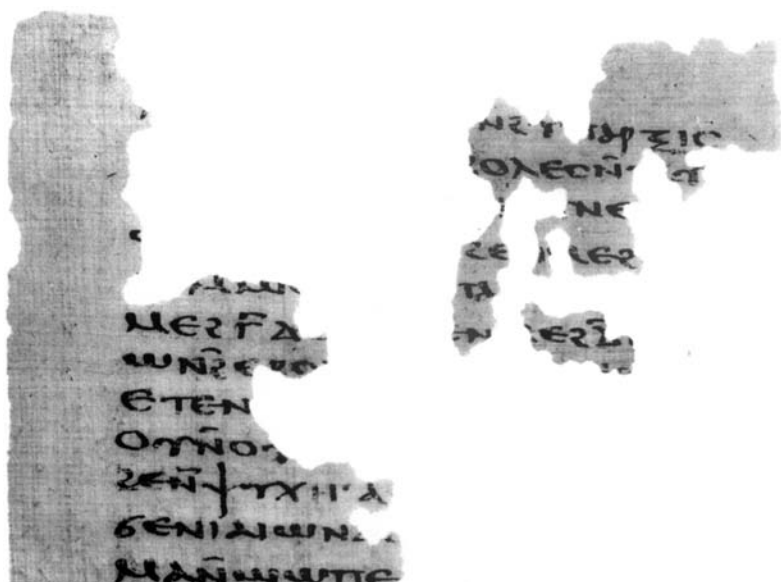


Plate 2: Top of Page 34 of Zostrianos NHC VIII,1



LE QUATRIÈME ÉCRIT DU CODEX TCHACOS:  
LES LIVRES D'ALLOGÈNE ET LA  
TRADITION LITTÉRAIRE SÉTHIENNE\*

Louis Painchaud

John D. Turner a consacré d'importants travaux à l'étude du corpus défini par Hans-Martin Schenke sur la base d'un certain nombre de traits communs et désigné comme « séthien » en raison du rôle particulier qu'y tient Seth et surtout de la place centrale qu'y occupe sa « semence » ou descendance<sup>1</sup>.

Parmi ces textes, il s'en trouve quatre, conservés en version copte dans les codices de Nag Hammadi, dont le contenu mystico-philosophique se rapproche particulièrement de la tradition platonicienne, les *Trois Stèles de Seth*, *Zostrien*, *Marsanès* et l'*Allogène*; ce sont les textes « séthiens platonisants » auxquels Turner a consacré l'essentiel de ses travaux<sup>2</sup>, textes dont les titres recourent en partie les renseignements que nous donne Porphyre au chapitre 16 de la *Vie de Plotin* concernant certains livres qui étaient lus et utilisés parmi les chrétiens dans l'entourage de Plotin<sup>3</sup>:

Il y avait à son époque de nombreux chrétiens, en particulier des sectaires issus de l'ancienne philosophie, les disciples d'Adelphios et d'Aquilinos, qui, possédant les très nombreux écrits d'Alexandre le Lybien, de Philocomos, de Demonstratos et de Lydos, et exhibant des apocalypses de Zoroastre, de Zostrien, de Nicothée, d'Allogène, de Messos et d'autres figures du même genre, trompaient beaucoup de personnes tout en étant eux-mêmes dans l'erreur, dans l'idée que Platon n'était pas parvenu à la profondeur des réalités intelligibles.

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\* Je remercie les participants du colloque « La mystique dans la gnose et chez Plotin » réuni à Québec le 21 mars 2009 par Jean-Marc Narbonne, et mes collègues du séminaire permanent sur les textes de Nag Hammadi de l'Université Laval, pour les remarques et suggestions qu'ils m'ont adressées à la suite de la présentation de versions préliminaires de ce texte, et spécialement Michel Roberge et Wolf-Peter Funk qui ont pris la peine d'en relire le dernier état.

<sup>1</sup> Schenke 1981, 588–616, en particulier 591.

<sup>2</sup> Voir principalement Turner 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Porphyre, *Vit. Plot.* 16, trad. Poirier et Schmidt 2010, 927.

D'après Turner, ces quatre écrits, à commencer par *Zostrien*, qui serait le plus ancien, témoigneraient d'une rupture avec un christianisme séthien, ou plus précisément avec un séthianisme chrétien (« Christian Sethianism ») en faveur d'une alliance avec un platonisme religieux, ou peut-être même d'une continuation directe avec une théologie baptismale barbéliote, suivant une trajectoire qui court-circuiterait le christianisme<sup>4</sup>. Selon ce scénario, le traité *Allogène* du codex XI de Nag Hammadi, présenté comme « [le] sceau de tous [les] livres d[e] l'Allo[gè]ne » (NHC XI 69.16–19)<sup>5</sup> représenterait un stade plus avancé de cette rupture avec le christianisme.

Sur la base de ces observations, il propose de reconstruire la tradition littéraire du corpus séthien défini par Schenke en distinguant trois phases : d'abord un stade pré-séthien ou « Sethian-Ophite » dont aucun texte entier ne nous serait parvenu, mais dont, selon lui, le monologue de Pronoia, à la fin de la version longue du *Livre des secrets de Jean*, porterait encore l'écho<sup>6</sup>. Puis un deuxième stade d'évolution aurait vu la production de plusieurs textes « séthiens » caractérisés par un schéma de descente d'inspiration chrétienne. Enfin, un changement de paradigme serait survenu au cours du II<sup>e</sup> siècle, alors que les schémas de descente chrétiens auraient fait place à un schéma d'ascension platonicien<sup>7</sup>.

Or la publication en 2007 du codex Tchacos a mis au jour cinq nouveaux écrits dont les relations avec le corpus de Nag Hammadi sont très étroites<sup>8</sup>. Ce qui nous est parvenu de ce codex contient trois écrits complets : la *Lettre de Pierre à Philippe*, dont on a également un témoin dans le codex VIII de Nag Hammadi ; un écrit portant simplement le titre *Jacques*, dont le contenu correspond à la (*Première*) *Apocalypse de Jacques* du codex V de Nag Hammadi ; et le fameux *Évangile de Judas*. Le quatrième écrit, dont le titre est presque totalement perdu et dont nous n'avons que les sept premières pages<sup>9</sup>, met en scène un personnage appelé Allogène, tout comme un des

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<sup>4</sup> Turner 2001, 200–201 ; cette reconstruction est partiellement remise en question par Tuomas Rasimus 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Funk, Poirier, et al. 2004.

<sup>6</sup> Il n'est pas possible ici de reprendre toute la discussion des rapports entre traditions séthiennes et ophites à propos desquels on pourra se référer à l'étude récente de Rasimus (2009).

<sup>7</sup> Turner 2001.

<sup>8</sup> Kasser, Meyer, et al. 2007.

<sup>9</sup> Depuis la rédaction de la présente contribution, Gregor Wurst (2012) a achevé l'édition de fragments de l'Ohio du *Livre d'Allogène* dont je le remercie de m'avoir procuré un copie. Ces fragments complètent les pages 63 à 66 ; un autre fragment, aussi de l'Ohio, dont la localisation dans le codex est impossible pour le moment, contient sur sa face antérieure

textes séthiens platonisants de la collection de Nag Hammadi, l'*Allogène* du codex XI. Finalement, le codex contenait un cinquième écrit, une version copte du traité XIII du *Corpus hermeticum* qui a été identifié par Jean-Pierre Mahé grâce à un fragment<sup>10</sup>. Comme seulement la moitié du codex nous est parvenue et que nous ignorons la longueur du *L[ivre d'Allogène]*<sup>11</sup>, il n'est pas impossible qu'il ait contenu encore un autre texte.

L'existence de ce nouveau texte, dont la figure principale est désignée sous le nom d'Allogène, appelle d'abord à examiner à nouveaux frais la question de l'existence d'une série d'écrits mis sous le nom d'Allogène, à se demander ensuite si le nouvel écrit en faisait partie, et enfin, à examiner sa teneur chrétienne. On verra en conclusion que ce nouveau texte exige de reconsidérer la reconstruction de la trajectoire séthienne proposée par Turner.

#### 1. L'EXISTENCE DE PLUSIEURS ÉCRITS MIS SOUS LE NOM D'ALLOGÈNE

L'*Allogène* du codex XI de Nag Hammadi se termine par ces phrases : « [Pro]clame ces choses, ô mon fils Me[ss]os. [Le] sceau de tous [les li]vres d[e] l'Allo[gè]ne. » suivies du titre souscrit « *L'Allogène* » (παλλογενης, NHC XI 69.14–20)<sup>12</sup>. À propos de l'emploi du terme « sceau » (σφραγίς), Madeleine Scopello note qu'il « signifie la clôture de la révélation. Il souligne aussi la nécessité, soutenue tout au long du traité, de garder la vision et l'enseignement reçus par Allogène dans le silence et le mystère »<sup>13</sup>. De son côté, Turner voit dans cette formule l'indice que, pour l'auteur d'*Allogène*, ce livre était « a final instance and a summary of *Zostrianos* and perhaps the *Three Steles of Seth* and other Platonizing treatises no longer extant »<sup>14</sup>. Toutefois, il est plus vraisemblable que la formule ne se réfère ni uniquement à l'*Allogène* du codex XI qu'elle scellerait, comme semble le suggérer

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la fin du *L[ivre d'Allogène]* et sur sa face postérieure, le début du traité XIII du *Corpus hermeticum*. Alin Suciu, que je remercie également de m'en avoir fait part, a aussi retrouvé deux autres fragments, dont nous préparons la publication. Le premier appartient au haut des pp. 59–60 du *L[ivre d'Allogène]* (Suciu 2012), quant au deuxième, il est impossible de le replacer pour le moment, mais il appartient vraisemblablement au même texte.

<sup>10</sup> Voir Kasser 2007, 29–30 ; et maintenant, Wurst (2012), qui donne une liste de fragments de l'Ohio appartenant au traité XIII.

<sup>11</sup> Voir encore Kasser 2007, 27–33, spécialement 28.

<sup>12</sup> Funk, Poirier, et al. 2004.

<sup>13</sup> Scopello et Turner 2007, 1574.

<sup>14</sup> Turner 2001, 200.



Scopello, ni à un ensemble de textes séthiens platonisants comme le voudrait Turner, mais plutôt, comme le suggère Funk, à une série de « livres d'Allogène », dont l'*Allogène* du codex XI de Nag Hammadi serait le dernier et le couronnement<sup>15</sup>.

On peut invoquer en faveur de cette interprétation trois arguments tirés du texte lui-même<sup>16</sup>. D'abord, la formule « [Le] sceau de tous [les li]vres d[e] l'Allo[gè]ne », qui semble bien faire allusion à plusieurs « livres d'Allogène » et non à un seul écrit ; ensuite, le caractère abrupt du début de l'*Allogène* (NHC XI 45.1–8), où une lacune des 5 premières lignes ne laisse guère de place pour une mise en scène de révélation, ce qui permet de croire que cet écrit en prolongeait un autre<sup>17</sup> ; enfin, une allusion à des instructions antérieures (NHC XI 45.9–13)<sup>18</sup>.

À l'appui de cette hypothèse, on peut encore citer un témoignage externe, celui d'Épiphane de Salamine, qui, dans la somme hérésiologique qu'il rédige vers 380, fait état de l'existence d'une telle série. Il mentionne en effet, dans la notice qu'il consacre aux séthiens, « sept livres mis sous le nom de Seth, et d'autres portant le nom Allogènes » (*Pan.* 39.5.1). Dans la notice suivante, consacrée aux archontiques, il reprend la même information : « ils utilisent des livres appelés Allogènes » et il précise qu'« il existe des livres portant ce titre » (*Pan.* 40.2.2). Toujours dans la même notice, un passage plus ambigu mentionne que ces hérétiques ont forgé des livres au nom de Seth, et d'autres en son nom ou en celui de ses sept fils, appelés Allogènes. Ici, on ne peut déterminer si ce sont les fils ou les livres qui sont appelés Allogènes, mais la question est secondaire dans la mesure où l'*Allogène* du codex XI nous apporte le témoignage d'un écrit qui porte le titre de son héros éponyme.

<sup>15</sup> Funk 2003, 765.

<sup>16</sup> Contrairement à l'opinion émise par Antoinette Clarke Wire qui ne voit aucun indice clair de l'appartenance de l'*Allogène* du codex XI à une série (Hedrick 1990, 17), c'est l'interprétation que proposent John Turner et Madeleine Scopello dans leur notice d'Introduction au même texte (Scopello et Turner 2007, 1537–538).

<sup>17</sup> En effet, dès le début de ce texte, l'ange Youel adresse une première révélation à Allogène et les cinq lignes manquantes du début ne laissent guère de place pour une quelconque mise en scène de révélation. Cela peut s'expliquer si ce texte est la suite d'un ou de plusieurs autres textes.

<sup>18</sup> « L'Intellect, le Gardien que je t'ai envoyé, t'a instruit et c'est la puissance qui est en toi qui s'est étendue, car maintes fois tu t'es réjoui dans le trois fois puissant ... » (NHC XI 45.9–13). On peut invoquer en faveur de cette interprétation le fait que l'*Allogène* du codex XI se présente bel et bien comme la relation d'une série d'instructions données par Youel à Allogène et utilise le même terme (сбав, 50.11, 16 ; 52.16). De plus, l'allusion à la joie d'Allogène à la réception de ces instructions pourrait indiquer que celles-ci étaient ponctuées des réactions d'Allogène, en particulier de sa joie, comme c'est le cas dans le codex XI en 57.32.

On retiendra donc du témoignage d'Épiphane qu'il existait en son temps, soit la deuxième moitié du IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, plusieurs écrits portant le titre « Allogène ». Le croisement du témoignage interne procuré par la formule finale de l'*Allogène* du codex XI de Nag Hammadi et du témoignage externe livré par Épiphane nous permet de conclure, à mon avis de façon certaine, qu'il a existé au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle une série de livres portant le titre d'Allogène. De plus, sur la base du contenu de l'*Allogène* du codex XI, et en particulier de la formule qui le conclut, on peut croire que cet écrit était le dernier de la série, qu'il scellait. Toutefois, l'existence d'une telle série peut soit résulter d'un dessein initial, soit d'une compilation secondaire ayant réuni plus ou moins artificiellement un certain nombre d'écrits, avec ou sans révision de leur contenu, soit encore d'un mélange de ces deux possibilités, par exemple une série initiale, formée de deux textes ou plus, augmentée au fil de sa transmission, avec tous les aléas que l'on peut imaginer.

Étant admise l'existence d'une telle série au IV<sup>e</sup> siècle, il faut maintenant se demander si le quatrième écrit du codex Tchacos en faisait partie.

## 2. LE QUATRIÈME ÉCRIT DU CODEX TCHACOS ET LES LIVRES D'ALLOGÈNE

Avant de tenter de répondre à cette question, quelques mots sur la conservation du seul témoin de ce texte<sup>19</sup>. Le manuscrit commence au haut de la p. 59 du codex Tchacos; les quatre premières pages (59–62) sont relativement bien conservées sauf les huit ou neuf premières lignes, qui comportent des lacunes importantes. À partir de la page 63, l'édition critique ne donne plus que le début ou la fin des lignes, ce qui rendait jusqu'à présent toute reconstruction impossible. Toutefois, les nouveaux fragments édités par Wurst complètent largement les pp. 63 à 66.

Quant au contenu, une mise en scène initiale présente un groupe, ou à tout le moins deux figures, Allogène lui-même et un interlocuteur, priant le « Seigneur Dieu qui est au-dessus de tous les grands éons » (59.17–18) en ces termes: « accorde-nous un esprit de connaissance pour la révélation de tes mystères de sorte que nous sachions d'où nous sommes venus, où nous allons et ce que nous devons faire pour vivre » (59.10–13, 22–25)<sup>20</sup>,

<sup>19</sup> Voir l'excellent article de Madeleine Scopello (2009) qui s'attarde surtout aux motifs qui trouvent des parallèles dans la littérature chrétienne, gnostique et non gnostique.

<sup>20</sup>  $\epsilon\pi\lambda\iota\upsilon\tau\iota\sigma\omicron\upsilon\gamma\omega\eta\eta\ \chi\epsilon\ \eta\tau\alpha\eta\epsilon\ \epsilon\upsilon\omicron\lambda\ \tau\omega\eta\ \eta\ \epsilon\upsilon\alpha\upsilon\omicron\kappa\ \epsilon\tau\omega\eta\ \eta\ \omicron\upsilon\ \pi\epsilon\tau\eta\alpha\alpha\upsilon\ \eta\tau\eta\omega\eta\epsilon$  (59.22–25); les citations du texte copte sont empruntées à Kasser, Meyer et Wurst 2007; on préférera ici la traduction de Brankaer et Bethge (2007, 381) à celles de Meyer et de Kasser (2007, 261 et

une formule qui rappelle le fameux passage des *Extraits de Théodote* 78.2 et qui pourrait bien avoir un arrière-plan liturgique. Ensuite, un narrateur anonyme relate à la troisième personne la tentation d'Allogène par Satan (59.13–62.9); toutefois, en 62.9–18, le récit passe à la première personne et c'est Allogène lui-même qui prend la parole pour faire le récit d'une révélation qu'il reçoit alors qu'il se voit entouré d'une nuée lumineuse. Grâce aux fragments bientôt publiés par Wurst, nous savons maintenant qu'il s'agit d'une instruction procurant à Allogène les réponses à donner aux questions de sept puissances (εζογκια) mauvaises, vraisemblablement au cours d'une ascension qu'il fera à travers les sphères planétaires. La nomenclature de ces puissances reprend, en inversant les deux premières, la liste des sept formes de la quatrième puissance (εζογκια) procurée par l'*Évangile selon Marie* (BG 16.5–12).

Le genre littéraire est difficile à déterminer: la mise en scène initiale sur une montagne rappelle des lieux communs des dialogues gnostiques de révélation<sup>21</sup>. Toutefois, la suite du texte fait plutôt penser à une apocalypse où Allogène reçoit une révélation céleste<sup>22</sup>.

Peut-on associer ce nouvel écrit au corpus des textes séthiens platonisants et en particulier à l'*Allogène* du codex XI de Nag Hammadi ?

Le titre de l'écrit n'est que partiellement préservé. Placé au milieu de la première ligne de la p. 59, il est entouré de chevrons; il est complètement perdu, sauf une première lettre, π et la trace d'une seconde lettre, vraisemblablement un χ. C'est sur cette base que les éditeurs ont reconstitué la première partie du titre: «Le L[ivre]» (πχ[ωωμϵ])<sup>23</sup>; le fait que

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277); voir aussi la *Lettre de Pierre à Philippe* (NHC VIII 134.23–135.1 et Tchacos 3.6–9) avec, en arrière-plan, Irénée, *Haer.* 1.2.11–21, ainsi que les parallèles chez Épiphane, *Pan.* 33.2 et dans la ( *Première*) *Apocalypse de Jacques* (NHC V 32.28–35.25; Tchacos 19.22–22.23).

<sup>21</sup> Voir par exemple la scène initiale de la *Sagesse de Jésus Christ* (BG 77.8–78.1 et NHC III 90.14–91.2), ou encore la *Lettre de Pierre à Philippe* (NHC VIII 133.12–134.13 et Tchacos 2.1–8); voir aussi Rudolph 1968 et Perkins 1980.

<sup>22</sup> D'autre part, il ne reste de la première ligne du texte que les trois premières lettres et les traces d'une quatrième à partir desquelles il est peut-être possible de reconstruire l'expression « mon [f]ils » (παωμ[ρε]), dans laquelle Brankaer et Bethge voient une caractéristique du genre épistolaire (Brankaer et Bethge 2007, 401). Toutefois, les lettres commencent généralement par le nom de leur expéditeur, par exemple, les lettres de Paul, d'Eugnoste. La formule « mon fils », ou mieux, « mon enfant » rappellerait plutôt les dialogues hermétiques. On peut peut-être la rapprocher de la formule « mon fils Messos » par laquelle l'Allogène du codex XI de Nag Hammadi s'adresse à son interlocuteur (NHC XI 49.39; 50.19; 68.28; 68.35–69.1; 69.19).

<sup>23</sup> L'espace disponible me semble trop court pour cette restitution, et il faudrait plutôt lire πχ[ωμϵ] avec un seul ω, graphie attestée en Tchacos 24.2. Lance Jenott (2012) a suggéré

ce mot soit centré au milieu de la ligne suggère que la suite se trouvait sur la ligne suivante; de cette suite, il ne semble rien subsister<sup>24</sup>. Au vu du contenu de l'écrit, on a cru pouvoir reconstruire le titre suivant: « Le L[ivre d'Allogène] »<sup>25</sup>.

Laissons de côté ce titre perdu; il reste que le héros de cet écrit est appelé Allogène (ΑΛΛΟΓΕΝΗΣ, 59.27; 60.14; 61.6, 16; 62.19; 63.[16]; 64.[15]; 65.[24]; 66.[17]), ce qui correspond à la désignation du personnage principal de l'*Allogène* du codex XI de Nag Hammadi, une figure qu'on ne retrouve, à ma connaissance que dans cet écrit et dans *Zostrien*, sous la forme ΑΛΛΟΓΕΝΙΟΣ (NHC VIII 128.7)<sup>26</sup>.

Au-delà de ce nom, qui ne se trouve que dans l'*Allogène* ou mentionné en lien avec des textes utilisés par des chrétiens platonisants d'après le témoignage de Porphyre, ou par ceux qu'Épiphane désigne comme archontiques ou séthiens, on doit se demander si l'on retrouve, dans notre écrit, des éléments caractéristiques des textes séthiens. Pour ce qui est des noms propres d'abord, hormis le nom Allogène (59.27; 60.14, 20; 61.6, 16; 62.19; 63.[16]; 64.[15])<sup>27</sup>, ce qui nous est parvenu du nouvel écrit ne comporte aucun des noms d'anges ou autres entités, par exemple Barbêlô, que l'on rencontre dans l'*Allogène* de Nag Hammadi. Allogène lui-même n'y est identifié ni à Seth ni à l'un de ses fils. On n'y retrouve non plus aucun des éléments caractéristiques de cette tradition séthienne définie par Schenke. Le terme « éon », fréquent dans les textes gnostiques, y apparaît dans l'expression « les grands éons » (ΜΙΝΟΣ ΝΑΙΩΝ, 61.19; et maintenant 64.6, 19–20; 65.17). Inconnue de l'*Allogène* de Nag Hammadi qui préfère utiliser ce terme au singulier, en particulier pour l'éon de Barbêlô (NHC XI 46.34; 51.13; 53.28; [56.26]; 58.21; 59.3), elle est attestée en *Zostrien* (13.2; 61.16 sing.) et aussi en *Marsanès* (14.20 sing.). On observe que la formule d'invocation: « O Dieu qui résides en haut dans les grands éons » (Ω ΠΝΤ ΠΕΤΡΡΑΙ ΖΗΝΙΝΙΟΣ ΝΑΙΩΝ, 61.19) est pratiquement identique à une formule que l'on trouve en

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la lecture ΠΧ[λαι ... sur la base du contenu de l'écrit; voir ΠΕΞ[1]ΜΑ ΧΑΕΙΕ en 61.24, mais cela me semble peu vraisemblable pour un titre.

<sup>24</sup> En tout cas, l'édition n'en fait pas mention; voir Kasser, Meyer, et al. 2007, 254.

<sup>25</sup> Quelle que soit la valeur que l'on accordera à la deuxième partie de cette reconstruction, il faut se rappeler que les titres des écrits anciens sont relativement instables. Le codex Tchacos nous en livre lui-même un bon exemple, puisqu'il nous donne un écrit seulement intitulé *Jacques* alors que la version parallèle du codex V de Nag Hammadi s'intitule *Apocalypse de Jacques*.

<sup>26</sup> Le quatrième (éon est celui) du quatrième lumineux, Èlèlèth, Codèrè, Épiphanie, Allogène; voir Barry, Funk, et al. 2000, 473.

<sup>27</sup> Ce vocable apparaît également une fois, dans une liste, en *Zostrien* 128.7 (ΑΛΛΟΓΕΝΙΟΣ).

*Zostrien* dans la description d'une liturgie céleste: «alors qu'ils bénis[sent le D]ieu qui surpasse les gr[ands] éons» (ΠΝ]ΟΥΓΓΕ ΕΤΣΑΞΡΑΙ Ν̄ΝΗ[ΟΣ Ν̄Ν]ΕΩΝ, NHC VIII 12.31–13.2)<sup>28</sup>. En outre, en réponse à Satan qui le tente, notre Allogène répond: «On m'appelle Allogène, car je suis d'une autre race (ΞΕ ΔΗΚΟΥΕΒΟΛ Ζ̄ΝΚΑΙΓΕΝΟΣ); je ne suis pas de ta race» (60.21–23). La formule, «je suis d'une autre race», qui n'est que l'explication du nom Allogène, se trouve également dans les *Trois Stèles de Seth* (NHC VII 119.34–120.6)<sup>29</sup>. À ma connaissance, on ne trouve pas ailleurs cette formule<sup>30</sup>, dont la source est évidemment le σπέρμα ἕτερον de Gn 4,25 LXX et renvoie par conséquent à Seth. Dans le *Livre des secrets de Jean*, Seth est engendré «selon le modèle de la génération d'en haut» (Ν̄ΘΕ ΝΤΓΕΝΕΑ ΕΤΖΝΤΠΕ, BG 63.12–16). Quant à la suite, «je ne suis pas de ta race», elle renvoie à Gn 3,15. Allogène n'est pas de la race de Satan, c'est-à-dire celle du serpent de Genèse, celle des cainites<sup>31</sup>.

Le fait qu'on ne trouve la formule, «je suis d'une autre race» que dans des textes séthiens, *Zostrien* d'une part et les *Trois Stèles de Seth* d'autre part, plaide en faveur d'un rattachement de notre écrit au corpus séthien. En outre, Goehring a suggéré dans une note de l'édition américaine des *Trois Stèles de Seth* que la répétition de la formule «tu es d'une autre race» dans ce texte pouvait s'expliquer par un contexte liturgique<sup>32</sup>; le fait qu'on la retrouve identique malgré un contexte différent dans le codex Tchacos pourrait être un indice supplémentaire d'une origine liturgique étant donné la grande stabilité de ces formules<sup>33</sup>. Et l'on peut penser que l'invocation au «dieu qui surpasse les grands éons» pourrait aussi avoir une origine liturgique ou rituelle puisqu'elle intervient dans *Zostrien* précisément dans la description d'une liturgie céleste: «... alors qu'ils bénissent le Dieu qui surpasse les [grands] éons» (NHC VIII 13.1).

<sup>28</sup> Barry, Funk, et al. 2000, 1259–261.

<sup>29</sup> «Tu es miséricorde et tu es quelqu'un d'une race autre (Ν̄ΝΤΚΟΥΕΒΟΛ Ζ̄ΝΚΕΓΕΝΟΣ), et elle est établie sur une autre race. Maintenant, tu es quelqu'un d'une race autre et elle est éta[blie] sur une autre race. Tu es quelqu'un d'une race autre ...» Claude 1983, 38–41.

<sup>30</sup> L'*Hypostase des archontes* 91.31–33 marque autrement l'altérité de Seth: «J'ai engendré un autre homme (Ν̄[ΚΕ] ΡΩΜΕ), de Dieu, à la place d'Abel ... dit Ève.»

<sup>31</sup> Voir le commentaire de Barc 2012, 302–303. Cette altérité de Seth n'est pas propre au texte grec et prend sa source dans la rédaction du texte hébreu de Genèse (Barc 2007 et 2010). Voir aussi *Les Trois Stèles de Seth* où la race de Seth est supérieure à une autre race (ϸΚΗ ΕΞΡΑΙ [Ε]Ξ̄Ν ΚΕΓΕΝΟΣ ... ϸΞ[Η] ΕΞ[Ρ]ΑΙ ΕΞ̄Ν ΚΕΓΕΝΟΣ, NHC VII 120.2, 4, qui renvoie sans doute aussi à Gn 3,15).

<sup>32</sup> Goehring 1996, 392.

<sup>33</sup> Concernant les traces de rituels dans les textes «séthiens», voir Sevrin 1986.

Sur la base des observations précédentes, et sous réserve de plus ample examen, je crois que l'on peut conclure provisoirement que le nouvel écrit partiellement conservé dans le codex Tchacos appartient bien au corpus des textes séthiens platonisants, et très vraisemblablement à une série d'écrits mettant en scène Allogène et transmis sous son nom. À l'appui de cette hypothèse, on peut encore invoquer une formule qui revient à la fois dans le codex XI selon laquelle Allogène est « entouré d'une lumière » : « Je vis la lumière qui m'entourait » (ἀ]εινὰγ επιγοοειν ε[κω]τε εροει, NHC XI 52.11), signe que son instruction est parfaite (NHC XI 52.16) et dans le codex Tchacos où « un nuage de lumière entoure » Allogène qui ne peut toutefois soutenir sa vue (ογβη[π]ι νιογοϊν ακωτ̄ ερο[ει] ἡπιδωμωσση εειωρῆ [ε]ρογν ρῆπογοϊν ετκωτ̄ ερος, 62.11–14). Certes, les nuages de lumière ne sont pas rares dans les textes gnostiques, ni la lumière qui « entoure » l'objet d'une vision<sup>34</sup>. Mais que le récipiendaire d'une révélation soit lui-même « entouré » de lumière ou d'un nuage de lumière n'est pas fréquent. On ne trouve ce motif en effet, dans une formulation très proche d'*Allogène* NHC XI 52.11, qu'en *Marsanès* 64.3, en conclusion du traité, où, dans un passage très mal conservé, Marsanès dit : « ... parce que ] j'ai [vu] toutes [les lu]mières (qui) m'entouraient ... » (ἀρ[ι]νε]γ ἀ[νογὰ]ειν τηρογ ε(τ)κωτ̄ [α]ρ]δει, NHC X 64.2–3)<sup>35</sup>. On observera qu'en *Marsanès* et *Allogène*, ces passages arrivent au terme d'une révélation et les récipiendaires peuvent « voir » cette lumière qui les entoure, alors que dans notre texte, la scène intervient avant la révélation et Allogène ne peut encore en supporter la vue<sup>36</sup>. Il semble donc qu'on soit ici en présence non pas d'un simple motif commun, lumière ou nuage de lumière, mais d'un thème plus spécifique, qui traverse de manière cohérente le codex Tchacos, l'*Allogène* du codex XI et *Marsanès*, soit la capacité de « voir la lumière » acquise au terme seulement d'une révélation. Cette lumière qui « entoure » le récipiendaire de la révélation est peut-être à rapprocher également de la lumière que revêt le baptisé dans d'autres textes, par exemple la *Première Pensée à la triple forme*<sup>37</sup>, ou encore

<sup>34</sup> Voir par exemple l'*Apocalypse de Pierre* NHC VII 82.9–14; le *Livre des secrets de Jean* NHC III 7.11.

<sup>35</sup> Funk, Poirier, et al. 2000, 348–349 et commentaire.

<sup>36</sup> Le texte comporte une incohérence, en effet, Allogène dit : « Une nuée de lumière [m']entoura (ακωτ̄ ερο[ει]). Je ne pus fixer des yeux la lumière qui l'entourait tellement elle était brillante » (ἡπιδωμωσση εειωρῆ [ε]ρογν ρῆπογοϊν ετκωτ̄ ερος : ἦε ετῆταατ̄ [ε] ἡμωσ, 62.12–15) alors qu'on attendrait « qui m'entourait ». Le texte est sans doute corrompu car il est improbable que la lumière entoure la nuée.

<sup>37</sup> Dans la *Première Pensée à la triple forme*, le Christ se dresse « dans sa propre lumière,

dans l'hymne baptismal final du *Livre sacré du Grand Esprit invisible*<sup>38</sup>, ce qui, encore une fois, ramène à un contexte liturgique.

Un autre élément remarquable de ce texte est son caractère répétitif. En effet, l'on sait maintenant grâce au fragment retrouvé par Alin Suciuc que la prière adressée au Seigneur Dieu en 59.17–25 répète intégralement la formule annoncée quelques lignes plus haut. De même les fragments publiés par Gregor Wurst montrent que l'instruction donnée à Allogène concernant son ascension à travers les cieux planétaires répète pour chacun des cercles planétaires les mêmes questions et réponses, de sorte que les formules en sont sept fois données. Ce caractère répétitif de l'écrit pourrait bien avoir eu une visée mnémotechnique dans un contexte d'instruction en rapport avec un rituel, baptismal ou autre.

Le contenu des nouveaux fragments ne semble contenir aucun élément que l'on puisse invoquer contre cette hypothèse concernant l'appartenance du *L[ivre d'Allogène]* du codex Tchacos à une série d'écrits mis sous le nom d'Allogène dont NHC XI,3 serait le dernier. Le fait qu'ils contiennent une instruction relative au passage des cieux inférieurs, première étape vers une ascension céleste, pourrait même assez bien convenir au premier écrit d'une série relatant l'ascension d'Allogène (cf. NHC XI 51.22–30) jusqu'à son instruction parfaite par Youel (NHC XI 52.15–17) racontée dans l'Allogène du codex XI de Nag Hammadi.

### 3. VOYONS MAINTENANT LES ÉLÉMENTS CHRÉTIENS

On observe, dans ces premières pages, les éditeurs l'ont bien vu<sup>39</sup>, des motifs appartenant à la tradition relative à Jésus : l'évocation du mont Tabor (ΘΑΜΒΩΡ, 59.15), la tentation d'Allogène par Satan (59.25–61.16) et une scène qui pourrait évoquer la transfiguration (61.16–62.18). Cette scène introduit une révélation provenant du nuage de lumière dont il a été question plus haut ; cette révélation consiste en l'annonce d'une « bonne nouvelle » (ὨΜΝΟΥ[ΦΕ], 62.23).

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celle qui l'entoure » (εἰκῶντε ἐροῦ) précise le texte (NHC XIII 38.3–5); voir Poirier 2006, 138–139.

<sup>38</sup> III 66.25–67.12 « ... je me suis armé d'une armure de lumière, je suis devenu lumière ... j'ai pris forme dans le cercle (κύκλος) de la richesse de la lumière ... » et IV 79.19–21 « dans le trésor qui entoure (εἰκῶντ[ε] ...) »; traduction Charron 2007, 547.

<sup>39</sup> Brankaer et Bethge 2007, 375–378; Kasser, Meyer, et al. 2007, 253–258; voir aussi Scoppello 2009.

Voyons un à un ces éléments apparemment disparates, à commencer par le mont Tabor : notre texte y situe la scène d'ouverture (59,10–25). Haut-lieu cananéen, le Tabor n'apparaît ni dans le Nouveau Testament, ni dans la littérature valentinienne ou séthienne. Toutefois, la tradition chrétienne ancienne y situe la transfiguration de Jésus. De même, un fragment de l'*Évangile des Hébreux* conservé par Origène (*Comm. Jo.* 2.12 §87) semble situer sur le mont Tabor la tentation de Jésus<sup>40</sup>.

À la suite de cette prière, Satan apparaît pour tenter Allogène, dans une scène qui semble bien s'inspirer de la tentation de Jésus, bien que le début de la réponse d'Allogène à Satan, « éloigne-toi de moi Satan » (κα[ε] ὠκ' εβολῆμοι πατανα[ε], 60,15–16) ne soit pas l'exact équivalent du grec ὑπαγε ὀπισω μου, σατανᾶ (« Va-t-en, retire-toi ... ») que Jésus oppose à Pierre en Marc 8,33 (Mt 16,23) et que Mt reprend dans la scène de la tentation au désert (Mt 4,10).

Satan vaincu, Allogène est entouré, comme nous l'avons vu, d'une nuée lumineuse d'où vient une voix dans une scène qui rappelle la rédaction matthéenne du récit de la transfiguration, la seule à comporter une nuée lumineuse (νεφέλη φωτεινή, Mt 17,5) là où Marc (9,7) et Luc (9,34) ont simplement une nuée.

Cette voix est envoyée à Allogène pour lui annoncer « la bonne nouvelle » (παῖνογ[ε], 62,23), non pas « une » bonne nouvelle, mais « la » bonne nouvelle. Au vu des éléments chrétiens que comporte le texte, il est évident que ce terme, dont le substrat grec était vraisemblablement εὐαγγέλιον, veut désigner la Bonne nouvelle que Jésus-Allogène doit recevoir. Il faut donc entendre ici la Bonne nouvelle ou l'Évangile au sens où le terme est employé par Marc et Matthieu, et surtout par Paul qui « reçoit » l'Évangile par une révélation (Gal 1,11–12) et non comme un titre<sup>41</sup>. Le fait qu'Allogène reçoive l'Évangile n'implique pas que le texte perde de vue ici son identification à Jésus<sup>42</sup>, mais seulement que cette bonne nouvelle lui est révélée d'en haut.

De cette bonne nouvelle, détaillée dans la suite du texte, l'édition critique ne donnait que des fragments qui sont complétés par les fragments de l'Ohio maintenant publiés par Gregor Wurst.

<sup>40</sup> Bertrand (1997, 460, note *ad* II) note que ce fragment, où Jésus est emporté par l'Esprit sur le mont Tabor, provient vraisemblablement d'un récit de la tentation, seul épisode évangélique où Jésus est entraîné par l'Esprit sur une montagne (Mt 4,1.8); voir aussi Scopello 2009, 698.

<sup>41</sup> Le fait que le traducteur copte n'ait pas conservé le gréco-copte εὐαγγελιον devenu technique comme titre, indique qu'il l'a bien compris en ce sens.

<sup>42</sup> Contrairement à ce que croient Brankaer et Bethge : « Dass Allogenes das Evangelium empfängt, spricht dafür, dass hier nicht (mehr) Jesus im Blick ist » (Brankaer et Bethge 2007, 415).



On a donc dans ces premières pages une accumulation de motifs relevant de la tradition de Jésus entrelacés de manière parfaitement cohérente dans le tissu narratif d'un texte séthien appartenant vraisemblablement à une série de textes circulant sous le nom d'Allogène. Ce texte identifie clairement Allogène à Jésus, une identification qui n'est pas sans parallèle puisque Seth, dans le *Livre sacré du Grand esprit invisible*, revêt «Jésus le vivant» (NHC III 64.1–3); cf. aussi le *Deuxième Traité du Grand Seth* (NHC VII 65.18; 69.21) et, dans un passage problématique, l'*Évangile de Judas* (Tchacos 52.4–6). On observera toutefois que ce Jésus qui implore la pitié du Dieu qui réside dans les grands éons (61.16–26) s'apparente bien plus au héros éponyme du traité *Zostrien* recherchant le principe de toute chose et aspirant au repos (NHC VIII 2.13–3.13) qu'au Jésus des évangiles canoniques<sup>43</sup>.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Le quatrième écrit du codex Tchacos appartient vraisemblablement à une série de textes dont Allogène était le héros éponyme et transmise sous ce nom mentionnée par Épiphane et présumée par la formule finale de l'*Allogène* du codex XI de Nag Hammadi. Il met en scène la déréliction d'Allogène-Jésus abandonné et seul «ici-bas en ce lieu désert» (ϣρᾶϊ ϣῆπερ[ιμ]ᾶ ΝΧΔΕΙΕ, 61.24; cf. *Zostrien* 3.25), encore incapable de supporter la vue de la lumière et recevant une première révélation non pas des choses célestes, mais de ce qui doit lui arriver lorsqu'il traversera les cieux planétaires et des formules par lesquelles il leur échappera. Un tel contenu ne peut convenir qu'au début, où se situer près du début de cette série d'Allogènes dont celui du codex XI serait l'aboutissement, le couronnement, le sceau.

La présence de motifs et formules bien attestés dans le corpus séthien et d'éléments narratifs provenant des traditions relatives à Jésus finement entrelacés dans la texture même de l'écrit, ne peut être l'effet d'interpolations secondaires visant à séthianiser un texte chrétien ou à christianiser un texte séthien. Elle ne peut s'expliquer que par une composition originale émanant d'un milieu identifiant Jésus et Allogène à des fins d'édification interne ou de propagande extérieure.

Si l'on admet les conclusions précédentes, on ne peut avancer que le *L[ivre d'Allogène]* ne soit que «secondairement séthien» ou encore qu'il ne soit pas relié aux textes séthiens dits «platonisants», ou alors c'est à

<sup>43</sup> Je dois cette observation à Wolf-Peter Funk.

toute la série des « Allogènes » à laquelle il appartient qu'il faudrait étendre cette opinion. En bonne méthode, j'ai cherché à montrer, sur la base des indices littéraires que nous procurent le *L[ivre d'Allogène]* du codex Tchacos et l'*Allogène* du codex XI de Nag Hammadi, et à partir des témoignages externes et indépendants de Porphyre et d'Épiphane, que l'on a toutes les raisons de penser que ces deux écrits appartiennent à une même collection de textes mis sous le nom d'Allogène et qu'ils doivent être rattachés à la tradition séthienne platonisante.

L'amalgame de matériau chrétien et séthien dans un texte appartenant à une série séthienne suppose pour le quatrième écrit du codex Tchacos et pour la série de livres d'Allogène à laquelle il appartient vraisemblablement, de même aussi sans doute pour les écrits séthiens platonisants en général, une situation moins distante du christianisme que ce que suggère Turner. Cela serait cohérent avec l'observation de Porphyre au chapitre 16 de la *Vie de Plotin* citée en introduction, pour qui les lecteurs de ces apocalypses étaient bien des chrétiens. Sans remettre en question la contribution irremplaçable de John Turner à la connaissance et à la compréhension du corpus séthien platonisant, ce nouvel écrit invite à revoir et à nuancer certains aspects de la tradition littéraire qu'il en reconstruit.

Enfin, la possible origine liturgique des formules « O Dieu qui résides en haut dans les grands éons » (61.19) et « je suis d'une autre race » (61.21–23), de même que la répétition de la formule de prière du début et des formules à produire lors de l'ascension céleste, tout cela pourrait bien être l'indice d'un texte destiné à une instruction liée à une pratique liturgique, peut-être baptismale. Il s'agirait donc d'un texte destiné à l'édification interne des membres d'un groupe plutôt qu'à une propagande externe.

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## THE *BOOK OF ALLOGENES* (CT,4) AND SETHIAN GNOSTICISM

Birger A. Pearson

It is a distinct pleasure for me to participate in this Festschrift for John Turner. I have known John since 1966 when I joined the Religion faculty at Duke University. John was a doctoral student then, working under the direction of the department's Coptologist, Orval Wintermute. In the Spring of 1968 James M. Robinson, Director of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity at the Claremont Graduate School, came to Duke. He was busy recruiting young scholars for a new project based at Claremont, "The Coptic Gnostic Library," involving the study and eventual publication of the Coptic codices discovered near Nag Hammadi in Upper Egypt in late 1945. Robinson had obtained photographs of the manuscripts from UNESCO in Paris, and these photos became the starting point for our work on the Coptic texts that constituted the "Nag Hammadi Library." John, Orval Wintermute, and I were recruited to join the project.

John and I came to Claremont in the summer of 1968 and began our work together with others, transcribing the texts that were assigned to us. John had moved to Claremont and had been hired by the Graduate School as a Research Associate, and eventually became a Visiting Assistant Professor. I began my work as Assistant Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1969, and spent the entire summer working with our team in Claremont. Over the years, John and I spent a lot of time together, in Claremont and eventually in the Coptic Museum in Old Cairo, where the Nag Hammadi manuscripts were housed.

John has been involved in the publication of a number of Nag Hammadi tractates, both in the "Coptic Gnostic Library" series published by Brill and in the "Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi" series published by Laval University in Québec. I think it is fair to say that the definitive work on at least one of these, *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3), has been done by John Turner.<sup>1</sup> He

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<sup>1</sup> See his edition of *Allogenes*, Turner 1990, 173–267; his Introduction to *Allogenes*, with complete English translation, Turner 2004, 1–188; and his introduction and translation, Turner 2007, 679–700.

is now also well-known as the author of a magisterial treatment of Sethian (“Classic”) Gnosticism.<sup>2</sup>

In 2007, another Coptic codex was published, the Codex Tchacos, and that manuscript contains fragments of another tractate featuring as recipient of heavenly revelations a figure called Allogenes. The title of that tractate is lost, but the editors have given it a title, “A Book of Allogenes.”<sup>3</sup>

In what follows I shall treat briefly the content of *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) and the *Book of Allogenes* (CT,4), and then offer some comments on how these two tractates relate to one another. I shall then situate the *Book of Allogenes* in the context and history of Sethian Gnosticism.

### 1. ALLOGENES (NHC XI,3)

*Allogenes* is an apocalypse featuring heavenly revelations given to the main character, Allogenes, by heavenly revealers. Allogenes can be identified as Seth, son of Adam, come down to earth from his heavenly home. The name Allogenes means “another race” or “stranger,” and is based on what is said about Seth in Genesis 4:25, “another seed” (ἕτερον σπέρμα). The revealer in the first part of the tractate is called Youel. The name “Youel” would appear to be based on the divine name Yao: “Yao is God (El).” But Youel here is a feminine figure. Allogenes hands down the revelations he has received to his son Messos (from Greek μέσος, “middle?”). Messos is thus the mediator of the revelations given to Allogenes. Youel is the revealer only in the first part of the tractate; in the second part the revelations are given to Allogenes by three heavenly beings called Salamex, Semen, and Arme.

The first part of the tractate consists of five revelations given to Allogenes by Youel. The first revelation features the divine aeon Barbelo and the supreme being called “the Triple-Powered Invisible Spirit.” In the second revelation, Allogenes is told that he has a great power within him, intellect, which enables him to receive revelations about the divine world. The third, fourth, and fifth revelations feature additional information about the Triple-Powered One and the aeon of Barbelo. Youel then departs from Allogenes, and he deliberates on what he has learned for a hundred years.

A hundred years later, Allogenes experiences a vision and is then caught up through the various levels of the heavenly world culminating in a revelation featuring the Unknowable One. At the end of the tractate Allogenes

<sup>2</sup> Turner 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Kasser et al. 2007. See also Brankaer and Bethge 2007.

tells Messos that he has been commanded to write down the things he has learned, and he commands Messos to leave the book containing the revelations on a high mountain and to proclaim them to others.

## 2. THE BOOK OF ALLOGENES (CT,4)<sup>4</sup>

Unfortunately this tractate is very poorly preserved; not a single one of the extant pages in the manuscript is complete. The tractate occupies pages 59–66 of the codex as currently preserved. How many more pages were devoted to the *Book of Allogenes* is completely unknown; so we have no idea at all as to how the tractate ended.

A superscript title occurred on lines 1–2 of p. 59, as indicated by the usual decorations above the first line. Only a single letter of the title is preserved plus part of a second letter and the first word of the title has been restored to read π[χΩΘΜΕ ...], “the book ...”. Since Allogenes is the main character in the tractate, the editors have given it a provisional title, “The Book of Allogenes.” Lance Jenott suggests a different restoration: πχ[αειε], “the W[ilderness],” based on the reference to “wilderness” at 61.24, a restoration I find unconvincing.<sup>5</sup> Very little is preserved of lines 3–9. The editors have conjectured the opening word to read παωυ[ρε ...], “my son,” and have suggested that Allogenes is addressing an unnamed son, recalling Allogenes’ addresses to his son “Messos” in NHC XI,3. In the following lines, Allogenes is accompanied by his disciples, who are praying for a revelation that would give them the ability to know themselves, where they have come from, where they are going, and what they should do to achieve life (59.7–13).

The following passage is given in the third person, and records an ascent of Allogenes and his disciples upon a mountain called “Tabor,” which is the mountain associated with the Transfiguration of Jesus in the gospels according to early Christian tradition.<sup>6</sup> There they bow down in prayer asking the Lord God who is “above all the great aeons” to give them a spirit of knowledge for the revelation of mysteries, that they might know themselves, where they have come from, where they are going, and what they should do to live (59.13–25).

<sup>4</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, translations of the text given here are those of the critical edition, Kasser et al. 2007. Translations of biblical passages are from the RSV.

<sup>5</sup> Jenott 2011, 101–107.

<sup>6</sup> The earliest attestation would appear to be in the *Gospel of the Hebrews*, frg. 2 in Ehrman and Pleše 2011, 219 (= Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.12 § 87).



This prayer is apparently uttered by Allogenes himself, for the last two lines on the page read, "After Allogenes had spoken these words [Satan] appeared" (59.26–27). The first 8 lines of the following page are almost totally lost, but most of the rest of the page is preserved. This passage is obviously based on the narrative of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness as recorded in the gospels of Matthew and Luke (Matt 4:1–11; Luke 4:1–13). It is obvious that Allogenes is equated with Jesus in this tractate.

The extant text of p. 60 picks up at line 9, where Satan is addressing Allogenes. Satan invites Allogenes to take for himself "what is in my world, and eat from my good things, and take for yourself silver and gold and clothes" (60.9–13). There is no direct quotation from the gospels, only allusions. "What is in my world" recalls Luke 4:6, where the Devil says that what is in "the kingdoms of the world" has been "delivered to me." The "good things" Allogenes is invited to eat reflect the "loaves of bread" in Matthew 4:3. Allogenes says to Satan, "Depart from me, Satan, for I seek not you but my Father who is superior to all the great aeons" (60.15–19). Allogenes' reply reflects Jesus' rebuke of the Devil in Matthew 4:10, "Begone (ὑπάγε), Satan!" Allogenes' Father, whom he seeks, is the transcendent God beyond the god of this world.

Allogenes tells Satan that he was called "Allogenes" because he is "from another race," not from Satan's race (60.19–23). Satan's reply to Allogenes is introduced by the narrator with the following words, "Then the one who rules the [world] said to him" (60.23–25). What Satan says begins with "We," but lines 1–5 of p. 61 are mostly lost. Satan's reply concludes with the words, "in my wo[rld]" (61.5). That Satan is depicted as ruler of the world reflects what is said of the devil in the Gospel of John, "the ruler of this world" (John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11). Of course, in John the "ruler of this world" is not its creator. The devil in John reflects the Jewish apocalyptic world-view, according to which "this age" is dominated by the devil and his minions. In the Gnostic *Book of Allogenes*, the "ruler of the world" is presumably also its creator. "Satan" in this tractate is probably equivalent to Yaldabaoth, the creator of the lower world. In the *Book of Allogenes*, the world-creator has been thoroughly demonized.

The temptation narrative concludes with Allogenes telling Satan once again, "Depart from [me,] Satan, go away, for I do not [belong to] you" (61.7–9). Satan, having been defeated, goes away "to his own place in great shame" (61.13–16). Cf. Luke 4:13: "And when the devil had ended every temptation, he departed from him until an opportune time."

Instead of being encouraged by his victory over Satan, Allogenes cries out to God for mercy and salvation from evil. "Look on me and hear me in this

forsaken place. Now [let your] ineffable [light shine on me ... (61.16–26).” Most of the top eight lines of the next page are lost, but reference is made to “your light” (61.5). His prayer concludes with the words, “Yea, Lord, help me, for [I] do not know [...] for ever and ever” (62.6–9).

The narrative suddenly reverts to the first-person. In an account reminiscent of the Transfiguration narratives in the NT gospels, Allogenes reports that a “luminous cloud” surrounded him, and he heard “a word from the cloud and the light” which was shining over him (62.9–18). We can compare the “luminous cloud” (νεφέλη φωτεινή) that overshadows the disciples in Matthew 17:5. Someone tells Allogenes that his prayer has been heard. “I have been sent here to you to tell you the good news, before you leave [this place], so that ...” (62.19–24). The extant text does not tell us who the messenger is who is telling him the good news, but I shall offer a conjecture on his identity in the concluding section of this essay.

Most of p. 63 is lost but a small part of the middle of the page can be read: “[But you, you] will leave, [O Allogen]es, you [will (?) ... and pass] by (?) the [...]” (63.16–18). A few lines later one can read “[...] which is above all [these great aeons], and [...]” (63.20–21). I would suggest the possibility that in what follows, Allogenes reports some kind of mystical ascent experience.<sup>7</sup> Unfortunately, only a few scattered words can be read in the fragments that represent pages 64–66. The name “Allogenes” is partially preserved at three places: “[Allo]gene[s]” (64.15–16); “Allo[genes]” (65.24–25); “[Allo]ge[nes]” (66.17–18).

In what follows I shall offer some comments on the figure and role of Allogenes in *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) and the *Book of Allogenes* (CT,4). There are some obvious similarities, but also some interesting differences between the two tractates. My references to NHC XI,3 are influenced by the seminal work of John Turner on that tractate.<sup>8</sup>

### 3. ALLOGENES IN NHC XI,3 AND CT,4

In both tractates Allogenes is an incarnation of the heavenly Seth, son of Adam. This is reflected in his name, “another race,” based on what is said of the birth of Seth in Genesis 4:25. In CT,4 Allogenes is obviously equated with Jesus Christ, and what is said of him reflects influence from the NT gospels.

<sup>7</sup> An ascent context for this passage is also suggested by Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 416.

<sup>8</sup> See especially Turner’s contribution to the Laval edition of *Allogenes* (Turner 2004).

On the other hand, NHC XI,3 is a non-Christian tractate, with no evidence of Christian influence in its composition. Instead, it is heavily influenced by third-century Middle Platonist philosophy.

In both tractates, Allogenes is incarnate in the lower world and is singled out for special revelations from one or more heavenly revealers. In both tractates, Allogenes responds with fear and prayers for deliverance. This is especially the case in Allogenes' responses to Youel's revelations in the first part of NHC XI,3. In CT,4 Allogenes prays for deliverance from "this forsaken place" (61.24), but also prays for God's "ineffable [light]" to shine upon him (61.25–26).

In Allogenes' response to Youel's third revelation in NHC XI,3, Allogenes reports that he was "very disturbed." But then he says, "And [I] turned to myself and saw the light that [surrounded] me and the Good that was in me, and I became Divine" (52.7–12). In CT,4 Allogenes reports that a "luminous cloud" surrounded him, so bright that he could not look at it (62.9–15).

In NHC XI,3 Allogenes is transported upward through the various levels of the heavenly world, and experiences visions of the unknown God and his various emanations. The second part of the tractate is devoted to a lengthy account of Allogenes' ascent. The extant text of CT,4 does not report such an ascent, but, as I have suggested above, the remaining fragments of p. 63 may provide hints of such an experience.

In NHC XI,3 Allogenes is reporting his experiences to his son Messos. In CT,4 there is a possible hint of a son who is addressed in Allogenes' accounts. The opening line can be restored to read, "My [son] ..." (59.3). In NHC XI,3 Messos is commanded to write down Allogenes' account in a book to be deposited on a high mountain for the benefit of those who are worthy (68.16–25). Those who are worthy are obviously the special "race of Seth." As already noted, we do not know how CT,4 ended, but there are hints throughout the extant text of a special "race" represented by Allogenes.

In both tractates, Allogenes functions as a savior figure, i.e., as a revealer of gnosis. But also, in both tractates, Allogenes is himself in need of salvation. He is a classic example of a "saved savior." As such, he is a paradigm of the elect soul in need of salvation, and he hands down to other elect souls the gnosis required for their ultimate return to their divine origins.

Both tractates are examples of "books of Allogenes," i.e., Gnostic books written and preserved for the benefit of the "other race," i.e., the "seed" or "race" of Seth. The tractate *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) has as its subtitle at the end of the book, "[The] seal of all [the] books [of] Allogenes" (69.16–19). Its author evidently meant his book to serve as the ultimate example of Allo-

genes books. Whether the *Book of Allogenes* (CT,4) was one of the Allogenes books known to the author of NHC XI,3 cannot be decided one way or the other.

#### 4. THE BOOK OF ALLOGENES (CT,4) AS A SETHIAN GNOSTIC TEXT

The editors of the Critical Edition of Codex Tchacos have identified the *Book of Allogenes* as “a Christian Sethian text,” perhaps datable to the second century.<sup>9</sup> Brankaer and Bethge, however, in their edition, claim that nearly all of the distinctive elements of Sethianism are absent from the tractate.<sup>10</sup> This is a very surprising claim, for numerous distinctive elements of Sethian Gnosticism can be found in it.<sup>11</sup>

The first of these elements is the figure of Allogenes, who is clearly identifiable as an earthly incarnation of the heavenly Seth, son of Adam, the Gnostic savior *par excellence*. This is a distinctive feature of Sethian Gnosticism.<sup>12</sup> In our tractate, Allogenes claims to be from “another race” (60.22), a play on his name (ἄλλογενής, “another race”). In Sethian Gnosticism, Seth is the progenitor of a special race, the race or “seed” of Seth, the ἕτερον σπέρμα of Adam referred to in Genesis 4:25. As already noted, Allogenes in our tractate is clearly identified with Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, in his earthly ministry prior to his crucifixion, is presented in our tractate as a manifestation of Allogenes. That the heavenly Seth came to be incarnate in Jesus Christ is a doctrine attributed to Sethian groups known to patristic writers.<sup>13</sup>

The *Book of Allogenes* shows some interesting relationships with other Sethian Gnostic tractates known to us from the Nag Hammadi corpus. Brankaer and Bethge have noted some close relationships in terms of structure and content between our tractate and two Sethian tractates, the *Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II,4) and the *Thought of Norea* (NHC IX,2).<sup>14</sup> These relationships have to do with what is said of the Gnostic heroine Norea in the two Nag Hammadi tractates. Her role in those tractates is comparable to that of Allogenes in the *Book of Allogenes*. In the latter, Allogenes is

<sup>9</sup> See Meyer’s introduction in Kasser et al. 2007, 258.

<sup>10</sup> Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 375.

<sup>11</sup> The basic work on the Sethian system is that of Hans-Martin Schenke (1981, 588–616).

<sup>12</sup> On the role of Seth in Sethian Gnosticism see Pearson 1990, 52–83. All of the evidence in patristic and original sources preserved in Coptic can be found there.

<sup>13</sup> Pseudo-Tertullian, *Adv. haer.* 8; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 39.3.5. See Pearson 1990, 53–54.

<sup>14</sup> Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 378, 408–411.

victorious in his encounter with Satan, and Satan then departs from him in shame (59.13–16). In the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, the evil archons attempt to rape Norea, and she curses them, whereupon the archons withdraw from her (92.18–93.8). Allogenes cries out to God for help, and so does Norea (61.16–62.9; cf. *Hyp. Arch.* 92.32–93.3). Their cries for help utilize the same Greek verb, βoηθεῖν.

Who is Norea? This Gnostic heroine has a very interesting history. I have treated this history in detail elsewhere.<sup>15</sup> Suffice it to say here that Norea, in Sethian Gnosticism, started out in Jewish lore as a “naughty girl,” Na’amah. Norea’s original name is Horaia, a name which also occurs in various Gnostic texts. Her name means “pleasing, lovely” (Greek ὠραία = Hebrew *na’amah*). The name “Norea” is a variant of the original name, “Horaia.” Other variants of the name appear in various Gnostic texts: “Noria,” “Noraia,” “Horea,” “Orea,” and “Nuraita.” The Gnostics took the Jewish story of Na’amah and made of her a Gnostic savior figure, a feminine counterpart to Seth, indeed his sister-wife in some Gnostic texts.

The birth of Norea is recorded in the anthropogonic myth that is part of the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. Immediately after the story of the birth of Seth we read the following:

Again Eve became pregnant, and she bore [Norea]. And she said, “He has begotten on [me a] virgin as an assistance (βοηθεία) [for] many generations of mankind.” She is the virgin whom the forces did not defile.<sup>16</sup>

(*Hyp. Arch.* 91.34–92.3)

Later in the tractate we read that the archons become enamored of Norea and attempt to rape her. As already noted above, their attempt is unsuccessful. Then she cries out to God for help. Her prayer is answered by a “great angel” who comes down from the heavens. He identifies himself as Eleleth, one of the four illuminators who stand in the presence of the great Invisible Spirit (*Hyp. Arch.* 93.2–22). In what follows in the tractate, Eleleth provides Norea with the gnosis requisite for her return to her divine origin.

The salvation of Norea is treated briefly in the *Thought of Norea* (NHC IX,2), a short tractate that can be seen as a hymn to Norea. Her prayers are heard, thanks to the “four holy helpers who intercede on her behalf with the Father of the All” (28.27–30). Her restoration to the divine Pleroma is described in the following terms:

<sup>15</sup> Pearson 1990, 84–94.

<sup>16</sup> Bentley Layton’s translation in Layton 1989. The word βοηθεία here probably reflects the word βοηθός (“helper”) in Gen 2:18.

And [she began] to speak with words of [Life], and (she) remained in the [presence] of the Exalted One, [possessing that] which she had received before the world came into being. [She has] the [great mind] of the Invisible One, [and she gives] glory to (her) Father, [and she] dwells within those who [...] within the Pleroma.<sup>17</sup> (Norea 28.12–22)

In both tractates featuring Norea she is presented as a “saved savior” in the same way as Allogenes in the *Book of Allogenes*. As such, she can be seen as a feminine counterpart to Allogenes=Seth=Jesus Christ. Both Allogenes and Norea are firmly fixed within the Sethian Gnostic tradition.

Another distinctive feature of Sethian Gnosticism in the *Book of Allogenes* is the cloud of light that surrounds him, from which is heard a heavenly voice (62.10–24). We can compare, for example, the luminous cloud seen by Judas in the *Gospel of Judas* (CT,3) which Jesus (not Judas!)<sup>18</sup> then enters (57.16–26). In the tractate *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1), Zostrianos, on his ascent through the various heavens, enters a glorious light-cloud (4.20–5.10). The luminous cloud in the *Book of Allogenes* and the other Sethian texts functions as a connecting link between Allogenes on earth and the ineffable divine light above (61.25–26).

Surrounded by the cloud of light, Allogenes says, “I heard a word from the cloud and the light.” Allogenes is told by this word, “O Allogenes, the sound of your prayer has been heard, and I have been sent here to you to tell you the good news ...” (62.15–24).

The conveyer of this message is not identified. Brankaer and Bethge see in this reference to “a word” a divine hypostasis, a Logos figure.<sup>19</sup> I have another suggestion, in view of the parallels we noted between Allogenes and Norea: Eleleth. It is he who conveys good news to Norea, as already noted, and it may very well be Eleleth who conveys good news to Allogenes in our tractate. Of course, there is no way of knowing for certain who is speaking to Allogenes, but Eleleth is a reasonable conjecture.

In the Sethian mythological system, Eleleth is the fourth of four “lights” or “luminaries” (φωστήρ) in the heavenly world who serve as attendants to Autogenes, the divine “Son” in the Sethian triad of Father (Invisible Spirit), Mother (Barbelo), and Son. The best preserved version of the Sethian myth is found in the *Apocryphon of John* (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG,2). In that version, which is a highly developed “Christianization” of an originally non-Christian

<sup>17</sup> My translation in Pearson 1981.

<sup>18</sup> The original editors of the *Gospel of Judas* have Judas entering the cloud, but that is certainly not correct. On this issue see Pearson 2009, esp. 147–149.

<sup>19</sup> Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 414.

system,<sup>20</sup> Eleleth is accompanied by three other “aeons,” Perfection, Peace, and Wisdom (Sophia, *Ap. John* II 8.20). Sophia, as the last of the various aeons, is the one whose “fall” results in the production of the world-creator Yaldabaoth. Eleleth is associated with the human souls who do not know the Pleroma and whose “repentance” is required for their salvation (*Ap. John* II 9.18–23). The position of the Illuminator Eleleth in the Pleroma allows him to serve as a bridge to elect souls here below in need of gnosis. That is the role that he plays in the salvation of Norea in the *Hypostasis of the Archons*. In view of the parallels already noted between Allogenes and Norea, it is not unreasonable to suppose that it is he who conveys the “good news” to Allogenes in the *Book of Allogenes*.

Finally, the question can be raised as to the possibility of finding in the *Book of Allogenes* some allusions to Sethian Gnostic ritual. Brankaer and Bethge have argued that one can find in the tractate some allusions to a Gnostic initiation ritual, though they do not argue for a specifically Sethian context to such a ritual.<sup>21</sup> They suggest that the actions taken by Allogenes and the disciples in the text reflect the following initiation features: (1) Preliminary instruction, (2) Such gestures as kneeling, prayers, and renunciation of the world-rulers, (3) Invocation of God and prayers for enlightenment and revelation. The goal of such a ritual sequence would be salvation from the cosmos and ascent into the Pleroma.<sup>22</sup>

Brankaer and Bethge note that there are no specific references to baptism in the *Book of Allogenes*. They account for this by arguing that our tractate reflects a later Gnostic tendency toward “deritualization,” involving a spiritualization of such ritual practices as water baptism.<sup>23</sup> They are certainly correct in noting the lack of references to baptism in our tractate, but I must confess that I am somewhat skeptical about their explanation for this lack.

Sethian Gnostic communities had a rich ritual life, involving two sacraments, baptism and ritual ascent.<sup>24</sup> Some of our Sethian texts provide information on these ceremonies. For example, there is considerable information on Sethian baptism in the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NHC III,2; IV,2).<sup>25</sup> Schenke rightly refers to the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5)

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<sup>20</sup> On *Ap. John* as a Jewish Gnostic document secondarily Christianized, see Pearson 1997, 126–134.

<sup>21</sup> Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 376–378.

<sup>22</sup> Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 376–378.

<sup>23</sup> Brankaer and Bethge 2007, 377.

<sup>24</sup> See esp. Schenke 1981, 602–607, on cultic practice in Sethianism.

<sup>25</sup> On Sethian baptism, see esp. Turner 2006, 941–991.

as “the etiology of a mystery of ascension of the Sethian community.”<sup>26</sup> Of course, not all of our Sethian texts contain references to the ritual life of Sethian communities. The Sethian tractates we have are of different genres and were written for different purposes. So the absence of any reference to baptism in the *Book of Allogenes* is no indication that the community of its author had no interest in cultic practice.

To conclude this discussion, I would suggest that the *Book of Allogenes* can be situated in the history of Christian Sethianism sometime in the early third century, either in Syria or in Egypt. The tractate is too poorly preserved to say any more than that.

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<sup>26</sup> Turner 2006, 602.



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## THE TEMPTATION OF ALLOGENES (CODEX TCHACOS, TRACTATE IV)

Madeleine Scopello

In this study in honour of our colleague and friend John D. Turner, we shall consider the fourth tractate from Codex Tchacos, *Allogenes*, and, to begin, we will give a preliminary overview of it. The ancient title of this tractate has not been preserved apart from two letters and its editors have entitled it *Book of Allogenes* after the name of its main character, Allogenes.<sup>1</sup> First, we must note that this text is entirely independent of the tractate *Allogenes* found at Nag Hammadi (NHC XI,3),<sup>2</sup> in which an initiate, who bears the name of Allogenes (the Stranger), receives revelations about the divine world. Speculation about the Gnostic pantheon was there given a philosophical structure with a Middle Platonic style (and sometimes a Neoplatonic one). This complex text that probably dates from the first half of the third century, was also influenced by themes common to Jewish mysticism.<sup>3</sup> The matter is entirely different in the *Allogenes* from Codex Tchacos, a document whose style and contents are more easily understood and which was probably destined for a less knowledgeable public. Moreover, this takes on significant interest for the reception of Christian traditions in a Gnostic context.

### 1. A CHARACTER DEAR TO GNOSIS

*Allogenes T* revolves around a symbolical figure dear to Gnosis: that of Allogenes, the Stranger. Let us briefly remind ourselves of the occurrences of this name in first and second-hand Gnostic literature. We have already mentioned the twenty-two-page tractate that is dedicated to him in Nag

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<sup>1</sup> Kasser, Meyer, Wurst, and Gaudard 2007. Only two letters of the title have survived, page 59.1: the B[ook].

<sup>2</sup> In this essay, we call the tractate of Codex Tchacos *Allogenes T* to distinguish it from the tractate *Allogenes* of Nag Hammadi Codex XI,3. For this document from Nag Hammadi, see Funk, Poirier, Scopello, and Turner 2004, with the French translation of the Coptic text by Scopello, pp. 189–239.

<sup>3</sup> See Scopello 2007b; 2008. See also my introduction (2007a) in the same volume.

Hammadi Codex XI,3: Allogenes is presented as a half-human, half-divine being<sup>4</sup> who receives a privileged knowledge during a celestial journey he takes during his life. This Gnosis is passed on to his spiritual son and disciple, Messos, and is destined for all those who will be worthy of it.<sup>5</sup> These celestial revelations are explained in turn by angels, mainly by a female angel, Youel;<sup>6</sup> they are recorded on a book written by Allogenes himself, a book that is kept under secure guard at the top of a mountain.<sup>7</sup>

If we take a look at indirect sources, we will find that Epiphanius of Salamis mentions the *Allogeneis*,<sup>8</sup> books that Sethians and Archontics are supposed to have forged and says that Archontics claim that some of these books were given to them by Seth himself.<sup>9</sup>

Speculations on the Stranger-Allogenes—whose being “other” symbolizes his affiliation to a celestial dimension—grew around Seth who was born, according to Genesis 4:25, from “another seed” (σπέρμα ἕτερον).<sup>10</sup> They have left a deep mark on some Nag Hammadi texts issued from Sethian tradition,<sup>11</sup> where the name “Allogenes” is applied not only to Seth<sup>12</sup> and his sons but also to the transcendent divinity, the Great Invisible Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Allogenes, the hero of NHC XI,3, has a non-standard longevity: he meditates on the contents of the first part of the angel’s revelations for one hundred years: NHC XI, 3 56.21–22; 57.27–31.

<sup>5</sup> NHC XI,3 68.16–69.16.

<sup>6</sup> Youel recalls Yahoel, the angel bearing the Tetragrammaton according to mystical Jewish lore (cf., for example, the *Apocalypse of Abraham*). See Scopello 1981, published in an extensive version in Scopello 2005, 49–78.

<sup>7</sup> NHC XI,3 68.20–23.

<sup>8</sup> See Epiphanius of Salamis, *Pan.* 39.5.1: “They (the Sethians) compose certain books in the name of great men, and say that there are seven books in Seth’s name, and give the name ‘Strangers’ to other, different books.” *Pan.* 40.2.1–2: “These people (the Archontics) too have forged some apocrypha of their own ... They heap up certain other books, moreover, (and add these) to any they may light on, to give the appearance of confirming their own error through many sources. And by now they also have the ones called the ‘Strangers’—there are books with this title.” (Trans. Williams 2009, 279 and 284.)

<sup>9</sup> *Pan.* 40.7.4–5: “(And so) they (the Archontics) have also composed certain books in the name of Seth himself, saying that they were given by him, and others in the name of him and his seven sons. For they say he sired seven (sons) called ‘Strangers’ as I have said in other Sects, I mean The Gnostics and The Sethians.” (Trans. Williams 2009, 289–290.)

<sup>10</sup> Gen 4:25: “Adam made love to his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, ‘God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him.’” (NIV).

<sup>11</sup> On the Sethian movements, see many important studies of John D. Turner. Here we cite four of them: Turner 1986; 1995; 2004; 2007a.

<sup>12</sup> See the impressive hymn to Autogenes, in *Steles Seth* NHC VII,5 120.1–15, built on the theme of “another race.”

<sup>13</sup> *Holy Book* NHC IV,2 50.18–20: “He who begets himself, and he who comes forth from

Furthermore, Porphyry of Tyre mentions a “Revelation of Allogenes” produced—according to him—by “sectarians who had abandoned the old philosophy, men of the schools of Adelphius and Aculinos, who possessed many treatises of Alexander the Libyan and Philocomos and Demostratos and Lydos and produced revelations by Zoroaster and Zostrianos and Nicotheos, and Allogenes and Messos, and other people of this kind” (*Vit. Plot.* 16).<sup>14</sup> These works were refuted in Plotinus’ circle in Rome, partly by Plotinus himself, partly by Amelius and Porphyry (*Vit. Plot.* 16).

## 2. THE MAIN CONNECTIONS OF THE *ALLOGENES T*

The fourth tractate of Codex Tchacos is composed of eight pages (pages 59–66 of the Codex); pages 59–62 have been quite well preserved, except for the first lines on the top of the pages. Pages 63–66 are, by contrast, very fragmentary and entire sections of the text are missing.<sup>15</sup> However, we can easily make out the structure of the text, made up of three main parts that follow each other without any literary devices of transition. Let us summarize its content.

The readable part of the text<sup>16</sup> begins with a collective prayer pronounced by a group of unidentified people in order to obtain knowledge (59.7–13): “a [...] revelation [...] so that we may know ourselves, that is to say, where we came from, [towards] where we are going, and what we should do to live.” Immediately after this supplication, the group goes up Mount Tabor where it pronounces another prayer, the second part of which is identical to the first one:

They bowed down in prayer, saying: “O Lord God, you who are above all the great aeons, you who are without beginning and without end, give us a spirit of knowledge for the revelation of your secrets, so that we may know ourselves, that is to say, where we came from, towards where we are going, and what we should do to live.” (59.17–25)

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himself, and the alien one (ἀλλογενής), the uninterpretable power of the ineffable Father” (trans. Böhlig and Wisse 1975, 55). See also *Treat. Seth* 52.8–10, where the revelator, who identifies himself with Christ, proclaims: “I am a stranger to the regions below.” The Coptic term *ϣμιο* (“stranger”) translates the Greek ἀλλογενής.

<sup>14</sup> *Vit. Plot.* 16.5–7. See Tardieu 1992; and more recently Poirier and Schmidt 2010, 940–942.

<sup>15</sup> New fragments of this tractate (the Ohio fragments) are going to be published by Gregor Wurst; he read at the Tenth Congress of Coptic Studies (Rome, September 16–22, 2012) a paper prepared by our beloved colleague Marvin Meyer, deceased on August 16, 2012. The paper is entitled: “A Provisional Report on New Fragments of the Codex Tchacos Book of Allogenes.”

<sup>16</sup> The top of page 59 is badly preserved: at line 1 it is possible to read “my s[on]” and at line 8 the term “revelation.”

The core of these two prayers is made up of a pressing demand to gain self-knowledge. Similar sentiments can be found in various Gnostic texts,<sup>17</sup> the most well-known version probably being from the *Excerpt from Theodotus* 78.2.<sup>18</sup>

After having related the words of the second collective prayer, the narrator seems to change his mind and attribute the pronouncing of this prayer (59.26)<sup>19</sup> to a unique personage, Allogenes—probably the most representative figure amongst the anonymous group that completes a spiritual ascension of Mount Tabor.

It is at this moment in the narrative that Satan appears; he tries to attract Allogenes by offering terrestrial goods. The dialogue between the two characters spans from page 59.27 to page 61.9. After having briefly commented upon the content of this dialogue (61.9–16), the narrator records the invocation to God that Allogenes pronounced on his own (61.16–62.9).

From 62.9 onwards, Allogenes takes the place of the narrator and expresses himself in the first person: his prayer provokes a mystical experience during which he is surrounded by a cloud the light at which he cannot look (62.9–15). In the following lines Allogenes reports the discourse he heard from a Word coming from the cloud: this Word, which was sent to him as a messenger of good news, assures him that his prayer has been heard (62.15–24). Pages 63–66 are very fragmentary and only a few words can be put together. They probably contain the subsequent part of the teaching delivered by the Word.

Here we shall focus our attention on the scene of temptation since we have already analysed elsewhere the ascension of Mount Tabor by Allogenes and his anonymous companions;<sup>20</sup> this will also pave the way for another study of the final revelation that Allogenes receives while he is surrounded by a cloud of light.

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<sup>17</sup> For example, *1 Apoc. Jas.* NHC V,3 33.11–20 and *James T* 20.2–22, 23; *Apoc. Paul* NHC V,2 22.23–23.26; Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.21.5. For other quotations, see DeConick 1996, 48n14. We have examined the content of the two prayers of *Allogenes T* in Scopello 2009, 686–691.

<sup>18</sup> This text has been transmitted by Clement of Alexandria: see the excellent introduction, translation and commentary by Sagnard 1970, 201–203. I give here the translation of R.P. Casey (1934, 88–89): “Until baptism, they say, fate is real, but after it the astrologists are no longer right. But it is not only the washing that is liberating, but the knowledge of who we were, and what we have become, where we were or where we were placed, whither we hasten, from what we are redeemed, what birth is and what rebirth.”

<sup>19</sup> *Allogenes T* 59.26: “After Allogenes had pronounced these words.”

<sup>20</sup> See Scopello 2009.

## 3. TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY

*Translation*<sup>21</sup>

Page [59]

26 After Allogenes had pronounced these words  
27 [Satan] appeared

Page 60

1 [on] the earth  
2 [ ] he  
3 said: ["...]  
4 [ ]  
5 [ ]  
6 [ ]  
7 [ ]  
8 [ ]  
9 and [take for] yourself what is in  
10 my wo[rld] (κόσμος), and eat  
11 from my good (ἀγαθόν) food, and take  
12 for yourself silver, gold  
13 and garments." Allogenes  
14 answered:  
15 "Get away from me,  
16 Satan, for it is not you I am looking for  
17 but my Father,  
18 who is above all the great  
19 aeons (αιῶν), because (γάρ)  
20 I have been called Allogenes  
21 since I come from  
22 another race (γένος). I am not  
23 from your race (γένος)." Then (τότε)  
24 the one who governs  
25 the wo[rld] (κόσμος) said to him: "We

Page [61]

1 [our]selves  
2 that [ ]  
3 Come [ ]  
4 [ ]  
5 inside my wo[rld] (κόσμος).  
6 Allo[gen]es [answered and] said to him:

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<sup>21</sup> I give here my own translation.

7 “Get away from [me], Satan,  
 8 retreat (ἀναχωρεῖν), for I do not  
 9 [belong to] you.” Then (τότε)  
 10 Satan [got away] from him,  
 11 after having made him irate  
 12 several times; and he was  
 13 incapable of fooling [them]. And  
 14 when he had been defeated, he retreated (ἀναχωρεῖν)  
 15 to his place covered in  
 16 shame. Then (τότε) Allogenes  
 17 cried loudly,  
 18 saying: “O God,  
 19 You who are in the great aeons (αἰῶν),  
 20 hear my voice, have mercy on me,  
 21 save me from every evil.  
 22 Look on me  
 23 and hear me  
 24 in this abandoned place.  
 25 Now [let your] light  
 26 glow on me

Page [62]

4 lines in lacuna  
 5 [ ] the light  
 6 [ ] Yea, Lord, help (βοηθεῖν),  
 7 me, because (γάρ) [I] do not know  
 8 [ ] for  
 9 ever and ever.”

### *Commentary*

The narrator specifies that Satan appeared on earth immediately after “Allogenes said these words” (59.26–60.1): he refers to the second prayer made by the group after its ascent to Mount Tabor<sup>22</sup>—a prayer that he attributes now to Allogenes. From this moment onwards, the group is not mentioned anymore and the attention focuses entirely on Allogenes.

#### *3.1. The Theme of the Dialogue: The Temptations*

After having appeared on earth, Satan engages in a dialogue with Allogenes (60.2–61.9). This dialogue is built around the theme of temptation, a theme that finds its origins in the Old Testament and that has left traces in Old

<sup>22</sup> *Allogenes T* 59.13–25.

Testament Pseudepigrapha from the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs* to the writings of the Essenes; it is also developed in the New Testament, in the narratives of Jesus' temptations by the devil in the desert, according to the Synoptic Gospels. We shall return to this below.

There is nothing left of the first part of Satan's words (page 60, lines 3–8). On the other hand, the rest of the text is marked by the repetition of "[Take for] yourself": these are the words used by Satan to encourage Allogenes to enjoy earthly goods. The temptations he offers are supposed to attract him to his world ("and [take for] yourself what is in my world," 60.9–10; see 61.3–5: "Come [...] inside my wo[rld]").

Were he to have read this text, a Gnostic would have immediately been able to identify Satan's tricks with those used by the Archon *κοσμοκράτωρ* to distract man by moving him away from salvific knowledge. Gnostic literature develops this theme enthusiastically: after having strongly depicted the negative condition of man entangled in the bonds of the world, sound advice is given to him to avoid mundane traps. Some Nag Hammadi writings such as *Exegesis on the Soul* (NHC II,6),<sup>23</sup> the *Book of Thomas the Contender* (NHC II,7)<sup>24</sup> and the *Authoritative Teaching* (NHC VI,3)<sup>25</sup> deal with these topics.

The *Teachings of Silvanus* (NHC VII,4) is probably the best parallel to *Allogenes T* on this point. Even if this tractate, which is heavily indebted to the Jewish and Egyptian wisdom traditions,<sup>26</sup> is certainly not Gnostic, and even bears some anti-Gnostic features,<sup>27</sup> it develops some themes about the human condition in a way Gnostics could well have approved. On page 94.31–95.6 Silvanus warns his spiritual son and disciple with these words that emphasize the deceitful tricks<sup>28</sup> of the Adversary:

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<sup>23</sup> See NHC II,6 127.25–128.17 about the captivity of the soul, seduced by the brigands, symbol of the evil powers; for sound advice, 136.6–8, 17–20.

<sup>24</sup> See NHC II,7 140.20–37; 141.29–142.2; 143.9–144.14 about humankind entangled in the illusion of temptations and, for sound advice, 145.1–16. The author develops these themes in the stylistic form of maledictions and benedictions.

<sup>25</sup> See NHC VI,3 24.4–22 about the soul as a whore living in debauchery and drunkenness, and blinded by matter (27.25–29); about humankind caught by the nets of man-eaters, see 29.5–16 and on the traps and nets set by the Adversary, 30.6–31.24. For sound advice about good behavior, see 26.21–27.23.

<sup>26</sup> See on this point Mahé 2007, 1169–171.

<sup>27</sup> See Zandee 1991.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. also NHC VII,4 88.12–15 and 96.7. The terminology used by the author of *Teach. Silv.* about the schemes and tricks of the Adversary recalls the use made by the Egyptian Desert Fathers and Athanasius, *Vit. Ant.* 7, 22, 52; comparisons can be found in Janssens 1983, 113–115.



My son, do not swim in any water, and do not allow yourself to be defiled by strange kinds of knowledge (γνώσις). Perhaps you know that the schemes (ἐπινοια) of the Adversary (ἀντικείμενος) are not few and that the tricks (μάγγανον) which he has are varied? Especially have they robbed (ἀποστερεῖν) the noetic man of the shrewdness of the snake.<sup>29</sup>

In fact, the Adversary comes to man as a flatterer, as a friend, telling him: “I advise (συμβουλεύειν) good things to you” (cf. 95.12–16). Since man is not able to recognize his deceitfulness (πανούργος), the Adversary casts into his heart “evil thoughts” as if they were “good ones,” and among them avidity (95.25), love of glory (95.27), boastfulness and pride (95.29–30), and most of all, godlessness (95.32).

The baits Satan offers *Allogenes* (*Allogenes T* 60.10–13) are of three types: dietary, financial and clothing. Behind these baits we can make out three vices: first gluttony, then love of money and lastly vanity. The ideal of the Gnostic life, founded upon the opposite virtues—abstinence (if not fasting), poverty and modesty—is here sketched out in the negative.

### 3.1.1. *Temptations about Food and Clothes*

Nag Hammadi writers mention a few times temptation about food but bring it together with other elements. Food and clothes are linked in the *Apocryphon of John*. At the end of his revelation discourse, the Savior says to John: “Cursed be everyone who will exchange these things (i.e., the “mystery of the immovable race,” NHC II,1 31.31) for a gift (δῶρον), whether for food or drink or for clothing or for another such thing” (II,1 31.34–37; cf. BG,2 76.10–13; NHC III,1 39.25–40.4). In these words the author provides a commentary for his Gnostics readers on the myth of the fallen angels and their negative presents to humanity which he had described in detail a few pages before (II,1 29.25–33; cf. BG,2 74.16–19).<sup>30</sup>

The same association between food and clothes can be found in the *Exegesis on the Soul*, where the soul, a prostitute, receives gifts from her lovers: “bread and water and garments and clothes and wine and oil she needed” (NHC II,6 130.1–5)—a quotation from Hosea 2:7 which constitutes, with some other passages from the Prophets, a sort of parallel narrative to the Gnostic one. Another short story of the soul, depicted as a whore, is given by the *Authoritative Teaching* of Nag Hammadi Codex VI. The following

<sup>29</sup> Trans. Peel and Zandee 1996, 307.

<sup>30</sup> “The angels brought gold and silver and a gift, and copper and iron and metal and all kinds of things.” On the original interpretation of this myth in *Ap. John*, see Scopello 1980.

passage represents Psyche who has become aware of her moral decline, and who leaves behind her earthly food and clothes:

After her experiences, the soul disdains this life, because it lasts only for a time. She seeks the kinds of food that will bring her life, and she leaves behind the food of falsehood. She learns about the light, and she goes about and strips off this world. Her true garment clothes her within, and her bridal gown reveals beauty of mind rather than pride of flesh.<sup>31</sup> (NHC VI,3 31.31–32.8)

The spiritual food and the bridal gown that come from the realm of truth can be opposed in this text to the mundane food and clothing that belong to the realm of untruthfulness.

Clothes as a negative symbol of worldly temptations can also be found in the *Gospel of Thomas*, logion 36: “Jesus said: ‘Do not worry from dusk til’ dawn and from dawn til’ dusk about what you will wear.’” The Greek fragment of this gospel makes here an interesting addition: “neither [about] your [food] and what [you will] eat, [nor] about [your clothing].”

### 3.1.2. *Temptation about Gold and Silver*

Gold and silver are mentioned together twice in the Nag Hammadi library. In the *Dialogue of the Savior*, Mary, “a woman who understood everything” (NHC III,5 139.11–13 [53]), says: “I want to understand all things, just as they are. The master said, ‘Whoever seeks life, this is their wealth. For the world’s [rest] is false, and its gold and silver are deceptive’” (141.12–19 [69–70]).<sup>32</sup> The teacher Silvanus in the homonymous tractate of Codex VII warns his pupil, already in the first lines of the text, against several vicious passions and also against the “desire (ἐπιθυμία) for things” (χρῆμα) (NHC VII,4 84.25) and, later, explains that all these devices are the powers of the Adversary (cf. 105.22–106.1).

### 3.2. *From Temptation to Renunciation*

The theme of temptation goes with the theme of renunciation: the latter is more developed in Gnostic texts of an ascetic nature, whereas temptation is more generally allotted to passions than to Satan. The powers of darkness have given rise to passions which strengthen their plot against humankind and help to keep it in slavery.<sup>33</sup> If the theme of temptation and seduction

<sup>31</sup> Trans. Meyer 2007, 387. See also Scopello 2007c.

<sup>32</sup> Trans. Meyer 2007, 309. See also Scopello 2007d.

<sup>33</sup> The association between passions and demons is underlined in one of the mythological sections of *Ap. John* NHC II,1 18.15–30: “From the four demons have come passions (πάθος):

appears quite often in Gnostic writings, it is nonetheless an abstract concept that is rarely represented by a one-on-one between Jesus and the devil.

As to the name “Satan,”<sup>34</sup> the author of *Allogenes T* utilises it in 59.[27], in 60.16 and in 61.7, 10. This name can be found only in two tractates from Nag Hammadi. In the *Apocryphon of James* (NHC I,2 4.35–39), in a dialogue between the Savior and Peter, the apostle asks Jesus to give his disciples the means not to be tempted by the evil devil. And Jesus answered: “What good is it to you if you do the Father’s will, but you are not given your part of his bounty when you are tempted by Satan? But if you are oppressed by Satan and persecuted and do the Father’s will, I [say] he will love you, make you my equal, and consider you beloved through his forethought, and by your own choice.”<sup>35</sup> In *Melchizedek* (NHC IX,1 20.14–15), heavenly messengers tell the eponymous hero not to be concerned with the priesthood he exercises “and [which is] from ... [in the deceitful] counsels [of] Satan.”<sup>36</sup>

Nag Hammadi authors have more often used synonymous terms for Satan: the Adversary (ἀντικείμενος, about 20 times) and the devil (διάβολος, about 30 times) and, more rarely (three times)<sup>37</sup> the name Beliar (or Belias), well-known in Jewish Pseudepigrapha.

#### 4. IS THERE A CONNECTION WITH THE GOSPEL NARRATIVES?

Does this narrative of *Allogenes T* have a direct link with the one that Matthew 4:1–11 and Luke 4:1–13—as well as Mark 1:12–13 but in a briefer way—devote to Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness? First, we can observe that, in this passage of *Allogenes T*, the Gnostic author retains only one of the three places where, according to Matthew and Luke, the devil tries to

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From grief come jealousy, envy, pain, trouble, distress, hardheartedness, anxiety, sorrow, and others. From pleasure comes an abundance of evil, vain conceit, and the like. From desire come anger, wrath, bitterness, intense lust, greed, and the like. From fear come terror, servility, anguish, and shame.” (Trans. Meyer 2007, 124; see also Turner 2007b.) See, in another context, the *Testim. Truth* NHC IX,3 30.5–8 where it is told that the demons, through passion, control the souls of those who are begotten in the world, and 31.15 where “those who have come to know imperishability have become capable of combating [passions].” Cf. also 42.23–43.1: “as he again ... fighting against [thoughts] of the archons, authorities, and demons without giving them a place in which to settle. [But] he struggled against their passions ... he condemned their error.” (Trans. Pearson 2007b, 618, 621.)

<sup>34</sup> Breytenbach and Day 1999.

<sup>35</sup> Trans. Meyer 2007, 25. See also Scopello 2007e.

<sup>36</sup> Trans. Pearson 2007a, 604.

<sup>37</sup> In *Ap. John*, Beliar/Belias refers twice to one of the twelve authorities begotten by the first Archon; this name appears also in the *Holy Book*.

tempt Jesus. According to the order of Matthew, these three places are the wilderness (4:1), the holy city, on the pinnacle of the Temple (4:5), and a very high mountain (4:8). This order is different in Luke, where we have first, the wilderness (4:1–3), second, a higher place (than the wilderness, 4:5) and third, Jerusalem, on the pinnacle of the Temple (4:9). As to Mark, he only mentions the wilderness, without any detail.

Furthermore, the narrative of temptation has been taken out of its context: in the Synoptic Gospels, the three temptations take place after the baptism of Jesus by John<sup>38</sup> and immediately before the beginning of his public life.<sup>39</sup> In our tractate, Satan's proposals to Allogenes have been inserted into a revelatory frame-narrative and follow the prayer to the transcendental God pronounced on Mount Tabor. Thus, Allogenes is already on Mount Tabor when he is tempted by Satan. Jesus, according to the Gospels, is taken by the devil to an anonymous mountain, his starting point being the wilderness.

According to the Gospels, it was the Spirit who led Jesus to the wilderness (Matt 4:1; Luke 4:1), the devil's temptations being part of a divine plan. Immediately after Jesus' baptism (Matt 3:16; Luke 3:22), the Spirit of God descended like a dove and alighted on him. The mention of a "Spirit of knowledge" opening the way to revelation can be noted a few lines before the narrative of temptation in *Allogenes T* 59.20—we can ask ourselves if the reading of this account suggested the insertion of the theme of the Spirit to the Gnostic author.<sup>40</sup>

*Allogenes T* keeps only one of the three satanic offers: the temptation on the mountain, where the dominant idea is that Satan offers Jesus power over the world. Let us quote Matthew 4:8–9:

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me (ταῦτά σοι πάντα δώσω, ἐάν πεσῶν προσκυνήσης μοι)." (NIV)

Luke 4:5–7 develops the same idea:

The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. And he said to him, "I will give you all their authority

<sup>38</sup> Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22.

<sup>39</sup> Matt 4:12–17; Mark 1:14–15; Luke 4:14–15.

<sup>40</sup> The *Gospel of the Hebrews* (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 2.12 §87) knows a tradition according to which the Spirit takes Jesus on mount Tabor to tempt him: "Even so did my mother, the Holy Spirit, take me by one of my hairs and carry me away on the great mountain Tabor." See Scopello 2009, 698.

and splendor; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to. If you worship me, it will all be yours (σὺ οὖν ἐὰν προσκυνήσῃς ἐνώπιον ἐμοῦ, ἔσται σοῦ πάντα).” (NIV)

According to the interpretation of G.H. Twelftree,<sup>41</sup> it is with this temptation, the third one, that Matthew’s narrative climaxes. Following Matthew’s order, in the first temptation the devil, asking Jesus to change the stones into bread, “appeals to Jesus’ power as Son of God ... Jesus is here tempted to assert his independence from God by performing a miracle for his own benefit. But Jesus rejects the devil’s temptation and remains obedient to his father.” As to the second temptation in Matthew’s order, when the devil asks Jesus to throw himself down from the pinnacle of the Temple, he tempts Jesus to display his messiah-hood. As to the third temptation, Twelftree recalls that some interpreters have highlighted that Jesus, by refusing power over the kingdoms of the world, considers the role of political Messiah as a satanic option. On the other hand, he proposes a convincing interpretation of this passage, explaining it within the context of the narrative of the baptism (Matt 3:17: “And a voice from heaven said: ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”). This passage may echo Psalm 2:7–8: “You are my son ... ask me, and I will give you the nations for your inheritance.” Moreover, Twelftree observes that, when Jesus replies to the devil (Matt 4:10), he quotes a text from Deuteronomy where Moses warns the Israelites against idolatry. And he comments: “So, in being tempted to idolatry or to acknowledge the devil rather than God being in control of the world, Jesus answers the devil with the command ‘You shall worship the Lord, your God, and him only shall you serve’” (Deut 6:13 in Matt 4:10–11). And he adds: “the final temptation is the most devilish of all: the call to Jesus to receive his proper inheritance without obedient worship of God.” In addition to this, Twelftree observes that at the end of his Gospel (28:18), Matthew gets back again to the theme of the temptation on the mountain, by claiming Jesus’ victory over the devil. In this passage, Jesus proclaims: “all authority in heaven and earth has been given to me.”

The author of *Allogenes T* does not reach the depth and the richness of Matthew’s narrative on temptation. He probably knew these excerpts from the Gospels, but he only takes them up as a source of inspiration and he does not make use of the key word of these texts: “to tempt” (πειράζειν). His main intent is to underline the gap between the transcendental God and Satan, a demiurgic figure, creator of a defective—but somehow attractive—world.

<sup>41</sup> Twelftree 1992. Quotations from pp. 823–824.

Moreover, the temptations are not here part of a divine plan according to which God tempts Jesus through an intermediary figure—let us recall the book of Job. On the contrary, temptations are part of the autonomous tricks of the demiurge. We can also note that Satan does not offer Allogenes power over the kingdoms of the world, but—in a more prosaic way—to make the most of earthly pleasures—food, wealth and garments. Finally, the mention of food might echo Matthew 4:3–4 in which Satan encourages Jesus to change stones into bread.

In *Allogenes T* 60.15 and in 61.7, the answer Allogenes gives to Satan: “Get away from me, Satan,” reproduces the trenchant phrase from Matthew 4:10: ὑπάγε σατανᾶ.<sup>42</sup> The same strong order is given by Jesus to the shouting Gadarene demons (Matt 8:32: ὑπάγετε) and to Peter, when Jesus, after having predicted his sufferings to come and his death, rebukes him, saying: “Get behind me, Satan! (16:23: ὑπάγε ὀπίσω μου, σατανᾶ). You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.” Here Peter takes on the role of Satan, as in the narrative of temptation, trying to divert Jesus from remaining obedient to his Father. The Gnostic author tends to superimpose (if not identify) Allogenes’ character onto that of Jesus, as in the preceding scene narrated by this tractate that told us about Allogenes’ ascension of Mount Tabor.<sup>43</sup>

We can ask if there are any literary parallels in Gnostic texts to this narrative. The scene of the temptation, built around Jesus’ character, has barely caught the attention of the authors we are aware of through direct or indirect sources; *Exc.* 85<sup>44</sup> is perhaps the only exception. On the other hand, the theme of mundane baits, a theme linked to the power the archons have upon the soul, has been vastly explored. The passage that, according to us, seems the closest to these lines from *Allogenes T* is to be found, once again, in the *Authoritative Teaching*, in which specific attention is given to the semantic field of the traps and nets laid out by the Adversary. We find here the theme of love of clothes and money:

<sup>42</sup> Vulgate: *Vade satanas*. Z (Harleianus, London, British Museum), G (Sangermanensis, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, lat. 11553): *Vade retro*. P (Split, Bibl. Capituli sine num.): *Retro me*.

<sup>43</sup> See on this point Scopello 2009, 695–698.

<sup>44</sup> *Exc.* 85: “Even the Lord after baptism was troubled like as we are and was first with beasts in the desert. Then when he had prevailed over them and their ruler as if already a true king, he was already served by angels. For he who ruled over angels in the flesh was fittingly served already by angels. Therefore we must put on the Lord’s armour and keep body and soul invulnerable—armour that is ‘able to quench the darts of the devil,’ as the Apostle says.” (Trans. Casey.)

[He displays] many kinds of baits before our eyes, the stuff of this world, because he hopes to make us desire just one kind of bait and to taste only a little of it, that he then may catch us with his hidden poison and take us from freedom into slavery ... And here are the baits with which the devil sets traps for us. First he plants pain in your heart so that you feel heartache over something trivial in this life, and he strikes us down with his poisons. After that he introduces the desire for a piece of clothing, so that you will be proud of it, and then love of money, pride, vanity, envy rivalling envy, beauty of body, and covetousness ... And yet all these traps are neatly prepared by the Adversary.<sup>45</sup> (NHC VI,3 30.10–31.9)

What is missing in *Allogenes T*, with respect to the *Authoritative Teaching*, is sexual temptation,<sup>46</sup> that is to say, the lure of the flesh, a lure that has nevertheless been one of the leitmotifs of Gnostic writers—not to mention the Desert Fathers.

Confronted with Satan's offers, Allogenes does not hesitate: "Get away from me, Satan, for it is not you I am looking for but my Father, who is above all the great aeons (αἰῶν)" (60.15–19). The term "to be above/to be superior" (Coptic, ⲥⲟⲩⲏ) is frequently used in Gnostic philosophical tracts and highlights the transcendence of the First principle. Amongst many examples, we quote from Nag Hammadi's *Allogenes*: "God is superior to Beatitude, Divinity and Perfection" (NHC XI,3 62.34–36), he is "something superior" (NHC XI,3 63.1, 4, 12) or he is "something superior to superior realities" (NHC XI,3 63.19). As for the "great aeons," they are these superior realities; they are thus named in several Nag Hammadi<sup>47</sup> texts and also in the *Gospel of Judas* of Codex Tchacos (47.5–9).<sup>48</sup>

The true Father is the goal of Allogenes' quest; he declares so without any ambiguity to Satan (60.16–17): the Coptic verb ⲕⲱⲧⲉ ⲛⲥⲟⲩ stands for the Greek ζητέω or the noun ζήτησις. Research is fully part of the path of Gnosis that goes with all its difficulties. This quest is both that of the individual and that of the superior entities regarding the Father.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>45</sup> I use here the translation of Meyer (2007, 386–387) with some changes of my own, putting emphasis on the word "bait (τροφή)" (translated by Marvin Meyer as "food") because the context of *Aut. Teach.* 29.3–30.4 deals with bait the fisherman casts into the water to catch the fish.

<sup>46</sup> See *Aut. Teach.* 23.13–21; 24.4–22; 25.5–8; 31.4–5, 14–24.

<sup>47</sup> *Ap. John* (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1), *Hyp. Arch.* (NHC II,4), *Orig. World* (NHC II,5 and XIII,2) *Holy Book* (NHC III,2 and IV,2), *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (NHC III,4), *Apoc. Adam* (NHC V,5) and *Zost.* (NHC VIII,1).

<sup>48</sup> "It exists as a great Aeon without limits, whose extent no rank of angels could see, in which is the great invisible [Spirit]" (my trans.).

<sup>49</sup> Cf., for example, Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.2.1. See Sagnard 1947, index of Greek words, at ζητέω and ζήτησις, p. 642. Cf. also *Tri. Trac.* NHC I,5 126.12.

In our tractate, the justification of this transcendent quest lies in the actual name of Allogenes: the Other, the Stranger: “Because (γάρ) I have been called Allogenes since I come from another race (γένος). I am not from your race (γένος)” (60.19–23). This name places him, according to his nature, beyond the reach of the ruler of the world and his tempting offers. Two remarks have to be made: first, this way of expressing oneself recalls the dialogues between the soul and the guardians of the spheres, who question the soul during its ascension after death and to which the soul must provide the right answers to go on its way.<sup>50</sup> Such an insistence upon the meaning of the name “Allogenes” then leads us to believe that for the reader’s instruction it was necessary to emphasize its etymology. The text would therefore not only be addressed to confirmed adepts of Gnostic theology, but also to a public of Christian tradition with mediocre knowledge: this public had to be made aware of Gnosis and its founding figures.

The author’s intention was to portray Allogenes as an example for the Gnostic man; just like Allogenes, he must part from the world by being aware of his origins that find their roots in a special race. Indeed, Allogenes says to Satan: “I am not from your race (γένος)” (60.22–23). The speculations on the chosen race that are peculiar to Sethian traditions—Seth himself bears the title of Allogenes—have perhaps rubbed off on this tractate.<sup>51</sup>

In 60.24–25, Satan is defined as “the one who governs the wo[rld] (κόσμος)”; the Coptic  $\alpha\mu\alpha\gamma\tau\epsilon$  (“to take hold of, to hold in one’s power”) can translate the Greek  $\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ . The Coptic translator probably had the Greek term  $\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\kappa\rho\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\rho$  before his eyes, a term which is also attested in Gnostic Coptic sources and which refers to the enemy of man, the demiurge.<sup>52</sup> The association between Satan and the world is underlined three times in *Allogenes T*<sup>53</sup> whereas the true God is twice associated with the great aeons.<sup>54</sup> The two entities and the worlds they rule over are therefore put into an emphatic opposition.

<sup>50</sup> *Apoc. Paul* (NHC V,2) and the two *Apocalypses of James* (NHC V,3 and NHC V,4) of the Nag Hammadi library contain this kind of dialogue between the soul and the archons of the spheres. To these texts, we can now add *James* (CT,2).

<sup>51</sup> See the introduction of Turner 2007a.

<sup>52</sup> Compare, for  $\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\kappa\rho\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\rho$ , *Treat. Seth* NHC VII,2 52.25–29; 53.29; *Melchizedek* NHC IX,1 2.6–9. The term  $\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\kappa\rho\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\rho$  is used in the singular to indicate the creator of the world; in several texts, this word in the plural designates the archons—a usage borrowed from Ephesians 6:12 (τοὺς  $\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\kappa\rho\acute{\alpha}\tau\omega\rho\alpha\varsigma$  τοῦ σκότους).

<sup>53</sup> *Allogenes T* 60.9–10: “[take for] yourself what is in my wo[rld]”; 60.24–25: “he who governs the [world]” and 61.3–5: “Come [...] inside my wo[rld].”

<sup>54</sup> See *Allogenes T* 60.16–17, where Allogenes proclaims the aim of his quest, as well as the final invocation: “O God, you who are in the great aeons” (61.18–19).



In 61.7–9, the phrase  $\epsilon\lambda\omega\kappa \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda \bar{\mu}\mu[\omicron\iota$  (the equivalent of the Greek  $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\alpha\gamma\epsilon \sigma\alpha\tau\alpha\nu\acute{\alpha}$ , already used in 60.15–17), appears again with a few variations: “Get away from [me], Satan, retreat ( $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\chi\omega\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ ), for I do not [belong to] you.” Let us note that “get away” (Coptic:  $\epsilon\lambda\omega\kappa \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$  from  $\epsilon\beta\omicron\sigma\epsilon$ , a translation for  $\acute{\upsilon}\pi\acute{\alpha}\gamma\omega$ ), is reinforced by  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\chi\omega\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ . Here this verb means “to go backwards, to retreat, to go back to,” according to its classic meaning and to the usage in the New Testament.<sup>55</sup>

In the lacuna of page 61.8 there was probably the second-person singular of the possessive pronoun  $[\pi\omega]\kappa$  (“for you”); this allows us to translate: “for I am not yours,” or “I do not [belong to] you,” in 61.8–9; the choice that presents itself for the Gnostic, to follow or not to follow Satan and accept his offers, is in fact predetermined by his belonging to the celestial world or to the earth.

Satan goes away but only after having made Allogenes irate several times (61.11–12). In Gnostic literature, the anger is usually attributed to the inferior powers: in the *Concept of our Great Power* (NHC VI,4 43.29–35)—and this is only one example among many others—the anger of the archon is mentioned.

In 61.12–13, it is said that Satan “was incapable of fooling [them]”: “them”—that seems to be the best term to fill in the lacuna—could be a reference to the group in which Allogenes ascends Mount Tabor. The verb used for “fooling” is the Coptic  $\bar{\rho}\epsilon\lambda\lambda$  that stands for the Greek  $\acute{\alpha}\pi\alpha\tau\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ . This term is often used in Gnostic narrations and myths that tell us about the deception worked together by the demiurge and his archons in order to keep man inside creation by making him forget about his celestial origins. The *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3 54.18–31) is one of the most interesting texts on this matter:

The rulers wanted to fool people, since they saw that people have a kinship with what is truly good. They took the names of the good and assigned them to what is not good, to fool people with names and link the names to what is not good. So, as if they are doing people a favour, they take names from what is not good and transfer them to the good, in their own way of thinking. For they wished to take free people and enslave them forever.<sup>56</sup>

But the closest text to *Allogenes T* on this issue is perhaps the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* (NHC III,2 61.16–23) in which Seth, another figure

<sup>55</sup> For  $\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\chi\omega\rho\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ , see Matt 2:12, 13, 14, 22; 4:12; 9:24; 12:15; 14:13; 15:21. Matthew 27:5 uses this verb referring to Judas “who cast down the pieces of silver in the temple, and departed ( $\acute{\alpha}\nu\epsilon\chi\omega\rho\eta\sigma\epsilon\nu$ ), and went off and hanged himself.”

<sup>56</sup> Trans. Meyer 2007, 163. See also Scopello 2007 f.

for Allogenes and father of the chosen generation, asks the celestial entities to protect his own γένος:

Great Seth saw what the devil was doing, his many guises, his schemes against the incorruptible immovable generation, the persecution by his powers and angels, their deception. They acted rashly against themselves.<sup>57</sup>

Once he has been defeated, Satan retreats “to his place” (*Allogenes T* 61.14–15): the Coptic term μα (τόπος) has a technical value in Gnosis. It can mean the kingdom of the transcendent entities as well as the court of the unknowable God or, more rarely, the infernal domain of the archon and his rulers. In our treatise, this place is called αμητε (the underworld)—the equivalent in Coptic of Hades (Tartaros)—which is mentioned in 63.12, in a part of the text damaged with many lacunae. The αμητε, a frequently used term in Gnostic writings, means—as Raymond Kuntzmann<sup>58</sup> notes—“firstly the west, the cardinal direction, but it also symbolizes the place of judgment and punishment; when it is employed without any article, it functions as the proper noun Hell.”<sup>59</sup>

In 61.14–16 of *Allogenes T*, the author adds the precision that Satan retreats to his kingdom, his place, “covered in shame” (literally: “in great shame”). The Coptic ωρη stands for the Greek ἀσχημοσύνη. The shame of the archons, dealt with in several Gnostic tractates, can appear as a parallel theme to this one. In the *Concept of our Great Power* this theme is developed through an apocalyptic scheme.<sup>60</sup> In the *Authoritative Teaching*, it is the archons—“those who deal in bodies” (NHC VI,3 32.18–19)—that the soul, endowed with its royal attributes, covered in shame.<sup>61</sup>

The following lines contain a prayer Allogenes addresses to God in order to get help and be delivered from evil (61.19–62.9); the abstract concept of Evil is thus substituted for the figure of Satan that provides a more concrete illustration in the tractate. Once again Allogenes addresses God by emphasizing his transcendence: “You who are in the great aeons,” an expression we can compare with 60.17–18. Although we can find in Gnostic literature many other prayers with which we could compare these lines,<sup>62</sup> we

<sup>57</sup> Trans. Meyer 2007, 264. See also Turner 2007c.

<sup>58</sup> Kuntzmann 1986, 128.

<sup>59</sup> We find the term αμητε in *Thom. Cont.* NHC II,7 142.37; 143.2; *Teach. Sib.* NHC VII,4 104.2; *Trim. Prot.* NHC XIII,1 36.4; 39.17, 22; 40.24; 41.6; 43.9.

<sup>60</sup> NHC VI,4 43.29–44.10.

<sup>61</sup> NHC VI,3 28.20–24.

<sup>62</sup> For example, *Exeg. Soul* NHC II,6 128.34–129.5.

would especially want to note the relationship with the “Our Father”—the prayer pronounced by Jesus as transmitted by Matthew.<sup>63</sup>

This pressing demand for help is made by Allogenes while he is in a “deserted place,” or in an “abandoned place” (61.24: πᾶσι[μ]δ ἀλλογῆ): therefore, this is how Allogenes perceives the world. If we understand the term ἀλλογῆ in the sense of “desert,” of “wilderness,” we are able to draw a parallel with the place in which the temptation of Christ took place, according to the narration of the Synoptic Gospels. Nevertheless, an interpretation in the sense of an “abandoned place” would fit in well with Gnostic pessimism according to which the world is a place abandoned by God.

In his prayer Allogenes invokes the gift of light—the gift of an “ineffable light” (61.25–26). Even if the following lines (62.1–4) are missing, the rest of the text permits us to understand that this light is a mystical experience for Allogenes who is surrounded by a luminous cloud (62.9–63.2).

Let us conclude. Gnostic negative perceptions about the dangerous seduction of the world as well as the Synoptic narratives about Jesus’ temptations in the wilderness have been a source of inspiration for the author of *Allogenes T*. Both have provided him with material to illustrate the Gnostic theme of the struggle of man against the powers of evil in recounting the story of Allogenes’ ascension and temptation on mount Tabor. If compared to the Gospel passages, in *Allogenes T* the landscape darkens more and more, in a merciless fight between Light and Darkness, between Satan and Allogenes—two opposing figures that represent paths between which humanity has to choose.

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## MARTIN HENGEL AND THE ORIGINS OF GNOSTICISM

Volker Henning Drecoll

The aim of this essay is to elucidate the background of contemporary German scholarship on Gnosticism. Current German scholarship maintains that Gnosticism had a Christian origin, while in Anglophone scholarship there is not only considerable skepticism about the term “Gnosticism,” but also a broad discussion as to whether the origins of Gnosticism are Jewish, Christian or lie elsewhere. Therefore, (a) I will point out the significance of Martin Hengel for contemporary German scholarship, (b) I will explain how his position fits into the current discussion about the origins of Gnosticism, and (c) I will show from a passage of Irenaeus that Hengel’s approach is helpful for a reconsideration of the origins of Gnosticism. From these observations I conclude that the most fitting explanation for these origins is what I term the “quick shift” theory.

### 1. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARTIN HENGEL FOR CONTEMPORARY GERMAN SCHOLARSHIP

One of the most influential discussions in German scholarship of the question of the “Origins of Gnosticism” comes from a New Testament scholar, namely, Martin Hengel.<sup>1</sup> His perspective can be found in his article “Die Ursprünge der Gnosis und das Urchristentum,”<sup>2</sup> that is an edited version of a lecture given before Protestant ministers at Stuttgart, published in 1997. Hengel rejected the thesis about Gnosticism that was common in Germany in the fifties and sixties, particularly the picture of a religious, syncretistic system of the second or first century BCE that would have to be taken into account for any reading of the New Testament. Hengel sought especially to refute the hypothesis of Rudolph Bultmann and others according to which the Gospel of John or the anthropology of Paul should be explained by

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Marksches 2009, 83m, who says that Martin Hengel “zu den Forschern im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert gehörte, die besonders nachhaltig ein neues Gnosis-Bild angeregt und vorbereitet haben.”

<sup>2</sup> Hengel 1997, 197–223, quoted according to Hengel 2008, 549–593.



reference to a Gnostic background. Hengel showed his independence here and considered Bultmann's hypothesis to be part of the "Marburger Gnosisfieber."<sup>3</sup> In his view, famous scholars such as Kurt Rudolph, Hans Jonas or Bultmann belonged to this group and neglected the historical setting of the Gnostic sources they used (especially the Mandaean texts, but even later texts of Manichaean provenance). The Nag Hammadi texts do not change this situation because they are not evidence for an early, proto-Christian Gnosticism.<sup>4</sup>

Hengel's approach was heavily dependent on Irenaeus, although he was very skeptical of many of the details Irenaeus gives. According to Hengel, Gnosticism is a phenomenon that arose very early in Christianity and that was substantially shaped by individual teachers. Consequently, he inspired various fundamental works about the first "Gnostic" teachers that are the backbone of current German scholarship on Gnosticism. That is why his name is referred to in the prefaces of books by Christoph Marksches on Valentinus, Winrich Löhr on Basilides, Niclas Förster on Marcus Magus, and Ansgar Wucherpfennig on Heracleon. The important collection of essays by Barbara Aland also refers to Martin Hengel in the preface.<sup>5</sup>

The argument of "Die Ursprünge der Gnosis und das Urchristentum" runs as follows: Hengel started with quotations from the Pastoral Letters of the New Testament. He refers the warning in 1 Tim 6:20 ff. to an already existing Gnostic group (the famous ψευδώνυμος γνώσις) and links this to the μῦθοι καὶ γενεαλογίαι ἀπέραντοι in the beginning of the letter (1 Tim 1:4) and to the group mentioned in 1 Tim 4:1–3 with their special ascetic appeal. The author of the Pastoral Letter feels obliged to add that every creature is good (1 Tim 4:4), and so the reason for this ascetic appeal can be understood as a negative assessment of the material creature. The term γνώσις, the link between myth and genealogies, and this ascetic appeal fit quite well with later Gnostic systems, as we know them from Irenaeus, around the end of the second century. What is astonishing, however, is the fact that the comparable text of Tit 1:14 mentions the Ἰουδαίικοι μῦθοι. Hengel interprets this as a sign of Jewish origin of the group mentioned.

Hengel is well aware of the problem of the date of the Pastoral Letters. Of course, we have no certainty about this question, but what we can say with certainty is that they are not written by Paul, but are post-Pauline.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Hengel 1997, 568n69.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Hengel 1997, 567–578.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Marksches 1992, viii; Löhr 1996, v; Förster 1999, vi; Wucherpfennig 2002, vii; Aland 2009, vii. Cf. also Weiß 2008, v.

Perhaps we can assume (with Hengel) a date of approximately 110–120 CE.<sup>6</sup> Anyway, an important piece of the New Testament seems to show traces of the early controversy between Pauline and Gnostic groups. Thus, we may ask: How early did Gnosticism begin? Is there a pre-Christian Gnosticism<sup>7</sup> that exerted some influence on early Christianity? Should we assume a Jewish or Christian origin?

According to Hengel, clear evidence for Gnostic circles exists only in the second half of the second century. Justin is one of the earliest witnesses, and 25 years later Irenaeus gives us a full spectrum of Gnostic groups. Justin does not offer detailed information, and chronological conclusions cannot be drawn from the few things that he does mention. What is worse, the information that Irenaeus gives us is—according to Hengel—not very trustworthy. For example, the attempt to discover the historically true Gnosticism of Simon Magus is “vergebliche Liebesmüh.”<sup>8</sup>

In spite of this, one piece of Irenaeus’ picture of Gnosticism seems historically true to Hengel, namely, that Gnostics were Christians, and that Gnosticism is an offspring “des theologisch-philosophischen Experimentierens”<sup>9</sup> of the second century. All that we can know about the Gnostic heresiarchs comes from this period. In this respect, Hengel integrates the results of the works of (especially) Marksches and Löhr into his analysis: Valentinus and Basilides did not shape a Gnostic system, but were Christian teachers, “erste christliche ‘Religionsphilosophen.’”<sup>10</sup>

Hengel, however, does not stop here. At the end of this article he takes up the question of whether Jewish apocalypticism should be considered one of the sources of Gnosticism. Hengel compares both phenomena and stresses the significance of revelation that is common to both, but also the important differences between apocalypticism and Gnosticism. From his point of view, Gnosticism can be understood as a “reversal” of apocalypticism. The presuppositions of apocalyptic thought, especially the expectation of a common salvation in history, are “replaced” by an absolutely individualistic, ahistorical perspective according to which the world, especially matter, is evil. Thus, Gnosticism could be the result of a strong rejection of the hopeful aspect of apocalyptic thinking. Hengel asks:

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Hengel 1997, 567.

<sup>7</sup> For the difference between pre- and proto-Gnosticism, cf. the “Documento finale,” in Bianchi 1970, xx–xxxii, esp. xxvii–xxviii.

<sup>8</sup> Hengel 1997, 581.

<sup>9</sup> Hengel 1997, 560.

<sup>10</sup> Hengel 1997, 557–558.

Wäre es nicht denkbar, daß nach 70 philosophisch gebildete Juden am Gott der Väter verzweifeln, sich den christlichen Gemeinden anschließen und ihre Kritik am Schöpfungsbericht und der alttestamentlichen Heilsgeschichte in diese jungen und durchaus noch nicht in ihrer Lehre völlig konsolidierten Gemeinden einbrachten und mit ihrer platonisierenden Alternative und ihren allegorisierenden Auslegungskünsten gegenüber dem in vielem anstößigen Alten Testament gerade bei Gebildeten Eindruck erweckten?<sup>11</sup>

There are two interesting points in this hypothesis:

- (1) Three sources of Gnosticism can be named: Platonism, Hellenistic Judaism, and Christianity. According to Hengel, Gnosticism arose among Christians, but especially among such Christians that were Hellenistic Jews and who also shared Platonic concepts.
- (2) These unknown groups of early Gnostics are, let us say, "Gnostics before the Gnostics." They belong to a generation that is earlier than teachers like Valentinus or Basilides. They are not Gnostics in the later sense of a developed Gnostic system (as this can be found, e.g., in the *Apocryphon of John*), but they shared certain views that explain the warnings in the Pastoral Letters.

Perhaps two further consequences of this hypothesis may be added:

- (3) The question should be raised whether we have in these "Gnostics before the Gnostics" a bridge to the problems Paul dealt with in his letters to the Corinthians, or at least his First Corinthians. Of course, the profile of the various groups mentioned in 1 Cor is a highly debated question,<sup>12</sup> but perhaps here we can observe a background whose later development is linked to Gnosticism.
- (4) According to Hengel, neither Hellenistic Judaism (Alexandria!) nor Platonism alone can sufficiently explain the origins of Gnosticism. Gnosticism could arise only in combination with Christianity. This means that between Judaism and Christianity there is, already at a very early time, a clear distinction or separation. Despite this separation, a common ground between Judaism and Christianity remains: the Old Testament and its interpretation with reference to a Platonic background. This explains the similarities to Philo, and even the strong reception, for example, of John's Gospel in Gnosticism.

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<sup>11</sup> Hengel 1997, 592.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. the splendid survey of Schrage (1991, 38–63).

The hypothesis of Hengel raises a wide range of questions. I will concentrate on the assumption that Gnosticism is a Christian phenomenon dependent on a Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of the Bible. I wonder if the border between Judaism and Christianity was already well-defined in early times, and I ask how we should imagine the transition from a Hellenistic Jewish and Platonic reading of Genesis to a Christian reading. From my point of view, these questions raised by Hengel offer a certain degree of convergence with some results of the discussion about the origins of Gnosticism in roughly the last fifteen years.

## 2. HENGEL'S PLACE IN CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON THE ORIGINS OF GNOSTICISM

For the current purpose of this essay it may be sufficient to consider four important approaches to the problem of the origins of Gnosticism.<sup>13</sup>

### *2.1. The Refutation of "Gnosticism" as a Historically Valuable Category*

Bentley Layton had previously noticed that the term "Gnosticism" was problematic because of its origin in the seventeenth century.<sup>14</sup> Γνωσις and the adjective γνωστικός are not regularly used by the ancient sources, especially not by the so-called original Gnostic texts. Michael A. Williams then analyzed the use of the terms in our ancient sources and came to the conclusion that "'gnostic' as a self-designation in these ancient sources does not provide a good justification for the modern category of 'gnosticism.'" <sup>15</sup> Karen King underlined the problematic character of the category on the basis that it is a modern designation not independent from the hermeneutical view of modern scholars and one, moreover, that puts together various and diverse ways of thinking; thus, not only are descriptions of Gnostic myths unconvincing, but so are different typologies of Gnosticism, because "none of the primary materials fits the standard typological definition."<sup>16</sup> Thus, a determination of the essence of Gnosticism is impossible: "there was and is no such thing as Gnosticism, if we mean by that

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<sup>13</sup> On research up to 2000, cf. Lahe 2012a.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Layton 1995, 348–349; Markschie 2009, 26–33.

<sup>15</sup> Williams 1996, 42.

<sup>16</sup> King 2003, esp. 226.

some kind of ancient religious entity with a single origin and a distinct set of characteristics.”<sup>17</sup>

Williams and King are right to be skeptical of the idea that the term “gnosticism” is justified by ancient sources. Furthermore, heresiological categories should be avoided wherever possible because they prevent a neutral understanding of a position that was condemned by its enemies (thus repeating the condemnation).<sup>18</sup> I doubt, however, that (a) the use of “gnostic” by the ancient sources is a sufficient argument for the complete elimination of the term; and (b) that the term “Gnosticism” can be deemed a “heresiological” category in the proper sense. In particular, Clement’s use of the term (and his concept of the true Gnostic) shows that “Gnostic” in itself was considered to be a positive appellation, not a heresiological category.<sup>19</sup> The usage of Irenaeus, who refers to the *ψευδώνυμος γνῶσις*, shows that it was the claim of the Gnostics to offer true understanding that was rejected, not *γνῶσις* in itself. If “Gnostic” is not a heresiological term in its proper sense, the question remains whether the term is perhaps still useful as a historiographical category, even though it is not justified by the ancient sources. This seems to be the case because the texts named “Gnostic” are a group of texts that can be described by a typological model. Even if there are several typologies and even if the construction of these typologies is dependent on the discourse of scholars’ research, the principal character of this coherence is nonetheless to be found there. It is exactly the advantage of a typological model that it describes a certain degree of coherence (and does not offer a “distinct set of characteristics” that has to be proven for every text). In a certain sense, even Williams maintains that the texts called “Gnostic” are a group of texts with a certain degree of coherence; otherwise his proposal that we introduce the term “biblical demiurgical tradition”<sup>20</sup> would not make sense. The Nag Hammadi library, though its historical origins are unfortunately unknown, also offers a certain evidence for this coherence: although the codices collect very different writings, it seems that here a library of a certain group of texts was produced, not a compilation of texts collected by pure chance. We could, of course, consider new and different terms by which we might name the phenomenon. The phrase “biblical demiurgical tradition” proposed by Williams, however, is in itself problematic, because it stresses the demiurge

<sup>17</sup> King 2003, 1–2.

<sup>18</sup> Therefore, it is not appropriate to use the term “Gnostic sect” (cf. Layton 1987, 5).

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Brakke 2010, 33–34.

<sup>20</sup> Williams 1996, 51.

as the cornerstone of what have been called “Gnostic texts.” Thus, it offers a far more restricted perspective of what may be termed “Gnostic” than the various typological models offer (e.g., Schenke, Marksches, Rasimus). It may be added shortly that in German, the term “Gnostizismus” is quite unusual (*pace* the definition of Messina), while “Gnosis” is used commonly. This latter term fits not only quite well the special significance of understanding, revelation and hidden truth that are crucial for the Gnostic texts, but it avoids the “-ism” that may connote a certain systematic and ideological character. So, from my point of view, the critical remarks of Williams and King do not do away with the problem of how the coherence of these so-called “Gnostic texts” can be characterized and which of the typological models is the most appropriate.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.2. “Sethianism”

Perhaps the most influential typology of the last 30 years is the typology of Sethianism, developed by Hans-Martin Schenke. I will not deal with all of the details of Schenke’s typology here, but I would like to mention the fact that, according to Schenke, Gnosticism had a pre-Christian origin and then later became Christianized. The Nag Hammadi Codices belong to the Christianized state, but also reveal the pre-Christian layer. In particular, the *Apocryphon of John* is derived from a pre-Christian state of Sethian Gnosticism, though we have it in a Christianized form.<sup>22</sup> Thus, according to Schenke, we have no explicit evidence for a Gnostic system before the Christian texts, but we do have traces of a pre-Christian state or substance of Gnosticism that shows us that Gnosticism is not merely a Christian heresy, but a development of its own, stemming from Platonizing Hellenistic Jewish circles.<sup>23</sup>

John D. Turner has been more explicit about this.<sup>24</sup> He describes Sethian Gnosticism as the result of a fusion of two groups: (a) a Barbeloite group, mingling together strands of contemporary Platonism and (b) the Sethites, a group that considered itself the true heir of the primordial revelations

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<sup>21</sup> Cf. the critical remarks on King and Williams in Pearson 2004, 208–218; Brakke 2010, 21–28, 46; and Lahe 2012a, 372.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Schenke 1974; 1981.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. Schenke 1981, 607: “Originally and essentially Gnostic Sethianism, or Sethian Gnosis, is non-Christian and even pre-Christian: pre-Christian at least in substance, even if not in chronology, about which nothing can be said.”

<sup>24</sup> A short summary of his view can be found in Turner 2000, 139–144. Cf. the typology in Turner 1995, 170–171.

to Seth. Before these groups “fused,” the Barbeloites amalgamated with Christian baptizing groups (in the first century), so baptism became an important part not only of their cult, but also of their thinking about the reception of Wisdom. Seth was often identified with Christ by those who had merged Sethianism with Christian ideas (in the early second century). At the end of the second century, Sethian Gnosticism detached itself step by step from Christianity, and, thus, in the third century it absorbed modern Platonism. The rejection of Sethian Platonism by “orthodox Platonists” and by Christian heresiologists led to a late stage of development in which Sethianism was divided into many minor groups.<sup>25</sup>

For our purpose, the idea that there were roots of Sethian Gnosticism in the first century is as important as the idea that already in the first century it amalgamated with Christian groups. It is of course debatable whether there were really distinctive groups (the Barbeloites and the Sethites). Because of a lack of clear evidence it is perhaps better to speak about “theological tendencies.” Nevertheless, Turner’s picture of a quick shift to a Christianized state seems to be worthy of further consideration.

### 2.3. *Christian Origins of Gnosticism*

In contrast to the approaches that are based on Schenke’s Sethianism, there are several approaches that stress the Christian character of Gnosticism from its very beginnings. The difference to the approach via Sethianism becomes clear from the critique that, for example, Luttikhuizen developed in a very concise article.<sup>26</sup> He summarizes his arguments as follows: (1) The title “Sethianism” is inappropriate, because, e.g., in the *Apocryphon of John*, the name Seth occurs only once; and occasionally, the catalogue of Sethian topics developed by Schenke is not convincing because it contains very different themes that do not occur regularly in all writings reckoned as “Sethian treatises” by Schenke. Furthermore, its negative theology is not a specific point that distinguishes Sethian treatises from others because negative theology is common currency of contemporary Platonism. (2) The so-called “Sethian treatises” belong to a Gnostic group, though Luttikhuizen doubts that it could be called “Sethian” because in some of the texts all humans are Sethians, but not all of them are Gnostics. Therefore, the designation of the group as “Sethian” is inadequate. (3) The hypothesis that writings

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<sup>25</sup> Cf. the diagram that shows the internal development of the Sethian movement according to Turner (1995, 217).

<sup>26</sup> Luttikhuizen 2006; 2009.

such as the *Apocryphon of John* contain a doctrine that is substantially pre-Christian and Jewish is denied by Luttikhuizen. Not only is the literary criticism which separates pre-Christian elements in the *Apocryphon of John* from later Christianization unconvincing, but the main focus of the writings as such is also missed because the crucial question of these groups was: "Was bedeuten die alten Texte im Lichte der neuen Offenbarung, die Jesus Christus gebracht hat?"<sup>27</sup> When Luttikhuizen proceeds by saying that "Das vielförmige Christentum des 2. Jahrhunderts ist gleichsam das natürliche Biotop, in dem eine solche Auffassung des alttestamentlichen Gottes gedeihen konnte,"<sup>28</sup> he is very close to Hengel's expression of the "Zeit des theologisch-philosophischen Experimentierens."<sup>29</sup> Markschies in particular developed the idea of the "Laboratorium der Theologiegeschichte" and tried to sketch a picture of the growth of theology and ecclesiastical institutions.<sup>30</sup> Markschies favours "die Rekontextualisierung dieses Phänomens in die christliche Kirchen- und Theologiegeschichte."<sup>31</sup> This would result in the fact that "das in Messina als Vorschlag normierte und methodisch wie historisch tief problematische Forschungsbild von der Gnosis als einer vorchristlichen Religion von niemandem mehr vertreten würde."<sup>32</sup> According to him, it can be said:

daß die antike 'Gnosis' am besten als ein Versuch interpretiert werden kann, Probleme der biblischen Tradition zu lösen und sie mit Hilfe platonischer Philosophoumena um eine Ur- und Nachgeschichte zu verbreitern, um sie für gebildete Kreise in den Metropolen der Antike akzeptabler zu machen.<sup>33</sup>

It is interesting that "biblische Tradition" may refer to several texts, but I take it for granted that Genesis 1–3 plays a dominant role here. The typology of Gnostic texts that Markschies developed<sup>34</sup> offers no clear reference to the specific Christian character of the texts, though an "Erlösergestalt" appears. This leads to the important question of how explicit and specific a Christian character should be given to a text in order to fulfill our expectations of it as a "Christian" one. Thus, the question about the transition from a Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of the Bible to a specifically Christian one is raised also by those scholars who maintain that Gnosticism had a Christian origin.

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<sup>27</sup> Luttikhuizen 2009, 84.

<sup>28</sup> Luttikhuizen 2009, 84.

<sup>29</sup> Hengel 1997, 560.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Markschies 2007, 380.

<sup>31</sup> Markschies 2009, 51.

<sup>32</sup> Markschies 2009, 51.

<sup>33</sup> Markschies 2009, 49.

<sup>34</sup> Markschies 2001, 25–26.



#### 2.4. *The Hypothesis about the Ophites by Rasimus*

One of the most interesting hypotheses about the origins of Gnosticism is the recent book by Tuomas Rasimus about the Ophites.<sup>35</sup> Rasimus also favours a typological model for the description of Gnostic texts.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, he reconsiders Schenke's "Sethianism"<sup>37</sup> and, by so doing, he develops a hypothesis about the Christian origin of Gnosticism.<sup>38</sup> The full range of results of this rich monograph cannot be summed up here, but I would like to highlight some points that are interesting for our purpose.

First of all, Rasimus inverts the significance of the *Apocryphon of John*. It is not the starting point for the analysis, but according to him the result of a development in which mainly three traditions joined each other. He distinguishes (a) Barbeloite material, (b) Sethian or Sethite material, and (c) Ophite material.<sup>39</sup> The Ophite material is carefully identified, principally on the basis of Irenaeus, *Adversus haereses* 1.30 in comparison with the Coptic writings *On the Origin of the World*, *Eugnostos* and *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. He also uses the description of the Ophites in Origen, *Cels.* 6.24–38 (the so-called "Ophite diagram").<sup>40</sup> Rasimus is able to show that this group has a high degree of internal coherence, especially with reference to the seven names of the archons of Yaldabaoth,<sup>41</sup> the link between Sophia and Eve,<sup>42</sup> the positive evaluation of the eating from the tree (partially linked to a positive evaluation of the serpent),<sup>43</sup> the introduction of a heavenly Man who is linked with the creation of man and the need for further help for all human beings.<sup>44</sup> This leads to the hypothesis that the appearance and modification of some of these elements in other Gnostic texts (especially the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Hypostasis of the Archons*) are a secondary and later integration of the originally coherent material. The distinction between Barbeloite and Sethian material is not the focus of the monograph, but it is presupposed several times. The result is that pure Sethianism hardly

<sup>35</sup> Rasimus 2009.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Rasimus 2009, 55.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Rasimus 2009, 28–41.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Rasimus 2009, 284: "the Ophite mythology seems to have developed out of a Platonic reading of Genesis through Christian lenses."

<sup>39</sup> Cf. the instructive figure in Rasimus 2009, 62; for the "rewriting" of Barbeloite and Ophite features in the *Apocryphon of John*, cf. pp. 151–154; for Sethianization, pp. 199–202.

<sup>40</sup> Rasimus 2009, 48–54.

<sup>41</sup> Rasimus 2009, 104.

<sup>42</sup> Rasimus 2009, 154–156.

<sup>43</sup> Rasimus 2009, 96–98.

<sup>44</sup> Rasimus 2009, 177–178; 183–184.

exists at all (only reports of Epiphanius can be considered here); rather, Sethianism is only present in different types of mixture (with Barbeloite and/or Ophite material).<sup>45</sup> Sethianism is interpreted as a kind of (secondary) reaction to a controversy between Christians and Jews by which (Gnostic) Christians tried to refute the accusation of innovation.<sup>46</sup> Thus, so-called “Classical” Gnosticism arose where Barbeloite and Ophite material flowed together.

Rasimus’ conclusions will be the subject of further scholarly debate. The description of the Ophite group is certainly persuasive, perhaps also the new perspective on the *Apocryphon of John* as a melting pot of diverse traditions. The questions of chronology are, perhaps, more problematic. Rasimus does not say very much about these. He assumes that the origins of the Ophites can be paralleled with the discussions Paul had in Corinth, so he assumes a very early date (second half of the first century).<sup>47</sup> On the other hand, the Ophite myth must have been there before the *Apocryphon of John* and presumably before Valentinus.<sup>48</sup> So I suppose that he would also agree with a date early in the second century. The reasons for this chronological conclusion are based on crucial issues of the typological description of Ophite texts. Perhaps, however, we should distinguish between some crucial features that seem to be substantial for the Ophite material and the literary texts we have. For example, it seems to me that the system Irenaeus reports is a quite elaborate and developed system; not the first steps, but the result of an already well-established tradition. The famous sentence of Irenaeus that “from those” the *multiplex capitibus fera* arose is no proof that the system of the Ophites reported in *Haer.* 1.30 is earlier than Valentinus, but only that it is earlier than the *schola Valentini*.<sup>49</sup> In other words, Irenaeus asserts that his actual opponents were influenced by the various systems mentioned before (*Haer.* 1.30 being the last of them). For our current purpose, this question is important because it raises the question whether all elements assumed to be Ophite by Rasimus are in fact already present in the first century (or at the beginning of the second). This question applies not only to such points as the identification of Sophia and Eve or the exact names of the seven archons, but also especially to their Christian character, i.e., the Adam-speculation and the counter-reading of the Genesis 2–3 story. I doubt that we have to

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. again the figure in Rasimus 2009, 62.

<sup>46</sup> Rasimus 2009, 203.

<sup>47</sup> Rasimus 2009, 186.

<sup>48</sup> Rasimus 2009, 286.

<sup>49</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.30.15 (384.277–279 Rousseau and Doutreleau).

presuppose the entirety of his Ophite typology in order to explain the origins of Valentinus' thought (or of some other teacher prior to Justin Martyr). The relationship with the development of the Barbeloite material is a second problem: Is the Ophite material earlier or later than Barbeloite material? Are there two (originally independent) origins of Gnosticism? What is, however, clear to both Rasimus and to me, is the fact that a new reading of Genesis 1–3 is the decisive factor for the origins of Gnosticism.

### 2.5. *Conclusion: Hengel's Place in Current Research*

According to Hengel, Gnosticism was invented one generation before Valentinus and Basilides, perhaps after 70 CE. He assumed that it was developed by Jews who knew a Hellenistic-Platonic interpretation of the Bible, especially of Genesis, and who were interested in a new interpretation of Christ. If we compare this with the above-mentioned hypotheses of Turner, Marksches, or Rasimus, it becomes clear that the question of the transition from a Hellenistic Jewish mode of thought to a specifically Christian perspective is the center of the whole question. Can we distinguish a non-Christian phase in the development of Gnosticism from a purely Christian one or not? Is a certain Gnostic flavor already present before these people (to use Hengel's words) "sich den christlichen Gemeinden anschlossen" or only after that?

From my point of view, even modern modifications of Schenke's approach (like that of Turner) point to this quick shift to a Christian theology. Rasimus' hypothesis not only fits the same chronological period (in comparison with Hengel, after Paul, perhaps after 70 CE),<sup>50</sup> but it also fits with the idea that the exegesis of Genesis played a significant role in this process. He assumes, however, that Ophitism had a Christian context from its very beginning.

Certain motifs of later Gnosticism can be completely explained by reference to such a Hellenistic Jewish and Platonizing world-view, even if they cannot be classified as typically "Jewish." Some examples of thought which are not typically "Jewish" are: the assumption that the first God is absolutely transcendent so that He himself is neither active nor in contact with the world, but instead there is some other degree of divinity below him who is (Sophia, an angel, the Name etc.); the negative character of the world and some of the angels; the attempt to explain evil by cosmogony and anthro-

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<sup>50</sup> Cf. Rasimus 2009, 287.

pogony; the redemption by a savior who offers special revelation and knowledge; and the presupposition that there must be something divine in human beings.

However, at the same time, it is plausible that these questions were of special interest for Christians who tried to enter the theological and philosophical discourse of the cities in the late first or early second century, and who offered their own experiment to this laboratory.

Consequently, the comparison of Hengel with some major contributions to the current discussion about the origins of Gnosticism leads me to the question: How should we imagine the process of transition from a standard Hellenistic Jewish and Platonic interpretation of Genesis to a specifically Gnostic and explicitly Christian form of thought? My hypothesis is that the thought of Menander and Saturninos as sketched by Irenaeus sheds light on exactly this question.

### 3. IRENAEUS ABOUT MENANDER AND SATORNINOS AND THE "QUICK SHIFT THEORY"

In chapters 23–28 of *Adversus haereses* book 1, Irenaeus develops his famous chronology of Gnosticism. His report about Simon Magus has been the subject of several analyses.<sup>51</sup> Hengel himself was quite skeptical about this point. From his point of view, "das ganze Konglomerat ist ein spätes und ... von der christlichen Gnosis geprägtes Kunstprodukt."<sup>52</sup> The report about Basilides in ch. 24 also seems untrustworthy since we know from the fragments of Basilides (especially those preserved by Clement of Alexandria) that Basilides himself did not advance such a Gnostic system.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, Hippolytus gives us an absolutely different picture of the Gnostic system of Basilides.<sup>54</sup> Even the reports about Carpocrates and Cerinthus have been debated in modern research.<sup>55</sup> Thus the information that Irenaeus offers does not seem to be very trustworthy.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Beyschlag 1974; Lüdemann 1975, 81–88.

<sup>52</sup> Hengel 1997, 581.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Löhr 1996, 255–273. A more traditional view of Basilides is given by Pearson 2008, who does not offer an argument why the heresiological view of Irenaeus should be accepted in order to describe the thought of Basilides—despite the major discrepancies between the report of Irenaeus and the fragments themselves.

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Löhr 1996, 284–323.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Löhr 1995; Marksches 1998, 48–76.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. the short remarks on the report about Saturninos in Löhr 1996, 261–262.

I would like to reconsider the section about Menander and Saturninos. I do not intend to reconstruct the historical thought of Menander or Saturninos.<sup>57</sup> However, the picture that Irenaeus gives us in the short reports about Menander and Saturninos is interesting for the aforementioned question of how we should imagine the transition from a Hellenistic Jewish to an explicitly Christian way of thinking.<sup>58</sup>

My starting point is *Haer.* 1.24.1. According to Irenaeus, Saturninos and Basilides are considered to have been contemporaries, though they have different doctrines. Both stem *ex his*, which refers either to Simon Magus and Menander,<sup>59</sup> or to the disciples of Menander. In both cases, it is difficult to draw chronological conclusions from this expression. It may simply mean that Basilides and Saturninos followed Menander and Simon (or their disciples) in some respect.<sup>60</sup> Still, Basilides and Saturninos did appear—according to Irenaeus—after Simon and Menander. Thus, Irenaeus wants to tell us something about what we can call “the third generation,” and this leads us into the time of Trajan and Hadrian, which is very plausible in the case of Basilides.<sup>61</sup>

If we consider the report about Menander, the information of Irenaeus does not suggest that he had a very well-elaborated Gnostic system.<sup>62</sup> In this respect, the reports about Menander and Saturninos are different from those about Simon Magus and Basilides. This is interesting because it diminishes the danger of unwittingly following the heresiologists in simply ascribing later thoughts to famous earlier names. Irenaeus reports the following major points about Menander’s doctrine:

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<sup>57</sup> The construction of the gnostic systems of Menander and Saturninos by Pétremont (1984, 431–442, 449–458) is highly problematic, as will be seen in the following footnotes.

<sup>58</sup> There is no detailed literature about this section of Irenaeus, but cf. the helpful analysis in Markschieff 2001, 78–80.

<sup>59</sup> The French translation of Rousseau and Doutreleau in their *Sources chrétiennes*-edition has: “prenant comme point de départ la doctrine de ces deux hommes”—which is explicitly more than *ex his* (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.1 [320.1–322.20 Rousseau and Doutreleau]), cf. Rousseau and Doutreleau 1979, 283–284 (‘Note justificative à p. 321,’ n. 3). Also Löhr 1996, 17 is in favour of Simon and Menander. That Menander is a disciple of Simon Magus is already the heresiological concept of Justin, *1Apol.* 26.4 (70.15–18 Marcovich), who stresses the magic arts of Menander (cf. also Justin, *1Apol.* 56.1 [112.6–7 Marcovich]).

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Löhr 1996, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. the result of Löhr 1996, 325: “Basilides war ein christlicher Lehrer in Alexandrien zur Zeit des Hadrian.”

<sup>62</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23.5 (320.93–104 Rousseau and Doutreleau).

- The highest principle, called *prima Virtus*, is absolutely unknown.
- The world is not made by this first principle; instead, an Ennoia sends angels, and these angels make the world.<sup>63</sup>
- A Savior is sent from the invisible realm (Irenaeus asserts that Menander considered himself to be this savior). The savior offers knowledge (via magic, as Irenaeus asserts), and by this knowledge the disciples can overcome the (now apparently bad) angels of the world.
- Menander announces a special baptism (in his own name, according to Irenaeus), by which disciples gain immortality and life without aging.

Of course, several points in this report are suspicious.<sup>64</sup> It is historically possible that Menander considered himself to be the savior,<sup>65</sup> but I doubt that this was exactly his self-understanding. Montanus, too, was condemned for claiming to be the paraclete, but from a historical point of view it is more plausible to assume that he considered himself to be a revealer of the paraclete who passed on the exact words of the paraclete (including those in the first-person singular) to his audience. Even the assertion about a special baptism remains obscure.<sup>66</sup> It is sufficiently strange that the promise of immortality<sup>67</sup> was understood in a truly corporeal sense (and it could hardly survive the first death of one member of this group).

What is interesting in this suspicious report, however, is the fact that the creation is made by angels. This is an element that also occurs in the reports about Simon, Satorminos, Basilides and Carpocrates. Markschieves gives an elucidating excursus in his book on Valentinus about the creation by angels in Jewish and early Christian literature.<sup>68</sup> From his point of view, this motif goes back to the “gestaltende Hand des Irenäus, der stets mit

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<sup>63</sup> This topic can be compared with Ophite theologoumena (cf. Rasimus 2009, 107–123), but in the report about Menander there are no names nor is there a Yaldabaoth figure, so this could be an earlier stage of development.

<sup>64</sup> The links to the reading of the Gospel of John that Pétremont 1984, 431–436, asserts cannot be found in the short text of Irenaeus, but are mere speculation based on the assumption that there is a considerable and specific “Samaritan” background to Menander’s thought.

<sup>65</sup> Pétremont 1984, 438–439. The assertion of Pétremont (436–437) that Menander favoured a kind of docetism is without any basis in the text of Irenaeus.

<sup>66</sup> Baptism in itself does not presuppose a Christian context, as Markschieves 2001, 79, argues.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Markschieves 2001, 78–79. This feature is attested already in Justin, *1Apol.* 26.4 (70.18–19 Marcovich), so perhaps Irenaeus integrated this observation, although it did not fit the other information he had.

<sup>68</sup> Markschieves 1992, 18–24.

denselben stereotypen Formulierungen das gleiche Motiv der Engelschöpfung beschreibt.”<sup>69</sup> Indeed the expression *mundus et omnia quae in eo est* occurs in a similar manner three times, but there are also interesting differences between the reports. In the report about Simon, the angels are only called *mundi factores angeli*—without further explanation. In the report about Menander, the angels are a kind of offspring of the Ennoia, and in the report about Saturninos, they are seven in number. In the report about Basilides, they are linked to the visible heaven, and in the report about Carpocrates, it is asserted that they are “much below” the Father. Did Irenaeus simply invent these details, for every heresy a new one? Or did he have (accurate or inaccurate) information about the doctrines of these groups? We cannot be certain about this point with respect to the details, but from my point of view, it is indeed plausible to assume that the creation of the world by angels is one of the starting points for early Gnostic theories.

Markschies is, of course, right that the creation of the world by angels alone is not an indication of a negative evaluation of the world or the whole of creation, but this seems to be different in the report about Menander. There must have been something wrong with the creation of the world, otherwise the assertion that *scientia/γνῶσις* offers a victory over the angels would not make sense. Exactly this ambivalence about the angels’ activity is perhaps one of the oldest doctrines that contains some historical plausibility. If we compare *frg.* 1 of Valentinus (where not the cosmogony in general, but the anthropogony in particular is the focus), it becomes clear that Valentinus was well aware of the fact that angels would lose their function as ministers of God if they created a being that was higher than it should be; therefore, his angels behaved very differently from those that Irenaeus mentioned in his report about Menander.<sup>70</sup> Perhaps Menander’s theory is one of the presuppositions for the much more sophisticated thought of Valentinus.

From my point of view, the report about Menander shows how small the step from a regular Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of Gen 1–3 to a Gnostic or at least pre-Gnostic one was. This short step, however, implies grave consequences. The creation of the world by angels could be a regular Hellenistic Jewish speculation, but now it becomes an ambivalent thing, a first step in the history of sin. Now the world is something that is bad from its very beginning as world (presumably as a material world)—not only as world after a fall or subsequent step in the history of sin and salvation.

<sup>69</sup> See Markschies 1992, 22 with a short list of the most relevant formulaic expressions.

<sup>70</sup> For the interpretation of Valentinus, *frg.* 1, cf. Markschies 1992, esp. 31, 42–43.

What is very interesting here is that this perspective includes certain ambivalence at the heart of monotheism. On the one hand, it is only the highest principle that is the cause of all things; on the other, it is precisely the actions of entities that derive from this highest principle that cause evil. On the one hand, we have unambiguous monotheistic thought; on the other, we have a clearly dualistic world-view. Both things are fused here and, indeed, such an ambivalence between monotheism and dualism is one of the most fascinating things in Platonism.<sup>71</sup> Platonism can use dualisms, but all dualisms are dependent on a higher or highest being.

I doubt that these structures (monotheism; ambivalent activity of the entities that descend from the highest principle; a negative evaluation of the world; a dualism between world and salvation, which is overcome by a savior) can be definitely reckoned as “Christian.”<sup>72</sup> They can be understood in a Christian manner, but they may also be seen as an interpretation of Genesis 1–3 (as a kind of experiment). The distinction “Christian-Jewish” seems to be of no use here.

The report about Saturninos is preserved not only in the Latin translation of Irenaeus’ *Haer.* 1.24.1–2, but also in Greek in Hippolytus’ *Ref.* 7.28.<sup>73</sup> A comparison with the Latin text proves that Hippolytus used Irenaeus’ Greek report verbally, so we can use Hippolytus’ report directly. The report about Saturninos can be divided into two parts: The first part describes the cosmogony and the anthropogony, and the second describes the redemption. There are serious and interesting discrepancies between the two parts.<sup>74</sup>

In the first part, Saturninos starts with the *πατὴρ ἄγνωστος* who made the angels and all heavenly powers.<sup>75</sup> Seven of these angels made the world.

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<sup>71</sup> In particular, Numenius could be compared here, because his second God is twofold, divided by his contact with matter (Numenius, *fig.* 11 [53.11–20 des Places]) and the latter part of the second god is the *κόσμος*, so the second God consists of the demiurge and the world (Numenius, *fig.* 21 [60.1–5 des Places]).

<sup>72</sup> Aland 2009, 36, asserted that “Fall und Errettung, Sünde- und Gnadentheologie” existed “so nur im Christentum.” Perhaps this is true, but we may add that the case of Menander shows that the fall can be expressed in a quite indirect manner, as the ambivalence of an angel’s action. For redemption I would like to ask whether apocalyptic thinking and perhaps even messianic hopes could be taken into consideration. They are not explicitly a “Gnadentheologie,” but they are very close to an idea of “redemption by a savior.”

<sup>73</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.1–2 (320.1–324.39 Rousseau and Doutreleau); Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.28.1–7 (302.1–304.31 Marcovich). Compare the Greek text in Theodoret, *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.3 (PG 83:347A–C).

<sup>74</sup> The differences between both parts of Irenaeus’ report are neglected by Pétremont 1984, 449–456.

<sup>75</sup> I doubt that Irenaeus compresses a complex genealogy here, as can be found in the *Apocryphon of John* (cf. Layton 1987, 161 note b).



Even human beings are the creation of angels. This is described through a kind of “seduction of the angels”: There was a luminous image from above, from the *Αὐθεντία* (Latin: *a summa potestate*) that could not be grasped by the angels because it suddenly ran back into the higher realm. After they lost this image, the angels had a discussion and came to the conclusion: *Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν* (Gen 1:26). But the result of this was insufficient. It could not stand up, but twitched like a worm. Then the highest Power (*ἡ ἄνω δύναμις*)<sup>76</sup> had mercy on this creature of the angels because it was similar to itself. Therefore it gave to him the *σπινθήρ ζωῆς*, a “spark of life” that returns to the higher realm at the moment of death.

Several details of this report are not very clear:

- Are the seven angels identical with the angels that created mankind?<sup>77</sup>
- Is the highest Power identical with the *Αὐθεντία*?
- Are both, *Αὐθεντία* and *ἡ ἄνω δύναμις*, identical with the *Πατήρ ἄγνωστος*? Or are they a second, perhaps a female divine being?<sup>78</sup>
- What is the luminous image? Is this a visible side of the *Αὐθεντία*? (This could be supported by the expression: *διὰ τὸ ἐν ὁμοιώματι αὐτῆς*)

Despite these open questions, the exegetical background of this passage is very clear. Not only is Gen 1:26 used, but the emission of the sparks of life certainly refers back to Gen 2:7.<sup>79</sup>

Reading the passage about Saturninos in light of Ophitism raises the question whether this first section offers a kind of standard summary of Ophitism. This could lead to the hypothesis that *Haer.* 1.24.1 has nothing to do with Saturninos himself or with an earlier stage of Gnosticism, but is only a kind of fictitious retrojection of later Ophitism upon Saturninos. There are some points of agreement with the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Hypostasis of*

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<sup>76</sup> It is probably identical to *Αὐθεντία*, but it is not absolutely clear, whether the term *αὐθεντία* was in the original wording of Irenaeus. The function of this highest power can be compared with Barbelo (cf. Layton 1987, 161 note d), but perhaps Barbelo is only a result of later, similar speculation.

<sup>77</sup> Pétrement 1984, 449–450 assumes this without any argument.

<sup>78</sup> Pétrement 1984, 456 identifies both without any argument.

<sup>79</sup> I disagree with Pétrement 1984, 452–453, who considers the sparks of life to be a reception of the Prologue of the Gospel according to John. The universalistic perspective of the anthropogony in the first part of Irenaeus' report becomes very clear by the last sentence which refers directly to death. Only the attempt to harmonize the first part of the report with the second could lead one to such conclusions.

*the Archons*.<sup>80</sup> In comparison with these two texts and the rather consistent Ophite corpus described by Rasimus, there are, however, several differences that should be taken into consideration:

- The seven angels have no names (nor is there any theriomorphic appearance).
- The creating activity of the angels is not caused by a false, immediately rebuked claim of a Yaldabaoth figure.
- The luminous image is a kind of model for the creation of man, but it has no link to a Son of Man figure that has to be understood in the light of an Adam-Christ typology.
- The highest Power or the *Ἀὐθεντία* are quite unclear figures, perhaps simply female aspects of the highest God—there is no (at least no explicit) link to a kind of emanation or Wisdom speculation.
- The Eve-figure, the (positive) re-interpretation of the eating of the tree, and the serpent are all completely missing.

Even if the report about Saturninos is only a short and quite unclear sketch, it does not exactly fit with the picture of Ophitism that Rasimus develops. It seems to be a more unclear and less developed version that is much closer to a Hellenistic Jewish reading of Gen 1–2 (Genesis 3 is missing here), as, for example, can be found in Philo. This is interesting because the re-interpretations of Gen 3—especially the positive evaluation of the eating from the tree and the Christian background of the heavenly model of Adam opposed to Christ—are exactly the differences between such a Hellenistic Jewish reading of Gen 1–2 and Ophitism. This leads me to suppose that the thought sketched here by Irenaeus is not simply a rough summary of later Ophite theology, but a (perhaps quite normal) Hellenistic Jewish reading of Gen 1–2. The protological question is at the center of the story: How can God create Man? In order to answer this question (a) different levels of divine beings are introduced, and (b) a certain kind of divine element in mankind is acknowledged (based on Gen 2:7). The transcendence of the highest being or God is stressed, the angels are direct products of this highest God, and they are not evil. Yes, they try to grasp the luminous image and they fail, but they do their best. Their fault is their *ἀδρανείς* (Latin: *propter imbecillitatem*): they are too weak for the work that they have attempted. This is the decisive point that causes the ambivalence of mankind. There is no bad intention or fall of the angels in this report. Mankind is at least partially good according

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<sup>80</sup> Cf. the marginal notes in Layton 1987, 161–162.

to this part of the report. Human beings have a spark of life that returns to the higher realm at the moment of death.

In contrast to the report about Menander, the expression *Virtus incognita* does not reappear, but it is not clear whether Saturninos actually distinguished the aspect of being unknown (*incognita*—linked now to the *πατήρ ἄγνωστος*) and the aspect of being the highest power (or potentiality: *δύναμις*—linked now to a second [and female?] divine being). Menander did, however, also know of a second divine being, namely, the Ennoia that sent the angels to create the universe. It seems that the distinction between the highest being and the second being in Menander and Saturninos is very similar, even if the names are different.

The ambivalence of the world is apparently caused by the ignorance of the angels and their overestimation of their own capacities. That is why mankind exists. Because of its corporeal state, it is something that will be destroyed; it is something corruptible. The corporeal part of human beings is apparently inappropriate for the purpose of the angels. It is not bad in itself, but bad as an image of the luminous image that appeared. On the other hand, there is some similarity with this luminous image—so human beings have, even in their corporeal state, some similarity to the divine. This is a quite positive evaluation of the body that fits quite well with a Platonizing reading of Gen 2. Compared with Menander, the creation of the world and mankind seems to be evaluated in a more positive way.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, any specifically Christian character of the cosmogony and the anthropogony is missing in this part of the report. If we only had this part, we would doubt that Saturninos was a Christian. The elements he uses could be understood with reference merely to a Hellenistic Jewish context.

What is different from Menander is the second part, about redemption. This is a clearly Christian and anti-Jewish text. The problem is that it is not a coherent description; rather, it puts together various details—and of course each detail raises doubts:

- The savior was not born (the Greek term *ἀγέννητος* is not very clear here); he appeared only *δοκῆσει*.
- The God of the Jews was one of the angels.
- Christ has come in order to destroy the God of the Jews and to redeem believers because the archons wanted to destroy the Father.

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<sup>81</sup> This is why the theology of Saturninos according to Irenaeus' report cannot be characterized as "anticosmism" (as Pétremont 1984, 450, asserts).

- Believers have the spark of life. They are the good part of mankind—distinguished from the bad part. Both parts are created by angels.
- Demons help bad human beings; that is why the Savior came to destroy the bad ones and to redeem the good ones.
- Sexual intercourse comes from Satan.
- The majority of the adherents of this group were ascetic, i.e., they did not eat ἔμψυχα.
- There are two kinds of prophecies: good ones from the angels that created the world, and bad ones from Satan, who is himself an angel, but an enemy to those angels that created the world, and an enemy especially to the God of the Jews.

Let us begin with the God of the Jews. On the one hand, the God of the Jews seems to be good, Satan being his enemy.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, there was a need to send the Savior or Christ in order to destroy Satan. The Greek has *κατάλυσις* (Latin: *destructio*), which means destruction, but perhaps also dissolution (in German it would be something like “Auflösung”). The devaluation of the God of the Jews seems to be necessary in order to explain the Savior’s activities, but his identification with one of the seven creating angels seemed perhaps plausible to Irenaeus, who was familiar with the Ophite identification of the Yaldabaoth figure with the God of the Jews. Perhaps Irenaeus confuses here several bits of information. Some other unclear points of the second part are as follows:

- Satan is explicitly described as an ἄγγελος ἀντιπράττων (Latin: *angelus aduersarius*). It is, however, unclear whether the archons are simply bad angels who followed Satan or perhaps something else.
- The reason why the archons wanted to destroy the Father remains absolutely unclear in the report. Of course, we could imagine a kind of revolt here, but this would be mere speculation.
- Humanity is not considered to be good in general. Instead, two kinds of human beings exists: good ones and bad ones. It is unclear how this fits with the anthropogony of the first part. Perhaps bad human beings have a kind of spark of darkness instead of spark of light? The bad angels perhaps imitate the good ones, creating human beings, too, but giving them a bad equivalent to the spark of life? This would, however, be difficult to reconcile with the text we have, since both kinds of human being are created by “the angels” (ὕπὸ τῶν ἀγγέλων).

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<sup>82</sup> Cf. Layton 1987, 162 note g.

- The role of the demons remains unclear. Are they simply bad angels, the archons, and/or the followers of Satan? Was there an idea of the fall, according to which some human beings lose their sparks of life, after they are attracted by the demons, the archons, and Satan?

These questions cannot be decided on the basis of the text of Irenaeus. Thus, we cannot give a description of the doctrine of Saturninos (his anthropogony and his soteriology, in particular) since Irenaeus shortens the doctrine in a way that makes it enigmatic in many respects.<sup>83</sup> However, even if this is the case, the reports about Menander and Saturninos are interesting in regard to the questions raised above. How then can we imagine the transition from a Hellenistic Jewish and Platonic reading of Gen 1–2 to a more explicitly Christian theology?

The section about Menander can be considered in light of an interpretation of Genesis. The first part of the report about Saturninos presents a more elaborated form of a similar thought. Both creation stories can be understood without reference to any specific Christian features. Only the second part of the report about Saturninos adds a Christian soteriology (even if its internal consistency is questionable; this, however, may simply be due to Irenaeus' presentation). At the center of the thought of Menander and Saturninos—as Irenaeus presented them, at least—is the question: How can the transcendent God operate in the material world and what does this mean for an evaluation of the world and human beings? To answer this question by re-reading Gen 1–2 is, of course, not only of special interest for Jews, but also for Christians. What seems to be decisive is the fact that the early steps of this discourse do not include a condemnation or a fundamentally negative evaluation of the God of the Jews. This seems not to be the starting point of Gnosticism. According to Irenaeus' report about Saturninos, the God of the Jews was not simply bad (as in later Gnostic systems), but good or at least ambivalent (because of his weakness). He is presumably one of the angels created by the highest Principle and he overestimates his own capacities and thus is responsible for the ambivalence of the world. Moreover, even if it remains unclear how this fits in with the work of Satan, the archons and the demons, it does seem clear that neither the God of the Jews nor the creation itself is simply bad. This also means that the origins of Gnosticism cannot be reckoned as simply “anti-Jewish.”

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<sup>83</sup> Pearson 2008, 18, assumes that the anthropogony of *Haer.* 1.24.2 is “a summary of one that is given in greater detail in the Apocryphon of John.” The short remarks of the second part, however, do not prove any dependence on the complex structure of the *Apocryphon of John*.

I would like to take up Hengel's question once again: Can we imagine that Jews became Christians by using their Jewish-Platonic reading of Gen 1–2 and applying their theology to a new interpretation of Christ as Savior? I think that exactly this quick shift is the area in which Gnosticism arose. This explains the great significance of the Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of Genesis for the origins of Gnosticism, and it explains the Christian character of early Gnostic thought as it can be observed in Valentinus, Basilides, perhaps Ophite speculations (if Rasimus is right), the early Sethian movement (if Turner is right) and the heresiological perspective of Irenaeus. Two elements are essential for the hypothesis named the “quick shift theory” here:

1. The starting point of Gnostic thought is not Christ, but an explanation of the ambivalence of the world and especially mankind (being divine in mind or spirit, but mortal and bad in flesh and moral behavior). This explanation arose from a Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of Gen 1–2. If people who thought in this way encountered elements of Christianity, then it would be of special interest to them because it offered a splendid and highly plausible reason for salvation. In particular, an Adam-Christ typology links this interpretation of Genesis very well with Christology: Christ is the savior who leads mankind to the goal that was not reached by creation, and he was already present at the moment of the creation—e.g., as the ideal model that was not grasped by the creating angels. The new revelation was then understood in light of this interpretation of Genesis. The identification of Christ as Savior with one of the levels of divinity already present at the moment of creation was extremely productive and gave rise to several Gnostic Christologies. Thus, “quick shift” means first that Gen 1–2 was read without Christian presuppositions in a way that was of special interest for Christians, but it does not necessarily lead to a Christian theology.

2. The setting of such discussions should not be neglected. Where might the discussions have taken place concerning an interpretation of Genesis that was not based on Christian presuppositions but that was interested in an integration of a savior figure that could be identified by some participants with Christ? Such Hellenistic Jewish interpretation of Gen 1–2 can be assumed to have taken place in circles where Christians and Jews were engaged in discussion with other philosophers or theologians about God's transcendence and operations and about the character of the world and mankind. A theology that stressed the need for salvation (as in apocalyptic thought by means of the idea that the end of history is approaching) could adapt exactly this idea, partially including the figure of Christ. Reports about

Jesus Christ were perhaps also present in some of these circles, and perhaps there were already Christians in some of these circles, or at least persons interested in Christ. Among the various experiments in the first century it seems nearly impossible to distinguish those thinkers who used Hellenistic Jewish ideas simply because they had some sympathy with Judaism (or were simply Jews), and those thinkers who used Hellenistic Jewish thoughts because they had some sympathy with Christianity (or were simply Christians), but who had no clear way of framing explicitly the Christian aspect of their experiments. Perhaps some of these people were torn between Judaism and Christianity. If we take into consideration the fluid limits of the *σεβόμενοι* (etc.), it becomes clear that Jewish thoughts and concepts were not simply reserved for members of a Synagogue community<sup>84</sup> or baptized members of Christian communities. Thus, “quick shift” could mean that the origins of Gnosticism are to be situated in a grey area where exact and well-defined borders between clearly demarcated Jewish and clearly demarcated Christian people did not exist.

The core of the “quick shift theory” is to overcome the simple alternative “Christian or non-Christian” (or “Jewish or non-Jewish”).<sup>85</sup> Instead of such borders, we may imagine a common atmosphere of Hellenistic Jewish and Platonizing re-reading of Genesis shared by Jews, Christians, and sympathizers of different “color” where the category “Christian” cannot be used in a distinctive and exclusive sense. In the case of Christians, or Jews who converted to Christianity, this resulted—step by step—in a more explicitly Christian character, especially in soteriology and a negative evaluation of the God of the Jews. Even if “any account of the Gnostics can only be tentative,”<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Cf. the illuminating analysis of the terms and fluid borders of Judaism by Wander 1998, esp. 229–230, with reference to Cohen 1989. The categories begin with “admiring some aspects of Judaism” and end with “converting to Judaism”—including different approaches to Jewish theology, concepts and rituals. The observation of these fluid borders does not mean that labels such as “Judaism” or “Christianity” should be abandoned in every case (in order to avoid any “essentialism”) nor that they have nothing to do with the historical groups and tendencies of the first and second centuries; they merely describe the origins of phenomena whose categories and borders are anything but clear in the fluid moments of their origin.

<sup>85</sup> That is why I am not convinced by the approach of Lahe (2012b) who tries to re-establish Quispel’s view of Gnosticism by demonstrating the backgrounds of Gnostic thinking in Jewish exegesis and theology. The attempt of Weiß (2008) to overcome the alternative “pre-Christian or post-Christian” by the “Phänomen einer nicht-christlichen Gnosis” (p. 521) is unconvincing, too, because he does not give sufficient consideration to the fluid borders and the multiple use of Jewish thoughts and his “Gnosis” is a quite distinctive phenomenon already in its first steps.

<sup>86</sup> Layton 1995, 334.

exactly this grey area between Judaism and a young Christianity may have been the field where Gnosticism arose because the quick shift from an interpretation of Genesis without Christian presuppositions to a Christian application of this reading would have been attractive. Only twenty to thirty years later, the borders between Judaism and Christianity became more solid and the pluriform Christianity of the second century became the field where Gnostic texts and groups could grow in new ways.

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ARITHMOS AND KOSMOS: ARITHMOLOGY AS AN EXEGETICAL  
TOOL IN THE *DE OPIFICIO MUNDI* OF PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

Robert M. Berchman

*“Wie du anfiengst, wirst du bleiben”*  
– Hoelderlin, *Rheinische Hymnen*

“As you began, so you will remain.” This hymn not only evokes what John Turner has provided scholars and scholarship in the depths of Nag Hammadi and Sethian Gnosticism; it also reminds those of us who work in the shoals of later Platonism and Pythagoreanism—that as we began we will remain—in debt to this scholar, his scholarship, and our own beginnings with both.

PREFACE

This essay is written in appreciation of John Turner’s preoccupation to lay a metaphysical foundation for the Platonizing Sethian texts of Nag Hammadi. While Moehring addressed the centrality of arithmology in Philo of Alexandria’s exegesis of the LXX, Tarrant’s recent linkage of Philo with Thrasyllus warrants a renewed examination of Pythagoreanizing Neoplatonic metaphysical and mathematical traditions utilized by Philo, later Platonists and possibly Sethian Gnostics.<sup>1</sup>

As this study begins, apart from merely focusing on the *Trümmerfeld* of Neopythagorean mathematical sources and traditions shared by later Platonists and Gnostics, it is suggested that anyone who utilized them shared a common Neopythagorean philosophy of mathematics that numbers are neither spatial, nor physical, nor subjective, but non-sensible and objective. In the context of a general philosophy of mathematics, Neopythagoreans claim numbers are not generalizations from our experience (mathematical psychologism), nor are they signs or a game played with signs (mathematical

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<sup>1</sup> Moehring 1978, 191–229; Turner 1992, 425–459; Tarrant 1993, 112–117.

formalism). Rather, numbers are ideas or conceptually independent objects (mathematical realism).

Once it was realized that numbers are objects of intellect, it follows that numbers are not mere properties of things but intelligible objects. The problem, then, in giving an account of numbers is to define this object, number. Here it is helpful to see that while numbers belong to concepts, a number is not a property of any concept. For example, the commonplace statement that Jupiter's moons are four, which looks as if it predicates four of Jupiter's moons, should be read as the number of Jupiter's moons is four, as asserting that the two objects—the number of Jupiter's moons and four—are identical. The "is" in "is four" is not the ordinary predicative "is" but asserts *identity*, just as in "Euclid is the discoverer of geometry." In this way Neopythagoreans defined the concept *having the same number as*, by mathematical notions of class and extension. With this as a starting point, anyone using Neopythagorean arithmology goes on to define, in mathematical terms, the series of numbers. Philo employs such definitions in his use of arithmology to exegete the LXX, and this is how later Platonists employed a similar arithmology to exegete the *Timaeus*.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of arithmology as an exegetical tool in the writings of Philo of Alexandria. Philo's basic concern was to explain the manner in which creation was presented by Moses.<sup>2</sup> In the *De opificio mundi*, he addressed the *logos* and *arithmos* character of creation. Philo's method of exegesis reveals a deeply imbedded mechanism. One might call it a focusing mechanism. He thought it possible to gaze on Genesis from an arithmological perspective. He thought that once appraised from this precipice, the creation account in Genesis could be grasped for what it really was, namely, that cosmos, micro-cosmos (Israel), and Pentateuch are all related and reflect one another. Philo also thought that this meaning had been scattered and lost on the distant vault of heaven for too long. His use of arithmology as an exegetical tool highlights divine sovereignty in a cosmos grounded in number, the difficult issue of the numerical sequence of creation, and the delicate business of defining the arithmological structure of the cosmos.

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<sup>2</sup> Dillon 1977; Winston 1985; Gersh 1986; Runia 1986; Tarrant 1993.

It has become the practice in recent years to regard Philo of Alexandria as merely one of the more important sources for the interpretation of the *Timaeus*,<sup>3</sup> Middle Platonic cosmological theory,<sup>4</sup> and the sources of Neopythagorean number theory in the early imperial era.<sup>5</sup> More recent research has focused on Philo's use of Neopythagorean arithmology to exegete the Pentateuch.<sup>6</sup> It is suggested by Moehring that Philo may be used not only for the reconstruction of a variety of Middle and Neoplatonic source traditions but also to help explain the nature, extent, and use of Neopythagorean arithmology in first century Middle Platonism. If Tarrant is correct about Thrasylus, then Philo may be of help in our understanding of arithmology as an exegetical tool among Neoplatonists and Sethian Gnostics as well.

The issue addressed in the following pages is the examination of Philo's use of ideas culled from the *Timaeus* and Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean sources, to demonstrate the *logos* and *arithmos* character of the Pentateuch. To keep this essay within appropriate limits and yet show the range of functions which Neopythagorean cosmological theory perform in the writings of Philo, the discussion will concentrate on numbers within the decad associated with the creation of the cosmos. Such an agenda will require a brief summary of Philo's relationship to later Platonism and Pythagoreanism.

We all know who Philo of Alexandria was, and we even have a reasonably clear idea of what we mean by the terms Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism. The problem lies in the juxtaposition of the name "Philo" and these terms. Although Philo's writings constitute one of the earliest and perhaps most comprehensive extant source for Middle Platonism and Neopythagoreanism, no attempt is made to classify Philo as solely a Platonist or a Pythagorean.<sup>7</sup> Not only are these elements but two of several constituent parts of Philo's philosophical arsenal, but apart from the philosophical and arithmological passages proper, it is not even certain whether one can identify exactly what is Platonic or Pythagorean in his corpus. As we know, the various philosophical traditions of the Hellenistic age had become so interwoven that they had become a new and different fabric altogether. What really matters in Philo is not the philosophical materials he uses in

<sup>3</sup> Runia 1986, 365–522, esp. 476–522.

<sup>4</sup> Dillon 1977, 139–183; Dillon and Winston 1983, 181–358; Berchman 1984, 23–54, 170–176.

<sup>5</sup> Robbins 1920, 309–322; 1921, 97–123; 1931, 345–360; Staehle 1931, 1–18; Boyancé 1963, 64–110.

<sup>6</sup> Boyancé 1963, 70 ff.; Moehring 1978, 191–227.

<sup>7</sup> The numerous arithmological passages in Philo qualified him as a Pythagorean according to Clement of Alexandria. Cf. *Strom.* 1.15.72.4; 2.19.100.3.

his work, but the arithmological exegesis shaped from these materials. In concentrating on Philo's interpretation of the *Timaeus*, and his utilization of Neopythagorean physics, we are permitted an insight into the task Philo set for himself—the exegesis of the philosophical character of Genesis.

## 2. PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA AND HELLENISTIC PHILOSOPHY

The starting point for the study of cosmogony and cosmology in the Hellenistic age was the *Timaeus*.<sup>8</sup> This work and commentaries upon it were most likely the main source from which authors of the Roman period drew their knowledge of Platonic and Pythagorean physics.<sup>9</sup>

Philo stands at an important point in the history of the interpretation of the *Timaeus* and the Pentateuch in antiquity.<sup>10</sup> He was among the first to use Platonic and Pythagorean theory to exegete philosophical and biblical sources.<sup>11</sup> With caution, the following can be said of Philo's knowledge and use of Platonic and Pythagorean sources:

- (a) Philo was thoroughly acquainted with the dialogues of Plato. He was knowledgeable of the *Timaeus*.<sup>12</sup> He employed the text and its theological and cosmological premises as the basis for exegeting the creation accounts in the Pentateuch.<sup>13</sup>
- (b) Philo's philosophical assumptions largely derive from his readings of the *corpus Platonicum*, especially the *Timaeus*.<sup>14</sup> He also used later Platonic, Stoic, and Peripatetic sources,<sup>15</sup> and culled much material from Neopythagorean doxographical texts as well.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>8</sup> For a review of the history of *Timaeus* interpretation in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and Philo's use of the text, see Robbins 1920, 97–99; Staehle 1931, 1–18; and Boyancé 1963, 64–110.

<sup>9</sup> Although Schmekel's 1892 theory of the existence of a Posidonius commentary has largely been discounted it still remains probable that the *Timaeus* functioned as the principal source for understandings of Pythagorean physics. See Robbins 1920, 309 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Before Aristobulus, a Pythagorean *florilegium* was used by an unknown Alexandrian Jew to establish a connection between numbers and the cosmos. Therefore, it is likely that a later Pythagorean theory would have been known to Philo. Walter 1964, 166–171.

<sup>11</sup> Moehring 1978, 191–227.

<sup>12</sup> Boyancé 1963, 82–95.

<sup>13</sup> Boyancé 1963, 96–104.

<sup>14</sup> Cf., e.g., *Opif.* 16–20. On the sources employed by Philo, see Boyancé 1963, 79–110; cf. Robbins 1921, 97 ff.; Dodds 1928, 129–142.

<sup>15</sup> For the sources utilized by Philo here, see Boyancé 1963, 82–95.

<sup>16</sup> On the continuation of the Pythagorean schools in the Hellenistic period, see Burkert 1961, 16–43, 226–246.

- (c) Philo's philosophical theology and cosmology are thoroughly eclectic: Philo fully represents what philosophical speculation in the early imperial era signified.<sup>17</sup> He combines Middle Platonic, Neopythagorean, and later Stoic theological and cosmological theories.<sup>18</sup>
- (d) Philo is concerned about a problem commonly debated in the Hellenistic period: the relation between *nomos* and *physis*. As a Jew, Philo has as his primary datum the sacred text of the Pentateuch which for him is inspired and thus authoritative. As an Alexandrian, Philo is familiar with the major trends of the philosophy of his age. According to Philo, the Pentateuch and the cosmos are related and reflect one another. The Pentateuch, or, as Philo calls it, the *law of Moses*, is the very essence of *nomos*. Moreover, aspects of it explain the order of the universe, or the structural basis of *physis*.
- (e) To explain this fact, Philo uses a number of exegetical devices, best summarized under the term "allegory." His reading of the Pentateuch is thoroughly allegorical: the primary data are those of Hellenistic philosophy, and the biblical text is forced to yield these data. Philosophical traditions had developed the concept of "intuitive intellect" which allowed a person properly equipped to grasp the true intent of sacred texts. Philo accepted this notion without reservation. Two of the exegetical devices he employed to demonstrate the universal significance of the Pentateuch were Platonic physical theory and Pythagorean number theory. The use of such theories is found in almost the entire corpus of Philo, but especially in the *De opificio mundi*, the *De decalogo*, and the *Quaestiones et solutiones in Genesin*.

It is not possible to discuss the problem of how Plato's writings may have reached Philo and other thinkers of the Hellenistic era,<sup>19</sup> nor do we have sufficient time to offer a complete study of the examples of Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean ideas in the *corpus Philonicum*.<sup>20</sup> Nonetheless, another approach is possible. Some representative passages of a Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean nature can be culled from one of Philo's treatises. The text chosen is the *De opificio mundi*. The reasons are: (1) In the *De opificio* we can observe how Philo used biblical and philosophical sources:

<sup>17</sup> Dillon 1977, 139–183; Berchman 1984, 23–53, 170–176.

<sup>18</sup> Dillon 1977, 139–183. Cf. Boyancé 1963, 79–82, for his probable reliance on Antiochus of Ascalon and Eudorus of Alexandria.

<sup>19</sup> Boyancé 1963, 79 ff.

<sup>20</sup> See Staehle 1931, 8 ff.; Walter 1964, 16–171; and Moehring 1978, 200–218.



the accounts of the creation in Genesis and the *Timaeus*. (2) The *De opificio* is the treatise in which Middle Platonic and Neopythagorean theory plays the most important role as an interpretive tool in Genesis and the *Timaeus*. (3) In the *De opificio*, we can see how the primary importance for Philo of the Hellenistic philosophical systems over the biblical narrative becomes clear (and this notwithstanding the repeated and loud protestations to the contrary on the part of Philo).

### 3. PHILO AND PLATONISM

With caution the following observations can be made about Philo's use of Platonic physical theory for exegetical purposes:

(a) Philo accepts the following principles of the *Timaeus* for his treatment of physics. His general premises are: (1) the eternal is the intelligible; what comes to be is the sensible. Since the world is sensible, it must be a thing that comes to be.<sup>21</sup> (2) What comes to be must have a cause—a maker, a father. This cause is identified with the *Logos*.<sup>22</sup> (3) The universe is fashioned after eternal models. These eternal models are the ideas, which are situated in the divine intellect.<sup>23</sup>

The first premise lays down the Platonic classification of existence into two orders.<sup>24</sup> The higher order is the realm of unchanging and eternal being possessed by Deity and by the ideas thought by God. This contains the objects of rational understanding comprehensible through the discursive arguments of mathematics and dialectic, which yield a securely grounded apprehension of truth and reality.<sup>25</sup>

The lower realm contains becoming, that which passes into existence, which changes and perishes. This is the world of things perceived by our senses. Sense can never apprehend a securely grounded knowledge of truth and reality. The application of this premise tells us that the visible world—the object of physics, as distinct from mathematics and dialectic, belongs to

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *Opif.* 16; 36; 129; *Her.* 280; *Plant.* 50; *Ebr.* 133; *Conf. ling.* 172.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *Opif.* 16–30; *Contempl.* 2; *Praem.* 40; *Leg.* 1.19; 3.96; *Conf. ling.* 146; *Cher.* 127; *Sacr.* 8; *Deus* 57; *Fug.* 95; *Prov.* 1.23.

<sup>23</sup> This is a later Middle Platonic development. Cf. Jones 1926, 317–326; Rich 1954, 123–133. In Philo, this notion is nicely presented in *Opif.* 5; 16 ff.; cf. *Leg.* 2.86; 3.75; *Det.* 118.

<sup>24</sup> *Tim.* 27C–29D.

<sup>25</sup> *Tim.* 51E.

a lower order of existence. Nonetheless, since the sensible world is a copy of the intelligible world, its nature can be explained through mathematics and dialectic.

The second and third premises assume the Platonic notion that becoming has a cause, a maker and father.<sup>26</sup> This *demiurge* is an intellect, who fashions his product on the model of the ideas, which are not identified with numbers.<sup>27</sup> The third premise and its application develops the image of the craftsman and his model. The *demiurge* copies an eternal model in shaping the universe. Therefore, his product, the cosmos, is good.<sup>28</sup> Philo claims there is an element of rational design in the structure of the world. The rational structure of the cosmos is mathematical.<sup>29</sup> This notion he largely derives from the *Timaeus*.<sup>30</sup>

The *Logos* endows simple bodies with regular geometrical shapes. These figures are the work of the *demiurge*. They are not the actual shapes of existing particles, but the perfect types, belonging to the intelligible world of mathematics. It is assumed that four of the regular solids, the pyramid, the octahedron, the icosahedron, and the cube are the best figures that the *demiurge* finds for the construction of primary bodies. Thus, when Philo discusses the configuration of things in nature he does so, at least partially, by means of geometrical shapes and numbers.<sup>31</sup>

(b) The created order has as its structure plane and solid numbers, a class which includes all squares and cubes. Squares and cubes are subdivisions of numbers.<sup>32</sup>

(c) The type of proportion upon which the world is fashioned is arithmological: this includes geometrical and arithmetical proportion: (1) geometrical proportion: this is the proportion par excellence and primary; (2) arithmetical proportion: this proportion is derived from geometrical proportion.

Geometrical proportion is the only proportion in the full and proper sense and the primary one because all the others require it, but it does

<sup>26</sup> *Tim.* 28A; 29D–30C; cf. *Phileb.* 26E.

<sup>27</sup> *Tim.* 28D.

<sup>28</sup> *Tim.* 29E.

<sup>29</sup> Philo's views on the relationship of the ideas and numbers are ambiguous. Cf. *Opif.* 102; *Her.* 156. It appears that numbers are images of the ideas, and the ideas are comprehensible through numbers, but not that the ideas are equated with numbers. Cf. *Leg.* 1.2–4.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Tim.* 27C–29D; 29D–30C; 31B–32C; 35B–36B; 38C–39E; 53C–55C; 55D–56C; 57C–D.

<sup>31</sup> This is presented by Philo in *Decal.* 21–24.

<sup>32</sup> *Tim.* 31B–32C.

not require them. The first ratio is equality 1/1, the element of all other arithmetical ratios and of the proportions they yield. From the proportion with equal terms arises double proportion, and from that triple, and so on.

The series arithmetically proceeds through the first even, and the first odd number, to their squares and cubes. Since proportion involves movement from numbers, to planes or squares, to cubes, and to solids, geometrical proportion is the basis for the harmony and structure of the world. Things in nature are represented by the cube because the cube symbolizes body in three dimensions.<sup>33</sup>

Following Plato,<sup>34</sup> Philo assumes that the *demiurge* crafts the world according to geometrical proportion, and that things in the cosmos can be identified through number, for number represents the nature of things.<sup>35</sup> Philo says that the universe is constructed on the basis of a musical scale, and he bases his discussion of the structure of the world on the decad<sup>36</sup>—the arithmetical progression 1, 2, 3, 4, which adds up to the perfect number 10. Ten contains the numbers of the perfect consonances:

- (a) 2:1 (octave), 4:3 (fourth), and 3:2 (fifth);
- (b) from numbers: 1, 2, 3, 4, one progresses to magnitudes: point, line, surface (triangle), solid (pyramid);
- (c) then to simple bodies: fire, air, water, earth;
- (d) and finally to figures of simple bodies: pyramid, octahedron, icosahedron, and cube.<sup>37</sup>

#### 4. PHILO AND PYTHAGOREANISM

For our purposes it is now important to assess Philo's knowledge of later Pythagorean arithmetic, mathematics, and arithmology.<sup>38</sup> With caution two observations can be made about Philo's use of Neopythagorean theory for exegetical purposes: (1) Philo is the heir of a long tradition reaching back to Pythagoras, mediated through Plato's *Timaeus*,<sup>39</sup> Aristotle,<sup>40</sup> and a number of

<sup>33</sup> *Tim.* 31B–32C.

<sup>34</sup> *Tim.* 35B–36B; 53C–55C; 55D–56C; 57C–D.

<sup>35</sup> Assuming that the ideas can be viewed as the basis of numbers. Cf. *Opif.* 102; *Her.* 156.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Decal.* 21; *Congr.* 89.

<sup>37</sup> Cf. *Decal.* 22.

<sup>38</sup> For an assessment of this aspect of Philo's thought, see Robbins 1931, 345–360.

<sup>39</sup> For Philo's use of the *Timaeus* and related arithmological literature, see also Robbins 1921, 97–123. Cf. Runia 1986, 365–522.

<sup>40</sup> See Boyancé 1963, 86–89.

Hellenistic authors such as Thrasyllus whose works are either lost or survive only in fragments.<sup>41</sup> (2) Philo is our earliest and most comprehensive source for Neopythagorean physics and its use by authors of the Roman imperial age. This is true in spite of the fact that the work *Peri arithmon* to which he frequently refers is lost.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4.1. Definitions

Philo's use of Neopythagorean physics and arithmology, however, is unsystematic, and requires the understanding of some basic definitions culled from ancient mathematical treatises.

##### 4.1.1. General Definitions

Pythagoreans assumed an intimate connection between numbers and things. This is clear from the etymology of *arithmos*. The word is related to *ARO*, usually found in the longer form of *arariskō*, "to join, put together." *Arithmos*, therefore, has the connotation of something joined, a structure.

According to Aristotle, the Greeks distinguished between two types of numbers:<sup>43</sup> (1) "the number which we count" (*arithmos ho arithmoumen*); and (2) "the counted or countable number" (*arithmos arithmoumenos* or *arithmētos*). The former is the number used every time we count: one, two, three ... The latter is represented by *dias, trias, tetras* ... and is best translated as "pair, triplet, quadruplet ..." in a concrete sense. The understanding of *arithmos* as "something joined together," as a "structure," is clearly seen in Aristotle's definition of "melody" as an *arithmos dieseōn*, a structure or arrangement of small half tones. Similarly Aristotle defines a polygon as an *arithmos trigōnon*, a structure or arrangement of triangles. It is this concept of *arithmos arithmētos* which forms the foundation of the teaching about the identity of numbers and things, or, in a weaker form, of the affinity between numbers and things.

##### 4.1.2. Arithmetical Definitions

Pythagorean mathematicians proposed general theories of number which are important to grasp. Our main source for this type of numerical definition is a source somewhat later than Philo, Nicomachus of Gerasa (*floruit*

<sup>41</sup> See Thesleff 1965.

<sup>42</sup> On this writing and Philo, see Staehle 1931, 1–18.

<sup>43</sup> Aristotle, *Phys.* 4.11 219B6.

ca. 100 CE), who wrote the *Introduction to Arithmetic*, from which the following examples are taken:<sup>44</sup>

- (a) Even number: “that which can be divided into two equal parts without a unit intervening in the middle.”
- (b) Odd number: “that which cannot be divided into equal parts because of the intervention of a unit.”<sup>45</sup>
- (c) Prime number: “that which admits of no other factor save the one with the number itself as denominator, which is always unity.”<sup>46</sup>
- (d) Secondary number: “that which can employ yet another measure along with unity, and is not elementary, but is produced by some other number combined with itself or with something else.”<sup>47</sup>
- (e) Deficient number: “that whose factors added together are less in comparison to the number itself” (e.g., 8:  $4 + 2 + 1 = 7$ ).<sup>48</sup>
- (f) Superabundant number: “that which has, over and above the factors which fall to it and fall to its share, others in addition” (e.g., 12:  $6 + 4 + 3 + 2 + 1 = 16$ ).<sup>49</sup>
- (g) Perfect number: “when a number, when comparing with itself the sum and combination of all the factors whose presence it will admit, neither exceeds them in multitude nor is exceeded by them, then such a number is properly said to be perfect, as one which is equal to its own parts” (e.g., 6:  $3 + 2 + 1 = 6$ ).<sup>50</sup>

#### 4.1.3. *Arithmological Definitions*

In a loose way one could say that arithmology is a form of applied arithmetic. It involves six basic presuppositions:

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<sup>44</sup> The edition used is Hoche 1866. Philo of Alexandria and Nicomachus of Gerasa shared common arithmological sources. Thus it is legitimate to use Nicomachus to explain a variety of suppositions held by Philo. Cf. Robbins 1921, 97–122.

<sup>45</sup> *Intr. ar.* 1.7.1–2.

<sup>46</sup> *Intr. ar.* 1.11.2.

<sup>47</sup> *Intr. ar.* 1.12.2.

<sup>48</sup> *Intr. ar.* 1.15.1.

<sup>49</sup> *Intr. ar.* 1.14.3.

<sup>50</sup> *Intr. ar.* 1.16.2. The numerical definition of the perfect number has to be distinguished from the “Pythagorean” definition of the “most perfect number,” for which no trace can be found before Aristotle, but which plays an important role in Philo and subsequent Neopythagorean authors. Philo indiscriminately applies the term “perfect” to both perfect numbers in the general sense of the *dekas*. Cf. *Decal.* 21–24.

- (a) The two different understandings of *arithmos* mentioned by Aristotle.<sup>51</sup>
- (b) The view that arithmetic is prior, and superior, to all other sciences. Nicomachus states: “because it existed before all others in the mind of the creating god like some universal and exemplary plan ... (and) because it is naturally superior to all, inasmuch as it abolishes other sciences with itself, but is not abolished with them.”<sup>52</sup> For this reason, arithmology can be used as a heuristic device.
- (c) The view that arithmetic is the basis of the knowledge of all things. Philolaus allegedly says: “The nature of number is the cause of recognition, able to give guidance and teaching to every man in what is puzzling and unknown. For none of the existing things would be clear to the mind either in themselves or in their relationships to one another, unless there existed numbers and its essence. Falsehood can in no way breathe on number, for falsehood is inimical and hostile to its nature, whereas truth is related and in close natural union with the race of number.”<sup>53</sup>
- (d) Numerical definitions of number in arithmology are given a moral interpretation, and because of the close connection between number and thing (be it identity or affinity), this moral interpretation is applied to the thing designated by the number. For example, both deficiency and superabundance are faults, thus things related to the numbers 8 or 12 are seen as faulty; things connected with the number 6 are seen as perfect; square numbers are even and can be seen as representing justice.
- (e) Numbers are explored and used as clues for the investigation of the universe. The foundation for this was the exploration of the numbers of the decad and their interrelationships. Smaller and higher numbers were put into a relationship to ten, before they were analyzed any further. Thus, four is significant because it is potentially what ten is actually. Twenty is analyzed as  $2 \times 10$ .
- (f) Numbers are understood as structures, so that one speaks of triangular, square, or pentagonal numbers. This is clear from the representation of the Tetractys, the arrangement of the numbers 1, 2, 3 and 4:

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<sup>51</sup> *Phys.* 4.11 219B6.

<sup>52</sup> *Intr. ar.* 1.4.2.

<sup>53</sup> Philolaus, *frag.* 11 (Diels-Kranz).

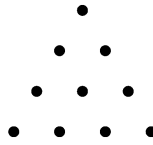


Figure 1: The Pythagorean Tetractys

The sum of  $1+2+3+4 = 10$ , and ten is a triangular number.

When the ancients worked on problems in physics they often saw them in terms of problems in geometry and numerical proportions. Point, line, and surface can be expressed as geometrical structures while the musical consonants of octave, quint, and quart can be expressed through the numerical proportions of 1:2, 2:3, and 3:4. The conclusion drawn from this was that number is the structure that grounds the world. The cosmos is numbers.<sup>54</sup>

## 5. PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA:

### *DE OPIFICIO MUNDI* AND NEOPYTHAGOREAN PHYSICS

For as he (scil. Moses) always adhered to the principles of numerical science, which he knew by close observation to be a paramount factor in all that exists, he never enacted any law great or small without calling to his aid and as it were accommodating to his enactment its appropriate number.<sup>55</sup>

#### 5.1. *The De Opificio Mundi*

The *De opificio mundi* may justifiably be regarded as part of the arithmological literature of the Hellenistic age, for Philo exegetes the Genesis accounts of creation according to the classification and interpretation of numbers discussed above.<sup>56</sup> Although it would be highly desirable to make a detailed analysis of each aspect of Philo's use of numbers to exegete the creation accounts in Genesis, this is not possible in the limited scope of our study. For our purposes it must suffice that a representative sample of the evidence be presented under number headings. The results gained will permit us to draw some general conclusions about the influence of the *Timaeus* and Neopythagorean cosmological theory upon Philo's in his writing the *De opificio mundi*.

<sup>54</sup> *Tim.* 53B.

<sup>55</sup> *Spec.* 4.105.

<sup>56</sup> This has been recognized since Robbins 1921, 97–123; 1931, 345–360.

The data are arranged in the following pattern: (a) text references are presented in compositional sequence; (b) numbers are introduced according to the compositional sequence of the *De opificio mundi*; and (c) only numbers with some Neopythagorean significance are included in this survey.

## 5.2. *The Evidence: Neopythagorean Physics*

### 5.2.1. *Reference #1: Opif. 13f.: Number Six*

Our first passage is a good example of how Philo uses Neopythagorean number theory:

Among numbers by the laws of nature the most suitable to productivity is 6 ... it is the first perfect number, being equal to the product of its factors, as well as made up of the sum of them ... It is in its nature both male and female, and is the result of the distinctive power of either. For among things that are it is the odd that is male, and the even female.<sup>57</sup>

Before he starts with the exegesis of the Genesis account of creation, Philo gives an introduction in which he summarizes the principle which he sees operating, not only in the account ascribed to Moses, but also in the very process of creation itself. Philo alludes to Gen 1:31b: "Evening came, and morning came, a sixth day." Thus:

For the things coming into existence there was need of order. (14) It was requisite that the world, being most perfect of all things that have come into existence, should be constituted in accordance with a perfect number, namely six; and, inasmuch as it was to have in itself beings that sprang from a coupling together, should receive the impress of mixed number, namely the first in which odd and even were combined, one that should contain the essential principle both of the male that sows and of the female that receives the seed.<sup>58</sup>

Since the sixth day was the last day of creation, Philo proceeds to extract from the number six involved in creation all the arithmological implications that allow him to demonstrate the *arithmos*-character of the biblical story.

First, we get a Pythagorean definition of the number 6:

- (a) 6 is the first perfect number according to the standard arithmetical definition.
- (b) 6 is the product of  $2 \times 3$  which equals the first product of the first female (2) and first male (3) number: 6, therefore, shares in the characteristics

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<sup>57</sup> *Opif.* 13.

<sup>58</sup> *Opif.* 14.



of both the male and female; and because it is the product of these two elements, 6 is well suited for productivity.<sup>59</sup>

Next we get the application of these Neopythagorean insights to the biblical account:

- (a) Philo makes a statement about what the reference to six days in Gen 1:31 does not mean: in reference to *Tim.* 37D–38A, Philo denies that the statement that God created the world in six days means that the creator needed (*prosedeito*) such an amount of time. On the contrary: “we must think of God as doing all things simultaneously (*hama gar panta dran eikos theon*).” Although this is a standard proposition in ancient philosophical theology, and one that Philo clearly accepted, the problem remains: why does Moses speak of six days?
- (b) Again the reason is a philosophical one: “Six days are mentioned because for the things coming into existence there was need of order (*tois genomenois edei taxeōs*).”
- (c) Upon the presupposition: coming into being requires order, Philo builds a logical structure which demonstrates the arithmological nature of the creation account in Genesis, which unfolds as follows: (1) prerequisite: order; (2) order involves number; (3) by the laws of nature (*physeōs nomois*), 6 is the number most suitable for productivity; (4) because: “it is the first perfect number, being equal to the product of its factors, as well as made up of the sum of them ... in its nature both male and female, and is the result of the distinctive power of either. For among things that are it is the odd that is male, and the even female.” Here Philo follows Pythagorean mathematical theory. The number 1 was not the first number, but 2.
- (d) Although Philo’s explanation of the number 6 in Gen 1:31 appears, at first glance, to make good sense and to cover the case, in fact it is incomplete. Philo chooses to ignore two problems because their discussion would disturb the unified exegesis offered. These are: (1) the question of the pre-existence of numbers; and (2) the problem of the use of *edei*.

Although the pre-existence of the ideas in the divine intellect is assumed by Philo,<sup>60</sup> the problem of the pre-existence of numbers is never discussed

<sup>59</sup> The same is true for 5, which is the sum of the first female and male numbers.

<sup>60</sup> Cf., e.g., *Opif.* 17–20.

in any of Philo's extant works.<sup>61</sup> This problem is finally addressed by one of Philo's followers in Alexandria. Origen states that numbers are part of the pre-existent pattern according to which God accomplishes the work of creation.<sup>62</sup>

Since numbers are not identified with the ideas, but apparently are images of the ideas, they cannot be the pattern or structure upon which the universe is created.<sup>63</sup> Later, when the cosmological significance of the number 6 is discussed again, Philo merely states: God finished creation on the sixth day because "the whole world was brought to completion in accordance with the properties of six, a perfect number."<sup>64</sup> This also explains why the product of two unequal factors—2 an image of matter, being parted and divided, and 3 an image of a solid body—represents 6 the perfect number which is the created realm.<sup>65</sup>

The use of the term *edei* (or *anankaion ēn*) in Philo raises another question: was God's freedom limited by the pattern of numbers? Is God himself subject to rules that he cannot violate?<sup>66</sup> We shall attempt to answer this question shortly when we examine Philo's interpretation of the number four.

### 5.2.2. Reference #2: *Opif. 15, 27, 35: Number One*

The number one represents some special problems, since in Pythagorean thinking it was not considered part of the numerical system, so that two was the first even, and three the first odd number.<sup>67</sup> Philo appears to be fully aware of three meanings of the number one: (1) one as *monad*; (2) one as that which is beyond *monad*; and (3) one as the first in the sequence of numbers.

#### 5.2.2.1. *One as Monad and One as the First in Sequence of Numbers*

Upon a first reading of Philo's *De opificio mundi*, one cannot avoid the impression that much of his exegesis is highly arbitrary. At the same time,

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<sup>61</sup> It would be difficult to assume that Philo identifies ideas with numbers. He assumes ideas have an affinity to numbers because they are the images of numbers. Cf. *Leg. 1.2–4*. Philo only goes so far as to identify the ten numbers of the *decad* with the ten categories; cf. *Decal. 30* (pace Dillon's 1977, 159, interpretation of *Opif. 102*; cf. *Her. 156*). The term *kai* is mistranslated and thus misinterpreted by the author.

<sup>62</sup> Origen, *Princ. 2.9.1*.

<sup>63</sup> *Leg. 1.2–4*.

<sup>64</sup> *Opif. 89*.

<sup>65</sup> *Leg. 1.2–4*.

<sup>66</sup> This seems to be the implication drawn from Philo's use of the terms *thelēma* and *boulēma*. Cf., e.g., *Opif. 3*; *Spec. 4.187*. But see also *Opif. 46*.

<sup>67</sup> This raised some questions for Aristotle. Cf. *Metaph. 13.6 1080B*.

however, one also should note that the biblical text used by Philo assisted him in his task. Or, to put it the other way around, Philo rarely missed an opportunity to fully exploit the biblical text in all its details for the purposes of reinterpretation. A good example is offered by Gen 1:5: whereas the Philonic text reads: “first day, second day, third day ...” in Gen 1:5 we read: “day one ...” The cardinal number is used instead of the ordinal. This seemingly minor oddity in the text is fully exploited by Philo.

In Pythagorean thinking, “1” is not a number like any other number. The first odd number is 3, not 1. One, the unit, stands apart from all the other numbers which are merely parts of a sequence. In Neopythagorean theology, moreover, “One” refers to God, and expresses the essential unity of God. Thus, Philo argues, Moses in his true insight into the nature of the cosmos carefully separates the unit from the others by using a different type of numeral in describing day one.<sup>68</sup>

He designates it by a name which precisely hits the mark, for he discerned in it and expressed by the title which He gives it the nature and appellation of the unit, or the “one.”<sup>69</sup>

Philo is careful to stress the uniqueness of the *monad*:<sup>70</sup>

“in the beginning” = “first.” (28) Even if the Maker made all things simultaneously, order was nonetheless an attribute of all that came into existence in fair beauty, for beauty is absent where there is disorder. Now order is a series of things going on before and following after.<sup>71</sup>

Therefore:

The Maker called Day, and not “first” day, but “one,” an expression due to the uniqueness of the intelligible world, and to its having therefore a natural kinship to the number one.<sup>72</sup>

Philo takes advantage of the correlation between “day one” and the *monad* itself:

“one” ... not with reference to the number which precedes the number two, but with reference to the unitary power, in accordance with which many things are harmonized and agree and by their own concord imitate the one.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Philo states: “the unit is not a number at all, but the element and source from which number springs.” *Her.* 190.

<sup>69</sup> *Opif.* 15.

<sup>70</sup> Philo says: “the sacred number of the *monad*, which is an incorporeal image of God, whom it resembles because it also stands alone.” *Spec.* 2.176–178.

<sup>71</sup> *Opif.* 27 f.

<sup>72</sup> *Opif.* 35.

<sup>73</sup> *QG* 1.15.

He does so in order to show that there is an intimate connection between the first day of creation and God, called “one” and the “*monad*” who is the source of the universe:

(Gen 2:8) There is nothing equal or superior to God ... The “one” and the “*monad*” are, therefore, the only standard for determining the category to which God belongs. Rather ... the One God is standard for the “*monad*.” For, like time, all number is subsequent to the universe and the *demiurge* ... (*pas gar arithmos neōteros kosmou, hōs kai chronos, ho de theos presbyteros kosmou kai dēmiourgos*).<sup>74</sup>

#### 5.2.2.2. *One Beyond the Monad*

This God is for Philo beyond the *monad*:

The vision only showed that He is, not what He is. For this which is better than the good, more venerable than the *monad*, purer than the unit, cannot be discerned by anyone else; to God alone is it permitted to apprehend God (*dioti monōi themis autōi hyph' eautou katalambanesthai*).<sup>75</sup>

One refers to the first unit of creation, which has its affinity not with one as the first in the sequel of numbers, but with the one as *monad*, and the God beyond the *monad*, who is the ground of creation.<sup>76</sup>

#### 5.2.3. *Reference #3: Opif. 45, 49–53, 113: Number Four*

Here Philo takes advantage of a difficulty in the biblical text in order to stress a theological point. Thoroughly familiar with Middle Platonic thought, he addresses a problem common to this tradition.<sup>77</sup> Does the regularity and order that one can observe in the functioning of the cosmos indicate that the intelligence thus displayed is inherent in the cosmos itself (Stoic position), or does this regularity merely point to a divine intelligence beyond the cosmos itself (Platonic position)?

The issue becomes clearer if we compare *Opif.* 45 with *Opif.* 113 ff.:

On the fourth day, the earth being now finished, he ordered the heaven ... to make clear beyond all doubt the mighty sway of his sovereign power.<sup>78</sup>

<sup>74</sup> *Leg.* 2.3.

<sup>75</sup> *Praem.* 39f. Cf. *Contempl.* 2: “[The Therapeutics] worship the Self-Existent who is better than the good, purer than the One, and more primordial than the *Monad*.”

<sup>76</sup> When Philo refers to one as first in the sequence of numbers he clearly means what the Pythagoreans mean, that 1 is a unit, and the source of numbers, not itself a number. Cf. *QG* 1.15; 4.110; *QE* 2.37; *Her.* 190.

<sup>77</sup> On Philo's relation to later Platonism, see Dillon 1977, 139–183.

<sup>78</sup> *Opif.* 45.

[T]he planets, the heavenly host that moves counter to the fixed stars ... and manifest large sympathy with air and earth ... They cause all things on earth ... to grow and come to perfection, enabling as they do, the natural power in each of them to run its full round ...<sup>79</sup>

In §§ 45 ff., Philo states that the earth was able to bring forth plants and fruits of all sorts before sun or moon existed, that is, before there were any seasons. This was done to confuse those: “who would trust phenomena rather than God, admitting sophistry rather than wisdom.” § 114, on the other hand, is part of the long excursus on the number seven (§§ 89–127) which Philo incorporated from a Greek, probably Stoic source.<sup>80</sup> His own position is best reflected by the Platonic teaching reflected in § 45: the beauty and orderliness of the cosmos is a witness to the divine intelligence that stands beyond the cosmos itself. Thus the presence of §§ 113–114 is difficult to explain. There are two options: (1) Since the whole excursus is of Greek origin (it does not contain a single reference to any biblical passage), Philo may have carelessly retained a passage that actually runs counter to a basic theological position of ancient Mediterranean Judaism also shared by him. (2) Philo may have been aware of the seeming contradiction but could have held that the contradiction was not real: in § 45 he would have spoken of the ultimate cause of seasonal change on earth (i.e., God), whereas he would have read §§ 113–114 as a reference only to the secondary source (i.e., the *Logos*) and thus have let the text stand, although in its original, probably Stoic context, it may have had a meaning that Philo would have found unacceptable.

It is suggested that the second solution is too apologetic in character. Even though Philo thought himself *logos*-inspired, he was capable of occasional lapses, and this is likely one of them.

In regard to Philo’s understanding of the number four, however, he is thoroughly consistent in interpreting its arithmological significance. According to the Pythagorean understanding of number, also reflected in the *Timaeus*, 4 “is the first number to show the nature of the solid.”

1 = point

2 = line

3 = area, plain

4 = solid

<sup>79</sup> *Opif.* 113f.

<sup>80</sup> Moehring 1978, 200 ff.

Philo reduplicates this proposition in his exegesis of the four pillars at the end of the tabernacle.<sup>81</sup> Elsewhere, in Neopythagorean fashion, Philo calls the number 4 a perfect number:<sup>82</sup>

But the heaven was afterwards duly decked out in a perfect number, namely four. This number it would be no error to call the base and source of ten, the complete number; for what ten is actually, this, as is evident, 4 is potentially; that is to say that, if the numbers from 1 to 4 be added together, they will produce 10, and this is the limit set to the otherwise unlimited succession of numbers; round this as a turning-point they wheel and retrace their steps.<sup>83</sup>

Philo's Neopythagorean competence becomes clearer if we examine §§ 49–51:

4 was the first number to show the nature of the solid, the numbers before it referring to things without actual substance ... It was this number that has led us out of the realm of incorporeal existence patent only to the intellect, and has introduced us to the conception of a body of three dimensions, which by its nature comes within the realm of our senses.<sup>84</sup>

And:

First among numbers, 4 is a square, made up of equal factors multiplying into one another, a measure of rightness and equality ... alone among them it is such to be produced from the same factors whether added or multiplied together ... thus exhibiting a right fair form of consonance, such as has fallen to none of the other numbers.<sup>85</sup>

Thus:

4 was made the starting-point of the creation of heaven and the world; for the four elements, out of which this universe was fashioned, issued, as it were, from a fountain, from the numeral 4 ... so also did the four seasons of the year, which are responsible for the coming into being of animals and plants.<sup>86</sup>

Once again, Philo allows his arithmological scheme to win out and over the biblical text. According to Gen 1:9–13, dry land and the seas, trees and other plants were created on the third day. But according to the Pythagorean system, steroids are possible only when the number 4 is reached. Confronted with this discrepancy, Philo chooses to ignore it.

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<sup>81</sup> *QE* 2.93 (Exod 26:32a): point—*monad*/line—dyad/surface—triad/solid—tetrad.

<sup>82</sup> See also *QG* 3.12.

<sup>83</sup> *Opif.* 47.

<sup>84</sup> *Opif.* 49.

<sup>85</sup> *Opif.* 51.

<sup>86</sup> *Opif.* 52.

However, the number four has a moral characteristic that Philo does not ignore. As the first square number, 4 is “a measure of rightness and equality ... alone (among the numbers of the decad) it is such as to be produced from the same factors whether added or multiplied together ... thus exhibiting a right fair form of consonance, such as has fallen to none of the other numbers.”<sup>87</sup>

And in § 52, Philo touches upon another aspect of the number four. It represents the number of elements of which the cosmos was thought to be composed: fire, air, water, and earth.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in characteristic Neopythagorean fashion, Philo expands on this. These four elements themselves, “issued, as it were, from a fountain, from the number 4.” It is this priority of the number four that distinguished Neopythagorean physics from others.

Philo discusses the importance of the number 4 within a Neopythagorean scheme in §§ 47–48:<sup>89</sup> (a) 4 is potentially what the sacred decad is in reality:  $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$  (The *Tetractys*). (b) 4 also contains the ratios of the musical intervals. The fourth and the double octave have ratios of 4:3 and 4:1.<sup>90</sup>

With all these wondrous properties of the number 4, God had no choice: he had to create the wonders of heaven on the fourth day:

It was of necessity that the creator arrayed the heaven on the fourth day (*kata ton anankaion ho poiētēs diekosmei ton ouranon tetradi*).<sup>91</sup>

For Philo, then, the arithmological scheme in the process of creation involved a binding force to which the *demiurge* is subject:<sup>92</sup>

Number as part of the world’s order, time by its mere lapse indicating it. For out of one day came “one,” out of two “two,” out of three “three,” out of a month “thirty,” out of a year the number equivalent to the days made up of twelve months, and out of infinite time came (the conception of) infinite number.<sup>93</sup>

Philo’s general position seems to be that an arithmological scheme forms the prior order according to which the cosmos is created.<sup>94</sup> In § 14 *edei gar* and in § 53 *kata to anankaion* would indicate that the numbers placed a restraint on God’s creative work in accordance with

<sup>87</sup> See also *Plant.* 117; *Mos.* 2.115.

<sup>88</sup> *Mos.* 2.88.

<sup>89</sup> *Plant.* 124–125.

<sup>90</sup> *Mos.* 2.115.

<sup>91</sup> *Opif.* 53.

<sup>92</sup> On exactly the same level as the creator-god of the *Timaeus* (27D ff; 53B ff.).

<sup>93</sup> *Opif.* 60.

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Opif.* 89: “the whole world has been brought to completion in accordance with the properties of six.”

the purpose and will of nature, in accordance with which the entire world also is administered (*pros to boulēma tēs physeōs tas praxeis apeuthynontos, kath' ēn kai ho sympas kosmos dioikeitai*).<sup>95</sup>

In § 60, however, Philo seems to take the opposite position. He makes the celestial bodies and their revolutions the cause, not only of the various chronological units and divisions, but of the numerical system itself.<sup>96</sup> Indeed in this passage, Philo speaks of the Genesis of number: the entire numerical system is described as a product of the chronological pattern established by the revolutions of the celestial bodies, which thus are declared to be primary. He did this for a pedagogical reason. In §§ 45 f., he argues that the earth brought forth plants before the sun and moon existed because God wanted to make certain “that there might be no one who ... should venture to ascribe the first place to any created thing.”

In this connection we can observe an instance of how Philo’s theological concerns influenced the handling of the text, which may explain why he contradicts himself on an important Neopythagorean point—the priority of number. Again, Philo chooses to randomly address or ignore an issue because its discussion would disturb the exegesis offered at different stages in the *De opificio mundi*.

#### 5.2.4. Reference #4: *Opif. 62: Number Five*

In uncharacteristic fashion, Philo neglects to give the Pythagorean definition of five in the text,<sup>97</sup> and immediately proceeds to its application, which is brief and superficial: the affinity between 5 and living creatures, they have senses, and of these there are five.

... there is no kinship so close as between animals and the number five. For living creatures differ from those without life in nothing more than in ability to apprehend by the senses; and sense has a five-fold division, into sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch; and to each of these their Maker assigned special aspects of matter, and an individual faculty of testing it ... Colors are tested by sight, sounds by hearing, savours by taste, perfumes by smell, while touch assays the softness and hardness of various substances, their smoothness and roughness, and recognizes things hot or cold.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> *Opif.* 3; *Spec.* 4.187. For a different interpretation, see *Opif.* 46: *panta gar theōi dynata*.

<sup>96</sup> Philo is not, as Colson and Whittaker’s translation (1929, 47) would indicate, talking about number “as part of the world’s order.” His *arithmos physis* means, “the nature, the character of number.” Cf. *Opif.* 60.

<sup>97</sup> Elsewhere in his corpus definitions are given. The number 5 is associated with the five parts of the sensible world, and the five senses. Cf. *Abr.* 147 f.; *Mos.* 2.81 f.; *QG* 3.3; 4.110.

<sup>98</sup> *Opif.* 62.



Living creatures have five senses because the “Maker took in hand to form the races of mortal creatures on the fifth day ...” Again, God’s creative effort displays arithmological coherence.

5.2.5. *References #5: Opif. 89–128; Decal. 105; Fug. 184: Numbers Seven and Twelve*

The *De opificio mundi* consists of one hundred and seventy two paragraphs. Thirty-eight of these, or some 22% of the entire treatise, are dedicated to a discussion of the number seven. No attempt will be made to assess the full range of Philo’s use of the number seven. Rather, a summary and review of Moehring’s study on the number seven in Philo will be presented.<sup>99</sup> The rationale is: (a) the number 7 requires examination in a study on Neopythagorean elements in Philo; (b) there is no need to expand Moehring’s study for the sake of avoiding redundancy; and, (c) therefore, only the number 7 in reference to the cosmos and the Sabbath will be examined.

The number seven plays an important role in Judaism simply because of the central position of the Sabbath in the life of an observant Jew. Philo himself seems to stress this connection by consistently calling the Sabbath the seventh day.<sup>100</sup> Curiously, however, this consideration for the significance of the number seven in the *De opificio mundi* is wrong. The entire excursus §§ 89–127 contains only three biblical references.<sup>101</sup> The material included in the excursus can be classified under the following headings:

- (a) Pythagorean definitions and references
- (b) Instances of the importance of the number 7 haphazardly collected from:
  - (1) nature (e.g., the seven planets)
  - (2) man, his life, anatomy, health (e.g., the seven stages in a man’s life)
  - (3) languages, grammar (e.g., the seven vowels, or the seven varieties of voice)
  - (4) music (e.g., harmonics)
  - (5) Greek myth (e.g., 7 is *motherless and virgin*; at §100 there is a reference to Nike)

<sup>99</sup> Moehring 1978, 200–218.

<sup>100</sup> *Opif.* 89.

<sup>101</sup> Philo does connect biblical passages with arithmological statements about 7 in other sections of his corpus. Cf., e.g., *Det.* 170 l; *Deus* 11–13.

- (6) ethics (e.g., the 7 virtues)
- (7) deity, his characteristics (e.g., as ruler, sovereign)

The preponderance of Greek data and examples is noteworthy enough in itself, but even more remarkable is the way in which Philo associates the Sabbath with a variety of cosmological facts:

(a) (§116) Each of the equinoxes occurs in a seventh month (depending on how one starts counting the months: in the autumn or in the spring—we still have the autumn equinox in September) “and during them there is enjoined by law the keeping of the greatest national festivals.” Philo traces the importance of these seventh months to the sun. This natural pre-eminence of the equinoxes is then ratified by the law of Moses, which places the two greatest national festivals in these months. In Philo, Passover and the festival of Booths are celebrated for natural reasons: “since at both of them all fruits of the earth ripen, in the spring the wheat and all else that is sown, and in autumn the fruit of the vine and most of the other fruit trees.”

(b) Two other references are even more significant. These are §§ 89 and 128, which not by accident stand at the beginning and the end of the excursus. Since they have as their common theme the sacredness of the seventh day they form a bracket around the entire discourse on the number 7, which seems to emphasize the importance of the observation of the seventh day as sacred. For Philo the observance of the seventh day is not only one of the characteristics by which God has separated his chosen people from the rest of humanity. The seventh day is also a universal holiday:

the seventh day is the festival, not of a single city or country, but of the universe (*tou pantos*), and it alone strictly deserves to be called public as belonging to all people and the birthday of the cosmos.<sup>102</sup>

Philo is aware that the observance of the seventh day as holy is particularly enjoined by the law of Moses. What is the purpose of this observance? Why are people refrained from work on that day? His answer is: in order

to give their time to the one sole object of philosophy with a view to the improvement of character and submission to the scrutiny of conscience.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> *Opif.* 89.

<sup>103</sup> *Opif.* 128.

Since there is a cosmic significance to the number seven, observation of the Sabbath also suggests the practice of an arithmological variety of astral piety. The glory of seven is reflected by the seven zones girdling the heavens,<sup>104</sup> the seven spheres of the planets,<sup>105</sup> and the Great Bear and Pleiades consist of seven stars each.<sup>106</sup>

At one point, Philo pushes the role of the number seven in the movements of the heavenly bodies and their events in the sublunar sphere such that it appears he accepted the principle of astrology, even though he was not interested in understanding celestial phenomena as such:

[T]he holy *hebdomad* belongs to those things reckoned as divine. The movement and revolution of these (scil. the seven planets) through the zodiacal signs are the causes, for sublunary things, of all those things which are wont to take place in the embrace of concord.<sup>107</sup>

At one point, Philo pushes this type of language to a stage where one could almost agree that in Philo we have evidence for number mysticism. In the *De decalogo*, Philo has three long passages in praise of the number seven.<sup>108</sup> After a long paraphrase of the section of secondary revolution, guided by seven,<sup>109</sup> Philo states:

(For many reasons) seven is held in honor. But nothing so much assures its predominance as that through which it is best given the revelation of the Father and Maker of All, for in it, as in a mirror, the mind has a vision of God (*phantasioutai ho nous*) as acting and creating the world and controlling all that is.<sup>110</sup>

Only in the seventh place do we find the world of ideas, the intelligible world, the sphere of the world of God. Thus:

[I]n accordance with a certain natural sympathy the things of the earth depend on the things of heaven, the principle of the number seven, after having begun from above, descended also to us and visited the races of mortals.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>104</sup> *Opif.* 112.

<sup>105</sup> *Opif.* 113. Cf. *Tim.* 38C–39E. The long list of the astrological characteristics of the number seven appear in Gellius, *Noct. att.* 3.10. Later writers employ a similar listing. Cf. Calcidius, *In Tim.* 37 (85.19–87.5 Waszink); Proclus, *In Tim.* 2.266.8f.

<sup>106</sup> *Opif.* 115.

<sup>107</sup> *QE* 2.78.

<sup>108</sup> *Decal.* 96–98 (on the seventh day); 103–105 (mathematical analysis); and 158–163 (on the seventh day).

<sup>109</sup> See *Tim.* 36C–D.

<sup>110</sup> *Decal.* 105.

<sup>111</sup> *Opif.* 117.

Philo's use of astrological associations can be illustrated through his interpretation of the number twelve. He says that in the cosmos we find the perfect number twelve at work: the zodiacal circle is adorned with twelve luminous constellations, the sun requires twelve months to complete its circuit, and the day is divided into twelve hours each of light and darkness. Moses also celebrates the number twelve and shows the harmony which exists between Israel and the cosmos: Israel is divided into twelve tribes, twelve loaves are displayed on the holy table, and in the "oracle" are placed twelve inscribed stones.<sup>112</sup>

In summary, Philo uses astronomy to find arithmological arguments for his interpretation of the biblical text. Indeed, he employs astronomy to illustrate two points simultaneously: (1) Israel and her cult are in full harmony with the cosmic order; and (2) Israel enjoys a unique relationship with God. Its Sabbath and festivals reflect her unique position among the nations of the world.

Fully convinced that his people had been chosen by God, Philo is not content to merely assert that claim; he also wants to demonstrate its cosmic reasonableness. For this purpose he makes use of exegetical tools and employs philosophical arguments understood by his contemporaries.<sup>113</sup> Principal among these were the Pythagorean.<sup>114</sup>

#### 5.2.6. *References #6: Spec. 2.211–212; QG 3.49: Number Eight*

Philo folds the number eight into a cosmological scheme by interpreting the meaning of the eighth day of creation according to the principles of Neopythagorean physics:

[A]s a crown to the seven days he adds an eighth ... the number eight, the first cubic number ... is the beginning of the higher categories of solids ... where we pass from the unsubstantial and bring to its conclusion the category of the conceptual which rises to the solid in the scale of ascending powers.<sup>115</sup>

According to Philo the eighth digit has many beauties:<sup>116</sup>

<sup>112</sup> *Fug.* 184.

<sup>113</sup> Philo implicitly accepts the Platonic criticism of Homer and Greek mythology. Cf. Fruechtel 1968, 88. In *Opif.* 133 Philo without disapproval refers to the myth of Demeter.

<sup>114</sup> In *Opif.* 148 Philo discusses the bestowing of names by wise men. According to Cicero, this was a view held, in particular, by Pythagoras. Cf. *Tusc. disp.* 1.62. On this whole question, see Boyancé 1963, 70.

<sup>115</sup> *Spec.* 2.211–212.

<sup>116</sup> *QG* 3.49 on Gen 17:12.

- (a) It is a cube.
- (b) It contains the forms of equality. 8 is the first number to indicate length and breadth and depth, which are equal to one another.
- (c) The composition of 8 produces agreement: 36 which the Pythagoreans call "homology." It is the first in which there is an agreement of odd and even: for the four separate odd (numbers) from 1 on, and the even ones from 2 on make 36:  $1 + 3 + 5 + 7 = 16$ ; and  $2 + 4 + 6 + 8 = 20$  (Total 36). This 36 is most productive, for it is quadrangular, having as its side the hexad, which is the first even-odd number (harmony).
- (d) The form of the ogdoad produces 64—the first number which at the same time is a cube and a square. It contains the pattern of an incorporeal, intelligible and invisible (produces a square plane) substance, and a corporeal substance (produces a solid cube).
- (e) 8 is akin to the ever original *hebdomad*. When the parts of eight are added up, they make 7:  $8 / 2 = 4$ ;  $8 / 4 = 2$ ;  $8 / 8 = 1$ ; and  $4 + 2 + 1 = 7$ .
- (f)  $8^2 = 64$  = the first square and cube at the same time.
- (g) From 1 on, the doubling of several numbers produce 64:  $1 + 2 + 4 + 8 + 16 + 32 = 64$ .

Since eight is the first cube, it is the first measure of equality.<sup>117</sup> This observation permits Philo to illustrate the particular and superior position of the people of Israel among the nations of the world. All males of Israel are commanded to be circumcised on the eighth day. It is this time limit of eight days that sets Israel apart: the first *hebdomad* of creation refers to those who are naturally righteous, but through the ogdoad, a second *hebdomad* begins, and this refers to those who are righteous by choice:

For the number eight, which indicates equality, is assigned to the second, but not the first, place in the order of rank. Thus he has symbolically indicated that he has adapted this first nation naturally to the highest and utmost equality and righteousness. And it is the foremost of the human race not through creation or in time, but by the prerogative of virtue, the righteous and equal being cognate and unified as if one part.<sup>118</sup>

### 5.2.7. References #7: Opif. 47; Congr. 95–121; Decal. 21–30: Number Ten

The only reference in the *De opificio* to the number ten is a brief one. Philo, in his analysis of the number four, states:

<sup>117</sup> QG 3.49 on Gen 17:12.

<sup>118</sup> QG 3.49 on Gen 17:12.

[T]he heaven was afterwards fully decked in a perfect number, namely four. This number it would be no error to call the base and source of 10, the complete number; for what ten is actually, this, as is evident, 4 is potentially; that is to say that, if the numbers from 1 to 4 be added together, they will produce 10, and this is the limit set to the otherwise unlimited succession of numbers; round this as a turning-point they wheel and retrace their steps.<sup>119</sup>

The decad, since it embraces all numbers and all numerical forms, was called perfect, and for these reasons Philo gives it the epithets holy, sacred, truth, wisdom, and complete. He also associates the number ten with *logos*, and hence with God.<sup>120</sup> Thus the decad is etymologically understood by Philo to be a

receiver (*dechad*), because it receives and has made room for every kind of number, and numerical ratios and progressions, and concords, and harmonies.<sup>121</sup>

The most common symbol used by Philo to express the cosmic significance of the decad is the *logos*.<sup>122</sup> This is largely illustrated through numbers. Ten is perfect according to Philo because it contains all different kinds of numbers:<sup>123</sup> even [2], odd [3], and even-odd [6]. The decad also contains all ratios: (a) of a number to its multiples; (b) of a number to its fractionals; and (c) when a number is either increased or diminished by some part of itself. Ten also contains all the analogies or progressions:

- (a) Arithmetical: each term in the series is greater than the one below and less than the one above by the same amount.
- (b) Geometrical: the ratio of the second to the first term is the same as that of the third to the second (e.g., 1, 2, 4), and this is so whether the ratio is double or treble or any multiple or fractional (e.g., 3:2, 4:3, etc.).
- (c) Harmonic: the middle term exceeds, and is exceeded by, the extremes on either side by the same fraction (e.g., 3, 4, 6).

The decad also contains the properties contained in triangles, quadrilaterals, polygons, as well as those of the concords: (a) fourth ratio: 1 1/3, 4:3; (b) fifth ratio: 1 1/2, 3:2; (c) octave: 2:1; and (d) double octave: 8:2. It embraces

<sup>119</sup> *Opif.* 47.

<sup>120</sup> This is a common Pythagorean association. Nicomachus gives ten the following epithets: All, Cosmos, Universe, Faith, Necessity, Might, Fate, Eternity, Atlas, Unwearied God, Phanes, Sun, Urania, Memory, Mnemosyne. Cf. Pseudo-Iamblichus, *Theol. arith.* 80–82.

<sup>121</sup> *Decal.* 23.

<sup>122</sup> *Abr.* 244.

<sup>123</sup> This is reconstructed from *Decal.* 21 ff.

nature both with and without extension in space: point [1], line [2], surface [3], and solid [4, 10]. Finally, the infinite series of numbers is measured by ten, and the decad reveals differences in numbers such as the square [4], the cube [8], and the perfect number six, which is equal to the sum of its factors 3, 2, 1.

Most significantly, for Philo's understanding of the numerical basis of the cosmos, there are ten categories in nature:<sup>124</sup> substance, quality, quantity, relation, activity, passivity, state, position, and the indispensable for all created existence, time and place.

He goes so far as to divide the cosmos into ten constituent parts:<sup>125</sup>

- 1–7 planets
- 8 sphere of the fixed stars
- 9 those sublunary things of one species which are changeable among themselves
- 10 the divine *Logos*, the governor and administrator of all things

Examples that illustrate the close connection between the number ten and God are generally drawn by Philo from the history and cult of Israel. This demonstrates the harmony between the cosmos and Israel as ordained by God.

For example, there are tithes;<sup>126</sup> the priests are commanded to offer the tenth of the *ephah* of fine flour—for they have learned to rise above the ninth, the seeming deity, the world of sense, and worship him who is in very truth God, who stands alone as the truth.<sup>127</sup> The soul's passover is on the tenth day; propitiation is established on the tenth day of the month; release is on the tenth day of the month in the jubilee year;<sup>128</sup> Abraham begins his supplication with fifty but ends with ten, which closes the possibility of redemption; Moses appointed rulers of ten last of all;<sup>129</sup> the tabernacle has ten curtains for the structure, which includes the whole of wisdom, to which the perfect number ten belongs; and there are ten commandments.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Decal.* 30.

<sup>125</sup> *QG* 4.110.

<sup>126</sup> *Congr.* 95.

<sup>127</sup> *Congr.* 102.

<sup>128</sup> *Congr.* 106–108.

<sup>129</sup> *Congr.* 109–110.

<sup>130</sup> *Congr.* 116; 120.

## 6. NEOPYTHAGOREAN PHYSICS AND ARITHMOLOGY IN PHILO OF ALEXANDRIA

In the problems, issues, and debates raised, Philo offers the student a rich road to an understanding of the place of the *Timaeus* and Pythagorean physics in early Middle Platonism. This is significant, since as a particular document in the early imperial era the Pentateuch can hardly lay any claim to being of profound philosophical significance. Yet, Philo renders such a judgment nugatory by demonstrating its decadic nature. The Pentateuch reflects the perfection and holiness of the cosmos. Cosmos, micro-cosmos (Israel), and Pentateuch are all related and reflect one another.

The use of numbers as a tool for the interpretation of the Pentateuch has one great advantage that Philo fully exploited. First, it was a language “known and used by Moses” throughout the Pentateuch. Secondly, numbers were international in usage and have definitions and mathematical relationships that anybody educated in the encyclical subjects could recognize and accept. Thirdly, when numbers are introduced, an element of communality and verifiability of the Mosaic account of creation is also introduced. After all, numbers are not dependent upon sense perception; they possess a degree of permanence which nothing in the sensible world can equal, not even the visible heavens: numbers are even prior to them.<sup>131</sup> Numbers are the meta-language of his God.

*In nuce*, there can be no better way to exhibit the truth and correctness of Moses’ account of the creation and of the biblical picture of the universe than by demonstrating the agreement between the numbers given in the Torah and the pattern of Greek cosmology given in the *Timaeus*. Both the world of corruptible and immortal things is formed according to number: this is Philo’s basic conviction. Moses demonstrated this principle, and for this reason he included so many numerical statements in the sacred text. Philo makes explicit what Moses already knew: things in nature = numbers. As Philo says: “Moses’ wish ... is to exhibit alike the things created of mortal kind and those that are incorruptible as having been formed in a way corresponding to their proper numbers.”<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> This is the view expressed by Augustine, *Lib.* 2.8.21: “I do not know how long any of the things will exist which I perceive through my physical sense organs, such as, e.g., this heaven and this earth and whatever other bodies I may observe. But  $7 + 3 = 10$ , and not only now, but always; and there never was a time when  $7$  plus  $3$  was not  $10$ , nor will there ever be a time when  $7$  plus  $3$  will not be  $10$ . For this reason I have stated that this inviolable truth of number is universal in character, for me and for anybody who thinks at all.” (My trans.)

<sup>132</sup> *Leg.* 1.4.



Philo traces his interest in the structure of the universe back to a command given by God to Moses. Moses wants to serve God alone, and he asks God to reveal himself to him, since he knows that only God can tell him about himself. God's answer is clear and constitutes the program for Philo's entire enterprise:

Do not hope to be ever able to apprehend me or any of my powers in my essence. But ... I will admit you to a share of what is attainable. That means I bid you come and contemplate the universe and its contents, a spectacle not apprehended by the eye of the body but by the unsleeping eyes of the mind.<sup>133</sup>

The entire universe is properly understood by Philo as "the highest and in the truest sense the holy, temple of God."<sup>134</sup> Contemplation of that universe with the intellect will result in the comprehension of the glory of God's work of creation. It is a process in two stages: sight first observes the movements of the visible celestial bodies, and reports what it has seen to reason, its sovereign. Reason:

seeing with a sharp eye both of these (scil. the celestial phenomena) and through them the higher paradigmatic forms and the cause of all things, immediately apprehends them and Genesis and providence, for it reasons that visible nature did not come into being itself; for it would be impossible for harmony and order and measure and proportions of truth and such concord and real prosperity to come about by themselves.<sup>135</sup>

In summary, the *De opificio mundi* gives ample evidence for Philo's belief that the biblical text contains philosophical truths about the cosmos. Among the exegetical tools used by Philo to lay open the many levels of cosmological meaning extant in the Pentateuch is arithmology. In applying this interpretive method, Philo was able to demonstrate the full agreement of the Torah with what is correct in the philosophical and scientific traditions of the Greeks.

Philo's use of the *Timaeus*, together with Neopythagorean physics and arithmology, permits us to make some preliminary judgements:

- (1) The premises of the *Timaeus* are frequently used by Philo to explain the Mosaic account of creation.
- (2) The premises of Middle Platonic physics and later Pythagorean arithmology are an integral part of his exegetical approach. He employs this

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<sup>133</sup> *Spec.* 1.49.

<sup>134</sup> *Spec.* 1.66.

<sup>135</sup> *QG* 2.34.

interpretation to demonstrate that the Genesis creation account is a *philosophia naturalis*.

- (3) The *Timaeus* and Neopythagorean physics and arithmology allow Philo to stress two points: (i) the *nomos* presented by Moses is a *physis*; (ii) the cosmic order described by Moses is of universal validity.
- (4) Philo assumes that the superiority of the Mosaic account of creation can be shown through Platonic physics and Pythagorean arithmology because Plato and Pythagoras learned their *nomos* and *physis* from Moses.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> *Leg.* 1.108; *Prob.* 57; *Spec.* 4.61; *Aet.* 17 f.

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PAROLE INTÉRIEURE ET PAROLE PROFÉRÉE CHEZ PHILON  
D'ALEXANDRIE ET DANS L'ÉVANGILE DE LA VÉRITÉ (NH I,3)

Anne Pasquier

*À mon collègue John Turner,  
ce petit essai pour dire ma profonde admiration*

Le roman intitulé *Cain*, de l'auteur portugais José Saramago, est une réécriture satirique des premiers chapitres de la *Genèse*. L'histoire des hommes est celle de leurs mésententes avec « le seigneur, connu aussi sous le nom de dieu »<sup>1</sup>. Un dieu qui expulsa :

le malheureux couple du jardin d'éden à cause du crime abominable que c'était d'avoir mangé le fruit de l'arbre de la connaissance du bien et du mal. Cet épisode, à l'origine de la première définition d'un péché originel jusqu'alors inconnu, n'a jamais été bien expliqué. En premier lieu, même l'intelligence la plus fruste n'aurait aucune difficulté à comprendre qu'être informé sera toujours préférable à ignorer, surtout dans des domaines aussi délicats que le bien et le mal ... En deuxième lieu, l'imprévoyance du seigneur est criante ...

De toute manière, conclut le romancier, « si ève n'avait pas donné le fruit à manger à adam, si elle n'y avait pas goûté elle non plus, tous deux seraient encore dans le jardin d'éden, malgré l'ennui qui y régnait ». Bien avant José Saramago, ces versets, où Dieu figure dans le récit au même titre que les autres personnages humains, furent l'objet de critiques, en particulier de la part de certains chrétiens gnostiques. Les anthropomorphismes, les actes cruels attribués à Dieu, sa colère, sa jalousie ou son repentir montraient selon eux que ce Dieu n'était qu'une image, et non le Dieu véritable :

De quelle sorte est donc ce Dieu-là ? Premièrement, [il] a envie à Adam de m[a]nger de l'arbre de la g[no]se ; et deuxièmement, il a dit : « Adam, où es-tu ? ». Dieu n'a donc pas la prescience, c'est-à-dire qu'il ne savait pas dès le début. E[t] ensuite il [a] dit : « Jet[o]ns-le [hors] d'i[c]i, afin qu'il [ne] mange

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<sup>1</sup> Saramago 2011, 14, 96–97.

[pas] de l'Arbre de la Vie et ne vive pas éternellement!». Mais s'il s'est révélé (ici) lui-même comme un méchant envieux, alors quelle sorte de Dieu est-ce là<sup>2</sup>? *(Témoignage de Vérité 47.14–48.2)*

Les passages problématiques mis en lumière par les gnostiques correspondent à ceux qu'ont relevés des philosophes comme Celse dans son *Logos véritable*<sup>3</sup> et Julien l'Empereur, dans le *Contre les Galiléens*: Dieu plantant un jardin, Dieu jaloux, en colère, ou changeant d'idée (lors du déluge). Julien demande par exemple pourquoi Dieu aurait voulu dénier aux humains la puissance de discriminer entre le bien et le mal<sup>4</sup>. Quel est l'homme assez stupide, écrit-il, pour ne pas sentir que, sans la connaissance du bien et du mal, il est impossible à l'homme d'avoir aucune prudence? Il conclut qu'un tel Dieu est envieux et il cite Ex 20,5; Dt 5,9 («Car je suis un dieu jaloux»), afin de démontrer cela<sup>5</sup>. Ces textes faisaient partie d'un arsenal antichrétien qui circulait largement. En outre, dans le monde ju-déen, ils faisaient l'objet d'interprétations tentant de trouver une solution à de telles difficultés. Philon d'Alexandrie, dans les *Questions sur la Genèse*, s'interroge à propos de passages qui semblent montrer un Dieu qui doute et ne sait pas (*QG* 1.21), un Dieu qui se demande où est passé Adam (*Gn* 3,8). Comment en effet des humains peuvent-ils bien se cacher du regard de Dieu?

Selon lui, ces problèmes ne peuvent être résolus que par une interprétation allégorique, lu littéralement le texte est irrationnel, *alogon*. Toutefois, selon certains gnostiques, le manque de sens ou encore les indignités sur Dieu ne sont pas l'indicateur ni le signe nécessaire qu'il faut lire spirituellement. Ils reflètent une certaine réalité, celle d'un ange démiurge, de puissances régnant sur le monde, ainsi que la nature psychique de ces puissances et de la Loi en général: selon le *Traité tripartite*, la «loi du jugement qui est condamnation et colère» provient de puissances inférieures<sup>6</sup>.

En revanche, si l'*Évangile de la Vérité* reprend la même accusation contre l'aveuglement de Dieu et semble bien reconnaître l'indignité des propos sur Dieu dans certains passages bibliques, il ne les attribue pas à une puissance

<sup>2</sup> Mahé 1996, 113.

<sup>3</sup> Voir Origène, *Cels.*, 4.36–40, 71–73; 6.58, 59, 61. Voir aussi 6.29 (pour le point de vue des gnostiques sur Dieu). Nous ne possédons que certains extraits du traité de Julien transmis par Cyrille d'Alexandrie (*Contra Julianum*).

<sup>4</sup> *Contra Gal.* 75A, 89A, 93E, 160D.

<sup>5</sup> *Contra Gal.* 93E, 155C–D.

<sup>6</sup> *Traité tripartite* 97.33–35; Thomassen-Painchaud 1989, 163. Voir aussi le *Témoignage de vérité* 47.14–48.7; le *Traité tripartite* 106.25–107.18; l'*Évangile selon Philippe* 73.33–74.12.

inférieure ou à un démiurge<sup>7</sup>. Il n'existe qu'un seul Dieu, le Père, que les spirituels doivent éviter de juger avec arrogance :

Or ceux-ci (les spirituels) ne se présentent pas ainsi : ils ne se sentent pas eux-mêmes supérieurs, ils ne diminuent pas non plus la gloire du Père, ni ne considèrent celui-ci comme mesquin, ou acerbe ou colérique, mais ils le voient sans malice, serein, plein de douceur, connaissant chaque voie avant même qu'elle ne soit venue à l'existence. Aussi n'a-t-il nullement besoin qu'on lui ouvre les yeux. (41.35–42.10)

C'est le texte biblique lui-même qui pose problème selon l'auteur. En d'autres mots, Dieu ne peut pas être inférieur aux humains qui croient en lui. Toute vision de Dieu, en particulier une vision légaliste, est une erreur de l'esprit. L'erreur vient de la recherche elle-même avant le salut :

Parce que ceux qui appartiennent au Tout cherchèrent à connaître celui dont ils sont issus et que le Tout était à l'intérieur de l'Inappréhendable inconcevable, lui qui est au-delà de toute conception, c'est alors que la méconnaissance du Père se fit perturbation et angoisse. Puis la perturbation se figea à la manière d'un brouillard au point que nul ne put voir. De ce fait, l'Erreur tira sa puissance. (17.4–15)

L'Erreur est devenue puissante, bien qu'elle soit une représentation mentale, une fiction sans existence :

Elle se mit à œuvrer sur sa propre matière dans le vide, ignorante de la Vérité. Elle consista en une fiction, élaborant artificiellement, grâce à la puissance, une alternative à la Vérité. Or, ce n'était pas une dégradation pour lui, l'Inappréhendable inconcevable. Car elle n'était rien cette perturbation, non plus que l'oubli, non plus que la fabrication mensongère. En revanche, la Vérité est inaltérable en sa stabilité, imperturbable, et sans artifice. C'est pourquoi, il vous faut mépriser l'Erreur ! Tel est (son) mode : être sans racine. Elle consista en un brouillard à l'égard du Père, subsistant en élaborant des œuvres, oubliés et angoisses, afin de leurrer au moyen de ces choses ceux du milieu et de les réduire en captivité<sup>8</sup>. (17.15–35)

Parmi les arguments utilisés pour convaincre ses destinataires, l'auteur présente une analogie, celle des songes et des cauchemars dont on se rend compte au réveil que ce que l'on y a vu n'existe tout simplement pas

<sup>7</sup> C'est la version du codex I de Nag Hammadi qui est citée dans cet article. Il existe une autre version copte, extrêmement fragmentaire, dans le codex XII de Nag Hammadi (NHC XII,2). La traduction donnée dans cet article est celle de A. Pasquier 2007, 55–81.

<sup>8</sup> Le « milieu » indique sans doute la situation de ceux qui ont à choisir entre la Vérité et l'Erreur. Dans les milieux philosophiques, le milieu désigne la situation de l'âme. En revanche l'Erreur personnifiée réfère à un autre groupe, sans le nommer explicitement. Elle signifie un durcissement, un refus de la Vérité de la part de certains.

(28.32–30.12). Ce ne sont que des apparitions (*phantasia*) nocturnes. Pourtant, l'auteur ne rejette pas l'ensemble du texte biblique, mais son sens littéral, il demande ainsi à ses destinataires :

Veillez à comprendre spirituellement, – vous, les fils de la compréhension spirituelle – ce qu'est le sabbat ... Parlez donc de l'intérieur, vous qui êtes le Jour parfait. (32-37–39, 32–33)

Son exégèse est sélective, de certaines parties faisant problème, il donne une interprétation inversée<sup>9</sup>, d'autres sont allégorisées. L'intention générale est cependant polémique : le véritable sens est enfoui dans l'obscurité du texte, une obscurité négative produite alors que le Père n'avait pas encore été révélé par le Fils. Ce sens, seul le Fils peut le révéler sur la croix. C'est dans ce cadre exégétique que l'on peut interpréter le thème philosophique du double discours, intérieur et proféré. Afin de mieux saisir la fonction de ce thème dans l'*Évangile de la Vérité* et son lien avec l'interprétation, il nous faut faire un détour et passer par Philon d'Alexandrie et sa théorie exégétique.

#### 1. DISCOURS MENTAL ET DISCOURS PROFÉRÉ CHEZ PHILON D'ALEXANDRIE

Bien que l'on puisse trouver précédemment ce thème chez Platon et Aristote, la terminologie spécifique, c'est-à-dire les occurrences les plus anciennes de l'expression *logos endiathetos*, se distinguant du *logos prophorikos*, datent du I<sup>er</sup> siècle de notre ère<sup>10</sup>. Une étude approfondie sur le thème du langage mental et proféré, celle de Claude Panaccio, met bien en lumière les contextes dans lesquels se développe ce thème qui devient, à partir du I<sup>er</sup> siècle de notre ère, une idée commune de la philosophie grecque<sup>11</sup>. La majorité des occurrences connues, souvent d'inspiration platonicienne, conduisent directement ou indirectement soit vers Alexandrie, soit l'Asie mineure. Cette terminologie est bien présente chez Philon d'Alexandrie et

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<sup>9</sup> Par exemple, l'arbre du paradis est la figure du bois sur lequel Jésus fut cloué. La croix ne donne pas la mort, contrairement à l'arbre paradisiaque mais, parce que Jésus meurt, il donne la vie. Et il devient fruit de la connaissance du Père pour tous ceux qui en ont mangé (18.21–31).

<sup>10</sup> Platon, *Phileb.* 39A; *Theaet.* 189E5; Aristote, *Cat.* 6 4B34; *An. post.* 1.10 76B24.

<sup>11</sup> Voir Panaccio 1999. Aussi Pohlenz 1965, 79–86; Chiesa 1991, 301–321; et 1992, 15–30; Fortis 1996, 75–101. Pour cette doctrine dans le christianisme ancien, Mühl 1962. La question de savoir si les Stoïciens ont été les premiers à la formuler est contestée.

on en trouve une mention unique à la même époque chez un certain Héraclite, un allégoriste tout comme Philon<sup>12</sup>. Le fait que les deux auteurs anciens soient des allégoristes révèle d'emblée le principal contexte d'apparition. Alors que peu à peu, dans les écoles philosophiques des II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècles, ces occurrences ne concernent plus nécessairement l'exégèse allégorique, chez les premiers écrivains chrétiens en revanche, on y reste attaché.

Au I<sup>er</sup> siècle, en effet, le couple verbe intérieur et verbe extérieur entre dans le vocabulaire courant de l'exégèse allégorique, que celle-ci porte sur Homère, Hésiode, les mythes grecs ou encore sur la Bible. Pour plusieurs penseurs, il s'agit de découvrir les significations philosophiques, spirituelles et théologiques. Cette méthode d'exégèse partait du principe que les mythes rapportés par les poètes contenaient des vérités rationnelles, universellement valables, cachées sous l'étrangeté du texte. Philon, tout comme plus tard les écrivains chrétiens, reprend cette idée en l'appliquant à la Bible qui selon lui raconte souvent en termes obscurs des mystères cachés. Pour justifier le recours à l'allégorie, il compare la découverte de l'intelligence de l'Écriture à une initiation sacrée (*Mos.* 1.11). Philon décrit la découverte progressive de l'Écriture sur le modèle des démarches de l'initié aux cultes grecs des mystères. Le sens allégorique est réservé aux voyants qui, à l'instar d'Israël, sont capables de contempler les réalités incorporelles et préfèrent l'intelligible au sensible<sup>13</sup>.

On voit ainsi apparaître une ambivalence à propos de cette notion du double discours : la théorie de l'esprit se transforme en un thème religieux et même métaphysique, grâce à l'interprétation allégorique. Si en effet le sens spirituel est réservé aux voyants, seuls capables de contempler l'intelligible, c'est que l'intellect en eux se situe au-delà de la simple raison humaine. Il se trouve dans la fine pointe de l'âme, dans l'œil de l'âme, le domaine intérieur de l'esprit humain qui est le point de rencontre où le *Logos* divin se manifeste. Car le sens spirituel est le *Logos* de Dieu lui-même qui se révèle au cœur de l'homme, la Parole de Dieu identifiée à l'ordre transcendant de l'univers intelligible. Cependant, ce *Logos* divin est également l'ordre

<sup>12</sup> Un seul ouvrage est attribué à cet Héraclite, les *Allégories d'Homère*, dont le texte est presque intégralement conservé : Buffière 1962, chap. 72. Selon Philon, le discours intérieur a une voix qui lui est spécifique, il ne s'exprime pas par des noms et des verbes mais par le processus délibératif propre à l'intellect. Philon utilise également les termes *nous* et *dianoia* pour indiquer ce type de discours.

<sup>13</sup> Sur le couple intérieur et extérieur, voir par exemple *Abr.* 83 ; *Spec.* 4.69. Dans *Migr.* 72-85, Philon conteste d'une part les allégoristes qui méprisent la lettre de la Loi et n'en donnent que des interprétations figuratives et d'autre part les sophistes dont le langage est coupé de toute inspiration spirituelle et divine.



immanent dans le monde sensible. On remonte ainsi du *logos prophorikos* au *logos endiathetos*, du manifesté au caché, du sens littéral au sens spirituel.

## 2. LA PAROLE CACHÉE ET PROFÉRÉE DANS L'ÉVANGILE DE LA VÉRITÉ

À la suite de Philon, les premiers écrivains chrétiens, tels Théophile d'Antioche, Justin ou encore Hippolyte de Rome, exploitèrent ce thème philosophique en contexte théologique : ils projetèrent en Dieu la double forme de discours. C'est également ainsi que l'*Évangile de la Vérité* présente la révélation du Fils, d'abord immanent dans le Père. Dans l'exorde, il est en effet envisagé comme Pensée formée par l'Intellect divin en son for intérieur, c'est-à-dire comme Parole intérieure avant d'être proférée en vue du salut (16.31–17.1). Puis, le thème est explicité un peu plus loin :

Alors qu'ils (les fils du Père) constituaient encore les profondeurs de sa Pensée, la Parole proférée les a révélés. Or une Intelligence qui s'exprime, qui est Parole et grâce silencieuse, se nomme : 'Pensée', puisqu'ils étaient à l'intérieur sans être révélés. Elle en vint donc à être proférée, lorsqu'il plût à la volonté de celui qui l'a voulu. (37.7–18)

Les termes utilisés rappellent ceux de Platon dans le *Sophiste* au cours d'une discussion à propos de la vérité ou de la fausseté des opinions, de l'imagination (*phantasia*) et de la pensée (*dianoia*). La pensée y est conçue de manière quasiment identique au processus du langage extérieur :

« Donc, pensée et discours, c'est la même chose, sauf que c'est le dialogue intérieur (*entos dialogos*) et silencieux de l'âme avec elle-même que nous avons appelé de ce nom de pensée »<sup>14</sup>. (Soph. 263E)

L'*Évangile de la Vérité* s'inscrit ainsi dans un courant de la spéculation chrétienne, aux II<sup>e</sup> et III<sup>e</sup> siècles, qui utilise ce vocabulaire philosophique afin de trouver dans le rapport intime de l'esprit à sa propre parole intérieure un modèle à dimension humaine de la manifestation de Dieu dans l'âme :

Lorsqu'il parut, les instruisant sur le Père inappréhendable, qu'il leur eut insufflé le contenu de la pensée, accomplissant sa volonté, et que beaucoup furent illuminés, ils se retournèrent vers lui ... c'est au surplus en des termes nouveaux qu'il parle, puisqu'il parle de ce qui est dans le cœur du Père, pour proférer la parole sans déficience. (30.31–31.1; 31.9–12)

<sup>14</sup> Trad. Diès 1992, 223. Sur ce passage et sur une doctrine apparentée chez Aristote, voir Panaccio 1999, 30–41.

Le *Logos* doit se révéler afin de faire connaître le Père, car «il signifie la découverte pour ceux qui sont à sa recherche» (17.3–4). Sans lui, la recherche elle-même produit un surplus d'ignorance, ainsi qu'on l'a vu plus haut (17.4–15). Il doit donc aussi lui-même ouvrir les Écritures. Il est décrit comme un Livre spirituel, d'abord inscrit dans l'Intelligence du Père, puis se révélant comme messager de la Pensée, l'Erreur en étant la figure inversée. Tel est le :

Livre vivant des vivants qui est écrit dans la Pensée et dans l'Intelligence [du P]ère. Or dès avant la fon[da]tion du Tout, c'est dans ce qu'il y a d'incompréhensible en lui qu'est inscrit ce (livre) que nul n'est en mesure de porter – car à qui le portera il est réservé d'être mis à mort –, si bien qu'aucun de ceux qui ont eu foi dans le salut n'aurait pu apparaître si le Livre n'avait paru au grand jour. C'est pourquoi, le compatissant, Jésus le fidèle, supporta avec patience les tourments au point de porter ce même Livre, car il sait que sa mort est source de vie pour beaucoup. (19.35–20.14)

L'auteur utilise la métaphore du Testament pour évoquer ce Livre qui ne peut être ouvert que s'il y a mort du testateur. Le Livre vivant des vivants correspond au sens voilé dans les Écritures, c'est-à-dire au *Logos* lui-même dont les croyants sont les membres. La manifestation du *Logos* signifie leur manifestation à eux, d'où son nom de Sauveur. Lors de l'ouverture du Livre, eux-mêmes se découvrent en lui : ils sont décrits comme des lettres spirituelles, jusqu'alors cachées dans le texte biblique. Mais le *Logos* est aussi celui qui *lit* le sens intérieur caché sous la lettre :

S'étant engagé dans les voies stériles, inspirés par la crainte, il se fit un chemin à travers celles qui sont «nues» du fait de l'oubli, car il est connaissance et perfection, lisant à haute voix ce qui est en [elles] [...] instruire ceux qui doivent être instruits. Or, ceux qui doivent être instruits sont les vivants inscrits dans le Livre des vivants. C'est sur eux-mêmes qu'ils s'instruisent. (20.34–21.5)

La découverte du sens intérieur procure le salut, grâce à cette Parole performative qui fait ce qu'elle dit. À cette Parole ou ce Livre intérieur, dont les croyants sont les lettres, est opposée une écriture qui provoque l'oubli, sans doute sous l'influence du *Phèdre* selon lequel l'écriture ne produit dans les âmes que l'oubli de ce qu'elles savent (*Phaedr.* 274–276). Les âmes sont sauvées de l'oubli (*lēthē*) par la Vérité (*alētheia*) :

Telle est la connaissance du Livre vivant qu'il a divulguée aux éons, jusqu'à la dernière de se[s] [let]tres. Celui-ci ne se présente pas comme s'il s'agissait d'éléments vocaliques pas plus que ce ne sont des consonnes muettes, pour que quelqu'un les lise et se perde en réflexions stériles. Mais, bien plutôt, ce sont des lettres de Vérité ... (22.38–23.9)

## 3. ÉT LE VERBE S' EST FAIT PAPIER

Chez Philon, la dualité du discours humain est à l'image de la dualité de la Raison divine, à la fois ordre transcendant dans l'univers intelligible et ordre immanent dans le monde sensible. Et s'il a recours à l'exégèse allégorique, il ne néglige pas pour autant l'exégèse littérale. À peu près tous les textes, selon lui, peuvent recevoir à la fois une exégèse littérale et une exégèse allégorique. Comme on l'a vu, l'exégète remonte du *logos prophorikos* au *logos endiathetos*. Cette double exégèse est la règle dans les *Questions sur la Genèse (QG)* et sur *l'Exode (QE)*, bien qu'il existe des cas où le passage à l'interprétation allégorique s'avère nécessaire, là où le sens littéral est impossible. Seulement dans ce cas doit-on passer directement à l'allégorie<sup>15</sup>.

En revanche, dans *l'Évangile de la Vérité*, « la méconnaissance du Père se fit perturbation et angoisse. Puis la perturbation se figea à la manière d'un brouillard au point que nul ne put voir. De ce fait, l'Erreur tira sa puissance » (17.10–15). L'erreur consiste à penser que l'on peut trouver Dieu par soi-même, sans lui. La recherche humaine, sans la grâce, est condamnée, l'esprit ne produisant qu'une idole, une fiction mensongère. Il y a défiguration et oubli de soi. Car l'âme produit par la faculté d'imagination (*phantasia*) une image d'elle-même sans réalité, une image en laquelle elle finit par s'absorber : l'artifice engendre la torpeur, le sommeil, et l'âme s'absorbe au point d'être totalement impliquée. Dans son traité *Des rêves*, Aristote s'interroge sur la nature des images (*phantasmata*) qui se produisent pendant le sommeil, des hallucinations inquiétantes voire effrayantes, qui captivent et font croire à l'existence de ce que l'on y voit, chez un dormeur qui a même oublié qu'il dormait. La question est le pouvoir sur l'esprit des images phantasmatiques<sup>16</sup>.

C'est ainsi que dans *l'Évangile de la Vérité*, l'Erreur devient d'autant plus puissante qu'elle peut se dire et s'écrire. Comme le rappelle Aristote, à propos de cet animal imaginaire qu'est le bouc-cerf, la représentation dans l'esprit (*eidōlon*) d'un être fictif peut donner lieu à une figuration, une image, ou encore être mise en discours. On peut donc poser des affirmations à propos d'un être parfaitement inexistant (*An. post.* 2.7 92B4–8).

Contrairement à Philon pour qui la lettre de l'Écriture est comme un miroir reflétant le sens intérieur, dans *l'Évangile de la Vérité*, cette « lettre » en bloque l'accès. C'est pourquoi, le *Logos* doit lire ce qui est à l'intérieur et en

<sup>15</sup> Voir Pépin 1987, 7–40.

<sup>16</sup> Voir par exemple, *Somn.* 2 460B20–22; 3 461A20–23; 3 461B29; 3 462A3–8.

faire découvrir le sens. Car ce ne sont pas seulement quelques passages qui semblent à l'auteur indignes ou obscurs, ou encore d'apparence mythique, mais la vision d'ensemble de Dieu lui paraît inadéquate, un Dieu de crainte alors que le Dieu véritable est miséricordieux<sup>17</sup>. Les termes utilisés par lui pour décrire l'Erreur évoquent une chute du langage dans la sophistique.

À l'inverse, il existe une Parole reflétant la Pensée du Père. Le sens spirituel est ainsi le *Logos* de Dieu lui-même qui se révèle au cœur de l'homme « puisqu'il parle de ce qui est dans le cœur du Père, pour proférer la parole sans déficience » (31.9–12). Bien qu'elle doive nécessairement se révéler au dehors en vue de la prédication, cette Parole est avant tout proférée intérieurement : « la Parole qui est dans le cœur de ceux qui la profèrent » (26.5–6). En ce sens, la parole correspond au processus mental de l'intellect. L'*Évangile de la Vérité* annonce à sa manière le *verbum cordis* d'Augustin (*De Trinitate* 15.10.17–18). Celui-ci croit que l'homme parle en lui-même dans le fond de son cœur. Autrement dit, il parle lorsqu'il pense. Cette parole dans le cœur, indépendante de toute langue de communication, coïncide avec le savoir lui-même, car elle est à la fois vision et parole intérieure<sup>18</sup>. C'est ce que souhaite à ses destinataires l'auteur de l'*Évangile de la Vérité* : « Parlez donc de l'intérieur, vous qui êtes le Jour parfait » (32.32–33).

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<sup>17</sup> Cf. sur cette vision légaliste de l'Erreur, Pasquier 2008, 305–315.

<sup>18</sup> Fortis 1996, 80.

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## REMARQUES SUR LA COHÉRENCE DES *EXTRAITS DE THÉODOTE*

Jean-Daniel Dubois

L'interprétation du gnosticisme valentinien dépend beaucoup de la manière dont on explique les *Extraits de Théodote* rassemblés par Clément d'Alexandrie. Or, nous sommes entrés, depuis plusieurs dizaines d'années maintenant, dans une ère de recherches sur les valentiniens qui tient compte en même temps des notices hérésiologiques des Pères de l'Église et de la nouvelle documentation directe issue des gnostiques valentiniens dans la collection des textes gnostiques coptes de Nag Hammadi. Il nous paraît donc important de revenir sur les hypothèses de nos prédécesseurs fondées souvent sur la lecture des seuls documents hérésiologiques, et particulièrement sur le témoignage du *Contre les hérésies* de l'évêque Irénée de Lyon, vers la fin du second siècle de notre ère. L'ouvrage magistral de François Sagnard, *La Gnose valentinienne et le témoignage de saint Irénée*<sup>1</sup>, toujours utile, illustre bien le type de recherches menées avant les découvertes de Nag Hammadi, alors que ce même auteur a édité à peu près en même temps les *Extraits* du valentinien Théodote dans la collection des « Sources chrétiennes »<sup>2</sup>. Si l'on compare l'ensemble de ces travaux aux pages récentes de l'ouvrage d'Einar Thomassen, *The Spiritual Seed*<sup>3</sup>, étude tout aussi magistrale portant sur l'ensemble de la documentation valentinienne accessible aujourd'hui, on mesure aisément le chemin parcouru et les questions complexes nouvelles que soulève l'abondance des témoignages coptes sur la gnose valentinienne et la difficulté relative pour en donner une interprétation cohérente malgré les divergences entre les sources diverses.

Nous nous proposons de revenir sur les *Extraits de Théodote*, car il s'est établi une sorte d'opinion commune à leur propos, largement répandue depuis plus d'un siècle, à une époque où l'on ne connaissait pas encore les documents de Nag Hammadi. Les ouvrages de F. Sagnard et même d'E. Thomassen la vulgarisent tous les deux. Mais peut-on continuer de

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<sup>1</sup> Sagnard 1947. Pour Théodote, cf. particulièrement les pp. 521–561.

<sup>2</sup> Sagnard 1948. Sauf indications contraires, nous citerons dorénavant la traduction française de cet ouvrage.

<sup>3</sup> Thomassen 2006. Pour Théodote, cf. particulièrement les pp. 29–38 (chap. 3: La doctrine de Théodote) et pp. 62–72 (chap. 7: La sotériologie des *Extraits* 43.2 à 65).

répéter les hypothèses de lecture des *Extraits de Théodote* et de faire comme si les découvertes des documents de Nag Hammadi n'avaient pas eu lieu? Nous partirons de ces hypothèses afin de proposer une lecture des *Extraits de Théodote* si on ne les enferme pas dans une lecture hérésiologique. Il nous est très agréable de proposer ces quelques remarques sur l'œuvre de Théodote pour honorer un collègue et un ami qui a consacré tant d'efforts, et depuis si longtemps, à faire découvrir le contenu et l'importance des textes coptes de Nag Hammadi.

### 1. LA POSITION DE F. SAGNARD

On peut trouver l'opinion de F. Sagnard dans l'introduction au volume des *Extraits de Théodote* dans la collection des « Sources chrétiennes » ainsi que dans l'ouvrage sur la gnose indiqué plus haut, avec les pages consacrées à l'œuvre de Théodote<sup>4</sup>. F. Sagnard reprend essentiellement les conclusions d'auteurs antérieurs comme Georg Henrici<sup>5</sup>, et Otto Dibelius<sup>6</sup> qui avaient repéré le lien d'une partie des *Extraits* avec le témoignage d'Irénée, ou encore un autre éditeur des *Extraits*, Robert P. Casey<sup>7</sup>. La partie la plus positive de ces travaux consiste en un repérage systématique des indices d'énonciation dans les extraits en question. En conséquence, tout le monde s'accorde à dire aujourd'hui que cet ensemble d'extraits ne provient pas de la même main valentinienne; il pourrait s'agir d'ouvrages différents ainsi que de commentaires propres de Clément d'Alexandrie (surtout dans la première partie, 4–5; 8–9; 10–15; 18–20; 27). Seuls cinq des extraits sont attribués à Théodote lui-même (22.7; 26.1; 30.1; 32.2; 35.1) et six fois Clément utilise la formule « il dit » (1.1; 22.1; 25.1; 38.2; 41.1; 67.1). Par ailleurs, Clément renvoie aux valentiniens en général, à « ceux des valentiniens » ou plus globalement à leur groupe avec l'expression « ils disent ». Il se pose donc un problème d'interprétation des *Extraits* suivant que l'on attribue tel extrait à Théodote ou à un autre valentinien.

De plus, on s'accorde habituellement à classer l'ensemble des *Extraits* en quatre groupes: A, avec les extraits 1–28; B, avec 29–43.1; C, avec 43.2–65 et D, avec les derniers 66–86. Le groupe C occupe une place à part dans ce lot puisqu'il ne comporte pas de citations explicites et qu'il pourrait

<sup>4</sup> Sagnard 1947, 521–561.

<sup>5</sup> Henrici 1871, 92.

<sup>6</sup> Dibelius 1908, 230–247.

<sup>7</sup> Casey 1934.

provenir d'une source unique proche du témoignage d'Irénée, *Haer.* 1.4.5–7.1 sur la doctrine de Ptolémée. F. Sagnard suggère que Clément aurait pu, en rassemblant ces extraits, mêler des citations de Théodote à des extraits d'autres œuvres valentiniennes<sup>8</sup>. Une présentation détaillée des thèmes traités dans l'un ou l'autre des groupes d'extraits aboutit pourtant à souligner « le solide fondement commun de ces quatre sections »<sup>9</sup>, malgré les différences relevées ici et là. À l'arrière-plan de la position de F. Sagnard repose l'idée aussi communément admise, sur la base du témoignage de l'*Elenchos*, que Ptolémée appartiendrait à l'école occidentale du valentinisme alors que Théodote serait un membre de l'école orientale. Einar Thomassen adopte avec nuance cette position et commente, dans un premier temps, surtout des passages tirés du premier groupe d'extraits, peu suspects d'être proches des positions de l'école de Ptolémée. Dans son ouvrage sur la gnose, F. Sagnard n'hésitait pas à partir de la divergence entre les deux courants occidental et oriental pour interpréter les *Extraits* et montrer que les deux écoles partagent pourtant une « doctrine fondamentale commune »<sup>10</sup>. Il semblerait donc difficile de faire coïncider les deux sortes de conceptions de la christologie ou de l'anthropologie dans ces divers groupes d'extraits, même si F. Sagnard pense que le maître valentinien a su harmoniser des tendances qui divergeront par la suite. La cohérence des *Extraits* demeure au cœur de nombreux commentaires depuis F. Sagnard, dont ceux d'E. Pagels<sup>11</sup> et de l'un de ses critiques, J. McCue<sup>12</sup>. Puisque les extraits du groupe « C » semblent les plus étrangers au reste des autres extraits, commençons par évoquer ceux-là.

## 2. LES *EXTRAITS* 43.2–65 OU GROUPE « C »

La proximité de ces extraits avec l'œuvre d'Irénée et avec des sources potentiellement ptoléméennes les place dans une position particulière par rapport aux autres. On y trouve des indications sur la descente du Sauveur dans la cadre de la cosmogonie, sur les rapports du Sauveur avec la Sagesse et le démiurge (*Extraits* 43–49) et en conséquence la présentation des trois sortes de catégories anthropologiques (50–57), hylique, psychique

<sup>8</sup> Sagnard 1948, 28.

<sup>9</sup> Sagnard 1948, 48.

<sup>10</sup> Sagnard 1947, 525.

<sup>11</sup> Pagels 1974.

<sup>12</sup> McCue 1980.



et pneumatique, avec ce qu'on peut en déduire pour la christologie (58–62) et l'eschatologie (63–65). Si l'on retient d'habitude la proximité de ces extraits avec l'œuvre d'Irénée, c'est principalement à cause d'extraits comme celui qui porte sur le sort des trois catégories (56.3) :

Ainsi donc l'élément pneumatique est sauvé par nature ; le psychique, doué de libre arbitre, a la propriété d'aller à la foi et à l'incorruptibilité, ou à l'incroyance et à la corruption, selon son propre choix ; quant à l'hylique, il est perdu par nature.

Sans s'en rendre compte, l'éditeur de ces lignes intitule les extraits 56.3 et 57 « Le sort des trois races », ou l'extrait 54 « Les trois races », comme s'il fallait faire une lecture « raciste » de ces trois catégories et les interpréter à partir de la lecture que propose Irénée de la doctrine valentiniennne. En effet, il n'est pas question en 56.3 du terme que l'on traduit malheureusement par « race » (en grec *genos*), mais d'« élément », un adjectif neutre substantivé accompagné de l'article neutre (par ex. *to pneumatikon*). Et dans l'extrait 54, il n'est pas non plus question de « race » mais de « nature » (*physis*), alors que l'extrait 50 commente la création de l'homme selon Genèse 1,26 et 2,7 avec des « parties » ou des « portions » (*meros*).

L'équivalent irénéen de ces extraits se trouve dans les chapitres 6 et 7 de la « Grande Notice » sur les gnostiques valentiniens, disciples de Ptolémée. En 6.1, Irénée parle d'éléments ; la traduction latine d'Irénée reste volontairement imprécise (*Cum sint igitur sunt tria*, « Il existe donc, disent-ils, trois éléments ») bien que le grec comporte des adjectifs neutres. En 7.1 il est question de « semences » et en 7.5 selon les valentiniens, le sort des trois « races » (à nouveau *genos* en grec, traduit cette fois en latin par *genus*) peut être résumé ainsi :

Ils posent comme fondement trois races (*genos/genus*) d'hommes : pneumatique, psychique et choïque, selon ce que furent Caïn, Abel et Seth, car, à partir de ces derniers, ils veulent établir l'existence de trois natures (*physis/natura*) non plus dans un seul individu mais dans l'ensemble de la race humaine. L'élément choïque ira à la corruption. L'élément psychique, s'il choisit le meilleur, aura son repos dans le lieu de l'Intermédiaire ; mais s'il choisit le pire, il ira retrouver, lui aussi, ce à quoi il se sera rendu semblable. Quant aux éléments pneumatiques ... ils seront donnés à titre d'épouses aux Anges du Sauveur, cependant que leurs âmes iront de toute nécessité, dans l'Intermédiaire, prendre leur repos avec le Démiurge<sup>13</sup> ...

Une présentation analogue se trouve aussi en Irénée en 1.6.1 :

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<sup>13</sup> Nous citons la traduction d'A. Rousseau et de L. Doutreleau dans la collection des Sources chrétiennes (1979, 111). Nous citerons dorénavant cette traduction.

Il existe, disent-ils, trois éléments: l'un, hylique, qu'ils appellent aussi de «gauche», périra inéluctablement, incapable qu'il est de recevoir aucun souffle d'incorruptibilité; l'autre psychique, qu'ils nomment aussi «de droite», tenant le milieu entre le pneumatique et l'hylique, ira du côté où il aura penché; quant à l'élément pneumatique, il a été envoyé afin que conjoint au «psychique», il reçoive ici-bas sa «formation» étant instruit avec ce psychique<sup>14</sup> ...

Selon Irénée, les gnostiques se considèrent comme les pneumatiques «qui possèdent la gnose parfaite», alors que les psychiques correspondent aux membres de l'Église d'Irénée et n'ont pas la gnose parfaite. Ceux-ci «sont affermis par le moyen des œuvres et de la foi nue» (6.2). En conséquence, une bonne conduite leur est nécessaire s'ils veulent accéder au salut. Les pneumatiques, en revanche, «du fait de leur nature pneumatique, seront absolument et de toute façon sauvés» (6.2). «Aussi bien les plus 'parfaits' d'entre eux commettent-ils impudemment toutes les actions défendues» (6.3). L'argumentation d'Irénée est simple: pour lui, les pneumatiques n'ont pas de sens moral, alors que les psychiques sont destinés à exercer leur libre arbitre pour accéder au salut. De plus, en présentant le salut des pneumatiques comme automatique, il confirme cette présentation des trois catégories sans lien entre elles; on ne peut pas passer d'une catégorie à une autre.

### 3. ÊTRE SAUVÉ PAR NATURE

Si l'on revient à la formulation de l'*Extrait* 56.3 citée plus haut, il faut aborder l'expression problématique qui désigne le sort de l'être pneumatique et qui prête à malentendu: «sauvé par nature». Dans son commentaire des fragments conservés de Valentin, Christoph Marksches a relevé plusieurs fois qu'on ne peut pas interpréter ce qui reste de Valentin à partir de la thèse classique de l'interprétation du valentinisme sur la doctrine des classes d'êtres humains<sup>15</sup>. Avant lui, Barbara Aland avait aussi essayé de montrer que la doctrine d'Héracléon ne cadrerait pas avec une interprétation pré-destinationniste du valentinisme qui valoriserait les trois catégories d'êtres humains<sup>16</sup>. Winrich A. Löhr a aussi abandonné une interprétation déterministe de la sotériologie valentinienne en prétendant qu'elle ressort d'une

<sup>14</sup> Rousseau et Doutreleau 1979, 91.

<sup>15</sup> Marksches 1992, 58, 81, 122, 128, 147-148.

<sup>16</sup> Aland 1977.

approche hérésiologique de la gnose<sup>17</sup>. Il nous semble quant à nous qu'il faut abandonner définitivement une lecture fixiste des *Extraits de Théodote* et du valentinisme en général tout en reconnaissant que la terminologie valentinienne elle-même et les sources directes du valentinisme orientent l'interprétation dans une autre direction.

La terminologie, utilisée par les valentiniens, présente la gnose comme l'accès à la connaissance ayant pour fondement une semence qu'il faut faire fructifier. Cette métaphore horticole implique un développement de la semence pour arriver jusqu'à la « gnose parfaite »<sup>18</sup>. Dans *Haer.* 1.6.1, Irénée précise que les pneumatiques coexistent avec les psychiques et qu'ils reçoivent tous un enseignement et une formation (cf. aussi 1.7.5 et *Extrait* 57). La consommation finale aura lieu quand tout l'élément pneumatique aura été rendu parfait, et que tous les pneumatiques auront été initiés aux mystères d'Achamoth. D'autre part, on peut se demander aussi comment il faut comprendre la triade de ces éléments s'ils sont qualifiés de « parts ». Dans sa contribution sur les *Extraits de Théodote*, James McCue envisage que certains êtres humains possèderaient les trois éléments, pneumatique, psychique et hylique; mais les psychiques ne disposeraient que des éléments hylique et psychique, alors que les hyliques n'auraient droit qu'à une part hylique<sup>19</sup>. Du point de vue du sens commun, nous ne savons pas comment J. McCue peut imaginer des êtres humains qui ne possèderaient pas d'âme. L'idée que des êtres ne possèderaient que l'un ou l'autre de ces éléments nous paraît tout aussi absurde. Il vaut donc mieux imaginer que tous les êtres humains possèdent les trois éléments, mais selon des proportions différentes<sup>20</sup>. De même, tous les êtres humains sont doués de libre arbitre, mais tous n'en font pas un tel usage que cela les conduise à mener une vie conforme à la voie pneumatique.

#### 4. LE POINT DE VUE DE CLÉMENT D'ALEXANDRIE

Comme Irénée, Clément d'Alexandrie reproche aux valentiniens leur conception d'être « sauvés par nature » :

Dans ces conditions les commandements sont superflus ... Mais si, au contraire, ils déclarent nécessaire la venue du Seigneur, c'en est fait pour eux de

<sup>17</sup> Löhr 1992.

<sup>18</sup> Nous sommes reconnaissant envers Alain Le Boulluec d'avoir attiré notre attention sur cette dimension.

<sup>19</sup> McCue 1980, 413.

<sup>20</sup> Une position analogue a été défendue par Ismo Dunderberg (2008, 69).

privilèges de la nature, et les élus sont sauvés par l'étude, la purification, la pratique des œuvres bonnes, et non par nature.

Ainsi les pneumatiques n'auraient pas besoin de conduire leur vie de manière éthique s'ils se déclarent sauvés par nature ; mais s'ils comptent sur la venue du Sauveur qui vient leur révéler la connaissance, ils peuvent progresser pour arriver jusqu'à la pratique parfaite des commandements du Logos (*Strom.* 5.1.3.3–4)<sup>21</sup>.

Il est vrai que les valentiniens envisagent l'accès au salut grâce à la parole révélatrice du Sauveur. Malgré cette critique envers les valentiniens, la position de Clément d'Alexandrie sur la condition du véritable gnostique nous paraît cependant très proche de ce que pouvaient penser les valentiniens des pneumatiques. Dans le même *Stromate* 5.1.2.5–6, on retrouve, en effet, la distinction entre psychique et pneumatique avec l'opposition entre « foi commune » et « foi supérieure » :

La foi commune est à la base comme le fondement ... L'autre, la foi supérieure, édifiée sur la première, se perfectionne en même temps que le croyant, et c'est avec elle que, provenant de l'étude, elle atteint son achèvement, au point d'accomplir les commandements du Logos.

Un peu plus loin en 5.1.7.2, Clément s'appuie sur une citation d'Éphésiens 2,5 pour se distinguer de la position des valentiniens : « Nous sommes sauvés par grâce, mais non sans les œuvres bonnes : naturellement aptes au bien, il nous faut tendre vers lui avec effort<sup>22</sup> ».

Ailleurs encore, Clément explicite ce que représente cette aptitude de l'homme au bien et donc ce qui peut être mis sous le terme de « nature » :

Dieu veut que nous soyons sauvés par nous-mêmes. L'âme a donc pour nature de s'élaner à partir d'elle-même. De plus, comme nous sommes doués de raison et que la philosophie est affaire de raison, nous avons quelque affinité avec elle ; l'aptitude est un mouvement vers la vertu. (3) Tous les hommes, je l'ai dit, sont nés pour acquérir la vertu, et ils s'en approchent plus ou moins par l'étude et par l'ascèse. C'est pourquoi, si les uns ont été capables de parvenir à la vertu parfaite, d'autres y sont arrivés jusqu'à un certain point et d'autres encore, par négligence, ont abouti à son contraire, bien qu'ils aient été par ailleurs dotés d'une bonne nature. (4) À plus forte raison, la connaissance, qui l'emporte en grandeur et en vérité sur tous les savoirs, est très difficile à acquérir et elle réclame un effort important<sup>23</sup>.

(*Strom.* 6.11.97.2–4)

<sup>21</sup> Le Boulluc 1981, 29.

<sup>22</sup> Sagnard 1948, 35.

<sup>23</sup> Descourtieux 1999, 253–255.

On repère ici une façon de décrire la vie éthique selon les trois catégories anthropologiques des valentiniens.

Dans un autre contexte, Clément précise à propos de la bienfaisance la disposition d'esprit qu'il faut avoir pour celui qui la pratique: «Quand il aura fait de la bienfaisance une habitude, il imitera la nature du bien, et cette disposition sera à la fois une nature et un exercice» (*Strom.* 4.22.138.3)<sup>24</sup>. Pour Clément l'exercice du vrai gnostique de conduire sa vie selon la nature du bien le pousse à prendre une disposition d'esprit qui devient à la longue une aptitude à faire le bien. En *Strom.* 6.9.74.1, Clément se rapproche des stoïciens en se distinguant des disciples de Platon, d'Aristote et de Pyrrhon qui prônaient «la mesure dans les passions» (*metriopatheia*, Platon, *Resp.* 4.423S; 4.431C): «Ainsi, il nous faut retirer au parfait gnostique toute passion de l'âme, car la connaissance produit une ascèse, et l'ascèse un état (*hexis*) ou une manière d'être (*diathesis*) et une telle disposition (*katastasis*) produit une absence de passions (*apatheia*) et non un sens de la mesure dans les passions; une absence de passion est en effet, le fruit d'une suppression totale du désir<sup>25</sup>». Cette conduite de la vie qui aboutit à l'absence de passions correspond exactement à ce que Théodote, de son côté, exprime de l'idéal baptismal du gnostique pour qui la passion du Sauveur lui permet d'être retiré de l'esclavage des passions (*Extrait* 76.1). Tout porte à croire que Clément explicite à sa manière ce que l'expression «sauvé par nature» pouvait vouloir dire pour un chrétien gnostique valentinien. Le salut gnostique ne dépend pas d'une ontologie particulière, mais d'une attitude d'esprit ou d'une disposition qui se conforme à la nature du bien; et à force d'exercice et d'ascèse, la recherche du bien devient une seconde nature, une aptitude au bien, qui peut amener le gnostique à rejoindre le cercle des pneumatiques. Mais il peut y avoir des parcours de vie très différents, certains arrivant à la connaissance parfaite, d'autres aboutissant à une connaissance partielle, d'autres enfin pouvant être rejetés par pure négligence (*Strom.* 6.11.97.3).

Le *Traité Tripartite* copte confirme cette orientation dans l'interprétation de l'éthique valentinienne. En effet, ce traité atteste d'une dizaine d'emplois du terme grec *diathesis* pour désigner les bonnes dispositions de l'âme en vue de la recherche du salut (120.7–8; 121.20; 130.26; cf. aussi 97.13); ce sont aussi les bonnes dispositions de l'Église des pneumatiques (59.2), les bonnes dispositions du Logos pour engendrer des êtres pneumatiques (63.34–35) ou

<sup>24</sup> van den Hoek et Mondésert 2001, 287.

<sup>25</sup> Descourtieux 1999, 211.

ses mauvaises dispositions, cause des choses qui n'existent pas (81.4). Ces dispositions du Logos sont aussi exprimées dans le *Traité Tripartite* avec le terme de *gnômē* quand il s'agit du sentiment divisé du Logos (106.23) ou de son sentiment désordonné (115.20). À l'inverse, la repentance du Logos le fait se tourner vers un bon sentiment et une autre pensée (81.18 et 23); c'est le bon sentiment des éons qui demandent au Père de l'aide pour leur frère (86.31), un sentiment issu de celui qui est (130.29), le bon sentiment des gnostiques qui cherchent le préexistant (83.10 et 13).

Si nous avons raison de considérer la perspective éthique des valentiniens comme étant une exhortation à adopter une bonne disposition et faire fructifier la vie de l'âme au milieu de deux extrêmes – la vie hylique selon un mode terrestre d'une part et la connaissance parfaite des gnostiques pneumatiques d'autre part (Irénee, *Contre les hérésies* 1.7.5) –, il ne faut pas non plus prendre la tripartition anthropologique des valentiniens pour trois catégories immuables et infranchissables. Dans ce cas, cette perspective a des conséquences pour la compréhension de la christologie valentinienne.

## 5. LA CHRISTOLOGIE VALENTINIENNE

C'est là qu'il faut revenir à l'examen de la notice de l'*Elenchos* (6.35.1–7) sur les dimensions psychique et pneumatique du corps du Sauveur, car F. Sagnard tenait à interpréter une partie des *Extraits de Théodote* à partir de l'opposition entre les deux écoles issues du valentinisme mentionnée par l'*Elenchos*<sup>26</sup>. C'est à la suite de la lecture du livre d'Aline Pourkier sur *L'Hérésologie chez Épiphane de Salamine*<sup>27</sup> que nous avons, pour la première fois en public<sup>28</sup> lors du colloque de Québec en 1993, émis un doute sur l'historicité de cette distinction entre les deux écoles du valentinisme. La distinction entre un courant occidental ou italique et un autre, oriental ou ionien représente un trait de l'hérésologie chrétienne, car elle est attestée déjà dans les présentations des successions de philosophes

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Kaestli 1980; Pagels 1980; Thomassen 2006, 39–45. On projette aussi souvent cette opposition entre les deux écoles dans un texte antérieur à l'*Elenchos*, le traité de Tertullien *Contre les Valentiniens* (*Val.* 4.1–3, et 11.2; éd. Fredouille 1981, 205–206 et 259). La collection rassemblée par Clément d'Alexandrie a dû être transmise à un moment où la notice de l'*Elenchos* pouvait être connue, puisque le manuscrit qui conserve ce qui nous reste de l'œuvre de Théodote rattache ce dernier à l'école orientale.

<sup>27</sup> Pourkier 1992, particulièrement p. 58 et note 29. Pour la présentation de Diogène, cf. Busine 2002, surtout pp. 53–54.

<sup>28</sup> Dubois 1995, 232.

dès le début du second siècle avant notre ère, avec Sotion d'Alexandrie (env. 200 BCE–170 BCE). Elle a été reprise notamment par Diogène Laërce, qui connaissait Sotion, dans ses *Vies, doctrines et sentences des philosophes illustres* à propos de la présentation des Sept Sages de la Grèce ancienne. Alors que l'auteur de l'*Elenchos* était préoccupé de rattacher les courants réfutés à des écoles de philosophie, il a très bien pu être intéressé par cette présentation stéréotypée qu'il est hasardeux de prendre pour une réalité historique. Plus les années passent, plus le doute s'installe dans la recherche sur cette présentation pseudo-historique des valentiniens selon l'*Elenchos* comme le montrent encore récemment les articles de J. Kalvesmaki<sup>29</sup> et de Clemens Scholten<sup>30</sup>. Du point de vue du contenu de la notice de l'*Elenchos* on remarquera aussi que l'on retient d'habitude que le corps du Sauveur serait pneumatique selon les orientaux alors qu'il serait de nature psychique pour les occidentaux. On déduit alors de cette distinction que le Sauveur serait venu sauver les psychiques selon les occidentaux, comme le spécifie Irénée en *Haer.* 1.6.1, alors que les orientaux penseraient que le Sauveur est venu sauver avant tout les pneumatiques, selon le témoignage du *Traité Tripartite* (122.17–19). Ces diverses affirmations nous paraissent partielles et partiales. Si le Sauveur est venu sauver les psychiques, cela ne veut pas dire que le salut des pneumatiques n'est pas possible (Irénée, *Haer.* 1.6–7). Et si pour les orientaux le corps du Sauveur est pneumatique, cela ne veut pas dire qu'il n'a pas de corps psychique (*Extraits* 1–2; 47.3; 59.3; 62.1–2; cf. aussi *Traité Tripartite* 115.29–31). La présentation de la notice de l'*Elenchos* est contradictoire, car elle affirme précisément que, pour les deux écoles, la partie pneumatique du Sauveur provient de la Sophia et que son corps psychique provient du démiurge.

Il faut donc déduire de toutes ces remarques que l'anthropologie valentinienne des *Extraits de Théodote* et leur christologie sont moins problématiques qu'on ne le pense habituellement. Avec une anthropologie qui souligne les trois composantes de tout être humain (*Extraits* 50–55), on peut retrouver comment Théodote applique cette compréhension des êtres humains à la figure du Sauveur. Selon les *Extraits* 59–60, on distingue clairement la dimension spirituelle du Sauveur qui revêt la semence spirituelle issue du Plérôme en vue de sa descente à travers les lieux du démiurge; puis, lors de l'incarnation, la figure de Jésus revêt le Christ, annoncé par les Prophètes et la Loi, image du Sauveur, et donc un Christ psychique. Mais cette

<sup>29</sup> Kalvesmaki 2008.

<sup>30</sup> Scholten 2011, particulièrement p. 155, n. 88.

dimension psychique du Sauveur était invisible. Il fallait donc que le Sauveur portât un corps sensible; c'est donc un corps de substance psychique qui fut tissé pour lui, selon une exégèse de Luc 1,35a et b, texte qui est précisément au cœur de la notice de l'*Elenchos* évoquée jusqu'à présent. Cette double dimension, pneumatique et psychique, du corps du Sauveur est manifestée par la référence au Christ qui croissait – c'est son corps psychique – et grandissait en sagesse – c'est sa dimension pneumatique, de Luc 2,20 et 52 (*Extrait* 61.2–3). À la Passion, l'écoulement de sang sur la croix (Jn 19,34) signifie l'écoulement des « substances mêlées de passions » hors de son corps psychique. Celui qui est transpercé est bien le Christ psychique dont la chair a été atteinte (*Extrait* 62.2). Si le corps souffre sur la croix, l'âme du Christ est déposée dans les mains du Père quand il expire. Et c'est la dimension pneumatique du Sauveur qui permet la remontée vers le Plérôme pour rejoindre la Mère dans l'Ogdoade avant d'entrer avec les semences spirituelles dans le Plérôme (*Extraits* 62.3–63).

## 6. POUR CONCLURE

Arrivé à ce point du parcours de notre recherche, il nous faut reprendre la question initiale de la cohérence des *Extraits*. Il nous semble que si l'on fait abstraction de ce rapprochement des *Extraits* du groupe « C » avec le témoignage d'Irénée ainsi que d'une interprétation partielle de la christologie valentinienne tirée de la notice de l'*Elenchos*, on peut concevoir que les relations des *Extraits* du groupe « C » avec le reste des *Extraits* sont plus fortes et explicites qu'on ne le reconnaît habituellement. Ceci ne veut pas dire qu'il faille gommer toutes les aspérités de quelques passages encore obscurs ou ambigus. On ne peut pas tout harmoniser. La collection des *Extraits* n'est qu'une collection de pièces éparses d'un puzzle dont on ne peut attendre qu'il retransmette toutes les dimensions de la doctrine valentinienne.

Prenons quelques exemples des *Extraits* pour montrer en quoi le groupe « C » des fragments conservés transmettent une doctrine assez bien représentée par les autres fragments. Sur le corps pneumatique du Sauveur, issu de « celle qui a enfanté » (58.1; 59.1; 41.2), l'*Extrait* 1 le désigne comme un élément « charnel » (*sarkion*), produit par Sophia (ou la « Femme d'en haut », 67; cf. 68 et 79) et représentant la semence spirituelle qui va produire les pneumatiques accompagnant le Sauveur dans sa descente (1.1; 31.1) et sa remontée vers le Plérôme (34.2; 26.3). Sa visibilité est manifestée par la Sagesse de Jésus et l'Église des semences supérieures (26.1). Quant au corps psychique, sensible (59.3–4) que le Sauveur revêt quand il arrive dans la



région du Lieu ou de la Médiété (59.2), c'est l'image du Sauveur, ou une image du Plérôme (32.2), manifestée dans la croissance du corps de Jésus (61.2), dans le flan d'où s'écoule le flux de sang (61.3), dans le corps qui souffre (61.3); c'est aussi celui qui est assis à côté du démiurge (62.1; cf. Ps 109,1) ou celui qui s'est mélangé aux Touts (32.3) et qui s'est enfui de ce qui lui était étranger (*to anoikeion*)<sup>31</sup> et qui s'est « replié » dans le Plérôme (32.3; 61.6). C'est encore le Christ psychique qui reçoit l'Esprit lors du baptême (16; 22.6; 61.6) par lequel les humains sont retirés du feu (76.1). Et la dimension visible et sensible du Sauveur dans le monde terrestre (59.3-4; 60) est manifeste dans l'*Extrait* 23 où l'on trouve la double dimension d'une connaissance du Sauveur comme un être engendré et passible, et comme un être spirituel.

La division tripartite de l'anthropologie valentinienne apparaît aussi hors du groupe « C » des *Extraits de Théodote*. Le corps et l'âme hyliques des *Extraits* 50 et 51 apparaissent déjà dans l'exégèse du récit de la Genèse dans l'*Extrait* 2, mais curieusement, l'adjectif « hylique » (47.3; 48.2; 50.1; 51.2; 55.3; 56.2-3) et « choïque » (51.1-2; 54.2; 55.1; 56.1) ne se retrouvent que dans le groupe « C », à part 80.3, dans une citation biblique rapportée. En revanche, l'âme et ses manifestations sont bien représentées hors du groupe « C » en 2.1-2; 3.1; 73.1-2; 77.2; 84; 85.3 pour souligner toute l'activité du Sauveur qui insuffle le pneuma ou la semence spirituelle (2.1-2; 67). Et l'élément spirituel de tout homme est explicité par les premiers *Extraits* (1-3) et par la dimension relationnelle des semences avec la lumière, engendrées comme des enfants (41.2).

Parmi les événements liés au Plérôme dans le groupe « C » des *Extraits* (43.2-65), la chute de Sophia n'est pas mentionnée, à la différence de l'envoi du Sauveur à Sophia (43.2) après sa prière (40; cf. 31.2), après la « sympathie » manifestée par les éons (30.2) ou leur prière (35.4) et leur appel à l'aide (38), après le fléchissement du Père (30). La descente du Sauveur auprès des hommes pieux (75.3), conçue comme un abandon de la Sophia au Plérôme (23.2; 32.3; 39) vient apporter la paix (74.1) et une double formation de sagesse (44) et de gnose (45). Il y a donc deux degrés de connaissance, selon les modes psychique et spirituel (43.1). L'enseignement du Sauveur (56) vise le redressement de la semence (35) et la transformation « d'enfants de la Femme » à « enfants de l'Homme » (68). Cette transformation est aussi exprimée en terme d'extraction des passions de l'âme humaine (45.2 et 41.4; 67.4; 76.1). Au niveau cosmologique, cette transformation par extraction a

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Héracléon, *frg.* 11 dans Origène, *Comm. Jo.* 10.11 § 48 (Blanc 1970, 416-417).

son correspondant dans la séparation du pur et du lourd (48) et la mise en valeur de l'élément médian le feu (48.4 et 37; 38.1; 81.1-3); la figure du demiurge apparaît peu (45.3; 47.1 et 33), mais le rassemblement des semences pneumatiques (49) à la fin des temps (63) revient plusieurs fois (26.3; 34.2; 41.2; 42.2; 73.2).

Sans avoir voulu être exhaustif, il nous paraissait important de souligner que les *Extraits de Théodote* constituent un document de premier choix pour l'étude du valentinisme conservé en grec. Cela permet, en effet, des comparaisons utiles avec la documentation d'Irénée, en grec et en latin, y compris dans sa réutilisation par Tertullien, mais à condition de ne pas prendre Irénée pour critère d'interprétation de l'ensemble de la documentation valentinienne. Et indépendamment de la documentation hérésiologique, la comparaison de ces *Extraits* avec la documentation copte de Nag Hammadi permet d'aborder tous ces textes avec moins d'*a priori* hérésiologiques que par le passé. Une interprétation renouvelée de l'anthropologie et de la christologie valentiniennes, libérées de leurs pré-supposés déterministes ou prédestinationnistes, devrait pouvoir ouvrir la voie à une meilleure appréhension de la documentation gnostique valentinienne conservée à Nag Hammadi, car elle n'a pas encore révélé tous ses secrets.

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EVIDENCE OF “VALENTINIAN” RITUAL PRACTICE?  
THE *LITURGICAL FRAGMENTS* OF NAG HAMMADI CODEX XI  
(NHC XI,2A–E)\*

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At the end of the first half of Nag Hammadi Codex XI, and completing the work of the first of its two scribes,<sup>1</sup> are five pages containing what seem to be liturgical texts. These five short texts follow the tractate known as *A Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2), separated from each other in the way in which tractates are usually separated from each other in the Nag Hammadi Codices. None of the pieces have titles,<sup>2</sup> and it is thus on the basis of their contents that they have been named *On the Anointing* (NHC XI,2a), *On Baptism A* (NHC XI,2b), *On Baptism B* (NHC XI,2c), *On the Eucharist A* (NHC XI,2d), and *On the Eucharist B* (NHC XI,2e).<sup>3</sup> It has been customary to treat these fragments as evidence of “Valentinian” beliefs and practices, based chiefly on the fact that in the manuscript they follow directly after *A Valentinian Exposition*,<sup>4</sup> which is believed to be an exposition of a version

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\* It is a great privilege to have the opportunity to present this essay in honor of John Turner, in gratitude for his many years of outstanding service to Nag Hammadi scholarship. This essay has been written under the aegis of project NEWCONT at the University of Oslo, which is funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Community’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007–2013) / ERC Grant agreement n° 283741.

<sup>1</sup> Codex XI is the work of two, quite different, scribal hands who divided the work on this codex between them. *Lit. Frag.* conclude the work of the first of these scribes. In addition to copying the first half of Codex XI (*Interp. Know.*, *Val. Exp.*, and *Lit. Frag.*), this scribe also copied *Treat. Res.* in Codex I. There is indeed a close relationship between codices I, XI, and VII, for the scribe who copied the latter half of Codex XI also copied the entire Codex VII. For an analysis of these three codices as a sub-collection, see Painchaud and Kaler 2007.

<sup>2</sup> There is, however, a possibility that there was a title at the beginning of *On Anoint.*, in the now lost upper part of page 40.

<sup>3</sup> I will hereafter refer to the five short pieces collectively as the *Liturgical Fragments* (abbreviated *Lit. Frag.*). There are three main editions of *Lit. Frag.*: Ménard 1985, 56–65; Turner 1990a; Funk 2000, 325–327. Turner’s critical edition represented a significant leap forward in the study of *Lit. Frag.* and in practice superseded the earlier edition by Ménard (see Emmel 1994). Due to the sorry state of the manuscript, there are significant differences between the editions with regard to the hypothetical reconstructions of the damaged portions of the text. In the present essay I will refer to Turner’s edition unless otherwise stated. Translations are my own.

<sup>4</sup> This is also a modern title based on the contents of the text, since the beginning of

of the “Valentinian” mythological and soteriological system.<sup>5</sup> In Turner’s assessment, *Lit. Frag.* are “merely prayers which contain little information to advance research into the nature of the Valentinian sacraments.”<sup>6</sup> While I agree with the latter part of Turner’s conclusion, the aim of the present article is to contribute to the discussion of the nature of the five liturgical texts in Codex XI and their place among early Christian liturgical writings, their relationship with the preceding *Val. Exp.*, and the question whether it is meaningful to classify them as “Valentinian” at all.<sup>7</sup>

Codex XI is a highly damaged codex. Consequently, much time has been spent by its modern editors on the difficult task of reconstructing its texts to make them readable. In the present essay, however, I have adopted a highly conservative and cautious approach to such reconstructions, and have tried as far as possible to base my analysis on the surviving portions of the texts.

### 1. ON THE ANOINTING

What is still extant of the first of the liturgical pieces, *On Anoint.*, seems to constitute an epiclesis-prayer<sup>8</sup> that ends in a doxology. The main part of the epiclesis-prayer, addressed to God, the Father, goes as follows:

It is fitting [for thee now] to send thy [Son Jesus] Christ, and for him to anoint us, so that we may be able to trample upon the head of the [serpent]s and [...] of the scorpions and [all] the power of the Devil by means of [...] shepherd] Jesus [Christ].<sup>9</sup> (*On Anoint.* 40.11–19)

the tractate, which may have contained a title, has not been preserved. In contrast to the first tractate of Codex XI, the *Interpretation of Knowledge* (ϕερνινια ἵπτηνως), however, it is clear from the well-preserved lower part of page 39 that it does not have a subscript title.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Pagels 1990; Turner 1992; Thomassen 1989; 1995; 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Turner 1992, 781.

<sup>7</sup> Taking my cue from the important critiques of the category of “Gnosticism” (see Williams 1996; 2005; King 2003; 2005; Desjardins 2005), I will not use “Gnosticism” as a heuristic category. A thorough critique of the category of “Valentinianism” as a modern scholarly construct is long overdue, but beyond the scope of the present essay.

<sup>8</sup> I use the term epiclesis in its broad sense of “invocation,” and not in its later, technical liturgical sense with specific reference to the invocation of the Holy Spirit to consecrate the elements of the Eucharist (cf. Patterson 1998, 377; Taft 1992, 489).

<sup>9</sup> σφε [δρακ] τῆ[ο]υ ἀτῆναυ ἱπεκωῆ[ρε ἰπ]τῆς πεχρηστος ἰπ[τ]ωρῆς [ἰπ]τῆς δεκασε ε-  
ναωθῆ[σα]ν ἱκαταπατει ἵπτ[ε] ἱπ[τ]ῆς ἀγω [. . . ] τε ἱπ[ο]γ[ο]ορε ἱπ[τ]σῶν [τηρ]τῆς ἱπ[τ]α-  
βολος [ε]τῆ[π]α . . . π[ο]ιμνῆ ἱπ[τ]ε [χρ]ῆ[σ]τ[ο]ς. The latter part of this passage (lines 16–19)  
has been reconstructed by Turner: ἀγω [ἱπ]τῆς ἱπ[ο]γ[ο]ορε ἱπ[τ]σῶν [τηρ]τῆς ἱπ[τ]α-  
βολος [ε]τῆ[π]α [π]οιμνῆ ἱπ[τ]ε [χρ]ῆ[σ]τ[ο]ς; Funk reconstructs: ἀγω [ἱπ]τῆς ἱπ[ο]γ[ο]ορε ἱπ[τ]σῶν  
[τηρ]τῆς ἱπ[τ]α-βολος [ε]τῆ[π]α [π]οιμνῆ ἱπ[τ]ε [χρ]ῆ[σ]τ[ο]ς.

In early Christian sources epiclesis-prayers are most commonly connected with the Eucharist, but sometimes they are also present in connection with baptism and prebaptismal rites.<sup>10</sup> In both baptismal and Eucharistic epicleses, it is usually the Holy Spirit that is called upon. In *On Anoint.*, however, the Holy Spirit is apparently absent. Instead, we have a call to God to send his son Jesus Christ to effect the prebaptismal anointing, a remarkable, and to my knowledge, unique feature of this text in relation to other early Christian liturgical writings.<sup>11</sup> Its closest parallel, however, seems to be found in the Egyptian tradition, more specifically in the sacramentary of Serapion of Thmuis, where we find that the Father is called upon to send his "Logos" in both baptismal and Eucharistic contexts.<sup>12</sup>

Its position in the manuscript, before texts dealing with baptism, makes it probable that *On Anoint.* refers to a prebaptismal anointing. The use of some sort of prebaptismal anointing was common in the initiatory rites of the early Church and its main functions were usually to exorcise, heal and strengthen the candidate for combat with the Devil.<sup>13</sup> *On Anoint.* states that the purpose of the anointing is to convey power to combat the forces of evil, represented here by snakes, scorpions and the Devil himself. The particular motif of trampling upon evil is an old one,<sup>14</sup> but it is Luke 10:19<sup>15</sup> that seems to be alluded to here. We find the same motif of trampling upon snakes and

<sup>10</sup> See C. Johnson 1999, 176–179.

<sup>11</sup> This includes so-called Valentinian sources.

<sup>12</sup> Serapion, *Sacramentary* 1; 7 (see M.E. Johnson 1995a, 46–47; 54–55; cf. 1995b, 26–27; Spinks 1998). The integrity and date of this document is disputed, as is its attribution to Serapion of Thmuis. M.E. Johnson (1995a, 281) concludes that it is "a mid-fourth century Egyptian collection drawn from diverse sources which reflect different strata of historical, liturgical, and theological development." For a discussion of the authenticity of the works attributed to Serapion, and of Serapion's fourth-century context, see Fitschen 1992.

<sup>13</sup> Daniélou 1956, 40–41; Finn 1992a, 19–20. The conflict with Satan was indeed one of the central themes of early Christian initiation (see, e.g., Daniélou 1956, 21), and prebaptismal rites almost without exception include both a renunciation of the Devil and an anointing (Riley 1974, 21; *Exc.* 76.2; cf. also Baumstark 1958). There is, however, nothing in the extant parts of *On Anoint.* to suggest an exorcistic aspect to the described anointing (as we find, e.g., in *Trad. ap.* 21.10). In this sense it is similar to the writings of Ambrose, where prebaptismal anointing is regarded as a source of strength for combat with the Devil, rather than as an exorcism (see Bradshaw 1992, 180).

<sup>14</sup> This has its scriptural origin in the story of God's punishment of the serpent in Genesis (Gen 3:16), and is developed further in Deuteronomy (Deut 8:14–16) and Psalms (Ps 90:13). All Old Testament references are to the Septuagint. In the New Testament, Luke alludes to these passages (Luke 10:19; cf. Mark 16:18; 1 Cor 15:25–26).

<sup>15</sup> "Behold, I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall hurt you." (Luke 10:19. Cf. also Mark 16:15–18).





When most of the hypothetical reconstructions of the missing parts of this passage are removed, we are in fact left with what appears to be a doxology that does not diverge from other orthodox doxologies of the period. The preserved parts of *On Anoint.* correspond well to a prebaptismal anointing widely employed in the early Church which gives the recipients the power to resist the Devil and the forces of evil, as attested by a wide range of texts. It was indeed, as Pagels has proposed,<sup>21</sup> probably part of an initiatory rite, but rather than necessarily a specifically “Valentinian” one, it appears to have had much in common with what we know from “mainstream” Christian ritual practice of the third to fifth centuries. At the same time, the specific forms in which the epiclesis and doxology appear here are, as far as I know, without any exact parallel in our surviving sources.

## 2. ON BAPTISM A AND B

*On Baptism A*<sup>22</sup> appears to focus on baptism, or more specifically “the first baptism” (ΠΑΡΑΡΤΗ ΝΒΑΠΤΙΣΜΑ). The following piece, *On Baptism B*, appears to be closely connected with *On Bap. A*, continuing its themes while adding some of its own. In contrast to the preceding *On Anoint.* and the following *On Euch. A* and *On Euch. B*, the two pieces *On Baptism* do not contain concluding doxologies, and do not in fact seem to be prayers at all, having more a flavor of mystagogical commentary.<sup>23</sup> The apparent closeness of the

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ΠΑΤΕ ΖΗΠ[ΩΗΡΕ ΠΑΤΕ] Ζ[Η]ΠΩΗΡΕ ΠΑΤ[Τ ΕΝΤΕΚΚΛ]ΗΣΙΑ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΔ Η[ΝΗΑΓΓΕ]ΛΟΣ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΔ ΧΙ[ΝΤΟΥ] ΓΩΟΠ ΩΑΔ[ΝΗΡΕ Ν]Τ[ΔΙ]ΩΜΙΑ ΝΗ[ΔΙ]ΦΗ [ΩΔ]ΝΙ[ΔΑΝ]ΗΡΕ. If Turner’s reconstruction of the doxology is right, the repetition, “the Father in the [Son, the Father] in the Son,” may perhaps be best explained as a dittography, since it does not seem to make sense to have “the Father in the Son” being addressed twice. The emended text should thus read: ΠΑΤΕ {ΖΗΠ[ΩΗΡΕ ΠΑΤΕ]} ΖΗΠΩΗΡΕ ΠΑΤ[Τ ΕΝΤΕΚΚΛ]ΗΣΙΑ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΔ Η[ΝΗΑΓΓΕ]ΛΟΣ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΔ (“the Father in the Son, the Father [in the] holy [Church and] the holy [angels]”). Thomassen (2006, 356) reconstructs lines 21–22: ΠΑΤΕ ΖΗΠ[ΔΙΩΝ ΠΑΤΕ] Ζ[Η]ΠΩΗΡΕ. A similar doxology to what we seem to have here is found in Pseudo-Chrysostom, *Encomium* 38: ΚΣΜΑΔΑΤ ΠΕΙΩΤ ΕΤΕΜΠΩΗΡΕ ΠΩΗΡΕ ΕΤΕΜΠΕΙΩΤ ΜΠΕΠΩΔ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΒ ΕΤΕΝΤΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗ ΝΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΕΤΟΥΔΑΒ ΩΔΕΝΕΖ ΝΕΝΕΖ ΖΑΜΗΝ (Wansink 1991, 37). I hesitate, however, to emend a text as badly preserved as this one. As for the references to Aeons in *On Anoint.*’s concluding doxology, rather than denoting the “Aeons” of the “Valentinian” myth, they should probably be understood in the way in which the term was most often used in early Christian prayers, where it is primarily used to express an eternity of time, and consequently the eternal validity of the prayer. It seems that this is how it should also be understood in Eph 3:21 as well as in other Pauline doxologies.

<sup>21</sup> Pagels 1990, 94.

<sup>22</sup> This text was originally somewhat over a page long, from the bottom of page 40, right after *On Anoint.*, to the end of page 41.

<sup>23</sup> Enrico Mazza’s (1989, 2) definition of the meaning of the term mystagogy among the

themes of *On Bap. A* and *On Bap. B* warrants treating them together. The first nine lines of *On Bap. A*, at the bottom of page 40, are well preserved and worth quoting in full, as they set the stage for what follows:

[This] is the totality of the summary of knowledge, which was revealed to us through our Lord Jesus Christ the Only-begotten. These are the sure and necessary (teachings) that should enable us to live in accordance with them.<sup>24</sup> And these are (the teachings) of<sup>25</sup> the first baptism.<sup>26</sup> (*On Bap. A* 40.30–38)

Although well preserved, this passage is as difficult as it is intriguing, since it is replete with problems of translation and interpretation, the above being my attempt to make sense of it. One of the major problems of interpretation is the ambiguity of the referents for “the sure and necessary” (ἴΒΕΒΑΙΟΝ ΑΥΩ ἸΑΝΑΓΚΑΙΟΝ).<sup>27</sup> As an explanatory gloss, Turner suggests inserting the word “items” (“these are the sure and necessary [items]”) and thereby implies that what is referred to is the contents of “the summary of knowledge” (ΠΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟΝ ἸΤΓΓΩΣΙΣ).<sup>28</sup> I believe Turner was on the right track, but would argue that it makes even better sense to take “the sure and necessary” to refer directly to mystagogical instruction, more specifically to the contents of the texts *On Bap. A* and *B* themselves. I have therefore in my translation inserted “instructions” in brackets, rather than “items.” These instructions would then collectively constitute “the summary of knowledge,” and the passage at the bottom of page 40 could thus be construed as an intratextual reference to the following mystagogical commentary contained within *On*

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Antiochene and Alexandrian Fathers as “the oral or written explanation of the mystery hidden in the Scriptures and celebrated in the liturgy” seems apt with regard to *Lit. Frag.*

<sup>24</sup> Literally: “that we may walk in them.”

<sup>25</sup> Literally: “these are those of.”

<sup>26</sup> ἡ[εἰ] ἡε ΠΠΠΠΡΩΜΑ ἸΠΚΕΦΑΛΑΙΟΝ ἸΤΓΓΩΣΙΣ ΠΕΕΙ ἸΤ[α]ΡΟΥΑΝῚΨ ΝΕΙ ΔΒΑΛ ΖΓΓῚΠΠΧΔΕΙΣ ἸἸΣ ΠΕΧΗΠΤΟΣ ΠΠΜΟΓΕΝΗΣ ΝΕΙ ΝΕ ἸΒΕΒΑΙΟΝ ΑΥΩ ἸΑΝΑΓΚΑΙΟΝ ΧΕΚΑΣΕ ΕΝΑΜΑΖΕ ἸΖΗΠῚ ἸΖΗΠΟΥ ΝΕΙ ἸΔΕ ΝΕ ΝΑΠΩΔΑΡῚ ἸΒΑΠΠΙΣΜΑ.

<sup>27</sup> *On Bap. A* 40.35–37. Although the quoted passage appears, in “orthodox” fashion (cf. the comments of Marksches [1992, 93n58]: “Scheinbar völlig orthodox spricht das valentinianische Gebet über die Taufe (A) von ‘unserem Herrn Christus, dem Monogenes’”), to refer to one person, *On Bap. A* nevertheless goes on to refer to “these” (νεει), “in them” (ἸΖΗΠῚ ἸΖΗΠΟΥ), and “those of the first baptism” (ΝΑΠΩΔΑΡῚ ἸΒΑΠΠΙΣΜΑ). Colpe (1974, 113; cf. Franzmann 1996, 33) suggests that “our Lord Jesus Christ the Monogenes” refers to more than one person. The phrases “thy Offspring Jesus Christ” (ἡ[ε]ΚΜΙΣΕ ἸἸΣ ΠΧΗΠ[ΣΤΟΣ]) in *On Euch.* A 43.37–38 and “thy Son [Jesus] Christ” (ΠΕΚΩῚ[ΡΕ ἸἸ]Σ ΠΕΧΗΠΤΟΣ) in *On Anoint.* 40.12–13, suggest otherwise, however, and nothing in the rest of *Lit. Frag.* gives us any reason to think so. Moreover, while Irenaeus states that the Valentinians “certainly do with their tongue confess one Jesus Christ” (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 3.16.6), he also asserts that they refused to call the Saviour “Lord” (χῶριος) (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.1.3; cf. Ehrman 1993, 162).

<sup>28</sup> *On Bap. A* 40.31–32.

*Bap. A* and *B*.<sup>29</sup> We learn about these “sure and necessary (instructions)” that they are necessary in order to “live in accordance with them,”<sup>30</sup> and what one is supposed to live in accordance with is most probably the abovementioned “sure and necessary” instructions.<sup>31</sup>

A good example of such mystagogical instruction is indeed found at the end of *On Bap. A*, where we are given an exegesis of the deeper meaning of the New Testament accounts of John the Baptist’s baptising in the river Jordan, based on an allegorical interpretation of the words “John” (Ἰωάννης) and “Jordan” (Ἰορδάνης):

For [the] interpretation of “Joh[n]” is the aeon, while the [interpretation] of that which is the Jord[an] is the descent which is [the step], namely [the departure] from the world [into] the aeon.<sup>32</sup> (*On Bap. A* 41.31–38)

We are told that the word “John” signifies “the aeon” and that the word “Jordan” denotes a descent, which is at the same time understood as an ascent from the world into the aeon. The exegesis is probably based on a Greek wordplay where Ἰωάννης = αἰών, and a Greek-Hebrew wordplay where Ἰορδάνης = ἄνω = descent.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> The final sentence on page 40 (lines 38–39), “And these are those of the first baptism” (ἡμεῖς ἡμᾶς νε μαριουαρῖι ἡβαπτισμα), may be interpreted in different ways. It may either be taken to refer back to “the summary of knowledge,” with “the first baptism” being regarded as the vehicle that confers “the summary of knowledge” (Turner [1990a, 143] translates the phrase as “But they are those of the first baptism”), and comments along with Pagels that “[the] ‘first baptism,’ apparently, conveys the summary (κεφάλαιον) of the *gnosis* that is revealed through the Savior’s psychic manifestation in Jesus Christ” (Pagels and Turner 1990, 170), or we may instead take it to refer to the mystagogical instruction which follows on page 41, as I have done here. I think it fits the context better to see this phrase as a kind of sub-heading introducing the interpretation of “the first baptism,” than to understand “the first baptism” itself to convey, or be “the summary of knowledge.” Alternatively we could take the phrase “the sure and necessary” to refer directly to the extratextual context of the ritual actions themselves, which would underline the importance of the ritual itself.

<sup>30</sup> This is rendered literally as μαρε ἡρηῖ ἡρητοῦ, “walk in them” (*On Bap. A* 40.37–38). Taking the Coptic word μαρε to be equivalent to the Greek περιπατεῖν (Crum 1939, 203b), I have chosen to render it in the sense it usually has within the Pauline epistles, which may loosely be translated “to live in accordance with.” Although he does not use it in his translation, Turner (1990b, 474) suggests essentially the same translation in the index of his critical edition. On the significance of mystagogical instruction, see, e.g., Mazza 1989; Satterlee 2002.

<sup>31</sup> Ménard (1985, 86), however, suggests the aeons.

<sup>32</sup> [Θερ]μηνια γαρ ἡἰωρ[άννης] πε παῖων Θερμ[ηνια ἡ]λε ἡπν ετεπορ[άνης] πε τκατα-  
 βασίς ετε[πβαθ]μος πε ετεπεει [πε πβακ] αβαλ εἡπκομο[ς] αρογῖ] ἀπαῖων. I follow Funk’s reconstruction [πβαθ]μος at 41.35–36, where Turner has [παναβας]μος, which seems somewhat too long to fit the lacuna; and [πβακ] αβαλ at 41.36–37, where Turner has [πῖει] αβαλ.

<sup>33</sup> Ménard 1985, 87. The latter of these wordplays was also used by Origen, who, echoing

The phrase “that which is the Jordan” (τὴν ἐτεροῦς[ἄνευ] πῆ)<sup>34</sup> could probably be understood as a reference to the baptismal font, which was regularly interpreted symbolically as the Jordan river.<sup>35</sup> An interpretation of the physical act of baptism indeed fits the way in which *On Bapt. A* adds that the descent is also an ascent, a connection that may have suggested itself from the fact that baptismal immersion involves a physical movement *down* into the water, followed by a movement *up* out of the water again, while at the same time drawing on an exegesis of Eph 4:9–10.<sup>36</sup>

The intriguing reference to “the first baptism,” at the very end of page 40, is unfortunately cut short by the missing upper part of page 41, but when we rejoin the text ten lines or so into the page, baptism seems indeed to be what is described, and at 41.21–22 there is very likely another reference to “the first baptism” (πρωτῆς ἑξ ἡβ[απτισμα]).<sup>37</sup> This “first baptism” seems to convey the forgiveness of sins,<sup>38</sup> and it thereby conforms closely to early Christian conceptions of baptism in water as a rite of purification.<sup>39</sup> Still, the label “first baptism” (πρωτῆς ἡβαπτισμα) causes problems. What exactly is meant by “the first baptism”? And what is the nature of the implied (but not

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Philo, explains the etymology as follows: “‘Jordan’ means ‘their going down.’ The name ‘Jared’ is etymologically akin to it, if I may say so; it also yields the meaning ‘going down.’” (Origen, *Comm. Jo.* 6.42 §217). Origen alludes to *1 Enoch* (see VanderKam 1996, 57). Cf. also Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 21.4. Philo succinctly stated the same interpretation: “Jordan being interpreted means descent” (*Leg.* 2.89).

<sup>34</sup> *On Bapt. A* 41.34–35.

<sup>35</sup> If it was merely meant as an interpretation of Scripture, the phrase would most likely have been οὐρηθῆναι ἡπορεύσασθαι, i.e., similar to the preceding phrase οὐρηθῆναι ἡπορεύσασθαι. The use of the term [πῆ]μος (“step”), if Funk’s reconstruction is right, also points in this direction. Thomassen (2006, 358), however, understands the phrase differently and translates τὴν ἐτεροῦς[ἄνευ] πῆ quite freely as “what is meant by ‘Jordan,’” rather than the more literal “that which is the Jordan.”

<sup>36</sup> This parallel is also noted by Pagels and Turner (1990, 171). According to Finn (1997, 160n30), this part of Ephesians (Eph 4–6) is “shot through by liturgical fragments.” The connection between the Jordan and an ascent may also have suggested itself from the story of the ascent of Elijah described in 2 Kings 2:1–15 LXX, where the prophet is said to have been taken up to heaven in a whirlwind immediately after crossing the river Jordan. Jordan as a symbol of passage from life to death, or from this world to heaven, probably also underlies Heb 3:17–19 (Thompson 1992, 957). One may also detect echoes of Joshua’s crossing of the river Jordan into the Promised Land (Josh 1–4).

<sup>37</sup> Both Turner and Funk also reconstruct [πρωτῆς ἡ]βαπτισμα at 41.11–12.

<sup>38</sup> *On Bapt. A* 41.10–12: “[the first] baptism [is the forgiveness] of sins” ([πρωτῆς ἡ]βαπτισμα [πῆ] πῆ πικρῆς ἀβ[α]π[τ]ισμα); *On Bapt. A* 41.21–23: “Moreover, the first [baptism] is the forgiveness [of sins]” (πρωτῆς ἑξ ἡβ[απτισμα πῆ] πῆ πικρῆς [ἀβ[α]π[τ]ισμα).

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., Justin, *1 Apol.* 61; Tertullian, *Bapt.* 4–5; Irenaeus, *frg.* 34; Clement, *Paed.* 1.6; Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 21.4; cf. also *Acts Thom.* 132.

mentioned in the extant parts of the manuscript) "second baptism"? Indeed, how many baptisms are here implied by the use of the term "first baptism"? First of all, it should be noted that "the first baptism" is not necessarily a rite that diverges from the ritual actions commonly associated with Christian baptism in water, and that the terminology of more than one baptism is also found in other Christian sources of the period.

What is expressly stated about "the first baptism" in *On Bap. A* is that it effects the forgiveness of sins. In the New Testament, John the Baptist gave precisely such a "baptism for the forgiveness of sins."<sup>40</sup> John the Baptist and the Jordan river are indeed explicitly mentioned in *On Bap. A*, so it is possible that what is meant by "the first baptism" is simply John's baptism of Jesus as the prototype of Christian baptism.<sup>41</sup>

Another possibility is that "the first baptism" is a reference to the baptismal immersion of the Christians, in which case the identity of the implied "second baptism" becomes rather more of a problem. It should be noted, however, that regular baptismal immersion in water was not the only thing that could be referred to as a "baptism" in early Christian sources, and that the term "baptism" is often used metaphorically. Among the things referred to as a "second baptism," martyrdom is probably the most well-known,<sup>42</sup> but Origen, for instance, who also speaks of martyrdom as an additional baptism, refers metaphorically to baptism also in other contexts, mentioning at least a further two additional "baptisms," namely, the two post-mortem baptisms: the baptism of the Holy Spirit which admits one to the Promised Land, and the baptism of fire, which may be seen as a forerunner of the medieval doctrine of purgatory.<sup>43</sup> It should also be noted that

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<sup>40</sup> The baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is described in Matt 3:13–17; Mark 1:9–11; Luke 3:21–22; John 1:32–34. John the Baptist's baptizing in the Jordan is also mentioned apart from the baptism of Jesus, in Matt 3:6; Mark 1:4–5; Luke 3:3; cf. Acts 2:38; 22:16. Cf. also Collins 1996, 218–238. The only possible parallel in Valentinian and related writings is found in *Gos. Phil.* 70.34–71.3 (cf. Colpe 1974, 113n15), but see Lundhaug 2010 on the supposed "Valentinianism" of *Gos. Phil.*

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Bapt. hom.* 3.22; Narsai, *Hom. Ep.* 274–294.

<sup>42</sup> See Malone 1951, 115–134. The prime exponent of this view is Tertullian. He uses terms like "second font" (*lavacrum secundum*) and "second regeneration" (*secunda regeneratio*) to describe martyrdom (See Malone 1951, 117). The term "second baptism" for martyrdom is also widely attested from the martyr-acts. In the account of the martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas, for instance, both Perpetua and Saturus are explicitly said to receive a "second baptism" (*baptismus secundus*) as they are slain in the arena (*M. Perp.* 6.1; 6.4. The redaction of this martyr-act, which is positively drenched in sacramental language and symbolism, has often been attributed to Tertullian). There is nothing in the extant parts of *Lit. Frag.* to indicate that martyrdom could be an issue here.

<sup>43</sup> Finn 1992b, 194; 1997, 170. See Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 24.2; cf. 14.6.

in several important details, monastic profession paralleled baptism,<sup>44</sup> and a link between monastic life and “second baptism” is well attested.<sup>45</sup>

What unites most concepts of a “second baptism” (the notable exception being martyrdom) was that they required previous participation in common Christian initiatory baptism in water, sometimes referred to as “the first baptism.”

*On Bap. B* begins with a more detailed description of what is probably the ascent “from the world [into] the Aeon” (ἀβαλ ἔμπροσθεν [εἰς αἰὼν] ἀπαίων), mentioned in *On Bap. A*,<sup>46</sup> and describes a process of transition and transformation, presenting us with a series of opposed pairs, of starting points and destinations or end-states, most of which are unfortunately badly preserved.<sup>47</sup>

One common metaphor of initiation that crops up here is that of adoption—a transition “into sonship” (ἐ[ἰς] αἰὼν ἀγαπήσει [τὸ] υἱόει),<sup>48</sup> and in the top half of the extant part of page 42, *On Bap. B* seems to describe a transformation “from [the carnal] into the spiritual” (ἀβαλ [ἐμπροσθικόν] αἰὼν ἀππνευ[ματικόν]),<sup>49</sup> and “[from] the physical [into the] angelic” ([ἀβα]λ ἔμφυ[σι]κόν [αἰὼν ἀτ]ῆνταγγελ[ε]ο[ς]).<sup>50</sup> At the bottom of page 42 the extent of the change seems to be summed up. Although the passage is severely damaged, it is possible to discern a description of a transformation of something “seminal” ([σι]εσματικο[ς])<sup>51</sup> into something with “a perfect form” (ἀγ-

<sup>44</sup> Malone 1951, 118–119.

<sup>45</sup> This is especially the case in Syrian sources. Philoxenus of Mabbug, for instance, talks about three births and two baptisms. The first birth was natural birth; the second birth was the first baptism; and the third birth and second baptism was the birth “out of the womb of the world into the fullness of the Spirit by self-emptying and the ascetic life” (McDonnell and Montague 1994, 312). He states: “You have two baptisms. One is the baptism of grace which arises from water; the other is the baptism of your own free will” (Philoxenus, *Hab.* 9.276, cited from McDonnell and Montague 1994, 312–313). The *Liber Graduum* speaks of a “visible (sacramental) baptism” that only in an incomplete way imparts the Spirit. The Spirit moves to perfection in a Christian leading a perfect ascetic life, as manifested in the second, invisible baptism (McDonnell and Montague 1994, 322–323).

<sup>46</sup> *On Bap. A* 41.37–38. Cf. *On Bap. A* 41.31; *On Bap. B* 42.19; *On Anoint.* 40.26–28. I agree with Desjardins (1990, 107) that *On Bap. B* “by its vocabulary and message is surely to be connected with the first fragment on baptism.”

<sup>47</sup> *On Bap. B* 42.10–24. For the rationale behind Turner’s reconstructions, see Pagels and Turner 1990, 171–172.

<sup>48</sup> *On Bap. B* 42.20. The notion of adoption through baptism was usually linked to Jesus’ own baptism, on the basis of Matt 3:17 and parallels Mark 1:11 and Luke 3:22 (cf., e.g., Clement, *Paed.* 1.6; *Ecl.* 19; Theodore of Mopsuestia, *Bapt. hom.* 3.24).

<sup>49</sup> *On Bap. B* 42.13–15.

<sup>50</sup> *On Bap. B* 42.15–16.

<sup>51</sup> *On Bap. B* 42.29.

μορφήν ἡτέλει[α]),<sup>52</sup> and some lines later, a passage may be reconstructed to show that “from now on the souls [will become] perfect spirits” (ἄμωμηνεὺ ἡΰχην [ἡἀρῆῆπ]νεύμα ἡτέλειον).<sup>53</sup> Paul’s discussion of the resurrection in 1 Cor 15:42–46 is here a crucial intertext. Like the resurrection body according to Paul, the initiates in *On Bap. B* are changed from seminal to perfect, from psychic to spiritual. In addition, *On Bap. B* adds a transformation from fleshly to angelic.

The inclusion of these qualities is best explained by seeing an allusion not only to 1 Cor 15, but also to 1 Pet 3–4, especially 3:20–22, where baptism is also connected to Christ’s resurrection. In 1 Pet 3:21, baptism is referred to as the “type” (τύπος) by which the Christians are saved through the resurrection of Christ, and also in *On Bap. B* 42.31–32 Christ’s baptism seems likewise to be described as an example (τύπικον).<sup>54</sup>

Most interpreters have taken it for granted that “the aeon” to which one is to ascend in *On Bap. A* refers to the “Valentinian” Pleroma. The use of the term “aeon” to denote the divine entities of the Pleroma is of course abundantly attested in “Valentinian” sources, but one need not turn to “Valentinianism” in order to find the term “aeon” used in a manner consistent with its use in *On Bap. A* and *On Bap. B*.<sup>55</sup> Here the term “aeon” seems to denote the heavenly destination of the ascent in some general way, with the possible added connotation of an eternity of time.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, the equation of the word “aeon” in singular with the “Valentinian” Pleroma is rare,<sup>57</sup> and there is no clear evidence of specifically “Valentinian” theology elsewhere in *Lit. Frag*. The focus seems to be simply on an ascent from this world into heaven in connection with baptism. Linked to the descent and the ascent into the Aeon associated with the exegesis of John and the Jordan, we find that initiation is also seen as a passage “[into] our village” ([ἀροῦν ἀ]ἡῆ-ἡ),<sup>58</sup> and “[into] those of the right” ([ἀρο]ῦν ἀναῆναι).<sup>59</sup> We thus seem

<sup>52</sup> *On Bap. B* 42.30.

<sup>53</sup> *On Bap. B* 42.36–37. For an alternative reconstruction, see below.

<sup>54</sup> I follow Funk in reading εἰχνη after the lacuna on 42.31, rather than Turner’s εἰχνη.

<sup>55</sup> E.g., in Origen and Tatian (see PGL 55B).

<sup>56</sup> Cf. PGL 55A–56B; Burns, forthcoming.

<sup>57</sup> It is attested by Origen, who witnesses its use in that way by Heracleon in his commentary on John (for references, see PGL 56B, though it is impossible to tell whether Origen here accurately reflects the terminology of Heracleon or imposes his own), and there is the possible example of *Tri. Trac.* 73.28–74.3 if one takes that text to be “Valentinian.”

<sup>58</sup> *On Bap. B* 42.23. “Our village” may be a reference to a monastery/monastic community (cf. Jerome’s translation of the rules of Pachomius).

<sup>59</sup> *On Bap. A* 41.25.



to have parallel references to an ascent into heaven and a crossing of the Jordan into the Promised Land.

*On Bap. A* is clearly concerned with “the first baptism,” which probably refers to baptismal immersion in water modeled on the baptism of Jesus, and it is likely that *On Bap. B* concerns the same rite. As other early Christian texts show, all the ritual effects mentioned in *On Bap. A* and *On Bap. B* could well be associated with baptismal immersion in water. There is no evidence that the additional baptisms implied by the use of the term “first baptism” are reflected in either *On Bap. A* or *On Bap. B*. Indeed, it is possible that these implied “baptisms” were not physical rites at all.<sup>60</sup>

### 3. ON THE EUCHARIST A AND B

After the fragments on baptism follow two highly fragmentary pieces named *On the Eucharist A* and *On the Eucharist B*. According to Pagels, they contain “liturgical prayers for a pneumatic sacrament, apparently celebrated as an eucharist.”<sup>61</sup> The only strong references to the Eucharist in *On Euch. A*, however, are the two terms [ϰ]ωπημα[τ]<sup>62</sup> and [ρεγαρι]στει<sup>63</sup> (both meaning “to give thanks”). The only part of *On Euch. A* that preserves continuous text, however, is its last few lines:

[...] they do thy will [through the] name of Jesus Christ [and they will] do thy will [...] always, filled with every grace and [every] purity. Glory be to thee through thy firstborn Son Jesus Christ [from now] until forever! Amen.<sup>64</sup>

(*On Euch. A* 43.31–38)

This prayer, ending in a doxology, seems to describe the state of the neophytes who have just been purified and have received “grace” through baptism. It thus seems more like a prayer of thanksgiving reflecting upon the effects of baptism, rather than a Eucharistic prayer as such.

<sup>60</sup> As was the case with several of the additional “baptisms” of Origen (see Ferguson 2009, 408–410).

<sup>61</sup> Pagels 1990, 95.

<sup>62</sup> *On Euch. A* 43.20.

<sup>63</sup> *On Euch. A* 43.20–21.

<sup>64</sup> [ . . . ] σεειρε ἡπεκο[γω]ωρε [εἰτῆπ]ρεν ἡἡς πεκ[ρνε]τος [αγω σε]αειρε ἡπεκοωωρε [ . . . ἡ]ογαειω νη ευχνη [αβαλ ἡχ]αρις νη εἰτογω [νη πε]αγ нек εἰτῆπεκω[ρε ἡωρ]πῆμι-σε ἡς πρη[στος χι]η[τη]ογ ωαανηε εαμηη. I follow Funk’s reconstruction at 43.37: [ρε ἡωρ]πῆμισε; Turner has: [ρε αγω] η[ε]κμισε. Turner also reconstructs the lacuna at 43.34: [τηογ ἡη]ογαειω.

As for *On Euch. B*, very little has been preserved, but the fact that the word τροφή (food) is mentioned as many as three times in the surviving text<sup>65</sup> makes this at least a better candidate for a Eucharistic text than *On Euch. A*. Apart from isolated references to “food” (τροφή), “word” (λογ[ος]), and “Church” (ἐκκλη[σί]α), however, only the last few lines of *On Euch. B* are well enough preserved for us to make any continuous sense of it:

[when you] die [purely, you] will become pure so that everyone who will receive food and [drink from] him/it may [live]. Glory be to thee until eternity!  
[A]men.<sup>66</sup> (On Euch. B 44.31–37)

The references to death and purification are likely to be understood as references to baptism, while “food and [drink]” should probably be understood as references to the Eucharist. A possible reading of the passage as a whole would thus be that baptismal purification, with its ritual death (based on Rom 6), leads to the reception of the life-giving Eucharistic elements—the food and drink that is the flesh and blood of Christ.<sup>67</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

All in all, the picture that emerges from *Lit. Frag.* is one of Christian initiation consisting of prebaptismal anointing followed by baptism and first communion, interpreted in terms of a renunciation of and combat with the Devil, a forgiveness of sins, an adoption, an ascent into heaven (and a journey into the Promised Land), an incorporation into a new community, and a transformation of souls into perfect spirits with angelic qualities.

It is striking that we seem to have two distinct genres represented among these liturgical pieces. *On Anoint.*, *On Euch. A* and *On Euch. B* all seem to be prayers, and end in doxologies<sup>68</sup> and a concluding “Amen.”<sup>69</sup> They are thus

<sup>65</sup> *On Euch. B* 44.19, 21, 35.

<sup>66</sup> ρο[ταν] εκφ[αν]μογ ε̄νογο[γ]βο κ]νατογβο ατρεφφ[ωνε̄ ν̄οι]ογαν νιν ετναχι α[βαλ ν̄]ηητ̄ι αγτροφν̄ η̄ν̄[ογσογ] πεαγ̄ νεκ φααληε̄[ε εα]μην. I follow Funk's reconstruction at 44.33: ατρεφφ[ωνε̄ ν̄οι] (Turner has: φ . . []); and at 44.34: ετναχι α[βαλ ν̄] (Turner has: ετναχιη[αειτ]).

<sup>67</sup> It is worth noting, however, that there is nothing in the preserved parts of *On Bap. A* and *On Bap. B* that hints at any reference to an interpretation of baptism along the lines of Rom 6.

<sup>68</sup> See Aune 1992, 981–982.

<sup>69</sup> Colpe (1974, 113) states that if it had not been for the presence of “Amen” at the end of the fragments there would have been scant reason for calling them prayers. However, since prayer may be defined as “an address to or celebration of a deity” (Kiley 1997, 1), and these

much closer to each other in style than they are to *On Bap. A* and *On Bap. B*, which seem instead to be short pieces of mystagogical instruction. As for *On Anoint.*'s epiclesis-prayer, it is evidently set in the context of a prebaptismal anointing, and it may well have been used as part of such a rite. The prayer in *On Euch. A*, on the other hand, is more difficult to place, but seems to be a postbaptismal prayer of thanksgiving for the gifts received in baptism, and as such it may have been used either in a directly postbaptismal or in a Eucharistic setting. The last fragment, *On Euch. B*, with its many references to food, seems most likely to have been a Eucharistic prayer. *On Bap. A* and *On Bap. B* seem, on the other hand, to be addressed not to God, but to a congregation. They also seem most likely to have been used in a postbaptismal context, as they appear to describe the significance of a baptism that has already taken place. As a whole, the five pieces constituting *Lit. Frag.* do not appear to be a continuous composition, but they do seem to be related to the same initiatory complex, as prayers and commentary.

What type of Christianity emerges from the above interpretation of *Lit. Frag.*? Although it has been taken for granted by scholars that *Lit. Frag.* are "Valentinian," they do not exhibit any unequivocally "Valentinian" traits. Even though they contain certain symbols and motifs that could conceivably be interpreted in a "Valentinian" fashion, they do not seem to depend in any way upon either the "Valentinian" myth or upon specifically "Valentinian" theologoumena, and there are no themes, concepts, or terms that are carried over from the preceding *Val. Exp.*<sup>70</sup>

Moreover, these texts are almost impossible to date. Codex XI itself is probably to be dated to the late fourth or early fifth century.<sup>71</sup> As for the date and provenance of the composition of *Lit. Frag.*, however, suggestions can only be highly tentative. When trying to formulate a theory of the date and provenance of *Lit. Frag.*, we run into problems beyond those directly connected to the manuscript's deplorable state of preservation. Not least of these is the fact that *Lit. Frag.* may well have been subjected to several stages of redaction in both their Greek and Coptic incarnations.<sup>72</sup> *Lit. Frag.*, as we know them, may therefore have evolved significantly during the

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three fragments are all addressed to the Father and celebrate him, they may thus safely be classed as such.

<sup>70</sup> In certain respects, *Lit. Frag.* even contradict other evidence of "Valentinian" ritual practice. As Thomassen (2006, 357) notes, "prebaptismal anointing is not attested in other known sources of Valentinian initiation."

<sup>71</sup> See Emmel 2008; 2010; Lundhaug 2010.

<sup>72</sup> See Painchaud 1995; Emmel 1997; 2008; Lundhaug 2010.

transmission of both the original Greek texts—if they ever existed as such—and their subsequent Coptic translations. Since liturgical texts have been shown to be especially prone to change, belonging as they do to the category of "living literature," the changes wrought by the vagaries of textual transmission may indeed have been considerable.<sup>73</sup>

All in all, however, the pattern of initiation and interpretation that emerges from the surviving parts of *Lit. Frag.* seems to correspond well with what we know from third- to fifth-century Egypt. As in early Egyptian practice, *Lit. Frag.* seems to attest to an initiatory ritual sequence consisting of a prebaptismal anointing that is more apotropaic than exorcistic and no postbaptismal anointing. Moreover, as in Egypt, interpretation centers on Jordan-related symbolism and Jesus' own baptism, as well as on baptism as a journey, perfection, etc.<sup>74</sup> We have also seen that the epiclesis of Christ in *On Anoint.* has its closest parallel in the epiclesis of the Logos found in the prayers of Serapion of Thmuis, and there are also other similarities between *Lit. Frag.* and Serapion. Like *Lit. Frag.*, Serapion describes the baptized as no longer fleshly, but spiritual, and he also speaks of the baptized becoming pure and like angels.<sup>75</sup>

In conclusion, there seems to be very little reason to regard the five liturgical pieces following *A Valentinian Exposition* in Nag Hammadi Codex XI as "Valentinian," other than the fact that they indeed follow *A Valentinian Exposition*,<sup>76</sup> with which, however, they do not seem to have anything in common.

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<sup>73</sup> See Bradshaw 1992, 73–74; 1993; Taft 1997, 207–208. An interesting question that needs to be further investigated is the use to which this rather strange codex was put by those who presumably employed it at the time when it was produced.

<sup>74</sup> See, e.g., M.E. Johnson 1995b.

<sup>75</sup> See, e.g., Spinks 1998, 269; Ferguson 2009, 465.

<sup>76</sup> One should also remember, as mentioned above, that the designation "*A Valentinian Exposition*" is itself a modern one, as the manuscript itself does not preserve any title for the second tractate of Codex XI.

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A SALVIFIC ACT OF  
TRANSFORMATION OR A SYMBOL OF DEFILEMENT?  
BAPTISM IN *VALENTINIAN LITURGICAL READINGS* (NHC XI,2)  
AND IN THE *TESTIMONY OF TRUTH* (NHC IX,3)\*

Antti Marjanen

In most early Christian groups, traditions and texts, baptism is regarded as the most important ritual through which a person receives a divine gift of salvation, demonstrates his or her religious conviction, becomes a member of a religious community and often participates in or receives a promise of future participation in new, transcendental life. Not infrequently the act is also seen as signifying a transformation the baptized person is supposed to undergo, either in terms of a change in his or her loyalties, moral renewal or some sort of existential or even ontological metamorphosis.

In Rom 6:6, for example, Paul describes baptism as a death in which the old life is left behind, and the baptized person is empowered to lead a new life. For Paul, the transformation is tied to baptism, i.e., the new life is characterized by deliverance from the life under the power of sin and death. The main object of the transformation seems to be the body which should no longer be ruled by the passions of sin but should become an instrument of righteousness. Baptism, for Paul, thus signifies both a change in loyalties and a possibility of moral renewal. The baptized person should no longer serve sin but he or she is, by divine grace, made capable of serving God's righteous purposes (6:12–14).

In the deutero-Pauline Letter to the Colossians, baptism also signifies deliverance from the power of sin (2:11–12). The main difference between Paul and the deutero-Pauline author of the Letter to the Colossians is seen in the fact that the latter does not regard sin as an absolute power on its own

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\* A preliminary version of this essay was presented in a seminar on Ritual Transformation in Rome, May 7–10, 2008. The seminar was organized by the research project “Metamorphoses: Resurrection, Taxonomies, and Transformative Practices in Early Christianity,” led by Prof. Turid Karlsen Seim (University of Oslo), at the Centre for Advanced Study at the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters in Oslo. I also presented the essay in a seminar of the Research Project on Gnosticism and Early Christianity (University of Helsinki). I am grateful for many helpful comments I received from the participants of these seminars.

but as an instrument which various cosmic powers use to enslave people. In baptism, Christ sets the baptized people free from the rule of these cosmic powers and gives them a new life. Unlike Paul, the Letter to the Colossians also implies that baptism not only gives a pledge of a complete new life after death but already promises that the baptized person may participate in resurrection life here and now (2:12). Therefore, the text suggests that baptism entails a kind of ontological metamorphosis.

Nevertheless, neither Paul nor the author of the deutero-Pauline Letter to the Colossians, for whom baptism seems to imply a radical renewal of a person, imagine that the idea of transformation connected with baptism will make the baptized automatically live a virtuous life. Paul, for example, must constantly combine the indicative fact of Christian salvation gained by the grace and power of God with the imperative task of realizing new Christian existence in concrete actions. The genuine Pauline letters provide a number of examples where Paul gets rather frustrated with Christians of various churches since the transformative power they have presumably received in baptism does not seem to produce the right kind of fruit (cf., e.g., 1 Cor 5:1–5; 6:9–11; 6:18–20; Gal 5:13–15; Phil 4:3–4).

The tension between the belief in the transformative power of baptism and the concrete realization of Christian life continued to be an important issue in Christian texts in the second century. In some texts, the discussion simply received a new twist. The repeated possibility of receiving the forgiveness of one's sins tended to lead to the situation in which baptized people no longer managed to live in accordance with the way baptism was supposed to empower them to. This actuated the question of how often one could repent and be forgiven without making baptism lose its transformative character.<sup>1</sup> In the Shepherd of Hermas, the Lord himself, who appears to Hermas, confirms what some Christian teachers seem to maintain, that after the forgiveness of sins received in the act of baptism no one should sin any longer (*Herm. Mand. 4:3*).<sup>2</sup> At the same time that the statement of the Lord strives to limit the number of post-baptismal repentances, it also suggests that it was possible to preserve the purity gained through baptism. Despite this, the Lord of the Shepherd of Hermas is ready to make a concession. Because of "human weakness" and "the shrewdness of the Devil," God in his mercy gives one extra chance to repent if one lapses

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that this kind of question was already Paul's concern (Rom 6:15–22).

<sup>2</sup> Heb 6:4–6 denies the chance for a second repentance for those who intentionally sin (cf. 10:26).

after baptism. Repeated failures, however, make it extremely hard for anybody to be saved.<sup>3</sup>

In the fourth century, post-baptismal lapse into sin was experienced as such a threat that many Christians did not receive baptism until very late in life, sometimes on their deathbed. It is not always clear whether this was due to the fact that many Christians no longer believed in the transformative power of baptism or whether they were simply afraid that their own weakness was so great that it could even conquer the power of baptism. Most likely, the latter was true.<sup>4</sup>

The purpose of this essay is to see how the tension between the transformative power supposedly integral to baptism and the lack of its concrete realization in Christian existence were dealt with in so-called Gnostic texts.<sup>5</sup> As examples I have chosen the so-called *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* and the *Testimony of Truth*, both from the Nag Hammadi Library. The choice of these texts is motivated by three things. Each of them treats baptism extensively, although the fragmentary character of both texts makes it somewhat difficult to get a full picture of the importance of the theme. Yet there are enough references to baptism to make the discussion of the theme in these two texts meaningful. Secondly, when the theme of baptism in these two texts is considered it appears so contradictory that it makes the comparison between the two texts especially interesting and fruitful. Thirdly, and most importantly, the *Testimony of Truth* presents vehement criticism of Valentinian teachers, especially with regard to the question of baptism, as we will see below.

## 1. BAPTISM IN *VALENTINIAN LITURGICAL READINGS*

### 1.1. *Introduction*

*Valentinian Liturgical Readings*<sup>6</sup> is a kind of appendix to *Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2) consisting of five distinct texts dealing with ritual practices:

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<sup>3</sup> It is possible that the text even allows this, although this alternative is not really seen as recommendable. See Osiek 1999, 115.

<sup>4</sup> On the issue of the postponement of baptism in the fourth and fifth century, see, e.g., Ferguson 2009, 568, 601–602, 776–780.

<sup>5</sup> For the definition of “Gnostic” and “Gnosticism” in this essay, see Marjanen 2008, 203–220.

<sup>6</sup> This general title was introduced for the first time in Meyer 2007, 663. In previous English versions of the Nag Hammadi texts (e.g., Robinson 1983) the texts belonging to this part of the document had no overall title.

one on anointing (*On Anointing*), two on baptism (*On Bap. A*; *On Bap. B*), and two on the Eucharist (*On Euch. A*; *On Euch. B*).<sup>7</sup> This study will focus on the two baptismal texts (*On Bap. A* 40.30–41.38; *On Bap. B* 42.1–43.19).<sup>8</sup> Yet it is not impossible that all five texts are related and represent liturgical readings in connection with a three-phase initiation ritual consisting of pre-baptismal exorcistic anointing, baptism, and the Eucharist.<sup>9</sup>

The exact relationship between *Valentinian Exposition* and the subsequent *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* is not entirely clear. *Valentinian Exposition*, which displays a mythical Valentinian account, beginning with the description of the Father and concluding with the final restoration of the spiritual seed to the divine realm, does not explicitly deal with sacramental rituals. Yet the very end of the text focuses on the unification of the spiritual seed with the angels in the pleroma. In many Valentinian texts this eschatological event is anticipated in a sacramental act, be it baptism, mystery of redemption, bridal chamber or a combination of some or all of them. In light of this, it is no wonder that the text, which ends with a depiction of an eschatological restoration of the pneumatic seed to the divine world, is followed by a set of liturgical readings related to sacramental acts by which this consummation is achieved.

It has even been suggested that *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* were used as liturgical texts by the same Valentinian group whose theology is represented in *Valentinian Exposition*.<sup>10</sup> Although there is no explicit connection between the two texts which would confirm this suggestion, they at least have common themes and terms which indicate that *Liturgical Readings* may also be a Valentinian work. For example, the division of humans into those on the right and those on the left is a typical Valentinian feature (*Val. Exp.* 38.30; *On Bap. A* 41.25). At least it is likely that the joining together of

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<sup>7</sup> The *editio princeps* and the first English translation of *Valentinian Exposition*, including what is here called *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*, was prepared by John D. Turner (1990) to whose *Festschrift* I have the pleasure to dedicate this contribution as a token of gratitude for many years' cooperation in the study of Nag Hammadi texts and Gnosticism. The English translations of *Valentinian Exposition* and *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* used in this essay derive from Turner's translation.

<sup>8</sup> Conventionally, the text on baptism has been seen as two separate entities since the diplés at the end of page 41 seem to indicate a conclusion of the first part of the text (cf. Thomassen 2006, 355).

<sup>9</sup> This is suggested by Thomassen 2006, 357. Yet, Thomassen (2007, 666; 2011, 896n5) has also pointed out that the order of *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* is puzzling, since the normal Valentinian or any other early Christian order of the three-phase initiation ritual was baptism, anointing, and the Eucharist.

<sup>10</sup> So Pagels 1990, 90; Pearson 2007a, 182–183; Thomassen 2007, 665.

*Valentinian Exposition* with *Liturgical Readings*, whether it was made before the compilation of the eleventh codex of the Nag Hammadi Library or in connection with it, reflects a deliberate attempt to have them read, understood and interpreted together.

### 1.2. *The “First Baptism” in Valentinian Liturgical Readings*

Undoubtedly, baptism in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* is seen as a transformative ritual act. Before we examine the precise nature of the transformation baptism is supposed to effect, one preliminary question about the way baptism is characterized in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* has to be addressed.

*Valentinian Liturgical Readings* refers to baptism specifically as the “first” baptism, at least in all those instances where the text can be read with certainty or likelihood. This is clearly true in 40.38 and most likely in 41.21 as well. Even *On Bap. B* 42.39 most probably speaks about the “first” baptism, for if the attribute that seems to end with a π is an ordinal number, which seems very likely, it almost has to be “first” since no other Coptic ordinal number between one and ten ends with that letter.<sup>11</sup> What, then, does the “first baptism” mean?

The first editors and commentators of the text, Elaine Pagels and John Turner, suggest that, as in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.21.2, the “first baptism” in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* refers to psychic baptism, following the model of Jesus’ baptism by John for the forgiveness of sins. Yet there is another, qualitatively superior “second” baptism, received by Christ and mentioned in Luke 12:50 and Mark 10:38, which effects the ultimate spiritual redemption. Thus the “first” baptism practiced by the so-called psychic Christians is an inadequate imitation of the “second” baptism. The “second” baptism, on the other hand, is a pneumatic baptism that is “for perfection” and leads a soul into the Pleroma.<sup>12</sup>

Although Pagels and Turner’s interpretation of the “first baptism” in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* is attractive (especially in light of Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.21.2) and seems to provide a good explanation for many passages poorly preserved in the text, I still find their view difficult to maintain for the following reasons:<sup>13</sup> (1) The “first” baptism in *Valentinian Liturgical*

<sup>11</sup> So also Turner 1990, 146–147.

<sup>12</sup> Pagels and Turner 1990, 170–171.

<sup>13</sup> In many points of my criticism I closely follow Thomassen (2006, 358–359) who also disagrees with Pagels and Turner’s understanding.

*Readings* is “a re-enactment of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan”<sup>14</sup> (41.21–38). In the description of this baptism both John the Baptist and the Jordan are represented as positive symbols. John stands for the (pleromatic) Aeon,<sup>15</sup> and the Jordan is seen as “[our exodus] from the world [into] the Aeon.”<sup>16</sup> This suggests that the “first” baptism is more than the psychic baptism practiced by psychic Christians. (2) In *On Bap. B*, baptism, i.e., the “first baptism,” is described as a movement from one opposite state to another (42.10–24).<sup>17</sup> As the characterizations of the first opposite seem to depict worldly existence (e.g., “world,” “physical,” “entanglements”), the attributes of the second refer to the pleromatic reality. Terms such as “spiritual,” “angelic” and “Aeon” definitely stand for pleromatic entities in a Valentinian context. The “first” baptism thus clearly refers to a sacramental act, the purpose of which is to help the baptized reach pneumatic existence. This conclusion also implies that in the movement from the left to the right, which baptism here also signifies (*On Bap. A* 41.21–27), the right does not stand for the position of the “psychic” but for that of the spiritual. (3) The fact that baptism in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* is portrayed as a movement from one contrasting reality to another seems to suggest that the normal middle category of “psychic” in Valentinian anthropology and soteriology is altogether missing between “sarkic/hylic” and “pneumatic.” As Thomassen has pointed out, the same is also true in *Valentinian Exposition*, which does not contain the notion of the “psychic” in its anthropology and soteriology.<sup>18</sup>

On the basis of these observations, one can conclude that in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*, the “first” baptism does not have the same inferior connotation as it has in Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.21.2, and it does not stand for a less spiritual form of ritual.

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<sup>14</sup> Thomassen 2006, 359.

<sup>15</sup> The positive interpretation of John the Baptist is somewhat surprising since in some other Valentinian texts John the Baptist can stand for the demiurge; see Heracleon, *frag.* 8 (cf. note 24).

<sup>16</sup> If Turner’s restoration “[to the Jordan]” in *On Bap. B* 42.10–11 is correct, as is likely, also here the Jordan stands for a spiritual reality (see Turner 1990, 146).

<sup>17</sup> To be sure, some of Turner’s restorations are hypothetical, as he himself admits (in Pagels and Turner 1990, 171), but the overall tendency of the text becomes very clear on the basis of Turner’s genial reconstruction.

<sup>18</sup> Thomassen 2006, 359n52.

### 1.3. *The Transformative Nature of Baptism in Valentinian Liturgical Readings*

When the transformative character of baptism is discussed in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*, four aspects can be brought into focus: (1) Baptism is associated with some things, “sure and necessary,” by which the baptized persons are exhorted to “conduct themselves/walk (μαρce)” (40.35–39). (2) Baptism is performed for the forgiveness of sins (41.10–12, 22–23). (3) Baptism allows one to picture one’s life as a movement from carnal, earthly reality to pleromatic existence (42.11–24). (4) Baptism effects a transition of the baptized person from potential, “seminal” (σπερματικον) existence to existence with a perfect form (42.28–30).

All of these features imply an idea of change, but what kind of transformation is actually involved? As I have previously argued, baptism is not only understood as an anticipatory act which gains its realization at the moment a soul is received into the pleroma; it also brings about a transformation already in this life. But what kind of transformation is this? Is it to be construed as moral/ethical, intellectual/mental or even ontological?

It is not easy to answer this question, partly because of the fragmentary nature of the text, partly because of the difficulty of the question. Nevertheless, some cautious conclusions may be drawn.

(1) The beginning of the first liturgical reading on baptism (*On Bap. A* 40.30–38) suggests that those experiencing the “first baptism” receive a revelation that enables them to walk in a new way (μαρce ζῆν). The content of the revelation is described in two ways: first, it is “the fullness of the summary of the knowledge”; second, the revelation is “sure and necessary.” The characterization of the revelation as “sure and necessary” indicates that it is considered reliable, required information provided to baptismal candidates, but for what purpose? Does it refer to understanding doctrinal issues in a right way or conducting oneself in a correct manner? The metaphor of “walking” often has a moral connotation.<sup>19</sup> If this is true also here, “the fullness of the summary of the knowledge” can refer to a set of ethical guidelines that help baptized persons to reform their lives. The problem with this interpretation is that no ethical directives are given in the text unless they are placed in the lacuna at the beginning of page 41. On the whole, however, the text seems to lack paraenetic material.

<sup>19</sup> For references, see Hauck and Schulz 1964–1976.



If “the fullness of the summary of the knowledge” does not refer to the teaching in *On Bap. A* but to the instruction given previously in *Valentinian Exposition*, then the revelation imparted in connection with baptism or a three-phase sacramental ritual does not have moral transformation as its primary target. Rather, it emphasizes an intellectual or mental change of thinking.

(2) That baptism in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* is tied to the idea of the forgiveness of sins, with the notion of transition from carnal to pneumatic existence, and to the concept of obtaining a new perfect form instead of a potential, “seminal” (σπέρματικόν) one, shows that baptism is seen to touch and transform people in their very essence. In radical terms, these characterizations of the impact of baptism speak about a change in a person’s loyalty relationships: baptism marks deliverance from the power of sin into the power of the pleromatic realm. They also speak about a change in the basic structure of the baptized person’s existence, not only in spatial terms (baptism marks a movement from earthly to pleromatic existence) but also in terms of the mode of existence (baptism signifies a metamorphosis from the potential, “seminal” [σπέρματικόν] to the perfect form of existence).

(3) Unlike Paul and even the author of the Letter to the Colossians, the writer of *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* seems to be more optimistic about the possibility of baptized persons realizing the transformation in real life. Unlike Paul, the author of *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* does not seem to presuppose an “already—not yet” tension in the new life of a baptized person. At the end of page 42, *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* emphasizes that after having undertaken a baptism “souls [will become] perfect spirits.” Differently from Paul and the Letter to the Colossians, *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* does not supplement—at least not in the extant text—the indicative fact of salvation gained in baptism with the imperatives of paraenesis. This seems to suggest that the transformation gained through baptism, although it also has a certain anticipatory character and will be consummated in a later event (perhaps in the redemption which will take place in the Aeon),<sup>20</sup> is seen as a radical change of the person’s ontological being.

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<sup>20</sup> This has been suggested by Thomassen 2011, 908.

2. BAPTISM IN THE *TESTIMONY OF TRUTH*2.1. *Introduction*

The *Testimony of Truth* (NHC IX,3)<sup>21</sup> provides an understanding of baptism that is very different from that of *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*. In fact, it is in complete disagreement with *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*, as we shall see. Before we enter into that discussion let us have a brief look at the text itself.

The *Testimony of Truth* is unfortunately a very fragmentary text. Only a little less than one half of it has been preserved. In that material there are three passages relevant for the discussion about baptism<sup>22</sup> and thus provide an interesting point of comparison with *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*.

The *Testimony of Truth* makes a distinction between the highest God, “who is over the truth” (45.3), and a malicious God, the chief of the creator-archons, a caricature of Yahweh, also called “the ruler of the womb” (45.23–48.15; 31.3–5).<sup>23</sup> It also maintains that the real self of the human being originates in the imperishable realm and is saved after having received the knowledge of his or her divine identity (44.23–45.6). The *Testimony of Truth* can thus be classified as Gnostic.

There is another feature in the text that is more significant from the perspective of the present essay. The *Testimony of Truth* is an extremely polemical text.<sup>24</sup> The author makes accusations of heresy with admirable ease. If we take into account the Gnostic character of the text, it is not surprising that

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<sup>21</sup> The *editio princeps* and the first English translation of the *Testimony of Truth* was prepared by Birger A. Pearson (1981). Pearson has also made the English translation of the text that is found in Meyer 2007. I follow the latter translation in my English quotations of the text.

<sup>22</sup> There is a fragmentary passage at the end of the *Testimony of Truth* which most likely contains a reference to baptism (74.20). Pearson (2007b, 628) restores the text in such a way that it can be translated as follows: “He baptized himself, and ... He became divine, and flew [up], and they did not grasp him ... the [enemies] ... since it was not possible [for them to] bring him down again.” In light of the context and prior references to baptisms, baptism here hardly refers to a concrete ritual act of water-baptism but is rather used as a metaphor of eschatological deliverance in the final ascent of a soul. Therefore, this passage is not included in our discussion about the attitude of the author of the *Testimony of Truth* toward ritual baptism.

<sup>23</sup> Actually *Testim. Truth* 31.4–5 maintains that it is John the Baptist who is “the ruler of the womb.” However, the context makes it clear that the author of the text deploys an allegory according to which John stands for the demiurge (cf. Heracleon, *frag.* 8); see Pearson 1981, 126.

<sup>24</sup> For an analysis of the polemics of the *Testimony of Truth*, see Koschorke 1978b, 109–174; Pearson 1990, 188–193.

the representatives of that form of Christianity which eventually gained a dominant position attract most vehement criticisms.

For example, a simple confession, "We are Christians," which leads to martyrdom, is viewed by the author of the *Testimony of Truth* as a foolish and ignorant act (31.22–32.5). Equally heretical is the belief in the carnal resurrection (34.27–35.2; 36.29–30), whereas the real resurrection is regarded as spiritual, deriving from self-knowledge (35.25–36.7). Since the *Testimony of Truth* represents an ultra-encratic standpoint, the Law is seen as a source of defilement since it prompts people to get married and procreate (30.2–5).<sup>25</sup> The *Testimony of Truth* is also clearly against water-baptism as will become clear below.

The most surprising feature in the polemics of the *Testimony of Truth* is that Gnostic leaders and their schools are attacked as well (55.1–60.4). Valentinus, his disciples, Basilides, his son Isidore and his other disciples, as well as the Simonians, represent, for various reasons, religious views the author of the *Testimony of Truth* cannot accept.<sup>26</sup> Basilides and Isidore are accused of lapsing into worldly allurements, the Simonians of accepting marriage, and Valentinus and his disciples of idol worship and, what is important for our discussion here, a wrong attitude toward baptism.<sup>27</sup>

The last observation is relevant to our previous discussion about the nature of baptism in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*. It invites one to ask how the author of the *Testimony of Truth* would have responded to the view of baptism in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* if he had read them. In order to compare the views in the two texts I now turn to the three relevant passages in the *Testimony of Truth* which shed light on its own understanding of baptism.

## 2.2. *The Interpretation of Jesus' Baptism in Testim. Truth 30.18–31.5*

The first relevant text dealing with our topic does not actually mention baptism, yet it is important exactly for this reason. It provides us with a version

<sup>25</sup> If Pearson's reconstruction of the text in 39.3–6 is accepted (1981, 142), the idea of the divine creation of genitalia for the sake of human enjoyment is also condemned.

<sup>26</sup> The author of the *Testimony of Truth* criticizes other Gnostic groups as well. In 58.4–5 he clearly refers to a group the Coptic name of which ends with  $\lambda\upsilon\omicron\varsigma$ . Pearson (1981, 175) has suggested that the group which is meant is the Coddians mentioned by Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26.3.6.

<sup>27</sup> Due to the fragmentary state of the text (55.4–10), it is difficult to say whether the author of the *Testimony of Truth* is critical of the practice of water-baptism as such or only of its wrong interpretation; see Koschorke 1978a, 110.

of Jesus' arrival at the Jordan River to be baptized by John.<sup>28</sup> When John recognizes Jesus' appearance, the narrative takes a surprising twist. Jesus is not baptized at all, and all the familiar elements belonging to the traditional version of the story receive allegorical interpretations which not only differ from the Synoptic narratives but also from the way they are interpreted in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*.<sup>29</sup> While in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* Jesus' baptism provides a prototype of a transformative act which provides a transition from carnal to pneumatic existence (42.10–24), in the *Testimony of Truth* baptism is seen as an act of defilement, a symbol of the dominion of carnal procreation (30.29–30). In *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*, John the Baptist stands for the (pleromatic) Aeon (41.31–33), whereas the author of the *Testimony of Truth* insists that John is an allegory for “the ruler of the womb,” i.e., the inferior god (31.3–5). In *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* (41.34–38), the water of the Jordan River marks the exodus from worldly existence to the Aeon, (pleromatic) reality; in the *Testimony of Truth*, however, it denotes the desire for sexual intercourse (31.2–3).

In the *Testimony of Truth*, Jesus is not baptized because by being baptized he would become part of a system which maintains the dominion of carnal procreation. By not being baptized he brings this dominion to an end. The logic of the argumentation as such is clear. It is not at first sight obvious, however, why baptism is linked with sex and its destructive power. It is nevertheless possible that the emphasis the *Testimony of Truth* places on the encratic lifestyle instead of giving any value to baptism leads the author to connect the latter with the dominion of carnal procreation (see below).

### 2.3. *Baptism and Redemption in Testim. Truth 55.1–56.9*

While criticizing Valentinus and his disciples, the author of the *Testimony of Truth* raises two issues with regard to the Valentinian system. First, according to Valentinian theology, the ogdoad is the place of repose/redemption for the spiritual ones before they enter into the pleroma.<sup>30</sup> The author of the *Testimony of Truth* flatly denies this and states that the Valentinians do not even know what redemption is all about. Second, the Valentinians receive

<sup>28</sup> Actually the story marks Jesus' appearance from the imperishable realm.

<sup>29</sup> It is noteworthy that the Gospel of John also omits any mention of Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist. Nevertheless, the dearth of this motif in the Gospel of John is not due to a critical view of baptism, as in the *Testimony of Truth*, but most probably to an attempt to eliminate the impression that Jesus would have derived his authority from John because the latter baptized Jesus.

<sup>30</sup> Pearson 1981, 170.

baptism to achieve redemption. According to the author of the *Testimony of Truth* this is a clear mistake. Baptism does not lead to redemption but to death (55.4–9).

Paradoxically, the Valentinians are right in believing that baptism offers a transformation, but they are wrong as to the nature of this transformation. Thus, the author of the *Testimony of Truth* maintains that the real life-giving transformation does not take place through a ritual of baptism but through something else, and the third baptismal section of the *Testimony of Truth* reveals what that is.

#### 2.4. *Baptism vs. Encratic Practice*

In *Testim. Truth* 69.7–32, the author introduces an alternative to water-baptism as a source of life-giving transformation. When water-baptism is seen as not having been instituted by Jesus, who did not baptize his disciples, but by the fathers of defilement, the “baptism of truth is something else” (69.22–23). It is to be found “by renunciation of the world” (69.23–24).<sup>31</sup> It is important that this renunciation does not take place through words alone but through active ascetic practices which especially manifest themselves in sexual continence. It is noteworthy that in the *Testimony of Truth*, the virginal birth of Jesus is to be taken as an incentive to live the “virginal life” (40.6–7). Purity is thus not gained through water-baptism but through encratic lifestyle.<sup>32</sup>

### 3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

(1) For *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*, baptism is a ritual tied to intellectual and ontological transformation of the baptized person. It signifies the transition from carnal existence to the pleromatic reality as this is already manifested in earthly life. Unlike many other Christians, such as Paul, and the authors of the Letter to the Colossians and the Valentinian *Gospel of Philip*,<sup>33</sup> the author of *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* has a very optimistic

<sup>31</sup> So also Rudolph 1975, 211.

<sup>32</sup> Another Nag Hammadi text, which is critical of water-baptism, is the *Paraphrase of Shem*. Nevertheless, it does not offer ascetic practices as an alternative means of spiritual perfection but the reception of the power of the Spirit and the knowledge provided by the Savior Derdekeas. For this see Rudolph 1975, 191–216, esp. 210–211.

<sup>33</sup> It is noteworthy that the author of the *Gospel of Philip*, the text which is usually regarded as Valentinian, also thinks that in some cases baptized Christians do not experience any real

view of the transformative power of baptism. For him or her, the baptized persons have undergone a change that makes them perfectly spiritual.

(2) The *Testimony of Truth* also sees baptism as a transformative ritual but in a completely different way. For the author of that text, water-baptism does not lead the baptized person to spiritual perfection but to spiritual death. Moreover, baptism is not linked with the idea of purity but with defilement since it somehow represents the dominion of carnal procreation which is to be opposed, according to the author of the text. Instead of water-baptism, the real transformative power is provided by the ascetic lifestyle which manifests itself in sexual continence. While baptism in *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* signifies mental and ontological transformation, the author of the *Testimony of Truth* completely dismisses its transformative power and only believes in a change caused by ethical transformation through the renunciation of procreation.

(3) The strange link between baptism and the dominion of carnal procreation in the *Testimony of Truth* may be motivated by polemical reasons. It is perhaps used as a somewhat illogical but effective rhetorical device to oppose a kind of ritualism and anti-asceticism found in a form of Valentinianism represented by *Valentinian Liturgical Readings*. It is nevertheless noteworthy that the *Testimony of Truth*, which is not a Valentinian text as such, contains numerous Valentinian features and theological *topoi*.<sup>34</sup> All this may suggest that the text originated in a milieu in which Valentinian ideas were common. Yet its author adopted a critical attitude toward that kind of Valentinianism, perhaps represented by *Valentinian Liturgical Readings* (and possibly *Valentinian Exposition*), which he did not consider ascetic enough.<sup>35</sup>

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change of identity through baptism (e.g. *Gos. Phil.* 64.22–31); for baptism as an identity marker in the *Gospel of Philip*, see Heimola 2011, 120–138.

<sup>34</sup> For examples, see Pearson 1981, 116.

<sup>35</sup> Much speaks in favor of Pearson's proposal according to which the author of the *Testimony of Truth* may have been an ex-Valentinian with a strong ascetic flavor (1981, 118–120). Whether or not this author can be identified with Julius Cassianus, as Pearson suggests, is a matter of debate.

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“THE GARMENT POURED ITS ENTIRE SELF OVER ME”:  
CHRISTIAN BAPTISMAL TRADITIONS AND  
THE ORIGINS OF THE *HYMN OF THE PEARL*

Dylan M. Burns

1. INTRODUCTION

Aside from his pioneering work on Sethian Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, John Turner is also a leading scholar of Gnostic ritual culture and the traditions associated with the apostle Thomas. Therefore this contribution, fondly dedicated to him, turns to that justifiably famous piece of ancient poetry, the so-called *Hymn of the Pearl*, embedded in the narrative of the second-century apocryphal text *The Acts of Judas Thomas, Apostle to the Indians*. While the Acts were probably written in Syriac, the wide use of Parthian terminology in the *Hymn* hinting at a dating somewhere in Sassanian-occupied Syria (thus in the first two centuries CE),<sup>1</sup> the origins of the poem remain a mystery. In the following, I will briefly detail the contents of the *Hymn* with special attention to its doctrine of a celestial “garment” or “robe,” before detailing several modern interpretations of it, advanced by Poirier, Layton, and DeConick. Each approach has its virtues, but is also inadequate, inviting a closer look into its background in early Christian baptismal liturgy. This comparison indicates that the *Hymn* and its description of a robe that “pours itself” over its protagonist may have originated within early Christian baptismal circles, instead of pre-Christian Jewish and/or Iranian groups.

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<sup>1</sup> For dating the *Acts Thom.*, see Bremmer 2001; on the language of the *Hymn*, see Poirier 1981, 169ff., 261ff.; Drijvers 2003, 332. See now also Russell 2001–2002, esp. 206, a study which helpfully elucidates the Parthian background of Syria during the period of the *Hymn*’s composition, but does not address the abundant Jewish and Christian lore that the text also draws upon. Beyer 1990, 241, also suggests a non-Christian, Iranian origin for the poem.

## 2. THE ACTS OF THOMAS AND THE HYMN

The *Acts of Thomas* is a typically Hellenistic romance which features the (mis)adventures and martyrdom of one of the Apostles, probably written in Syriac around the turn of the third century.<sup>2</sup> In our story, Jesus sells our eponymous hero to a Hindu merchant, forcing him to evangelize in India, where various escapades ensue (there are weddings, wedding nights interrupted, man-eating tigers, and a good deal of carpentry). As apostles are wont to do, he breaks up a marriage, winds up in jail, and sings a song, our *Hymn*.<sup>3</sup>

The contents of the hymn may be briefly described as follows: a young prince is sent by his parents to Egypt to recover a pearl guarded by a ferocious serpent. He is told that when he returns, he will receive a beautiful robe and rule the kingdom, second in authority only to his father. Once in Egypt, the prince falls prey to the malicious wiles of the locals and forgets his quest. His royal parents learn of his troubles, sending a magical letter that awakens him. He recalls and accomplishes his mission by putting the dragon to sleep with a magic spell. Finally, he returns home, and at the palace the royal servants bring out the robe, the description of which is clearly the centerpiece of the *Hymn*, as follows:

And because I did not remember its fashion—  
 For in my childhood I had left it in my father's house—  
 All of a sudden, when I received it,  
 The garment seemed to me to become like my mirror image (ܩܘܨܝܢܐ).  
 I saw it all in all,  
 And I too received all in it,  
 For we were two in distinction  
 And yet again one, in one likeness.  
 And the treasurers too,  
 Who brought it to me, I saw in like manner  
 To be two (and yet) one likeness,  
 For one sign of the king was written on them (both) ...<sup>4</sup>

The prince goes on to list the various jewels on the robe. Then:

And I saw also that all over it  
 The rumblings of knowledge (ܩܘܨܝܢܐ ܩܘܨܝܢܐ) were working,

<sup>2</sup> On the Hellenistic romances and the various Acta of the apostles, see the classic study of Söder 1932.

<sup>3</sup> Chs. 105–108.

<sup>4</sup> Vss. 75–81. All translations in the following are my own, except where noted. The text is from Poirier 1981; for the Greek, see also Bonnet 1959.

And I saw too that it was preparing to speak.  
 I heard the sound of its tones ...:  
 “I am the active in deeds,  
 whom they reared for him before my father;  
 and I perceived myself,  
 that my stature grew according to his labors.”  
 And in its kingly movements  
 It poured its entire self over me,  
 And on the hands of its givers  
 It hastened that I might take it.  
 And love urged me  
 to meet it and receive it;  
 and I stretched forth and took it.  
 With the beauty of its colours I adorned myself,  
 And I wrapped myself wholly in my toga  
 Of brilliant hues ...<sup>5</sup>

Having donned the robe, the prince then goes to the “gate” of the father’s chamber. “Mingling” with other royalty, he gives the pearl to the king of kings. Thus ends the *Hymn* of the apostle Thomas.

### 3. THE PRINCE’S ROBE IN THOMASINE CHRISTIANITY, “CHALDAEAN” PHILOSOPHY, AND JEWISH APOCALYPTIC

The actual handing over of the pearl is barely mentioned. The pearl itself is not described at all, while the glorious beauty of the heavenly garment is the climax of the poem. *Pace* Jonas, the pearl is not a symbol for the soul or an abstract “Gnostic” myth about it,<sup>6</sup> but the “kingdom of heaven” in Synoptic sayings traditions.<sup>7</sup> Thus the pearl is not the soul. It is not the prince. It is not the title or even topic of the poem; it is a narrative device.<sup>8</sup> Like the vague phrase “kingdom of heaven” to which it refers, it is, in itself empty of content—that is supplied by the description of the robe.<sup>9</sup> More importantly,

<sup>5</sup> Vss. 88–97.

<sup>6</sup> Jonas 1963, 125–127; 1974, 278–282; more recently, Filoramo 1990, 8; for more, see Klijn 1960, 156n8; Poirier 1981, 82–144.

<sup>7</sup> The text refers clearly to “one pearl,” or “a certain pearl,” in both the Greek and the Syriac (τὸν ἕνα μαργαρίτην, and ܩܘܢܐ ܩܕܝܫܐ, respectively). The phrase “one pearl” is also used in one of Jesus’ famous parables, Matt 13:45–46 (= *Gos. Thom.* log. 76): “the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl (τὸν ἕνα μαργαρίτην) of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it” (following Klijn 2003, 191). Beyer 1990 suggests instead that the reference is a Christianizing gloss (241).

<sup>8</sup> Klijn 1960; Poirier 1981, 238–239; Ferreira 2000, 209.

<sup>9</sup> Similarly Poirier 1981, 202.

the pearl motif recalls the Jesus-sayings traditions, in particular a tradition we know had currency in Syria due to its presence in the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>10</sup> To speak of a formal “school of St. Thomas” is probably an exaggeration,<sup>11</sup> but it is undeniable that Syria was home to a peculiar body of traditions and literature featuring the apostle Thomas, such as the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas the Contender* of Nag Hammadi. By virtue of their Syrian provenance, Thomasine sources provide both the most geographically and thematically immediate backdrops for the *Hymn*. Moreover, they describe a model of divine twinship that corresponds to that of the *Hymn*.<sup>12</sup>

As is well known, this theory stems from the very name of Thomas himself, meaning “twin” in Aramaic.<sup>13</sup> In the Syrian tradition, Thomas is also referred to as “Judas Didymus,” as at the beginning of the *Gospel of Thomas* or the *Acts of Thomas* (cf. John 11:16; 20:24; 21:2). The name was one effective enough for the *Book of Thomas the Contender* to explicitly refer to him as Jesus’ “brother” and “double.”<sup>14</sup>

In the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Book of Thomas the Contender*, Thomas possesses a highly privileged authority bestowed by Jesus himself;<sup>15</sup> in the former, Thomas (purportedly) transmits the “secret sayings” of Jesus that will bestow eternal life, and in the latter, we have a frame narrative which features Thomas receiving Jesus’ esoteric teachings. In both texts, we are told, our souls have come into this world from realms of eternal light. Recovery of this light is nothing less than the discovery of the self—the divine self: In the *Book of Thomas*, Jesus tells his interlocutor,

Now, since it is said that you are my double and my true companion, examine yourself and understand who you are, how you exist, and how you will be. Inasmuch as you are going to be called my sibling, it is not fitting for you to be unknowledgeable of yourself ... For those who have not known themselves have not had knowledge of anything. But those who have only known themselves have also received knowledge of the depth of the entirety. So for this reason, Thomas my brother, you have personally seen what is hidden from mankind and what people are impeded by when they lack knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Thus Quispel 1967, 23.

<sup>11</sup> Thus Uro 2003, 20–30; cf. Turner 1975, 233–237; Layton 1987, 359–365; Sellew 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Poirier 1981, 319–320; Layton 1987, 369; Hartin 1999, esp. 1014–1017.

<sup>13</sup> See further Poirier 1997; also 1981, 308–310.

<sup>14</sup> *Thom. Cont.* NHC II,7 138.7; 138.19; also 142.7.

<sup>15</sup> *Thom. Cont.* NHC II,7 138.7–15; 139.24; 142.26–37; *Gos. Thom.* log. 1, 13.

<sup>16</sup> *Thom. Cont.* NHC II,7 138.7–19 (trans. Layton, modified).

The motif of Thomas as Jesus’ twin who thus has perfect knowledge of him is a symbol of humanity. We are actually perfect twins of the realm of light, which is our true self, although it does not seem this way to us right now because we are presently encased in bodies and beholden to mundane desires. Like the *Hymn*, Thomasine literature is highly ascetic. The *Book of Thomas* dwells on the terrible fates that await those enslaved to carnal life: fires, tortures, tombs.<sup>17</sup> The *Gospel of Thomas*, meanwhile, disparages Mary’s femininity, tells disciples not to concern themselves with material trappings, and asserts the independence of spirit and body.<sup>18</sup> The purpose of this *askēsis* is to achieve a return to the origins, the transesterial realm of light.<sup>19</sup>

The *Hymn* from the *Acts of Thomas* thus has a very similar mystical outlook to other Syrian Thomasine literature: Ascetic practice, denigration of the body; extra-terrestrial origin located in a celestial realm of light; discovery of origin explicitly described as the process of self-discovery, called “knowledge”; and assimilation, having acquired knowledge, to the light of heaven in some kind of visionary experience. Yet, notably, the linchpin of the *Hymn*—the celestial robe—is missing from the Thomasine traditions.

Layton, meanwhile, has proposed a possible Greek philosophical provenance of the *Hymn* and its relation of the fall of the soul into the body and subsequent forgetfulness.<sup>20</sup> Contemporary Platonic speculation discussed this matter by theorizing the famous “vehicle of the soul,” or *ὄχημα*. “This concept of an aetherial, luminous body has great pedigree in Greek physics, but by Plotinus, it had become bound up with narratives of the soul’s descent from heaven (or lack thereof), playing a pivotal role in the return of the soul to its origin.”<sup>21</sup> The second-century *Chaldaean Oracles* describe the *ὄχημα* in contexts dealing with the entrapment of the soul in matter.<sup>22</sup> *Frg.* 120

<sup>17</sup> *Thom. Cont.* NHC II,7 139.32 ff.

<sup>18</sup> *Gos. Thom.* log. 36, 42, 114, *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> I.e., avoiding the terrible fates described in *Thom. Cont.*, achieving a return to our origins—the transesterial realm of light, per *Gos. Thom.* log. 11: “Jesus said, ‘The heaven will pass away, and the one above it will pass away. And the dead are not alive, and the living will not die. In the days when you used to ingest the dead things, you made them alive. When you are in the light what will you do? On the day that you were one, you made two. And when you are two, what will you do?’”

<sup>20</sup> Layton 1987, 367.

<sup>21</sup> See Dodds 1963; Shaw 1995, 52n12.

<sup>22</sup> While the Numenian cosmology of the *Chaldaean Oracles* betrays a second-century Greek philosophical provenance (Majercik 1989, 2–3), scholars remain divided on whether or not they were available to Plotinus. (Majercik 1998 answers in the negative; cf. Finamore 1998.)

refers to a “delicate vehicle of the soul” (ψυχῆς λεπτὸν ὄχημα), and *frg.* 201, quoted by Proclus, states that “particular souls ... become mundane (ἐγκόσμαι) through their ‘vehicles.’” The vehicle (πνεῦμα) draws “irrational nature (ἄλογιστον φύσιν).”<sup>23</sup> Thus, the Platonic subtle body is a quasi-physical husk, something the theurgist acquires during descent into matter and later sheds on the way back to heaven.<sup>24</sup>

While this Platonic subtle body superficially resembles the poem’s doctrine of the heavenly body, the sources part ways in the details.<sup>25</sup> First of all, the ὄχημα functions as the site for the soul’s forgetting of divine origin as well as its recollection, so its value is somewhat ambivalent; in the *Hymn*, the coat is an unambiguous goal. Second, the hymn’s robe describes the destination of the divine journey, not the vessel taken there, which is the function of the vehicle. Third, it is at the summit of reality, the divine throne-room, that the *Hymn*’s prince dons the robe. The Platonic ὄχημα, meanwhile, is taken on at the ontologically inferior spheres of increasing matter. The hypothesis of a Greek philosophical background for the description of the robe is probably best left aside.

Finally, the location of the prince’s investiture—the divine throne room—has led some scholars to recall Jewish visionary ascent literature. For instance, DeConick seeks to establish the *Gospel of Thomas* and the *Hymn of the Pearl* in the context of Hellenistic visionary ascent literature, especially that of Judaism. “This early Jewish mysticism,” she writes, “filtered into Christianity, Gnosticism, and the Hekhalot literature, teaching that, after proper preparations, one could seek to ascend into heaven in order to gain heavenly knowledge and a transforming vision of the deity.”<sup>26</sup> Indeed, early Jewish and Christian apocalypses are replete with accounts of seers being transformed in heaven, often described with the metaphor of leaving the earthly “robe” and donning a celestial one, becoming an angel. A *locus classicus* is 2 *Enoch*:

And the LORD said to Michael, ‘Go, and extract Enoch from [his] earthly clothing. And anoint him with my delightful oil, and put him into the clothes of my glory.’ And so Michael did, just as the Lord had said to him. He anointed me and clothed me. And the appearance of that oil is greater than the greatest light, and its ointment is like sweet dew, and its fragrance myrrh; and it is like

<sup>23</sup> *Chald. Or.*, *frg.* 196 Majercik.

<sup>24</sup> See the discussions of Finamore 1985, 59–124; Majercik 1989, 31–45; Lewy 2011, esp. 199 ff., 413 ff.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Brock 1982, 28n6.

<sup>26</sup> DeConick 1996, 38.

the rays of the glittering sun. And I looked at myself, and I had become like one of his glorious ones, and there was no observable difference.<sup>27</sup>

Other examples extend from the Jewish apocalypses to the Christian Revelation and *Ascension of Isaiah*,<sup>28</sup> as well as to the Sethian Gnostic literature from Nag Hammadi.<sup>29</sup>

DeConick is probably right that the *Hymn* is indebted to these traditions, but it also transforms them. First of all, its praxis of transformation via an encounter with the divine twin is not paralleled at all in apocalyptic literature. Second, it is possible that the language of the “robe” could derive from closely related Jewish traditions of Adam’s pre-lapsarian “robe of glory” (or “garments of paradise”), which became a popular motif in Syrian Christian literature.<sup>30</sup> While the end-result of these cousin-traditions—adoption of a new, heavenly body—is the same, it is possible that the *Hymn* grew out of their Syriac Christian reception history, rather than Jewish ascent literature. Third, while the liturgical context of transformation is central to the frame narrative of the *Acts of Thomas*,<sup>31</sup> it is not explicitly present in the *Hymn* itself, which comprises a separate literary unit.

#### 4. A SYRIAN BAPTISMAL MILIEU?

The absence of liturgical language in the *Hymn* remains vexing, but is not impossible to explain either. Rather, it appears to be associated with bap-

<sup>27</sup> 2 *En.* 22:8–10, trans. Andersen in *OTP*. Cf. 1 *En.* 62:15: “the righteous and elect ones shall rise from the earth and shall cease being of downcast face. They shall wear the garments of glory. These garments of yours shall become the garments of life from the Lord of the Spirits. Neither shall your garments wear out, nor your glory come to an end before the Lord of the Spirits.” (Trans. Isaac in *OTP*.)

<sup>28</sup> 1 *En.* 62:15 ff.; *Apoc. Ab.* 13:14; *Rev* 7:9–17; *Ascen. Isa.* 8:14; 9:9; 2 *Bar.* 51; *T. Levi* 2:5–5:7; 8:1–19. Cf. *Ezek* 42:14; 44:17–19. For discussion, see Morray-Jones 1992, 17; Fletcher-Louis 1997, 134; Schäfer 2009, 70–72, 82 ff.

<sup>29</sup> E.g., *Zost.* NHC VIII,1 6.3–21; 7.1–22; 30.29–31.23. A similar complex of glorification and subsequent transformation amongst the angels, probably implying the angelification of the seer, can also be glimpsed in *Holy Book* (NHC III,2 = IV,2), *Trim. Prot.* (NHC XIII,1), *Steles Seth* (NHC VII,5) and perhaps *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) and *Marsanes* (NHC X,1).

<sup>30</sup> Drijvers 2003, 332; Young 2007, 202–203, 210–214 (adding further biblical parallels, particularly to the robe of the high priest of the Temple), both regarding Brock 1982; 2008, 61 ff. Brock actually suggests that the Syriac tradition may be seen instead as a “commentary on the *Hymn of the Pearl*” (1982, 21).

<sup>31</sup> *Chrism*: chs. 27, 121, 132, 157; water baptism: chs. 121, 132, 157; eucharist with bread: chs. 27, 29, 49–50, 133; eucharist with bread and water: ch. 121; eucharist with bread and cup: ch. 158 (Drijvers in Schneemelcher 2003, 2:333). See also the commentary of Klijn 2003, 77–79, 206–207, 241.



tism. Let us recall the lines describing the reception of the coat: “And in its kingly movements, it poured its entire self (ܠܥܘܠܡܐ ... ܡܠܘܥ) over me, and on the hands of its givers it hastened that I might take it.” The choice of wording here—the coat “pouring itself”—is striking, and has led some translators to prefer the Greek MS.<sup>32</sup> However, it is worth at least attempting a reading privileging the Syriac, given its general priority for the *Hymn* (and the *Acts* in general),<sup>33</sup> and observing that the Greek is not obviously free from corruption either.<sup>34</sup> The root ܥܘܪܐ, “to pour,” is used in early Syrian Christianity to denote the sealing with oil that takes prior to baptism.<sup>35</sup> As Klijn points out, pre-baptismal chrism symbolizes the Holy Spirit in other liturgical passages in the *Acts*, recalling the “pouring out of the Spirit” onto the “new man.”<sup>36</sup> While the background of the motif is eschatological, referring to the Spirit “pouring itself out” as fire and prophecy,<sup>37</sup> apostolic literature uses it to refer to the “gift of the spirit” received in preaching and particularly baptism (Acts 2:33).<sup>38</sup> Later (2:38), the “gift” of the spirit is presented to those who have themselves baptized at Pentecost. This “gift” is poured over the family of Cornelius (10:45), identical with that received at Pentecost by the apostles (11:17). Titus 3:5, meanwhile, tells us that the Spirit “poured out” over us during rebirth. As in Rom 5:5, the operation of the spirit is present in baptism and follows it with a gift, the remission of sins. Klijn suggests this operation is chrismatic in the *Hymn*, but as Ysebaert recognizes, the technical sense of the “pouring” is not clear. While it is a pre-baptismal chrism in Syrian liturgy, it is a more clearly post-baptismal laying on hands in the apostolic literature, an ambiguity that follows naturally from the sense that the Spirit would be active at both ends of the baptismal process.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>32</sup> αἱ δὲ κινῆσεις αἱ βασιλικαὶ πᾶσαι ἐπανεπαύοντό μοι αὐξανούσης πρὸς ταύτης ὀρμᾶς.

<sup>33</sup> Scholars today widely agree that the poem was composed in Syriac and later translated into Greek, like the *Acts of Thomas*. (For status quaestionis on the *Acts*, see Attridge 1990; see also 2010, 3–4; Drijvers 2003, 323; on the *Hymn*, see Poirier 1981, 42; Beyer 1990, 235, 237–239, emphasizing an Iranian milieu.)

<sup>34</sup> (ἐπαν)επαύοντο must be rendered rather freely, with a sense of the reciprocal movement between the prince and the robe (thus Poirier 1981, 435, regarding vs. 97b; certainly this is a strange use of the middle of παύω [cf. LSJ 1350b]): “(ils) se reposèrent sur moi” (Poirier 1981), “reposed on me” (Layton 1987), “it stretched out to me” (Attridge 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Klijn 1973, 57–60; Leloir 1985, 248–256.

<sup>36</sup> *Acts Thom.* chs. 27, 48, 132; and Klijn 2003’s comments ad loc. For review and *status quaestionis* on baptism and chrism in the *Acts Thom.*, see Ferguson 2009, 429–435.

<sup>37</sup> Lam 2:4; Hos 10:5; Matt 3:10, 12; Luke 3:9, 17; Isa 44:3; but esp. Joel 2:28–3:2, cit. Ysebaert 1962, 59.

<sup>38</sup> Ysebaert 1962, 72–74, 135, 269–270.

<sup>39</sup> “The expressions ‘to pour out,’ ‘to give,’ and ‘to receive the Spirit’ refer unambiguously to the post-baptismal rite on account of its effect” (Ysebaert 1962, 270; see also pp. 59, 266).

An alternative suggestion is to recall that it is a garment which is being “poured,” an expression that at face value seems inexplicable. A remark of Justin Martyr might shed light on its meaning:<sup>40</sup> “The Holy Spirit called those who receive the remission of sins through him ‘his garment (στολή).’ Among them he is always latently present (i.e., like what is hidden under a garment), but at his second coming, he shall be manifestly present.”<sup>41</sup> On this reading, the Spirit pours itself into the one undergoing baptism, who becomes a “robe,” as it were, for the Spirit. Indeed, the robe in the *Hymn* serves as nothing else than the prince’s twin—effectively, the prince himself. Its function is thus quite different from a mere symbol of royalty,<sup>42</sup> evocation of the Jewish high priest’s vestments,<sup>43</sup> or allusion to the garments of paradise. Moreover, it almost certainly is a metaphor for the working of the Spirit during or after baptism, not during the pre-baptismal chrism of first and second-century Syrian liturgies. Significantly, St. Ephrem retained this metaphor, changing it to suit his own theologico-poetic ends, when he describes how the baptized become themselves robes of glory worn by Christ.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> For the Spirit pouring itself out as clothing, see also Cod. Bruc. *Untitled* 34 (251.12–16 Schmidt-MacDermot) “it (i.e., the Monad) gathered its garments and made them into the form of a veil which surrounded it on all sides. And it poured itself over all (the heavenly beings) (ἀσπαστῆς ἐβολ ἐξωοῦ τῆροῦ), raising them all up. And it divided them all according to rank and according to ordinance and according to providence” (trans. MacDermot, slightly modified). The usage here might refer to the sort of eschatological sense of the spirit pouring itself out, but relocated to the celestial realm, whereas it is combined with baptismal language by Irenaeus: “the Holy Spirit ... who at the end of time has been poured forth in a new manner upon humanity over the whole earth, renewing man to God” (*Epid.* 6, trans. Robinson; cit. Ysebaert 1962, 145). Theodore of Mopsuestia, meanwhile, discusses the post-baptismal indwelling of the Spirit and His gifts (*Bapt. hom.* 3.26–27 in Finn 1992, 96–97).

<sup>41</sup> Justin Martyr, *Dial.* 54, my translation, cit. Ysebaert 1962, 71. See also Joel 3:1 at 87.6 cit. Ysebaert 1962, 350; also 1 Clem. 2:2; 46:6, cit. Ysebaert 1962, 349. Pseudo-Barnabas’ Epistle, meanwhile, refers to a more permanent indwelling of spirit after the post-baptismal rite, i.e., *Barn.* 1:3.

<sup>42</sup> Pace Poirier 1981, 203.

<sup>43</sup> As suggested by Young 2007.

<sup>44</sup> *HNativ.* 22.39.3; *HEpi* 9.12 (Beck); on these passages, see Brock 1982, 18–19; Seppälä 2011, esp. 1140, 1156–1157, 1161–1162, 1169–1171. (Beck raises questions about the authenticity of *HNativ.* 21–27, but is unwilling to declare them spurious [CSCO 186:vii–viii].) Note that Ephrem, writing here more as a poet than a systematic theologian, also refers to the garments of glory acquired in baptism as clothes of the Spirit (e.g., *HEpi* 13.2), collapsing the identities of baptisant, Son, Spirit, and garment. Similarly see Aphrahat, *Dem.* 6.14 in Finn 1992, 139–140; also *Dem.* 14.8–9.

## 5. CONCLUSION

There is no need, therefore, to isolate Parthian epic poetry, Greek philosophy, and Jewish apocalyptic as the central background of the *Hymn*. Indeed, it is a paradigmatically “syncretic” work. Nonetheless, the *Hymn of the Pearl* probably originates in a Syrian Christian baptismal group, for the puzzling motif of the garment “pouring itself” over the prince most likely preserves a tradition, also attested in Justin and probably originating in Syria, wherein the “gift of the (Holy) Spirit” pours itself out into the baptizand, who becomes its “robe.” The “pouring” thus probably refers to baptism, rather than a pre-baptismal chrism, as in the rest of the *Acts of Thomas*. Its origin is probably Syrian, given the constellation of sources associated with it (Thomasine, and, later, Syriac literature). It is impossible to determine whether the *Hymn’s* greater motif of divine twinship (identifying the baptized with the robe of the Spirit) is derivative of Thomasine traditions, or if it arose independently, later incorporated into the *Acts of Thomas*.<sup>45</sup> (Similarly, its importance in Manichaeism does not necessarily testify to Manichaean origins.)<sup>46</sup> In any case, the text was hardly alone in postulating that the baptismal initiate acquires a new, spiritual body that is the equivalent to one’s divine self; yet this self is not identified as an angel (as in the various apocalypses discussed above) nor as a “primal androgyne.”<sup>47</sup> For a so-called “syncretic” piece, the *Hymn of the Pearl* remains singular both as a Christian baptismal hymnody and a work of great beauty.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> See also *Odes Sol.* 13.1 (*OTP*); *Left Ginza* 559.29–32 (Lidzbarski), cit. Klijn 2003, 195.

<sup>46</sup> Pace Ferreira 2000, 208–209.

<sup>47</sup> Meeks 1974; MacDonald 1987.

<sup>48</sup> This study is a revision of a lecture delivered to the Dorushe Annual Graduate Student Conference on Syriac Studies, Yale University, New Haven, Conn., March 2009. I thank Yonatan Moss and Michael Peppard for their valuable criticisms and suggestions. My editorial work on this volume was conducted under the auspices of a postdoctoral research fellowship from Copenhagen University (the Faculty of Theology), to which I express my gratitude.

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ALEXANDER OF LYCOPOLIS,  
MANICHAISM AND NEOPLATONISM

Johannes van Oort

1. STATE OF RESEARCH ON ALEXANDER OF LYCOPOLIS

The place of Alexander in history is based on one single writing. According to this text in a late ninth to early tenth-century codex from the Biblioteca Laurenziana at Florence, the title of his work runs: Ἀλεξάνδρου Λυκοπολίτου ἐπιστρέψαντος ἐξ ἐθνῶν πρὸς τὰς Μανιχαίου δόξας.<sup>1</sup> Former scholarship understood this title as referring to the treatise of a certain Alexander, bishop of Lycopolis, who once “turned from paganism to the Manichaean opinions.”<sup>2</sup> Modern research, following August Brinkmann in his critical edition with a long Praefatio, did not subscribe to this opinion. Alexander was neither converted to Manichaeism, nor was he a Christian bishop. Such false views, presently still circulating by means of the preface to Jacques-Paul Migne’s often reprinted edition,<sup>3</sup> seem to have been caused both by the reference of the Byzantine Patriarch Photius (ca. 810–890) in his famous *Bibliotheca* and by the mistaken translation of the manuscript’s title by the first editor P. Combefis as “*Alexandri Lycopolitae, qui ex gentibus ad Manichaei opinioniones conversus erat.*”<sup>4</sup> The Greek phrase πρὸς τὰς Μανιχαίου δόξας should rather have been translated as “*contra Manichaei opinioniones,*” whereas ἐπιστρέψαντος ἐξ ἐθνῶν simply is a pious invention. Already the founding father of Manichaean studies, the famous Huguenot Isaac de Beausobre (1659–1738), opined that Alexander could only have been “un Philosophe Payen”: (1) in his dispute with the Manichaeans he never quotes from the Bible; (2) he speaks of the souls of the nymphs: “cela n’est pas du stile Chrétien”; (3) he makes mention of the cataclysms in the age of Deucalion and Phoroneus, but not in Noah’s time; (4) he says that “of all the gods” the

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<sup>1</sup> Brinkmann 1989, iv–v.

<sup>2</sup> Hawkins 1869, 236; 1978, 241n1; Coxe 1978, 252–253.

<sup>3</sup> Migne 1857, 410–411.

<sup>4</sup> Brinkmann 1985, 13 ff.



Manichaeans only revere the sun and the moon; (5) Greek mythology is considered to be “our tradition” and the battle of the giants to belong to “our poetry.”<sup>5</sup> For these and some other reasons, all leading modern researchers share this opinion and consider Alexander a pagan philosopher.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. THE MAIN CONTENTS OF ALEXANDER’S TREATISE AND ITS IMPORTANCE

In his treatise, Alexander reports that “some of those who have pursued the study of philosophy with me” (τινας τῶν συνεσχολακότων ἡμῖν ἐν τῷ φιλοσοφεῖν, 8.14–15 Brinkmann) converted to Manichaeism. This refers either to former colleagues during his student years in Alexandria, or (most likely) to some of his own pupils in Lycopolis. The general tone of his writing, as well as Alexander’s concern for “the minds of those who uncritically accept” the Manichaean doctrines (8.12–13), reveals the attitude of the solicitous professor rather than that of the former student.<sup>7</sup> The circumstances that gave rise to his tract seem to parallel those of the famous Neoplatonist philosopher Plotinus (ca. 205–270) of Rome—circumstances that brought about *Ennead* 2.9 [33] “Against the Gnostics.” On a certain day, Manichaean missionaries entered Alexander’s school in Lycopolis and, under the guise of being his students, started their mission. Alexander mentions some of their names: “the first expounder of his (Mani’s) doctrines to visit us was a man called Papos, after whom came Thomas” (4.17–19). Both are well known from Manichaean texts<sup>8</sup> and figure in the Coptic Psalmbook which, like other Manichaean texts from Egyptian Medinet Madi, was written in a Coptic dialect typical of the Lycopolis region.<sup>9</sup>

Alexander speaks of Manichaeism as a “novelty” (καινοτομία) which has “but recently” (οὐ πάλα) come to the fore (4.16–17). Other sources reveal that Manichaeism entered Egypt from 244 onwards.<sup>10</sup> In 4.21–22 Alexander indicates that he had learnt of the death of Mani (277 or 276), but he does not make mention of Diocletianus’ edict against the Manichaeans of the year 297 (or 302). Most probably his treatise, in which a philosopher addresses other philosophers, was written sometime between 277 and 297.

<sup>5</sup> de Beausobre 1984, 236–237.

<sup>6</sup> Van der Horst and Mansfeld 1974; Villey 1985, 16 ff.; Edwards 1989, 483–487.

<sup>7</sup> Villey 1985, 198.

<sup>8</sup> Villey 1985, 108–115; cf. Lieu 1992, e.g., 90, 103.

<sup>9</sup> Allberry 1938, e.g., p. 34 for “Pappos” and pp. 203–228 for “Psalms of Thomas.”

<sup>10</sup> Gardner and Lieu 2004, 111–112.

In modern research, Alexander's *Against the Doctrines of Manichaios* is important for two main reasons. Firstly, because it is a highly significant source for our knowledge of early Manichaeism. A major characteristic of Alexander's description is that he considers it to be a form of Christianity. In the past decades, this assessment of Mani's religion has been confirmed by several discoveries of Manichaean texts. Secondly, because Alexander shows himself to be a Platonist philosopher. His treatise is an important and, in many respects, unique text in the history of early Neoplatonism.

The work can be divided into three main sections: Introduction (on the Christian philosophy and its decadence) (3.1–4.13); Manichaeism (4.13–9.16); Refutation of Manichaeism (9.17–40.6). A closer look at its contents makes clear that it provides an introduction to Manichaeism and methodological considerations on how to refute it (3.1–9.16) and, after that, consists of the philosophical refutation proper (9.17–40.6).

### 3. ALEXANDER ON MANICHAISM AND ITS MAIN TENETS

Some major elements of the treatise may be highlighted, first and foremost with regard to Manichaeism and Alexander's methodological considerations. To Alexander, Manichaeism is a recent and very deviant form of Christian philosophy. His treatise opens with the apodeictic statement: "The philosophy of the Christians is termed simple" (3.1). Having indicated this simplicity, and also the fact that Christianity focuses on ethical instruction suited for "ordinary people" (3.1–18), Alexander explains, that "this simple philosophy has been split up into numerous factions" (3.19–20). Some adherents had become leaders of "sects," but none of them were able to attain theoretical precision and thus they brought this philosophy to a near nullity (3.20–4.13). The person called Manichaios is an example of this.

Alexander briefly introduces Mani and makes mention of some disciples (4.13–22). He then provides a very significant doxography of Manichaeism. This synopsis of Manichaean doctrines is thoroughly marked by his philosophical point of view. It is hard to say whether or not Alexander used a written document.<sup>11</sup> But what he describes as being Mani's tenets turns out to be highly accurate.

According to Alexander, Mani laid down two principles: God and Matter (ὕλη). However:

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<sup>11</sup> Schaefer 1927, 65–157. Schaefer made much of φήμη in 4.23–24: "The account (φήμη) of this man's doctrine as it came down to us by his pupils."

he calls matter not that which Plato calls it, which becomes all things when it assumes quality and shape—therefore he terms it ‘all-receiving’ (*Tim.* 51A7) and ‘mother’ (*Tim.* 50D3) and ‘nurse’ (*Tim.* 49A6)—nor what Aristotle calls it, namely as the element in relation to which form and privation occur (*Phys.* 1.7 190B17–191A22; *Metaph.* 12.2 1069B32, 12.4 1070B18–19), but something beside these. For the random motion (*ἄτακτος κίνησις*) in each of the beings, this he calls matter. (5.3–8 Brinkmann)

Right from the start Alexander tackles a central Manichaeian tenet and, in the course of his refutation, he more than once returns to it (10.5, 24; 11.2, 10–11; 23.19; 25.21; 26.1, 4; cf. 33.15).

In former years there was much debate between the Orientalist Hans Heinrich Schaeder and the classical philologist Richard Reitzenstein on whether the Greek terms and concepts of ὕλη and ἄτακτος κίνησις are genuine Manichaeian concepts<sup>12</sup> or whether they originated with Alexander or some Neoplatonically-coloured Manichaeian source used by him.<sup>13</sup> As a matter of fact, it is reasonable to assume that in the sentence quoted above the references to Plato and Aristotle are due to Alexander. One may also assume that in his discussion of these concepts in, e.g., 10.4–12, Alexander mixes up his refutation of Mani with his refutation of Middle Platonic concepts of matter such as found in Plutarch, Atticus and Numenius. But from several Manichaeian texts and other first-hand testimonies, we know for sure that Mani himself used the Greek word ὕλη of matter and that also the concept of ἄτακτος κίνησις fully (and perhaps even literally) matches the essential character of Manichaeian matter.<sup>14</sup> It is unnecessary to assume the existence of any special written document in order to acquaint Alexander with real Manichaeian doctrine: the Manichaeian interlocutors in his school would have been his real source.

From these intermediaries Alexander also seems to have received information on many other Manichaeian tenets, which he conveys very accurately. What is striking in his account is the (near-) absence of typical Manichaeian mythological elements, a feature which might already be due to his interlocutors. In a precise way, Alexander discusses Mani’s teachings on the two principles (*ἀρχαί*) of God and matter; the auxiliary powers on the side of God and those on the side of matter; the desirous attack of matter on “the region above”; God’s sending of “a certain power which we call soul”

<sup>12</sup> Schaeder 1927.

<sup>13</sup> Reitzenstein 1967 (original 1929), 92–93; 1931a, 185–198; 1931b, 28–58; cf. Troje 1948, 96–115.

<sup>14</sup> Van Oort 1987, 140–145.

(ψυχή); God's sending of a second power "which we call demiurge" (δημιουργός); the demiurge's creation of this world from the mixture of soul and matter; the work of "another power" (termed in other sources the third envoy or *tertius legatus*) who enables sun and moon to fulfill their task in the delivery of light; the creation of man as a mixture of matter and divine soul; Christ as an intellect (νοῦς); etc. All these teachings, according to the Manichaeans based upon "the voice of the prophets" and put forward by them "without any form of proof," Alexander proposes to answer, with God's help, "in a rational way" (μετά λόγου) (9.5–16).

#### 4. IN SEARCH OF ALEXANDER'S PHILOSOPHY

It is evident that Alexander's refutation of Mani is coloured by his philosophical system. But what kind of philosophy are we dealing with? In order to get the right perspective on his description and refutation of Manichaeism, this should be our additional topic here. The following considerations by a student of Manichaeism are written down in the hope that they can fully stand the test of our current master both in the field of Gnosticism and Platonism, John Turner. If not, one may hope that he will return to the problem and will advance scholarship on this particular issue as well.

Throughout the tractate it becomes clear that Alexander is a Platonist. Moreover, he turns out to be a Platonist of an eclectic type. In particular, the Utrecht scholar Jaap Mansfeld, in a groundbreaking philosophical commentary on Alexander's treatise, has described him as an eminent source for the history of Neoplatonism and its Alexandrian variety. In many respects he seems to reveal doctrines, which may be attributed to Ammonius Saccas.<sup>15</sup>

Because the exact doctrines of this founding father of Neoplatonism are unknown, there is an element of speculation in this view. Besides, we do not know for sure that Alexander studied with him. All we have is one accidental writing that fails to provide a systematic overview of Alexander's philosophy, but that aims to show the incompatibility of Manichaeism with the essentials of the major currents of Greek philosophy. In order to refute this "most astonishing doctrine" (cf. 4.15), Alexander brings together arguments from all philosophical schools important to him. His refutation of Mani's dualism, for instance, is achieved by referencing a dualistic concept ascribed to the Pythagoreans (10.12–19), but this does not necessarily mean that he himself adheres to such a view.

<sup>15</sup> Mansfeld in Van der Horst and Mansfeld 1974, e.g., 6–46.

Yet there is a number of philosophical principles explicitly endorsed by Alexander. Once he even speaks of “the true doctrine” (24.19: ἡ ἀληθὴ δόξα; cf. τὸ ἀληθές 38.5) and sometimes he makes clear that one theory is to be preferred over another (9.17–10.5; cf. 35.14). According to Alexander, there is one first principle, the cause of all beings. This productive cause (3.5–6: τὸ ποιητικὸν αἴτιον; 9.21–10.1; 10.6; cf. 10.9–10) is an intellect (νοῦς) from which all things come into being hypostatically (10.3–4). Although the hypostases (ὑποστάσεις) derive from God, He himself remains (24.19–20). Alexander’s mention of an intellect demiurge (δημιουργός) seems to be an indication of his pre-Plotinian Platonism. But elsewhere he speaks of God as “beyond being” (τὸν ἐπέκεινα οὐσίας, 39.18), which first recalls Plato’s idea of the Good (*Resp.* 509B), and then Plotinus.

Both in his straightforward rejection of Manichaean dualism and in his view of matter, Alexander seems to be closely connected to Neoplatonic opinions. This enables him to reject Mani, but also compels him to attack—although their names are not mentioned—Platonic dualists such as Plutarch, Atticus and Numenius, who taught of primordial matter (cf. 10.2: “God does not stand in need of matter in order to make things”). Alexander seems to support the idea of a creation of matter by God and out of Himself, an idea which, according to Mansfeld, was first taught in Pythagorean circles but is also found elsewhere.<sup>16</sup> There turn out to be strong similarities between Alexander and the fifth-century Neoplatonist Hierocles of Alexandria, who considered God to be a demiurgic intellect whose will was sufficient to cause the hypostasis of all things.<sup>17</sup> (That this view of Hierocles was due to Christian influences, as was once stated by Praechter, is now definitively rejected by Ilsetraut Hadot.)<sup>18</sup> In Alexander we find this same emphasis on the will of God (39.11–17). This does not imply any movement of God towards the world, but rather some sort of procession of all beings out of the Immovable One: “those entities which proceed in an orderly way from the divine Immovability are the hypostases” (24.19–20).<sup>19</sup> Matter, too, appears to have proceeded from God, though perhaps through a hypostasis that was very inferior to the highest principle. Unfortunately, the polemical character of the treatise prevents us from determining Alexander’s position with precision.

The same goes for other subjects essential to the philosophy of his time. From his reaction to the Manichaean doctrine of the soul being mixed up

<sup>16</sup> Mansfeld in Van der Horst and Mansfeld 1974, 14 ff.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Mansfeld in Van der Horst and Mansfeld 1974, 25–26.

<sup>18</sup> Praechter 1912, 1–27; Hadot 1990, 241–262.

<sup>19</sup> Villey 1985, 77, 282.

with matter we may deduce his view that there is a world soul from which all individual souls derive (30.14–17). In contrast to Manichaeism, Alexander stresses that the world soul cannot leave its body (25.11 ff.). Against Mani he also stresses that the coming of the soul into matter is not a bad thing, but a positive one, since it changes the random motion (ἀτακτος κίνησις) of chaos into a cosmic harmony (26.1–7, 16–17; cf. *Tim.* 28B). Because he elsewhere states that the soul has been connected with matter “eternally” (25.4), Alexander seems to interpret Plato’s *Tim.* 28B as relating to an eternal world. Since the soul both came from the divine intellect and was made from matter that did not contain any malignancy in and of itself, this world, being eternally ruled by the soul, is essentially good.

Some other philosophical principles can also be gleaned from Alexander’s polemical treatise. He speaks of intermediate beings between the world soul and the souls of humans and animals like nymphs and demons (30.15–16). Elsewhere he says that the demons are ‘beings endowed with sense-perception’ (22.12: αἰσθητικὰ ζῶα). Against a supposed Manichaean determinism, which he (incorrectly) interprets in light of Stoic fatalism, Alexander stresses man’s free will and choice as the only possible source of evil (e.g., 22.21–24). Here, in the writing of a pagan philosopher, we see for the first time what is permanently stressed by all later Greek ecclesiastical writers against Manichaeism: the source of evil is man’s free will.<sup>20</sup>

In many respects, Alexander turns out to be a Platonist, i.e., a disciple of a monistically and optimistically interpreted Plato. But, as with other Platonic syncretists, his concept of the first principle as intellect is a fusion of the demiurge of the *Timaeus* (the *nous* contemplating the ideas) and Aristotle’s Intelligence “intelligizing” itself (*Metaph.* 12.9 1074B34: νόησις νοήσεως). The same goes for Alexander’s concept of matter: with Plato it is called “all-receiving,” “mother” and “nurse” of all becoming things (5.5; cf. 11.2), and with Aristotle “the first substratum and that which is without structure” (11.1: τὸ πρῶτον ὑποκείμενον καὶ ἀρρύθμιστον).<sup>21</sup> The same synthesis is found in Plotinus and, earlier, in Alcinous.<sup>22</sup> But Alexander, in order to refute Mani’s doctrine of two antithetical principles, recurrently uses Aristotle’s *Physica* and its theory of the “proper places” of things (11.18–24; 13.20–14.12; 14.18–15.18). Like Aristotle, he also distinguishes between several kinds of motion (10.23–13.2).

<sup>20</sup> Cf., e.g., Klein 1991, esp. 113–132: “Die christliche Erklärung des Bösen in der Welt.”

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Mansfeld in Van der Horst and Mansfeld 1974, 62–63nn234–235.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Villey 1985, 220–222.

All in all, in his reaction to Manichaean dualism, Alexander turns out to be a Platonist. His position in this school is, in all likelihood, somewhere between Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism. As in Middle Platonism, his highest principle seems to be a demiurgic intellect. But, as is the case with Hierocles, this idea does not seem to be caused by any Christian influence. Alexander's explicit monism and theory of hypostases may be interpreted as signs of a developing Neoplatonism. Perhaps it is best to characterize him as a pre-Plotinian Neoplatonist.

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CRAFTING GNOSIS:  
GNOSTIC SPIRITUALITY IN THE ANCIENT NEW AGE

April D. DeConick

What is it to craft something? To make. To fashion. To forge. With skill. By hand. To practice a trade. To practice an art. Crafting involves specialized knowledge, learned from a master, limited only by the imagination and cunning of the crafter who, when crafting, creates something new from the old.

My title, “Crafting Gnosis: Gnostic Spirituality in the Ancient New Age” is a double entendre. First, I am crafting a contemporary understanding of Gnostics in antiquity by studying how ancient religious people crafted identities as seekers or possessors of Gnosis. The ancients were knowledge-makers, crafters, as much as I am. My academic goal is to craft a contemporary understanding of the ancient Gnostics that corresponds tightly to the religious identity these ancient people had crafted for themselves.

Second, I am crafting a hermeneutical link between the past and the present by deploying the tag “New Age” with reference to the ancient world. I am doing so, not to suggest that there is a historical connection between the religious world of the ancient Gnostics and the religious world of the modern New Agers, although it is true that some New Agers have been exposed to ancient Gnostic sources and have incorporated this exposure into the New Age repertoire.<sup>1</sup> Nor do I mean to suggest a one-on-one correspondence between the motifs of the ancient Gnostics and those of the modern New Age, although there are similarities in some motifs that might be valuable to examine.<sup>2</sup> Rather, by invoking the New Age, I do so to craft a semantic link of analogy between the present and the past.

The New Age as a concept conjures for us a contemporary religious movement whose boundaries are difficult to delineate and whose relations among individuals and groups are less than clear.<sup>3</sup> Since it is not a single organization, it has no unambiguous leaders beyond those who are

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Burns 2007.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. O'Regan 2001.

<sup>3</sup> Hanegraaff 1998, 1, 7–8.

self-proclaimed at the grassroots level, and no official documents or standard religious practices beyond those idiosyncratic items associated with those grassroots movements. The New Age is understood to emerge from the cultic milieu, the deviant belief systems and practices of society, as an alternative to the dominant cultural trends as they relate to spirituality and metaphysics.<sup>4</sup> The thing that unifies this diversity is a common spirituality of seekership and a quest orientation.<sup>5</sup> This quest orientation takes the shape of a personal spiritual journey focused on the inward search for meaning, self-transformation, and personal integration.<sup>6</sup>

I am not a specialist on the New Age or contemporary therapeutic movements. Rather, I study the ancient world. But what has struck me for some time now are my observations that these similarities between the New Age movements and those of the old Gnostics from the first four centuries of the common era are too strong to ignore.<sup>7</sup> The fact that we are dealing with very different historical moments and very different societies means that the sameness is either coincidental or dependent on something else. Today, I am going to explore the latter option, and suggest that the “something else” may have to do with the way humans think.

By combining insights from cognitive linguistics with historical-literary analysis of ancient texts, I suggest that a new type of religiosity, “Gnostic spirituality,” formed in the first century of the common era, when the adjective *gnōstikos* came to describe a particular kind of religious person, one who possessed *gnōsis*. A constellation of attributes was associated with this emergent category, including mystical practices, a transgressive esotericism and hermeneutics, a belief in an innate spiritual nature, a quest orientation, and inclusive metaphysics. Together these characteristics defined a new religious identity: Gnostic spirituality.

This concept was a cognitive innovation, what cognitive linguists call *emergent structure*. This new conceptual category was distributed and entrenched in Western culture as a cognitive model or frame. It became part of the fabric of Western cultural memory, embedded and disseminated in literature, practices, and conversations. While various ancient Gnostic groups and systems emerged as expressions of this new type of religiosity but ultimately failed to perpetuate themselves, the cognitive frame remained avail-

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<sup>4</sup> Campbell 1972, 122; Hanegraaff 1998, 1; Roof 1999, 203–212.

<sup>5</sup> Campbell 1972; Roof 1999, 46–76.

<sup>6</sup> Roof 1999, 46–76.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Kaler 2009 who explores the idea that the Nag Hammadi codices were copied for seekers within a deviant religious environment or cultic milieu.

able to recruit by future generations. The *Gnostic* in this way triumphs, remaining a vital aspect of Western culture and critique of Christianity even today, where it is recruited and reshaped by contemporary New Age movements.

In this essay, I must limit myself to the basics. First, I want to explain how emergent structure forms and is perpetuated. Second, I want to work on recovering from our ancient sources the *Gnostic* as an emergent structure and entrenched cognitive frame. And third, I want to craft a useful understanding of Gnostic spirituality based on this exploration.

### 1. THE WAY HUMANS THINK

My understanding of knowledge—its creation and dissemination—has expanded to take into account that mental activity is dependent on the situation or context in which it occurs. This localization refers to the fact that cognition relies on both our brains and bodies, as well as our cultural and social environments into which the cognitive process extends.<sup>8</sup> Recent studies in cognition argue for a concept called “extended mind” which means that cognition extends beyond the boundaries of the individual person.<sup>9</sup> Cognitive systems reach beyond individuals into their physical and social environments. Not only do we regularly off-load cognitive processing onto the environment and upload from it, but we cannot think without doing so. As Wilson and Clark observe, “In the domain of cognition, no one is an island.”<sup>10</sup>

So cognition foremost is embodied. Knowledge is produced, stored, and distributed by brains dependent upon bodies. Without the involvement of the body in both sensing and acting, our thoughts would be empty.<sup>11</sup> This embodied knowledge represents individual cognition, which involves largely unconscious processes, personal memory, the senses, bodily activities, and personal experiences. Professor Coulson has observed that cognitive activity has a mediating role between an individual’s words and the world. Our words arise in the context of human activity and they are used to evoke mental representations.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Robbins and Aydede 2009, 3; Wilson and Clark 2009, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson and Foglia 2011, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Wilson and Clark 2009, 60.

<sup>11</sup> Wilson and Foglia 2011, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Coulson 2001, 17.

Second, knowledge is enculturated. By this I mean that it is constructed by culture, and it constructs culture simultaneously. Knowledge is dispersed and spreads contextually within a larger cultural web that involves conversation, cultural memory, and artifacts. Artifacts are produced to prompt specific constructions of meaning, and serve as reference points, external memory resources and material anchors. So cognition is not simply something that happens inside our heads. It extends beyond our skin and is deeply dependent on and integrated into our cultural environment.<sup>13</sup>

This extension of cognition includes our social environment too. So my third point about knowledge is that it is embedded in local social matrices. These social matrices serve as group environments for activity, production, conversations, and collective or communal memory. Particular domains of knowledge serve to structure the memories and activities of the group, and provide resources for the storage, interpretation, and transmission of shared knowledge.

Finally, knowledge is historically situated and historically developed, not in some linear process or ladder of progress, but in complicated networks of speciation and clades that have common ancestors and traits, as well as unique and new characteristics. These networks do not only involve current contacts and conversations. They are deeply linked to the past, in mappings that continually remodel the past to bear on the present.

## 2. THE CREATION OF EMERGENT STRUCTURE

The main feature of situated cognition that I want to focus on in order to address the question of how Gnostic communities emerged and self-identified as unique and distinctive is a concept from the field of cognitive linguistics called emergent structure. I rely heavily on the work of Professors Lakoff, Johnson, Fillmore, Fauconnier, Turner, and Coulson who have been instrumental in developing a theory of cognition—how we construct meaning—that explains the imaginative, the creative and the innovative. This perspective relies on empirical evidence that the locus of reason for humans is the same as the locus of perception and motor control.

Professors Lakoff and Johnson in their ground-breaking book *Metaphors We Live By* argue for a new understanding of metaphor as the basis for the way humans think.<sup>14</sup> Metaphor is not only a matter of expressed language

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<sup>13</sup> Hutchins 1987; Suchman 1987.

<sup>14</sup> Lakoff and Johnson 1980.

or linguistics. Rather, cognition itself is grounded in analogy. They make the case that human thought processes, including even our mundane conceptual systems, are metaphorical in nature. In other words, when we want to reason about ourselves or our world, we mentally map a set of knowledge (also called domains, schemas or frames) onto another set by using analogy. This means that important information and inferences from the originally separate sets of knowledge are integrated to construct meaning analogically.

While considering Lakoff and Johnson's conceptual metaphor theory foundational, Professors Fauconnier and Turner have gone on to develop mental space theory in order to explain how cognitive innovations—what they call emergent structures—come into being. In other words, our thinking processes are not just about reproducing the input domains or even their partial structures. Our thinking processes are creative and frequently result in new structure or logic that was not found in the initial domains. When emergent structure forms and stabilizes, according to Professor Fauconnier, “it reorganizes our categories and allows thought to move in new directions.”<sup>15</sup> When cognitive work occurs within the new blend, using the emergent logic, this is called “running the blend.”<sup>16</sup>

To explain how this process works, Fauconnier and Turner build a network model based on the concept of mental spaces, which in reality are sets of activated neuronal assemblies. Mental spaces are conceived by Fauconnier and Turner to be small conceptual packets that we construct while we think and talk. Mental spaces are models that help us understand the dynamic mappings that occur in thought and language.<sup>17</sup> Mental spaces are conceptual in nature, having no ontological status beyond the mind.<sup>18</sup> They are understood by Fauconnier to be domains of discourse that are built up as we think and talk, providing the substrate for our reasoning and for our interface with the world.<sup>19</sup> In this model, cognition depends upon the capacity of our minds to manipulate a web of links between these mental spaces.<sup>20</sup> Conceptualization is a complex mental operation that includes binding, linking, blending, and integration over multiple mental spaces. Professor

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<sup>15</sup> Fauconnier 1997, 23.

<sup>16</sup> Fauconnier 1997, 150–151.

<sup>17</sup> Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 40. See Lundhaug 2010, for an application of cognitive blending to the Gnostic texts the *Gospel of Philip* and the *Exegesis on the Soul*.

<sup>18</sup> Lakoff 1987, 282.

<sup>19</sup> Fauconnier 1997, 34.

<sup>20</sup> Fauconnier 1997, 149.

Coulson notes that meaning is constructed when mental spaces are linked into a bigger network.<sup>21</sup>

What is this network? Local mental spaces are connected or linked to long-term schematic knowledge known as “frames” and to long-term knowledge specific to the individual. Professor Fillmore explains that a frame is a category or system of concepts that are related in a holistic sense.<sup>22</sup> Mental spaces within working memory recruit frame structure and other knowledge otherwise located in long-term memory in the conceptualization process.<sup>23</sup> Professor Coulson explains that cognition involves linguistic cues that prompt us to recruit a referential structure or frame in which we fit relevant information about each of the entities of discourse.<sup>24</sup>

How does this work in terms of emergent structure or new ideas? Analogy is what enables the mapping of partial frame structures from two or more domains in order to produce new meaning. These frame structures are mappable because of their similarity with each other. The frames can be envisioned as schema with specific slots. These slots are filled with elements particular to each domain. When one domain maps onto another, structure is projected from the domains, often partially. Innovations are created when the newly constructed or target domain is expanded by extending the input structures further, creating new structure in the target domain, or reinterpreting the old structure in the target domain. This ability to extend the structure is the most crucial component of innovative thinking.<sup>25</sup>

When emergent blends are successful, they become for us new ways to construe reality. Some blends are significant enough to represent revolutions in thought. Fauconnier remarks that the change brought about by the rise of an emergent blend is permanent because, once formed, the emergent blend remains available to run more expansively. While this type of change is most readily noticeable in major scientific shifts, it also applies to conceptual change more broadly: to the reconceptualization or formation of categories, cultural models, and language itself.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Coulson 2001, 25.

<sup>22</sup> Fillmore 2006, 373.

<sup>23</sup> Fauconnier 1997, 22–23; Fauconnier and Turner 2002, 40.

<sup>24</sup> Coulson 2001, 21.

<sup>25</sup> Fauconnier 1997, 103–104.

<sup>26</sup> Fauconnier and Turner 1994, 12, 22–24; Fauconnier 1997, 168.

### 3. RECOVERING THE GNOSTIC FRAME

Past scholarship has been focused on understanding the ways in which historical forces are at play in the emergence of Gnostic communities and identities, although it has cast a spell of pure origins of Christianity that has been difficult to break. This spell has bound the Gnostic to a later secondary era when the pure Christian religion was threatened with Gnostic erosion and degeneration, but was saved by the heroes of the Catholic Church.<sup>27</sup> The other story that has been told most recently has unintentionally resulted in the complete marginalization of the Gnostic, so that the Gnostic is no longer part of history, and only the Christian remains.<sup>28</sup>

My own construction of the Gnostic asks us to consider the role of cognition in the formation of new identities and their perpetuation. What I will suggest here is that Gnostic spirituality is a complex cognitive network, an emergent structure, that forms in the first century. It is a new religious frame that people begin to identify with, using it to think about and discuss metaphysics and engage perennial conversations, many of which have existential dimensions. Once this new conceptualization of spirituality is formed in the West, it becomes dispersed into the wider cultural web of knowledge, entrenched in long-term and collective memory and distributed within artifacts that were built to prompt these specific constructions of meaning. This framework continues to be operational today, as the scaffold for the spirituality of the New Age and therapeutic movements.

My thinking on this subject has been greatly helped by the work of Professor Lakoff, who wrote an outstanding book in the late 80s on how humans create and use categories. The book is called *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*. Professor Lakoff understands the cognitive frames we use to organize our knowledge to have a logical integrity and be relatively stable structures in long-term memory. Each frame represents a whole system or category that is idealized, what Lakoff refers to as an idealized cognitive model. This frame or model is a complex symbolic structure where all of the structural elements exist

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<sup>27</sup> For most recent variations of this narrative, see Jenkins 2001; Bock 2006; Evans 2006; Wright 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Williams 1996; King 2003. For responses calling to limit the use of the terms Gnostic and Gnosticism, see Markschie 2003; Logan 2006; Marjanen 2008; Brakke 2010. Pearson 2007 remains a strong advocate for the existence of Gnostic religion in antiquity and the use of words Gnostic and Gnosticism.



independently, but the meaning of the whole is a function of the meanings of its parts.<sup>29</sup> These frames or models represent background or prototypical knowledge necessary for us to understand a given word or concept. Their complexity is increased when more than one idealized cognitive model combines to form clusters.<sup>30</sup> One of the advantages of Lakoff's idealized cognitive model is its flexibility. His model emphasizes that our thoughts are always relative to frames that are idealized, frames that may or may not fit the world well, and may not be consistent with one another.<sup>31</sup>

Categories then are conceptual structures or frames, that we recruit to discriminate phenomena.<sup>32</sup> Professor Langacker has shown that categorization is a comparative construal operation that is a fundamental operation of human cognition.<sup>33</sup> This cognitive operation involves a comparison between the phenomenon at hand and the entrenched frame that is recruited based on analogous elements.<sup>34</sup> Categories are constructed through experience that includes discourse and they are recruited as we conceptualize our experience.<sup>35</sup> The creation of categories occurs through discourse and negotiation, so they are not only idealized but also ideological and strategic. When categories are constructed in reference to a group identity, they tend to profile particular features of identity. When this happens, they highlight differences between the in-group and the out-group.<sup>36</sup>

The cognitive frame or model that I will employ to understand the *Gnostic* is the taxonomy. This type of category is one of the most common that we use to make sense of our experiences. They are structured as bundles of features or properties.<sup>37</sup> While taxonomies distinguish things by kinds based on shared characteristics or properties, we can imagine that there may be multiple reasonable ways to sort any given thing to represent different aspects of reality. But there is a folk sense among humans that there is only one correct division of the kind. We need to resist this folk sense as we continue the project of crafting the Gnostic. Taxonomies are cognitive constructions, invented by human minds.<sup>38</sup> Taxonomies are *idealized* cognitive models that

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<sup>29</sup> Lakoff 1987, 284.

<sup>30</sup> Lakoff 1987, 68–90.

<sup>31</sup> Lakoff 1987, 130.

<sup>32</sup> Hart 2011, 171–192.

<sup>33</sup> Langacker 1987, 103–105.

<sup>34</sup> Croft and Cruse 2004, 54.

<sup>35</sup> Hart 2011, 171–192.

<sup>36</sup> Hart 2011, 171–192.

<sup>37</sup> Lakoff 1987, 286–287.

<sup>38</sup> Lakoff 1987, 118–121.

we construct and employ as frames when we think. While frames provide structure to our thoughts, they are not inflexible, but can shift to accommodate new information.<sup>39</sup> Sometimes they reflect our world well. Other times they do not. They may be consistent with other cognitive structures we hold, or they may not. But they are not only useful for cognition; they are necessary. We cannot think without them.

My project strikes at several major problems that have yet to be resolved in the study of Gnosticism, including whether or not there ever was a real type of religion that we can call Gnosticism. For me, this is a non-starter. Yes, there was a real type of religion that we can call Gnosticism and it still exists today. By the early third century, both Manichaeism and Mandaeanism had formed as new religions quite independent of other contemporary religions in terms of self-identity, religious beliefs and practices. Both religions were Gnostic religions. Mandaeanism continues today, although now most of the practitioners live in the diaspora.

So the trouble is not whether or not Gnosticism as a type of religion existed in antiquity. The trouble is that we have not yet determined how this type of religion formed or what its relationship was to the other major religious traditions in the ancient world. At the crux of the problem is the fact that we have not been able to delineate how Gnostic identity was initially constructed and continually negotiated by the Gnostics. Instead, we have adopted the constructions of the Gnostics that were formed by the first Catholic Christians, or we have dropped them completely. The result has been the same. The Gnostic is rejected—either as a heretic or as a heretical construction—having no worthwhile contribution to make to Western thought and culture.

So what about the *Gnostic*? First it is important for us to remember that the word *gnostic* was invented by Plato as an adjective of the word *gnōsis* that could be substantivized and used as a noun.<sup>40</sup> In the ancient world, *gnōsis* was not so much propositional knowledge, as it was the direct apprehension of objects. It was knowledge that involved knowing someone or something (i.e., “I know God”) as distinct from knowing *about* someone or something (i.e., “I know about God”).<sup>41</sup> *Gnostic*, as it was used almost exclusively in the Platonic tradition, referred to cognitive activity or theoretical understanding (*gnōstikē epistēmē*) such as exemplified by mathematics, rather than

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<sup>39</sup> Coulson 2001.

<sup>40</sup> Smith 1981, 799–801; Layton 1995; Marksches 2003, 7.

<sup>41</sup> LSJ 355a; Layton 1987, 9.

understanding practically applied (*praktikē epistēmē*) such as exemplified in the work of a carpenter or statesman.<sup>42</sup> It points to knowledge that depends on a person's innate cognitive abilities (the divine element of the soul) versus knowledge acquired and used on the job. It was the cognitive capacity to know someone or something.<sup>43</sup>

Its application to people or a social group is discovered in second-century materials when it is used to define people who called themselves *Gnostics* or were called *Gnostics* by outsiders.<sup>44</sup> For the first time, the substantivized *gnōstikoi* is employed with reference to people, as in *Gnostic people*. It is an application of a technical philosophical term of Platonic-Pythagorean origins—*Gnōstikos*—to persons.<sup>45</sup> As such, it is an emergent blend.

Heresiologists in general use *Gnōstikoi* to indicate those people who belong to a *hairesis* or *scholē* that deviates from their own Catholic form of Christianity.<sup>46</sup> This pejorative keying of *gnōstikoi* with *hairesis* in a deviant sense is a strategic way that heresiologists mark the Gnostics negatively as outsiders and transgressors of Catholic Christianity. The Gnostics were understood by the heresiologists to be so diverse, that Irenaeus compares the Gnostics to mushrooms that have sprung up among the Christians.<sup>47</sup>

In particular, Irenaeus applies the name to those who propagate Sethian mythology or something like it, such as the so-called Ophian mythology.<sup>48</sup> The second-century Roman philosopher Celsus knows of some Christians who call themselves *Gnostics*, although it is not clear if these are the Ophians whom he later describes as *Christians*, or another group.<sup>49</sup> Porphyry in the third century identifies the Gnostics as Christian *hairetikoi* who were present in Plotinus' seminar.<sup>50</sup> They were therapeutic magicians and exorcists, as well as philosophers.<sup>51</sup> They knew a mythology such as that found in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, which probably were versions of the Nag Hammadi texts modern scholars identify with the Sethian tradition. Epiphanius recognizes as *Gnostic* a number of groups that have Sethian mythological

<sup>42</sup> Plato, *Pol.* 258E. Cf. LSJ 355b.

<sup>43</sup> Smith 1981, 801.

<sup>44</sup> Brox 1966, 105–114; Pétrement 1984, 358.

<sup>45</sup> Smith 1981, 800–801.

<sup>46</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.11.1; 1.29.1; 1.30.15; cf. Tertullian, *Val.* 11.2.

<sup>47</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29.1.

<sup>48</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29–30.

<sup>49</sup> Origen, *Cels.* 5.61.

<sup>50</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16.

<sup>51</sup> On their contributions to philosophy, see Turner 2001; and Rasimus 2010.

associations, including the Borborians, Phibionites, and Archontics.<sup>52</sup> Based on this evidence several scholars have moved to delimit Gnostic identity to the Sethian school and its literature.<sup>53</sup>

But this is not the entire story. There are a number of other major groups whom the heresiologists say claimed the Gnostic identity for themselves: the Carpocratians, Prodicians, Justinians, Naassenes, and Valentinians. Irenaeus says that the Carpocratians under the leadership of Marcellina in Rome called themselves *Gnostics*.<sup>54</sup> Clement of Alexandria says that followers of Prodicus called themselves *Gnostics*.<sup>55</sup> Tertullian mentions Prodicus along with Valentinus and a shared teaching of multiple gods.<sup>56</sup> Clement also claims to have known a leader of a *hairesis* who called himself a Gnostic.<sup>57</sup> Hippolytus says that Justin (mystagogue and author of the *Book of Baruch*) and his followers called themselves *Gnostics*, claiming that they alone know the Perfect and Good God.<sup>58</sup> He knows too that the Naassenes called themselves *Gnostics*.<sup>59</sup> The Naassene teacher is said to have taught that the only ones who can become hearers of the mysteries are the perfected *Gnostics*.<sup>60</sup> In the fourth century, Epiphanius tells us that Valentinus called himself a Gnostic, as did his followers.<sup>61</sup> This seems to fit with Irenaeus' opinion that the Valentinians were Gnostic offspring because they reinvented the Sethian mythology by adapting the principles of the Gnostic *hairesis*.<sup>62</sup> He says that the Valentinians flattered themselves as having gnosis that was superior to the gnosis that any other group had.<sup>63</sup> He claims that some Valentinians say that they were aware of powers that precede Bythos and Sige. Because of this awareness, they considered themselves to be "more perfect than the perfected (*teleiōn teleiōteroi*) and more Gnostic than the Gnostics (*gnōstikōn gnōstikōteroi*)."<sup>64</sup> Irenaeus intimates that Marcus the Valentinian considered himself to be "perfect" because he was acquainted with the highest

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<sup>52</sup> Epiphanius, *Pan.* 25, 26, 39, 40.

<sup>53</sup> Layton 1987; 1995; Logan 2006; Brakke 2010; cf. Rasimus 2009, who includes Ophians.

<sup>54</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.25.6.

<sup>55</sup> Clement, *Strom.* 3.4.30.1.

<sup>56</sup> Tertullian, *Scorp.* 15; *Prax.* 3.

<sup>57</sup> Clement, *Strom.* 2.20.114.5; 3.4.30.2; 4.18.114.2; 4.18.116.1; 7.7.41.3; cf. *Paed.* 1.52.2.

<sup>58</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.23.3.

<sup>59</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.2; 5.6.4; 5.8.1; 5.11.1.

<sup>60</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.8.30.

<sup>61</sup> Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31.1.1; 31.1.5.

<sup>62</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.29.1; 1.11.1; cf. Brakke 2010, 32.

<sup>63</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.11.3; 1.31.3.

<sup>64</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.11.5.

power from the transcendent realm. Thus he claimed to possess the greatest knowledge and perfection of anyone.<sup>65</sup> This construction of the Valentinians appears to be shared by Tertullian who sees their doctrines as plants growing in a Gnostic forest.<sup>66</sup>

The heresiologists identified a number of other leaders and groups as *Gnostic*. In Eusebius' *Chronicon* it is reported that, in the sixteenth year of Emperor Hadrian's reign (132 CE), Basilides lived in Alexandria and "from him derive the Gnostics."<sup>67</sup> Epiphanius also recognizes Basilides as a Gnostic, along with Saturnilus, Colorbasus, Ptolemy, Secundus, Carpocrates, and the Nicolaitans.<sup>68</sup>

Given this type of rich evidence, it is clear that the word *Gnostic* had a wider application than to one group. In other words, it was not circumscribed by the ancient people to Sethianism. The term *Gnostic* did not indicate for them a single cult that we today identify as "Classic Gnosticism." This academic demarcation is a particular construal of the evidence that ignores the way the term was actually being employed by the ancient writers. To handle the complexity of the situation, I suggest that we try to approach the problem from a different angle, by posing a cognitive question: What does *Gnostic* as a concept mean for these writers?

It is my position that the concept of the Gnostic is an idealized cognitive frame that the heresiologists recruit and shift in pejorative ways in order to accommodate their own experiences and create capital for themselves. They understand the word to represent a type of religious person who claims to possess and teach Gnosis that others do not have. The Catholics adjust this element of the frame by nuancing the meaning of *Gnosis*, creating a demarcation between true Gnosis and false Gnosis. The *Gnostics* possess the latter, while the Catholics the former. Thus Irenaeus speaks of those who possess and teach "*Gnosis falsely so-called*."<sup>69</sup> Likewise Clement of Alexandria refashions the Gnostic category by defining the true *Gnostic* as the Christian who is perfected through his acceptance and observation of the law of Moses, his love of God for no practical or redemptive purpose, his recognition that creation is good, and his engagement of self-restraint and the contemplative life.<sup>70</sup> This is the *Gnosis* that Clement claims

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<sup>65</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.13.1.

<sup>66</sup> Tertullian, *Val.* 39; cf. *Scorp.* 1; *An.* 18.

<sup>67</sup> Helm 1956, 201.

<sup>68</sup> Epiphanius, *Pan.* 25, 26, 39, 40.

<sup>69</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.1, etc.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Clement, *Strom.* 4.21.130–123.152.

has been transmitted by the few through oral instruction received directly from the apostles.<sup>71</sup>

While this perforation of the cognitive frame is a heresiological construct, it represents a shifting of the frame, not its invention. The heresiologists were recruiting and differentiating a complex frame that was already entrenched in the culture. The Gnostic was a category that had emerged previously among people who claimed to possess and teach Gnosis. It was a category that compressed within it a number of individual concepts into a novel blend. When taken together as a whole, the compression of concepts pointed to a new way of being religious—a new type of spirituality that they called Gnostic. The heresiologists responded to this emergent category by differentiating the frame so that it defined the differences between those who possessed false Gnosis and true.

#### 4. CRAFTING GNOSTIC SPIRITUALITY

So what more can we recover about the Gnostic frame that the heresiologists recruited and then shifted to their own advantage? My first observation is that the heresiologists are aware of the Gnostics' claim to esoteric knowledge, that is, their *Gnosis* is known only to an in-group. It is marketed by the Gnostics as secret knowledge accessible only to an initiated community. For example, Justin the Gnostic and his followers claimed to be Gnostics because they were the only ones to have had direct apprehension of the supreme God.<sup>72</sup> How secret their *Gnosis* actually was is another issue. But the claim to secret knowledge had currency for them nonetheless.

My second observation is that the heresiologists know that this esoteric knowledge has ritual and mystical dimensions. Not only was the apprehension of God understood by the Justinian Gnostics as secret knowledge, it was understood by them to be the ineffable mysteries preserved for the initiates.<sup>73</sup> The Naassenes who styled themselves Gnostics did so, according to Hippolytus, because they alone were acquainted with the depths of knowledge and mystic rites, which are compared to the Eleusinian initiation rites.<sup>74</sup> According to Irenaeus, the Carpocratians who called themselves Gnostics taught that Jesus privately told the mystery to his disciples, and told them

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<sup>71</sup> Clement, *Strom.* 6.7.61.3.

<sup>72</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.23.3.

<sup>73</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.24.1–2.

<sup>74</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.2; 5.6.4.

to pass on this mystery to their followers.<sup>75</sup> The Ophians, whom Epiphanius considers Gnostic offspring, trace the origin of *Gnosis* to the snake in Eden and present this tale as one of their mysteries.<sup>76</sup> What were the Ophian mysteries? We know from Celsus and Origen that the Ophians had a complicated initiatory ritual of ascent through the Zodiacal spheres which Celsus believed had affinities with Mithraic initiation.<sup>77</sup>

My third observation is that the heresiologists acknowledge that the Gnostics' claim to possess Gnosis is rooted in their assertion to be spiritual people who possess a divine nature. They understand this innate spirituality in exclusive terms. The Gnostics contain seeds of spirit or, in some way, belong to a spiritual generation of people. According to Irenaeus, some Gnostics claimed that most of Jesus' disciples were confused, and transmitted erroneous teaching about Jesus and the meaning of resurrection. He was only able to instruct a few of his disciples who were able to understand and transmit the great mysteries, which included knowledge of their true natures and destiny.<sup>78</sup> These "other" Gnostics arguably have affinities with Sethian teachings.<sup>79</sup> The Valentinians, whom Irenaeus understood as Gnostic offspring, were known for similar claims. Irenaeus says that they understand redemption to be complete when spiritual persons have been initiated into the mysteries of Achamoth and attained *Gnosis*, which they define as the perfect knowledge of God. They identified themselves as these spiritual Gnostic persons, while other Christians merely as faithful members of the Church for whom salvation consists of good works instead.<sup>80</sup> Tertullian compares the Valentinian *hairesis* to the Eleusinian mysteries, saying that they guard access to full knowledge until the person has reached the final stage of initiation, when the divinity who is secreted away is revealed. Tertullian finds it personally frustrating that they will not openly share their knowledge with non-Valentinian Christians like himself.<sup>81</sup> He complains that they feel gifted with the bequest of spirituality, which they link to the fact that their persons contain spiritual seeds.<sup>82</sup>

My fourth observation is that the heresiologists make it clear that part of the knowledge the Gnostics purported to have was contingent upon

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<sup>75</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.25.5.

<sup>76</sup> Epiphanius, *Pan.* 37.3.1.

<sup>77</sup> DeConick 2013.

<sup>78</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.30.14.

<sup>79</sup> Layton 1987, 170–181; Rasimus 2009, 9–61.

<sup>80</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.6.1.

<sup>81</sup> Tertullian, *Val.* 1.

<sup>82</sup> Tertullian, *Val.* 4.

transgressive hermeneutics. In other words, they approached scripture very differently from Catholic Christians like themselves. There is demonstration again and again in the heresiological literature that their knowledge is “proven” with reference to an interpretation of scripture that is anything but traditional. Epiphanius gives voice to this well when he criticizes the Gnostics for reading scripture radically, refashioning its meaning and then saying that this new meaning comes from the Spirit of Truth.<sup>83</sup> The heresiologists know that this type of transgressive interpretation of scripture has resulted in the development of Gnostic metaphysical systems that are radically different from their own. Because the Gnostic metaphysical systems in part emerge out of transgressive interpretation of scripture, the systems themselves are transgressive. The Gnostics conceive of the world, humans and God in non-standard, even subversive terms, challenging and critiquing traditional views. Thus, both the Catholic heresiologists and Plotinus can object.

The heresiologists also know, and this is my fifth observation, that these transgressive metaphysical systems are not merely biblically based, but open out into a network of common philosophical and religious traditions known internationally in late antiquity. In other words, the Gnostic was an inclusive religious seeker and thinker, whose quest for truth extended beyond the answers given by any one religion.

If we compare this network of five concepts with extant texts that reflect the type of metaphysical systems identified by the heresiologist as *Gnostic*, we find rich references to support each one of them. Indeed the Gnostic texts themselves make claim to esoteric knowledge with ritual and mystical dimensions. The authors identify themselves as spiritual people, whose true nature is divine. They create transgressive metaphysical systems based on transgressive hermeneutics as they wrestle with perennial existential questions. This transgression is fostered by an inclusiveness, where the quest for truth crosses philosophical and religious boundaries.

This structural integrity between the extant Gnostic texts and the heresiological testimonies suggests that the heresiologists are recruiting a conceptualization of the Gnostic that is already in play among the Gnostics themselves. The word *Gnostic* was not circumscribed by the Gnostics to a particular religious group, although each Gnostic group likely felt itself to be the ones who possessed authentic *Gnosis* or *Gnosis* superior to all other forms of it. While their literature shows us that each group called themselves

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<sup>83</sup> Epiphanius, *Pan.* 26.6.1–2.



by different in-group names (i.e., The Elect, Children of the Bridal Chamber, Kingless and Perfect Generation, Children of Seth, Seed of Seth, etc.), each group also believed its members to possess *Gnosis* exclusively. In other words, *Gnostic* did not identify a specific group as much as it referred to a type of spirituality that certain people associated with.

Gnostic spirituality, as an emergent frame structure, then, is a compression of five complex concepts. While each of these is an individual concept, when the five are taken together they form a whole that scaffolds the meaning of the category *Gnostic*. *Gnostic* references a new form of spirituality that people engaged in the ancient world, allowing them to think and talk about metaphysics and to participate in affiliated religious praxes in ways that previously had not been conceived.

(1) *The Personal Possession of Gnosis*. The main frame associates the *Gnostic* with a particular type of person or persons, one who possess *Gnosis*.

(2) *Experiential knowledge of God through Mysticism*. Since *Gnosis* is knowledge of God by acquaintance, Gnostic identity is formed within the forge of ancient mysticism. Through initiatory rites or some form of practice, the Gnostic encounters God directly. This experiential knowledge is reserved for the Gnostic and is elicited through a practice or ritual system that (re)joins the essential human being to its divine (fore)ground. In this way, the person attains spiritual wholeness and returns to the primordial divine condition.

(3) *Innate Spiritualness*. The possession of Gnosis is further linked to the exclusive claim to an innate spiritualness. The Gnostic is a person whose essential nature is believed to be uncreated, deriving directly from the divine. This innate spiritualness is what permits the Gnostic to see the truth, where others are blind.

(4) *Transgressive Esotericism*. There is a transgressive esotericism fundamentally grounding Gnostic spirituality. This is the belief that spiritual truth is hidden from the many, but when it is uncovered by the Gnostic, it transgresses the standard opinion of the many. This manifests concretely in terms of the transgressive hermeneutics which the Gnostic adopts. Central is the belief that sacred writings conceal truth from the many, but when they are read properly, they reveal a secret message that transgresses standard understandings of that scripture. Because of these subversive exegetical tendencies, the Gnostic metaphysical systems that develop radically transgress the traditional systems of Judaism and Catholic Christianity. So when God

is known by the Gnostic, it turns out not to be God as God is standardly conceived in either Judaism or Catholic Christianity. In fact, the standard conception of God is perceived by the Gnostic as erroneous trickery or illusion that has duped the majority population.

(5) *Seekership Outlook and Quest Orientation.* Gnostic spirituality is characterized by a seekership outlook and quest orientation that is focused on serious metaphysical questions. The quest for answers to perennial existential dilemmas is inclusive, spanning vast philosophical and religious territories, and negotiating a new identity across them. The Gnostic is a person who entertains pluralism and delights in unbounded knowledge, finding identity in the negotiation of the metaphysical expanse.

When we reconceive the *Gnostic* as a complex conceptual frame or idealized cognitive model that refers to a type of spirituality rather than a peculiar doctrinal system, we are freed from the confinement of typological and systematic definitions that have not been able to account for either the sameness or the difference in historical Gnostic systems, without distorting, marginalizing or eliminating the Gnostics who have always been among us.

## 5. MUSHROOMS

While there are wild differences and disagreements among the various metaphysical systems that the Gnostics develop, there are doctrinal and mythological similarities across them too. The heresiologists recognized this, and so they reorganized the entrenched Gnostic frame by further schematizing the systems of a variety of unrelated Gnostic thinkers with reference to a loose genealogical organization that had very little, if anything, to do with historical reality. This conceptual taxonomy worked to link together otherwise unrelated Gnostic systems into a huge and very confusing network of Gnostic ancestors and offspring that began with Simon Magus.<sup>84</sup> This new taxonomy restructured the entrenched Gnostic frame so that the category shifted away from its focus on a particular type of spirituality to a focus on mythic, thematic, and systematic similarities in Gnostic metaphysical systems as defining features of the *Gnostic*.

Whether one Gnostic system is an actual ancestor to another is something that the historian must determine based on critical analysis and

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<sup>84</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.1.1, etc.

argument. Most, if not all of the Gnostic systems that did arise seem to me to be variations of either a transcendent system where the God of worship lives outside the universe while the subordinate creator within, or a panastral system where the God of worship lives in the highest heaven while the creator in the lowest. Certainly it is true that some of the mythological sameness is due to inherited features shared among groups that were in direct contact and dialogue. But it is also true, based on what we know about how humans conceptualize, that some of the sameness could have been the result of independent developments within human minds.<sup>85</sup> The human mind can only construct so many answers to any given question, and has access to only so many presuppositions in any given historical moment. This is especially the case in situations where we are dealing with people who employ the same scriptures, myths, and philosophies as important foregrounds to their metaphysical discussions. Within this conversation, there are a finite number of entrenched frames available for ancient people to organize their concepts and converse about them. If these people also have seeker mentalities and believe themselves to have an innate spiritualness that demands a transgressive interpretation of scripture and theology, there are only a limited number of metaphysical systems that are likely to emerge from their conversations.

Once Gnostic spirituality emerges and is distributed into the cultural web, it is engaged by a variety of people and groups. The result is a large number of Gnostic religious movements, which boast alternative mythologies and doctrinal systems. Boundaries around the groups are difficult to delineate. Relations between individuals and groups is less than clear. Some Gnostics form supplemental or lodge movements whose members remain affiliated with a traditional Catholic church. Others create reform movements and hope to convince the Catholic church to alter its ways. Other Gnostics form separatist movements, believing themselves to be the only true Christians. Some Gnostics do not affiliate with the Catholic church at all, but forge their own path as new religious movements. Within this complex web, leaders rise and fall, along with disciples. There is no over-arching organization of the movements nor are the ritual systems standardized. Rather, numerous grass-roots movements spring up with self-proclaimed leaders and idiosyncratic publications. Difference abounds. And yet they are all Gnostic. Perhaps Irenaeus' comparison to mushrooms growing out of the ground is an apt metaphor after all.\*

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<sup>85</sup> See Couliano 1992, 1–22, who also advocated a cognitive explanation for sameness within Gnostic systematics.

\* I dedicate this essay to my mentor and friend, John D. Turner, in celebration of his

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brilliant career. This essay emerged out of *Mapping Death*, an Andrew W. Mellon Research Seminar awarded through the Humanities Research Center at Rice University. I extend my thanks to Rice University and the Mellon Foundation. To the Seminar's guest lecturers: Mark Turner (Case Western Reserve University), Roger Beck (University of Toronto) and Vernon Robbins (Emory University). And to the graduate research fellows: Grant Adamson, Matthew Dillon, Goat M. Domeracki, Franklin Trammell and Adriana Umaña.

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PART II

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: GNOSTICISM AND PLATONISM





THE SYMPOSIUM AND REPUBLIC IN THE MYSTICAL  
THOUGHT OF PLOTINUS AND THE SETHIAN GnostICS

Kevin Corrigan

What is “mysticism”? Is it a special experience that somehow self-validates itself or part of a context of ascent to some principle, or principles, that somehow transcends experience or is it an exploratory, performative unraveling of experience or set of experiences that somehow defy expression in language?<sup>1</sup> In Plotinus, one finds a little bit of all of these, and more, sometimes with the accent on personal experience, as in the famous opening lines of *Enn.* 4.8 [6] 1: “Awoken out of the body into myself ...”<sup>2</sup> Here Plotinus probably describes a momentary experience of union with the One—or perhaps divine intellect;<sup>3</sup> and the context of ascent and descent, active and passive moments (“seating myself” and “having been seated”)<sup>4</sup> involves language that Plotinus inherits from Plato, Aristotle and others (but especially the *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Phaedrus*), a language, we have come to realize more and more in the last 25 years, Plotinus shares with—perhaps even gets in part from—those Sethian Gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi in the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For treatment of the question, see McGinn 1994, xiii–xxx.

<sup>2</sup> *Enn.* 4.8 [6] 1.1–11: Πολλάκις ἐγειρόμενος εἰς ἔμαυτὸν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος καὶ γινόμενος τῶν μὲν ἄλλων ἕξω, ἔμαυτοῦ δὲ εἴσω, θαυμαστόν ἡλίκων ὁρῶν κάλλος, καὶ τῆς κρείττονος μοίρας πιστεύσας τότε μάλιστα εἶναι, ζῶν τε ἀρίστην ἐνεργήσας καὶ τῷ θεῷ εἰς ταῦτὸν γεγενημένος καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἰδρυθεὶς εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἔλθων ἐκείνην ὑπὲρ πᾶν τὸ ἄλλο νοητὸν ἔμαυτὸν ἰδρύσας, μετὰ ταύτην τὴν ἐν τῷ θεῷ στάσιν εἰς λογισμόν ἐκ νοῦ καταβάς ἀπορῶ, πῶς ποτε καὶ νῦν καταβαίνω, καὶ ὅπως ποτέ μοι ἔνδον ἢ ψυχῇ γεγένηται τοῦ σώματος τοῦτο οὐσα, οἷον ἐφάνη καθ’ ἑαυτὴν, καίπερ οὐσα ἐν σώματι.

<sup>3</sup> The phrase ὑπὲρ πᾶν τὸ ἄλλο νοητὸν is ambiguous. It may be pleonastic or it could signify either an intellectual context or the One as object of knowledge (as apparently in *Enn.* 5.4 [7] 2) or, perhaps more likely, the One as object of knowledge *for intellect*—on which see Corrigan 1986, 195–204.

<sup>4</sup> For the active and passive “moments”: ἐν αὐτῷ ἰδρυθεὶς εἰς ἐνέργειαν ἔλθων ἐκείνην ὑπὲρ πᾶν τὸ ἄλλο νοητὸν ἔμαυτὸν ἰδρύσας.

<sup>5</sup> For Sethian Gnosticism see Schenke 1974; and John D. Turner’s contributions in Funk, Poirier, and Turner 2000, 134–248 (*Marsanes*); Barry, Funk, Poirier, and Turner 2000, 131–157 (*Zostrianos*); and Funk, Poirier, Scopello, and Turner 2004, 104–117 (*Allogenes*). For Turner’s English translations of these texts, see Meyer 2007 (*Marsanes*, pp. 629–649; *Zostrianos*, 537–583; *Allogenes The Stranger*, 679–700); and for his discussion of the Sethian School, Meyer 2007, 784–789.

As John Turner has shown, the visionary ascent scheme of the Platonizing Sethian texts bears strong affinity with Middle Platonic and Neoplatonic representations, since the Gnostic is assimilated to the vertical hierarchy of intelligible being by virtue of a contemplative act of mind.<sup>6</sup> The Sethian population might be somewhat different (Triple-Powered Spirit, Barbelo and its sub-Aeons etc.) but the progression from Autogenes to Protophanes to Kalyptos (i.e., the Barbelo sub-Aeons) is similar to the ascent in Plotinus, being a movement from sequential discursive thought occupied with differentiated particulars (the individuals) to the vision of their undifferentiated unity (those who exist together) to the awareness of pure being in its total unity (the authentic existents).<sup>7</sup> As in Plotinus' treatment of the increasing intensity of unified contemplation in *Enn.* 3.8 [30],<sup>8</sup> so with the Gnostics the increasing self-concentration of vision must finally transcend the realm of determinate being through contemplation of the absolute infinitival being of the Triple-Powered One, which leads to the Invisible Spirit entirely beyond being.<sup>9</sup> Here all cognitive activity, discursive reasoning and intellectual thought, is abandoned. "Knowing gives way to unknowing, to learned ignorance, a flash of insight or revelation."<sup>10</sup> With a shock, then, we realize the stunningly obvious. There is little new under the sun. Plotinus lives in a shared world of mystical frameworks. Some of the Gnostic scaffolding looks different, but the expression is similar.

Upon reflection, this is hardly surprising since the quest for union with God bears similar Platonic marks in thinkers as different as Philo, Numenius, Valentinus, Alcinous/Albinus (*Epit.* 10.165.16–34; 28.181.19–182.2), Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 5.11.71), and Origen (*Cels.* 5.42–45). As John Turner has again argued, what is generally common to these visionary ascents is initial purification, usually through some form of instruction involving the use of analogies, negations, and successive abstraction.<sup>11</sup> This involves in Alcinous a series of ways or stepping stones: a way of analogy or approximation from effects to causes, based upon the simile of the sun in Plato's *Republic* (6.508–509); a way of negation or abstraction from all affirmative predicates, based in some measure upon the first hypothesis of *Parmenides* (137C–142A), such as we find in the negative theologies at the beginning of

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<sup>6</sup> Turner 2001, 480ff.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. *Allogenes* 55.17–32.

<sup>8</sup> *Enn.* 3.8 [30] 1.1–6, 14–17.

<sup>9</sup> Turner 2001, 480.

<sup>10</sup> Turner 2001, 480.

<sup>11</sup> Turner 2001, 482.

the *Apocryphon of John* and in the revelation of the luminaries in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*; a way of eminence or of ascending degrees, based on Plato's *Symposium*, that corresponds to the stage by stage withdrawal to the highest level of the Triple-Powered One in *Allogenes*; and perhaps finally, a way of assimilation or imitation, based on *Theaet.* 176A–B; this last way seems to correspond to “primary revelation” or non-knowing knowledge of the Unknown One, as in *Allogenes*, for instance, that is, the point at which one becomes simultaneously subject and object of one's own vision, where learning is abandoned and “suddenly” (cf. *Symp.* 210E) one sees the source of light itself.

The prototype for this sequence of cognitive and visionary acts is found in Plato's *Symposium* (210A–212A) in Diotima-Socrates' ladder of ascent or “greater mysteries.” In this passage, we find in Turner's words, two kinds of purgation and progressive ascent: a qualitative purgation that involves a progressive shift of attention from the sensible to the intelligible realm in three levels of experience: physical beauty, moral beauty and intellectual beauty; and a quantitative purgation that involves a shift of attention from individual instances of beauty, to the ideal beauty of all forms, and finally to absolute beauty itself, which then discloses itself as a sudden and immediate intuition. “As in the *Symposium*, so also in the *Republic* the final moment of attainment is conceived as a revelation of the supreme form ... No longer does one 'know about' the object things that can be predicated of it, but one actually possesses and is possessed by the object of one's quest.”<sup>12</sup>

We can see clearly in Plotinus something of the sequence of ways characteristic of Alcinous, Clement and others, and the merging of the two classic texts from the *Symposium* and *Republic*. *Ennead* 6.7 [38] 36 is a classic statement of this shared tradition:

The knowledge or touching of the Good is the greatest thing, and he (Plato) says it is the greatest study (cf. *Republic* 505A2), not calling the looking at it a study, but learning about it beforehand. We are taught about it by analogies, negations, and knowledge of the things that come from it and certain methods of ascent by degrees, but we are put on the way to it by purifications, virtues, adorning and by gaining footholds in the intelligible and settling ourselves firmly there and feasting on its contents. But whoever has become at once contemplator of himself and all the rest and object of his contemplation, and since he has become substance, intellect and the complete living being (*Timaeus* 31B), no longer looks at it from outside—when he has become this, he is near, and That is next and close, shining upon all the intelligible world. It

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<sup>12</sup> Turner 2001, 487.

is there that one lets all study go, up to here one has been led along (παιδαγωγ-  
γηθείς) and settled in beauty and up to this point, one thinks that in which one  
is, but is carried out of it by the surge of the wave of intellect itself and lifted on  
high by a kind of swell (έξενεχθείς δέ τῷ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νοῦ οἶον κύματι καὶ ὑψοῦ ὑπ'  
αὐτοῦ οἶον οἰδήσαντος ἀρθείς) sees suddenly (εἰσεἶδεν ἐξαίφνης), not seeing how,  
but the vision fills his eyes with light and does not make him see something  
else by it, but the light itself is what he sees. For there is not in That something  
seen and its light ... but a ray which generates these afterwards and lets them  
be beside it; but *he* himself is the ray which only generates intellect and does  
not extinguish itself in the generation, but it itself abides and that comes to  
be because this exists.<sup>13</sup>

What is striking is that while Plotinus superimposes onto the *Symposium's*  
ladder of ascent the study of the Good in the *Republic*, he nonetheless dis-  
tinguishes them and subordinates the former to the latter. The pursuit of  
the Beautiful serves as a propaedeutic to that of the Good in two stages. In  
the first instance, we have a form of knowledge that one learns (through a  
mediator) as in the *Symposium*; and in the second stage, the mediated rela-  
tionship leads to more intimate participation in the intelligible, where one  
feeds upon truth, as in the *Phaedrus*,<sup>14</sup> and finally to integral participation  
in the identity of subject seeing and object seen “no longer ... from outside.”  
Here one abandons study for simply being what one is. The pursuit of the  
Good, however, implicitly merges the swell of the “great sea of beauty” just  
before the appearance of the self-disclosing Beautiful in the *Symposium* with  
the self-disclosing light of the Good in the *Republic*. We have then two or  
three stages of mystical ascent: learning from someone or something else;  
progressive identity of subject and object; and deeper touch without dis-  
tinction. As Simmias puts it in the *Phaedo*, one either learns from someone

<sup>13</sup> *Enn.* 6.7 [38] 36.3–25: “Ἔστι μὲν γὰρ ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ εἴτε γνώσις εἴτε ἐπαφή μέγιστον, καὶ μέγιστόν φησι τοῦτ' εἶναι μάθημα, οὐ τὸ πρὸς αὐτὸ ἰδεῖν μάθημα λέγων, ἀλλὰ περὶ αὐτοῦ μαθεῖν τι πρότερον. Διδάσκουσι μὲν οὖν ἀναλογίαι τε καὶ ἀφαιρέσεις καὶ γνώσεις τῶν ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀναβασμοί τινες, πορεύουσι δὲ καθάρσεις πρὸς αὐτὸ καὶ ἀρεταὶ καὶ κοσμήσεις καὶ τοῦ νοητοῦ ἐπιβάσεις καὶ ἐπ' αὐτοῦ ἰδρύσεις καὶ τῶν ἐκεῖ ἐστιάσεις. Ὅστις γένηται ὁμοῦ θεατῆς τε καὶ θέαμα αὐτὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων καὶ γενόμενος οὐσία καὶ νοῦς καὶ ζῶον παντελὲς μηκέτι ἔξωθεν αὐτὸ βλέπει—τοῦτο δὲ γενόμενος ἐγγὺς ἐστί, καὶ τὸ ἐφεξῆς ἐκεῖνο, καὶ πλησίον αὐτὸ ἦδη ἐπὶ παντὶ τῷ νοητῷ ἐπιστίλβον. Ἐνθα δὴ ἐάσας τις πᾶν μάθημα, καὶ μέχρι τοῦ παιδαγωγηθείς καὶ ἐν καλῷ ἰδρυθείς, ἐν ᾧ μὲν ἐστί, μέχρι τούτου νοεῖ, ἐξενεχθείς δὲ τῷ αὐτοῦ τοῦ νοῦ οἶον κύματι καὶ ὑψοῦ ὑπ' αὐτοῦ οἶον οἰδήσαντος ἀρθείς εἰσεἶδεν ἐξαίφνης οὐκ ἰδὼν ὅπως, ἀλλ' ἢ θέα πλῆσασα φωτὸς τὰ δῆματα οὐ δι' αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο ὄραν, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ τὸ φῶς τὸ δραμα ἦν. Οὐ γὰρ ἦν ἐν ἐκείνῳ τὸ μὲν ὁρώμενον, τὸ δὲ φῶς αὐτοῦ, οὐδὲ νοῦς καὶ νοοῦμενον, ἀλλ' αὐτῇ γεννώσα αὐτὴ εἰς ὕπερον καὶ ἀφείσα εἶναι παρ' αὐτῷ. αὐτὸς δὲ αὐτῇ μόνον γεννώσα νοῦν, οὕτι σβέσασα αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ γεννήσει, ἀλλὰ μείνασα μὲν αὐτῇ, γενομένου δ' ἐκεῖνου τῷ τοῦτο εἶναι.

<sup>14</sup> *Phaedr.* 246D–247E.

else or searches out the truth for oneself.<sup>15</sup> The ascent to intellect in Plotinus is a mediated ascent that culminates in subject-object identity. The way of the Good, however, is immediate in a different way. Something of this I shall examine more closely in what follows.

My essay is in two parts. First, I want to determine how reasonable it is for Plotinus simply to merge the ascent to the Beautiful from the *Symposium* and the study of the Good in the *Republic*. How far is the distinction between the beautiful and the good justified by the *Symposium* itself? Second, I want to outline the compelling differences—despite the real similarities—between the Gnostics and Plotinus primarily from the *Großschrift* itself, more as a provocation to discussion than a defense of Plotinus.

A distinction between the beautiful and the good is suggested by Diotima herself. We do not love the beautiful for its own sake, she argues, as we love the good, but we love it because of our desire to procreate and beget children in the beautiful.<sup>16</sup> It would therefore appear that neither happiness nor the beautiful are the ultimate goals of all human longing. In addition, Agathon, the beloved darling of the get-together, is in Socrates' pun the "good" (*Symp.* 174B4–5),<sup>17</sup> so the "Good" is present in the *Symposium*: (1) indirectly through a pun; (2) as an implicit part of Diotima's argument; and (3) by its absence, though we may think of it as a kind of after-image in the ascent to the beautiful,<sup>18</sup> for the ascent characterizes, we may surmise, the nature of loving rather than that of the ultimate beloved. Loving has the nature of need and desire; it therefore characterizes the transformability of the desiring subject. The ultimate beloved, however, might well have a different nature. Again, Diotima suggests this distinction between loving and the beloved in conversation with Socrates: "What you thought love to be is not surprising. You supposed, if I take what you said as evidence, that the beloved and not the loving was love. That is why, I think, Eros seemed completely beautiful to you. In fact, it is the beloved that is really beautiful ... and blessed; but loving has this other character" (204B8–C6). I suggest, therefore, that the ladder of

<sup>15</sup> *Phaed.* 85C–D.

<sup>16</sup> *Symp.* 204D–207A.

<sup>17</sup> *Symp.* 174A5–B5: Καὶ τὸν εἰπεῖν ὅτι Ἐπὶ δεῖπνον εἰς Ἀγάθωνος. χθὲς γὰρ αὐτὸν διέφυγον τοῖς ἐπιπυκίοις, φοβηθεὶς τὸν ὄχλον· ὠμολόγησα δ' εἰς τήμερον παρέσεσθαι. ταῦτα δὴ ἐκαλλωπισάμην, ἵνα καλὸς παρά καλὸν ἦω. ἀλλὰ σύ, ἦ δ' ὅς, πῶς ἔχεις πρὸς τὸ ἐθέλειν ἂν ἰέναι ἀκλιητος ἐπὶ δεῖπνον; Κἀγώ, ἔφη, εἶπον ὅτι Οὕτως ὅπως ἂν σὺ κελεύης. Ἔπου τοίνυν, ἔφη, ἵνα καὶ τὴν παροιμίαν διαφθεῖρωμεν μεταβαλόντες, ὡς ἄρα καὶ Ἀγάθων ἐπὶ δαίτας ἴασιν αὐτόματοι ἀγαθοί. Ὁμηρος μὲν γὰρ κινδυνεύει οὐ μόνον διαφθεῖραι ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑβρίσαι εἰς ταύτην τὴν παροιμίαν. Translations of *Symposium* are from Rowe 1998.

<sup>18</sup> See Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan 2004, 94–100, 157–158.

ascent characterizes progressive dialogical education and transformability of desire, just as the study of the Good characterizes the development of the synoptic eye of the dialectician.<sup>19</sup> What is disclosed at each level “strengthens and increases” (ῥωσθεῖς καὶ ἀυξήθεις) the apprentice in a movement through beauties of bodies, souls, moral ways of life, sciences and studies, in each case from many to one, which is ultimately the knowledge of the beauty yet untold (210D6–8); and at the top of the ladder, the sudden sight of the beautiful itself, the apprentice sees reflexively “by that which makes it visible” (ὁρῶντι ᾧ ὁρατὸν τὸ καλόν) (212A) and begets “not images of virtue, because he does not touch upon an image but true things because he touches the truth ... and in begetting true virtue and nurturing it, it is given to him to become god-beloved, and if any other human being is immortal, he is too (καὶ εἴπερ τῷ ἄλλῳ ἀνθρώπων ἀθανάτῳ καὶ ἐκείνῳ)” (212A).

What is ᾧ ὁρατὸν τὸ καλόν, that by which the Beautiful is visible? Undoubtedly the Beautiful discloses itself by its own light, but one cannot exclude from this deceptively simple phrase the final medium and source of intelligible light from the *Republic*, namely, the Good itself, likened by Socrates to the “sun” of the intelligible realm, ultimate cause of all intelligible visibility.<sup>20</sup> And if so, then the *Symposium* requires the *Republic* for its contextual interpretation of the ladder of ascent, for that which makes the Beautiful visible has to be the Good. And the *Republic* equally requires the *Symposium*, for the Good is expressly said by Glaukon to be “an inconceivably beautiful thing (Ἀμήχανον κάλλος) you’re talking about, if it provides both knowledge and truth and is superior to them in beauty” (6.509A), and Socrates uses the language of the mysteries to suppress Glaukon’s further thought that this might be pleasure: Εὐφήμει, ἦν δ’ ἐγώ.

We should note that in the *Symposium* the ascent to the Beautiful is, unlike *Zostrianos*, embodied (if any other *human being* [i.e., not soul simply] is immortal) with the accent on the loving apprentice. With the Good of *Republic* 6, by contrast, the Good beyond “being” and “intellect,”<sup>21</sup> the accent is on the nurturing power of the ultimate beloved. The Good is the last of all to be seen because the Good’s self-disclosing activity is that by which we see, think or exist in the first place. For Socrates, this is the only pursuit really needful or useful (504E–505B), and it implicitly includes the beautiful (505B2–3). Every soul pursues this, Socrates argues, and does everything for its sake “divining that it is something (ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι) but is at a

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Resp.* 7.537C.

<sup>20</sup> *Resp.* 6.507D–509C; 7.517A–C.

<sup>21</sup> *Resp.* 6.509B.

loss and cannot adequately grasp what it is" (505D11–E2; cf. 506A6; *Symp.* 192D1–2).

These two texts, therefore, require each other and speak to each other. The Good is the ultimate principle, hidden and therefore *needing to be divined* on Diotima's ladder of ascent. And implicitly it is said to be more beautiful than the beautiful in the *Republic*. Conversely, while the Good is infinitely beautiful, the Beautiful is not the Good (unlike the sub-Aeon Kalyptos in *Zost.* 117).<sup>22</sup> Plotinus' view throughout the *Enneads* (or at least from 1.6 [1] to 6.7 [38]), that the Good is the supremely or super Beautiful and intellect pure beauty because of it,<sup>23</sup> is a much more plausible, indeed necessary, interpretation of the *Symposium* and *Republic* than has for the most part been supposed (I mean the common view that Plotinus imposes his own later system upon an earlier, pristine "Plato," disengaged after centuries of Neoplatonism from its anachronistic mystical prism).<sup>24</sup> Indeed too, the Sethian Gnostics seem to be in agreement with Plotinus or vice versa. They ascend into an apocalyptic vision of an intelligible universe crowned by the beauty of the Barbelo Aeon. Like Socrates, the apprentice is "led by the hand" of different guides; at different stages the apprentice is "strengthened" or "confirmed"; and through the Triple-Powered Spirit he is lifted up into unknowing the Supreme One or Good, perhaps by a link with "the good" in the apprentice himself.<sup>25</sup> The Plotinian and Gnostic universes may therefore seem much more congruent, despite Plotinus' critique, than we have hitherto acknowledged—even to the point of comprising a similar hierarchical progression of mystical ascent, starting from purification and mystical self-reversion and then proceeding through similar stages such as autophany, intensification of the transcendental self and greater self-unification (as in the Barbelo Aeons) to ultimate mystical union, as Zeke Mazur has recently and cogently shown to be characteristic of Plotinian mystical practice.<sup>26</sup> The similarities are indeed striking; and the sophistication of the Sethian Gnostic systems seems in some respects to outdo Plotinus who prefers, on

<sup>22</sup> See *Zost.* 117.15–20; Turner in Meyer 2007, 577.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. *Resp.* 6.509A6–7: Ἀμήχανον κάλλος, ἔφη, λέγεις, εἰ ἐπιστήμην μὲν καὶ ἀλήθειαν παρέχει, αὐτὸ δ' ὑπὲρ ταῦτα κάλλει ἐστίν.

<sup>24</sup> On the Good and the Beautiful see Martin Achard's (2007) useful analysis of Plotinus' arguments about the relationship between the Good and the Beautiful from *Enn.* 1.6 [1] to 6.7 [38] (why Plotinus sometimes says that the One is *kalon* and sometimes that it is beyond beauty).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *Allogenes* 57.7–12.

<sup>26</sup> Mazur 2010.



the whole, greater simplicity.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, while the Gnostics seem to go in for a lot more talking and hearing than Plotinus seems comfortable with—though he does a lot himself too—one could argue that the Gnostics interpret the *Symposium* more faithfully than Plotinus to the degree that each level of ascent involves a dialogue between hierophantic presence and apprentice that results in different *logoi* that are plainly the offspring of dialectic and to be nurtured with care, precisely as in the *Symposium*.<sup>28</sup>

So how are we to distinguish “la mystique” in each? And how far is the interpretation of the *Symposium* and *Republic* really at stake in this matter? Can we in fact delineate the major compelling differences between each system? I shall argue in the last part of this essay that we can succinctly outline compelling differences from Plotinus’ critique of the Gnostics, that this critique is not simply *Enn.* 2.9 [33], but the entire *Großschrift*, and that the *Symposium* and *Republic* turn out to be at the heart of Plotinus’ objections. Let me start by setting out the three major questions, or mystical paths, that, in my view, help to contextualize *Ennead* 2.9 [33].

The first question, one that sets up a mystical pathway, is the nature of contemplation, a major item of dispute between Plotinus and the Gnostics. Gnostic apocalyptic visions claim to be essentially contemplative throughout. However, even though they recognize the noetic identity of subject contemplating and object contemplated, they present contemplation as spectacle and praxis: “I traversed the atmospheric [realm] and passed by the Aeonic Copies (*Zost.* 5.17 ff.) ... I ascended to the [truly] existent sojourn (5.24) ... I became a [contemplative] angel and stood upon the first ... aeon together with the souls (6–7).” At a crucial point for ascent and return in *Zostrianos*, namely, a discussion of the type of person who repents, the issue is precisely an inquiry into action and its results, an inquiry that will result in the reception of a different form of thinking:

if [the one who repents] renounces dead things and desires real things—immortal mind and immortal soul—it is going to be zealous about them by first undertaking for itself an inquiry, not just about action, but of the results. From this he [receives another way of thinking. The entire place] and [every] attainment will be his. (*Zost.* 43.19–30)

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<sup>27</sup> See, for example, the “core” mythological features of Sethianism, in the estimation of Schenke and Turner in Barry, Funk, Poirier, and Turner 2000, 134 ff., and the enneadic complexities of the being-life-mind triad in Sethian Gnosticism in Funk, Poirier, Scopello, and Turner 2004, 138–154.

<sup>28</sup> *Symp.* 210A7 ff.

In other words, an inquiry into action and its effects lies at the root of Gnostic self-reversion, and thought or contemplation is represented as the product of this inquiry.

This is precisely the issue at stake at the beginning of *Enn.* 3.8 [30]. Do *praxis* and *poiēsis* give birth to contemplation or is it the other way round? For Plotinus, by contrast, contemplation is *primary, internal* to everything, *unmediated* externally (i.e., not a revelation from another), and a function of *ordinary experience* from playfulness to greater seriousness. “Suppose we were to say playing at first, before undertaking to be serious, that all things aspire to contemplation ...” (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 1.1).

Apart from Aristotle’s *Ethics*,<sup>29</sup> Plotinus is thinking of *Republic* 7: “I forgot we were playing,” Socrates says, when he thinks of the ridicule brought on philosophy by its sham students. How then should we teach students, he asks. Children should be instructed, nourished, not by force, like slaves, but by play (ἀλλὰ παίζοντας τρέφε) (537A1).<sup>30</sup> Only at a later stage should this free play be given structure by bringing all its unconscious pursuits together into a comprehensive, multidimensional view so that their kinship with one another and with reality can be seen (537B–C). This is the dialectic that Plotinus *performs* in *Enn.* 3.8 [30]. It starts from play, moves through an initially playful analysis (e.g., Nature gets to speak and tells us off for asking stupid questions)<sup>31</sup> and an analysis of the phenomenology of *theōria, praxis, poiēsis*, and becomes more serious as the synoptic vision moves more deeply into unity: “and by how much the confidence is clearer, the contemplation is more silent, in that it leads more to a one, and what knows in so far as it knows—for already we must be serious (ἤδη γὰρ σπουδαστέον)—comes to a unity with what is known” (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 6.14–17). Conspicuously unlike the Gnostic apprentice, the sage or serious one (ὁ σπουδαῖος) “has already finished reasoning when he declares what he has in himself to another; but in relation to himself he is vision. For he is already turned to what is one, and to the quiet not only of things outside, but also in relation to himself, and all is within him” (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 6.36–40).

Again, unlike the relation between a hierophant and select initiate, Plotinus’ ladder of ascent is dialogically more inclusive and radically, if I may so put it, *democratic*: “Well, as this arises *among ourselves* (πρὸς ἡμᾶς) there will be no risk of playing with our own things. Are we now contemplating

<sup>29</sup> For passages and commentary, see Corrigan 2004, 102–107.

<sup>30</sup> See Corrigan and Glazov-Corrigan 2004, 214.

<sup>31</sup> *Enn.* 3.8 [30] 4.

as we play? Yes, *we and all who play* (ἡμεῖς καὶ πάντες ὅσοι παίζουσι) are doing this or this at any rate is what they desire as they play” (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 1.8–12). The inclusive pedagogic dialectic that is 3.8 [30] is therefore a compelling example of a *Republic-Symposium* performative ascent whose offspring or *logos*—thanks to Porphyry—we are responsible for nurturing.

But Plotinus’ rethinking of Plato and Aristotle goes further, for it will include *everything* so that even nature’s life, a silent contemplation constantly giving rise to bodily forms (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 4.3–10) is a form of thought (8.11–21), which becomes more unified the more it “hastens” to intellect (8.1–8), that is, to the formal and final cause of all desire (7.17–18). And this is by no means the complete story, for the mystical ascent will go back through a series of “ones” to the One (ch. 10), to that which *makes visible* the ethical beauty of intellect (implicit in Plotinus’ rethinking of Aristotle’s ethics) and shows it to be the choosable good. It is striking, therefore, that in *Enn.* 3.8 [30] the Good makes its first explicit appearance only in an analysis of sight: “For seeing, then, filling and a sort of perfection come from the sense-object, but for the sight of intellect the Good is the filler” (11.7–9), exactly as I have argued it does in Diotima-Socrates’ ladder of ascent. However, the inquiry does not stop here. In the positive theology of *Allogenes* (64.37–67.20), the powers of the luminaries tell *Allogenes* in the presence of the One and Triple-Powered Spirit: “Do not seek anything more but go ... It is not appropriate to dissipate further through repeated seeking” (67.19). Plotinus’ view, which surely must be directed against *Allogenes*, could not be more different: “The Good therefore has given the trace of itself on intellect to intellect to have in seeing, so that in intellect there is desire and it is always desiring and always attaining” (καὶ ἐφιέμενος ἀεὶ καὶ ἀεὶ τυγχάνων) (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 11.22–24).

Plotinus’ remarkable statement here (that we probably would never have suspected but for the Gnostics) already anticipates Gregory of Nyssa’s doctrine of *epektasis*, namely, the view that the soul or intellect is eternally drawn out in its desire for an infinite God;<sup>32</sup> it is also strikingly *positive*: “always attaining.” The mystical path through contemplation in *Enn.* 3.8 [30], then, is a positive mystical performance (by contrast with a remote, unknowing and unknown One) that includes negative and positive moments but goes beyond them to evoke a path open to anyone.<sup>33</sup> This is undoubtedly directed not so much against the Gnostics (whom Plotinus

<sup>32</sup> For Gregory, see Daniélou 1953, 309–326; Mühlenberg 1966, 159 ff.

<sup>33</sup> See the recent treatment by Bussanich 2007.

admits he cannot convince in *Enn.* 2.9 [33]) as it is an internal dialogue with those ἡμῖν φίλοι or γνωρίμοι of Plotinus' school who somehow continue to be Gnostics. But one corroborating key to understanding why Plotinus starts with an inquiry into contemplation appears throughout 2.9 [33], but especially in the final chapter, 18.35. Instead of rejecting or despising the stars, he argues, we should imitate the contemplation of our "sister" soul of the all (cf. 4.3 [27]) and of the stars, preparing ourselves "by nature and training, while their contemplation belongs to them from the beginning." By contrast, the Gnostics claim that they *alone* can contemplate (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 18.36). This strong claim therefore is what first had to be refuted in order to lay any foundation for discourse.

Plotinus' second problem or mystical path, the path of beauty and moral excellence, in part articulated in the earlier chapters of *Enn.* 2.9 [33], is a further key to understanding both 3.8 [30] and 5.8 [31]. "Those who already have the *gnōsis* should have pursued it *from here and now* (2.9 [33] 15.23) and ... in an orderly way as the discrimination of beauty and the practice of the good through virtue." To tell someone to "look to god" is meaningless unless one teaches them *how* to look and unless one practices the good as a precondition for looking properly and in due order, Plotinus argues (2.9 [33] 15.38–40). What is the proper order then? It is the progressive recognition, exactly as in 5.8 [31] and the *Symposium*, that "the beauties here exist because of the first beauties":

But perhaps they may say they are not moved (by the beauty which moves divine souls), and do not look any differently at ugly or beautiful bodies; but if this is so, they do not look any differently at ugly or beautiful ways of life or beautiful subjects of study; they have *no contemplation* then, and hence no God.<sup>34</sup>

Without discrimination of beauty and practice of the good, we are simply "flying in our dreams":

[T]he person of real dignity must ascend in due measure, without boorish arrogance, going only so far as our nature can, and consider that *there is space for others at the god's side* and not *set himself alone* after god, *like flying in our dreams ...*<sup>35</sup>

<sup>34</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 17.22–25. Cf. *Symp.* 210A7–C6.

<sup>35</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.46–50: ἔπειτα σεμνὸν δεῖ εἰς μέτρον μετὰ οὐκ ἀγροικίας, ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον λόντα ἐφ' ὅσον ἡ φύσις δύναται ἡμῶν, ἀνιέναι, τοῖς δ' ἄλλοις νομίζειν εἶναι χώραν παρὰ τῷ θεῷ καὶ μὴ αὐτὸν μόνον μετ' ἑκείνων τάξαντα ὡς περ ὀνειράσι πέτεσθαι ἀποστεροῦντα ἑαυτὸν καὶ ὅσον ἐστὶ δυνατόν ψυχῇ ἀνθρώπου θεῷ γενέσθαι.

The two mystical ascents performed in *Enn.* 3.8 [30] and 5.8 [31], then, are the path of contemplation that leads positively to the Good and the path of beauty and moral practice that leads from the beautiful *here and now* of the sensible world (5.8 [31] 1–9) to the reflexive identity of intellect (which is like something we do not notice such as good health) (5.8 [31] 11) and to the proper appreciation of the three and only three hypostases in terms of Greek myths interpreted properly (5.8 [31] 12). They are opposed to what the Gnostics do, namely, falsify Plato, multiply realities and give names to a multitude of supposedly intelligible realities as if they were dealing with some human conference (2.9 [33] 6; 10). Moreover, these two paths are inclusive, radically democratic, performative mystical ascents to union with intellect and the Good that both reflect and contrast at almost every point with items in the Sethian Gnostic texts, but that in principle reflect a phenomenology of ordinary—and not so ordinary experience—open to everyone. I have space here for only a few details before I come to the third path, perhaps the most remarkable of all, in *Enn.* 5.5 [32].

The famous images of the One as a spring in which all rivers have their source and as the life of a great plant, though common enough to be found individually in Macrobius (*Somn. Scip.* 2.16.23) and the *Corpus Hermeticum* (4.10) are *both* to be found in the *Tripartite Tractate*. In Plotinus, the spring gives the whole of itself to the rivers and is not used up by them, “but the rivers that have gone forth from it, before each of them flows in different directions, remain for a while all together, though each of them knows, in a way, the direction in which it is going to let its stream flow” (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 10.5–10). Plotinus is virtually citing the *Tripartite Tractate*, with the major difference that Plotinus grants a kind of knowledge even in abiding unity to entities that are virtually henads, not revelatory appearances of the Triple-Powered Spirit:<sup>36</sup> “But he is [as] he is ... a spring ... not diminished by the water flowing from it. As long as they remained in the Father’s Thought, they were incapable of knowing the Depth ... nor could they know themselves or anything else.”<sup>37</sup> On its own, this might be insignificant, but Plotinus also reflects Sethian Gnostic retreat-language when he argues in *Enn.* 3.8 [30] 9 that we know what is above intellect by an ἐπιβολῆ ἀθρόα, a wholly simultaneous casting of ourselves upon [it], since “there is something of it in us too, or rather there is nowhere it is not for the things that can participate

<sup>36</sup> Cf. *Zost.* 15–16 in Meyer 2007, 553.

<sup>37</sup> *Tri. Trac.* 60.1–62.6, trans. Einar Thomassen in Meyer 2007, 65–66. Text in Painchaud and Thomassen 1989.

in it" (9.21–24). "So our intellect *must retreat backwards*, so to speak, and let itself go *to those things behind it*, since it faces in both directions, and there, if it wants to see that, it must not be altogether intellect" (9.29–32; cf. *Zost.* 16.2 ff.). Again, there is an implicit henadic multiplicity prior to intellect. The path backwards is both positive and yet a destabilizing relinquishing of oneself, unlike the more sober Gnostic retreat in order to receive.

In *Enn.* 5.8 [31] generally, then, there are at least seven features that provide an important emphasis for our broader understanding of the treatise. They are as follows: (1) the twin emphasis upon beauty and moral practice, as in the *Symposium*; (2) the striking immediacy of intelligible to sensible (5.8 [31] 9); (3) the remarkable argument that *everything* in the sensible world is *form*, even matter (ch. 7); (4) the visionary description of the "true earth" and "true heaven" (based upon *Phaed.* 109Dff. and *Phaedr.* 247 ff.) clearly parallel to *Zost.* 48–55,<sup>38</sup> but with the major difference that Virtue, Justice and Sophia rule and pervade the entire intelligible world (ch. 4); (5) the call to recollect the *sight* of practical wisdom in oneself from the face of the other as an immediate reality of shared being (ch. 2); (6) the thought experiment that retains everything in this sensible cosmos, augments its "sphere" by taking another shining "sphere" in the soul (cf., for "sphere," *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 17) (without the phantasm in "you") and then prays for the god who made that of which "you" have the phantasm to come with the whole of the intelligible universe (5.8 [31] 9); (7) the silent, spontaneous, demiurgic creativity of intellect at the heart of the coming-to-be of the sensible world that is before all (Gnostic) *epinoia* or *ennoiai*. All of these items, if taken together with Plotinus' citation of *Zost.* 10.1–20 in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.19–33 and his insistence that one follow a certain order and not proliferate—or more perniciously for Plotinus—mix up hypostatic entities, as perhaps when the Gnostics appear to call Kalyptos the Good (*Zost.* 116.24–118.8)—all tend to confirm that while Plotinus is obviously capable of thinking many things at once, these earlier parts of the *Großschrift* set the crucial context for the explicit critique of *Enn.* 2.9 [33] and that the measured ascent of the *Symposium* to the Beautiful and to what in both the *Republic* and the *Symposium* makes the Beautiful visible is right at the heart of these three performative *logoi*, namely, *Enneads* 3.8 [30]; 5.8 [31]; and 5.5 [32].

The third way, however, that of 5.5 [32], is a little different, for it starts already with intellect and takes up in the first seven chapters the self-

<sup>38</sup> In relation to the Kalyptos Aeon, see *Zost.* 113.1: "and angels, daimons, minds, souls, living creatures, trees, bodies and those prior to them ..."; compare Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.2 [43] 21–22: "and bodies and matter are there."

evidentiary character of intellectual cognition in relation to the Good. But of course it builds upon the earlier treatises and particularly Plotinus' insistence on love, desire, intimacy, possession, especially 5.8 [31] 10.33–36. If I understand Plotinus correctly, for him the Gnostics recognize love and sex superficially; they prefer to be voyeuristic about them. By contrast, Plotinus thinks that the way of love is messy, more like getting drunk, coming to dwell *in* the other or to be possessed *by* the other, as in the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*. I quote:

But those who do not see the whole only acknowledge the external impression, but those who are altogether, we may say, drunk and filled with the nectar, since the beauty has *penetrated through the whole of their soul*, are not simply *spectators* ... one looks from outside at everything one looks at as a spectacle ... But one must transport already what one sees into oneself and look as one and as oneself, as if someone *possessed* by a god ...

(Enn. 5.8 [31] 10.32–43)

This passage about intelligible beauty, so evidently directed to his Gnostic friends, may seem at first sight more in tune with Plotinus' wonderful erotic treatment of the One in *Enn.* 6.7 [38] 20–37 than the rather sober beginning to 5.5 [32], but it anticipates intellect's giving itself up entirely to the Beautiful-Good and seeing the Good which is “in nothing” “by that of it which is not intellect” later in 5.5 [32] 8. It also anticipates Plotinus' analysis of the being-in-ness of body in soul, soul in intellect, and of everything being in-possessed by the One in ch. 9, which provides a striking contrast to the emergence of the Barbelo Aeon in *Zost.* 76.2 ff., where Barbelo has come to exist outside the Triple-Powered Spirit and where “his knowledge dwells outside of him with that which contemplates him inwardly.” Plotinus is to develop (in ch. 7) an image of seeing—simultaneously external/internal—that leaves one wondering: was it inside or out? And his answer seems to be that it is much more deeply “in” where there is no inner-outer (ch. 9).

Let me go back to what I think is at stake in *Enn.* 5.5 [32] 1. This is a question implicit at the top of Diotima's ladder of ascent: does soul-intellect possess only images at this level or “true things”? Plotinus uses such language at 5.5 [32] 1.54–56, indicating the Platonic level at which he is operating, but his focus is squarely upon the Gnostics. In the case of the Barbelo sub-Aeons, for instance, or even in that of Gnostic Sophia, does intellect have to “go run around looking” (1.45; 2.11) so that its knowledge is outside of it like that “of a guesser or ... of someone who has heard what he knows from someone else” (1.5–6), or does intellect have only *typoi* (imprints or model-patterns, not only Stoic but also a favorite Gnostic word), or is intellect characterized by unknowability or is its knowledge self-authenticating, “clear” truth? Intel-

lect's knowledge is, of course, self-authenticating, Plotinus concludes, and this includes its knowledge of being derived from the Good: "and if there is anything before it, intellect knows clearly (and internally) that this is what it derives from" (2.15–17). Intellect, therefore, could not mistake itself for the Good; nor could it be a series of different Aeons (Autogenes, Protophanes, Kalypptos); it is "one nature, all realities, truth" (3.1–2), self-guaranteeing, yes, but "a second god revealing himself before we see that other one" (θεὸς δευτέρως προφαίνων ἑαυτὸν πρὶν ὁρᾶν ἕκείνον) (3.4–5). Intellect is, in other words, a unified self-guaranteeing entity (not Autogenes, but Autothenenarges); it is also essentially the manifestation or fore-appearing (not Protophanes, but a different mode altogether, hanging in its own fore-appearance, 3.3–7) from the fore-appearance of the One over all: ἐφ' ἅπασι δὲ τούτοις βασιλεὺς προφαίνεται ἑξαίφνης αὐτὸς ὁ μέγας (3.13–14).

This progression inherent in the self-validating "eye" will also be revealed later (in *Enn.* 5.5 [32] 7) through a phenomenological analysis of sight which discloses its full range, or *neusis*, from object illuminated through illuminated seeing to pure light, revealed as a "veiling" entity (Kalypptos) that "in not seeing sees light":

Just so intellect, veiling itself from other things and drawing itself inward, when it is not looking at anything will see light, not a distinct light in something different from itself, but suddenly appearing, alone by itself in independent purity, so that intellect is at a loss to know where it has appeared from, whether it has come from outside or within ...<sup>39</sup>

I suggest that *Enn.* 5.5 [32], chs. 1–7, are an implicit rethinking and critique of the Barbelo Aeons by means of an analysis based upon Greek philosophical notions of intellect, number, etymology in the earlier chapters and, finally in ch. 7, upon a phenomenology of seeing that evokes "veiling" at the highest level of mystical experience, first, by the ordinary experience of closing one's eyelids, pressing one's eyeball, and seeing light by itself ("the eye's possessor squeezes it and sees the light in it"), second, by the immediate passage in the reader's mind to mystical experience with one's eyes "tight shut" ("for then in not seeing it sees ... most of all") and, third, by the Platonic, mystical expression of sudden appearance in the *Symposium*, *Republic* and *Seventh Letter* ("for it sees light"). I wonder in this context if Plotinus' earlier pointed reference to those who have gone away satisfied with what they

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<sup>39</sup> Οὕτω δὴ καὶ νοῦς αὐτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων καλύψας καὶ συναγαγὼν εἰς τὸ εἶσω μηδὲν ὁρᾶν θεάσεται οὐκ ἄλλο ἐν ἄλλῳ φῶς, ἀλλ' αὐτὸ καθ' ἑαυτὸ μόνον καθαρὸν ἐφ' αὐτοῦ ἑξαίφνης φανέν, ὥστε ἀπορεῖν ὅθεν ἐφάνη, ἕξωθεν ἢ ἔνδον (*Enn.* 5.5 [32] 7.31–34).



have seen before the coming of the “great king” (3.14–15) might not include Zostrianos himself, since Zostrianos is apparently not baptized in the waters of Kalyptos, but only “hears about Kalyptos” (*Zost.* 24.1ff.).

Finally, I shall conclude with one of the most remarkable chapters in the *Enneads*: 5.5 [32] 12. Instead of the absolutely unknowable One cognized by not cognizing, Plotinus presents the Good as a radically positive presence beyond simple presence from which we have always already withdrawn and yet is always already here beyond memory or even recollection, not just for mystics with their eyes tight shut, but for sleepers. Whatever this chapter suggests, it is neither positive nor negative theology in any commonly accepted sense but rather a profoundly disturbing, yet positive evocation of the shocking, yet quiet superabundance thoroughly pervading ordinary experience, so that we do not notice what is open to anyone:

And we must consider that people have forgotten that which from the beginning until now they want and long for. For all things desire and yearn for it by necessity of nature, as if *divining instinctually* that they cannot exist without it. The grasp and the shock of the beautiful come to those who already in a way know and are awake to it, and the awaking of love: but the Good, since it is present long before an innate desire, is present even to those asleep and does not shock those who at any time see it, because it is always there and there is never recollection of it; but people do not see it because it is present to them in their sleep.<sup>40</sup>

Plotinus goes on, with arguments reminiscent of Diotima, to suggest that whereas all human beings want the Good, not all recognize beauty and are content to seem beautiful without being so, and to contend, as Plotinus represents the Gnostics doing in *Enn.* 2.9 [33], that they are just as beautiful as any primary beauty. By contrast, Plotinus argues: “the Good is gentle, kindly and gracious” (5.5 [32] 12.33–35) (language, in part, used of Barbelo in *Zost.* 76.2).

This chapter reinterprets *Republic* 6–7 and the *Symposium* in new light. Where is the Good on the ladder of ascent? We have to *divine* its hidden presence in beauty, just as in Aristophanes’ speech there is a deeper instinctual yearning for union in separated human beings beyond cognitive representation: “No one would think this to be for the sake of sexual intercourse ... that

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<sup>40</sup> *Enn.* 5.5 [32] 12.6–19: Χρή δὲ ἐννοεῖν, ὡς εἰσιν ἐπιλελησμένοι, οὐ καὶ ἐξ ἀρχῆς εἰς νῦν ποθοῦσι καὶ ἐφίενται αὐτοῦ. Πάντα γὰρ ὀρέγεται ἐκείνου καὶ ἐφίεται αὐτοῦ φύσεως ἀνάγκη, ὡσπερ ἀπομεμαντευμένα, ὡς ἄνευ αὐτοῦ οὐ δύναται εἶναι. Καὶ τοῦ μὲν καλοῦ ἤδη οἶον εἰδόσι καὶ ἐγρηγορόσιν ἢ ἀντίληψις καὶ τὸ θάμβος, καὶ τοῦ ἔρωτος ἢ ἔγερσις· τὸ δ’ ἀγαθόν, ἅτε πάλαι παρὸν εἰς ἔφεσιν σύμφυτον, καὶ κοιμωμένοις πάρεστι καὶ οὐ θαμβεῖ ποτε ἰδόντας, ὅτι σύνεστιν αἰεὶ καὶ οὐ ποτὲ ἢ ἀνάμνησις· οὐ μὴν ὀρώσιν αὐτό, ὅτι κοιμωμένοις πάρεστι.

the one so eagerly delights in being with the other; no, it's something else the soul of each clearly wishes for that it can't put into words, but *divines what it wishes, and hints at it in riddles*" (ἀλλ' ἄλλο τι βουλομένη ἑκατέρου ἢ ψυχὴ δήλη ἐστίν, ὃ οὐ δύναται εἰπεῖν, ἀλλὰ μαντεύεται ὃ βούλεται, καὶ αἰνίττεται) (*Symp.* 192C–D). Or again: "Every soul pursues the good and does whatever it does for its sake. It divines that the good is something but it is perplexed and cannot adequately grasp what it is ..." ("Ὁ δὴ διώκει μὲν ἅπανσα ψυχὴ καὶ τοῦτου ἔνεκα πάντα πράττει, ἀπομαντευομένη τι εἶναι, ἀπορούσα δὲ καὶ οὐκ ἔχουσα λαβεῖν ἱκανῶς τί ποτ' ἐστίν) (*Resp.* 6.505D–E). What is the effect then of Plotinus' third way? Instead of being the most remote, infinitely removed principle, the Good is *the* most familiar, unconscious presence beyond presence, more intimate to myself than myself, as Augustine will say, *the* most accessible, not just for hierophant and initiate, but for everyone. This, I think, is the goal of Plotinus' critique of the Gnostics: to reverse completely the spectacle of ascent, to break the dichotomy of inner-outer, to radically democratize *la mystique*—basically to turn experience and representation inside out.

Jean-Louis Chrétien, in a beautiful book, *L'inoublable et l'inespéré*, has well observed:

Always already there, always already come, the Good is that which forever escapes all anamnesis. Yet this does not express a negative trait that would render it unthinkable, but rigorously describes, in distinguishing it from the Beautiful, its mode of presence in the contraction of the immemorial ... The immemorial of the Good leaves in us a mark without remark, a forgotten presence, but always already at work.<sup>41</sup>

However, Chrétien then goes on to distinguish Plotinus from the "ethical dimension" in the work of Levinas and *Autrement qu'être*. This, I think, is a profoundly mistaken interpretation of both Plato and Plotinus. For Socrates in the *Republic*, the Good is the most useful, beneficial and practical gift without which every other possession is useless (6.504E–505A). For Plotinus, the Good is the *archē kai telos* of all contemplative action, divined in and beyond intellect itself. Ethical, contemplative action cannot be separated from vision and touch. This is the whole point of the *Großschrift*. The real *amechanon kalos*, whether of the Good itself, or of what shines forth into intellect, or reflected in (Socrates' ironic comment on) Alcibiades' divination about those statues in Socrates,<sup>42</sup> is intrinsically bound up with real ethical practice, as Plotinus in fact argues in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 17. The ethical

<sup>41</sup> Chrétien 2002, 29.

<sup>42</sup> *Resp.* 6.509A; *Symp.* 218E.

and metaphysical good cannot be separated. This, among other things, is at the root of Plotinus' argument with the Gnostics and of the three mystical paths he performs here *pros hēmas*: contemplation, beauty, erotic love, intimacy and goodness are not performative without moral excellence. The *Symposium* and *Republic* remain Plotinus' guide. As he says in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 15.38–40: "It is moral excellence, in fact, that goes ahead of us to the goal and when it enters into the soul with practical wisdom *shows* god; but god, if you talk about him without true excellence, is only a name."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ἀρετὴ μὲν οὖν εἰς τέλος προιοῦσα καὶ ἐν ψυχῇ ἐγγενομένη μετὰ φρονήσεως θεὸν δεῖκνυστιν· ἄνευ δὲ ἀρετῆς ἀληθινῆς θεὸς λεγόμενος ὄνομά ἐστιν.

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“THOSE WHO ASCEND TO THE  
SANCTUARIES OF THE TEMPLES”:  
THE Gnostic CONTEXT OF PLOTINUS’  
FIRST TREATISE, 1.6 [1], *ON BEAUTY*\*

Zeke Mazur

A recent resurgence of scholarly interest in Plotinus’ relationship with the Gnostics has refocused attention upon the subtle traces of anti-Gnostic argumentation that can be found not only in the so-called *Großschrift* or “tetralogy,”<sup>1</sup> but also throughout the entirety of his oeuvre, beginning already in his sixth, and even possibly as early as his second treatise (4.8 [6] and 4.7 [2], respectively).<sup>2</sup> In this essay, I would like to extend the investigation back to what is ostensibly Plotinus’ very first writing, 1.6 [1] Περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ.<sup>3</sup> I would suggest that in this treatise, he is tacitly attempting to draw a distinction between his own position and that of the Gnostics concerning the ontological status of beauty, yet he nevertheless supports his argument with several concepts and images borrowed from the Gnostics themselves.<sup>4</sup> I would

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\* This contribution is warmly dedicated to John D. Turner—my dissertation advisor, mentor, and friend—whose monumental (and often intimidatingly prescient) lifetime of work on Sethian Gnosticism will, I suspect, be of increasing importance for the study of Plotinus. With John’s kind encouragement, I presented a preliminary sketch of this essay in December 2011 at a colloquium entitled “Par-delà la tétralogie antignostique: Plotin et les Gnostiques, colloque en hommage à Pierre Hadot,” organized by the École Pratique des Hautes Études and the Université de Paris-Ouest Nanterre-La Défense.

<sup>1</sup> I.e., treatises 3.8 [30], 5.8 [31], 5.5 [32], and 2.9 [33], a great work (or series of works) that in their entirety comprise the *locus classicus* for Plotinus’ anti-Gnostic polemic.

<sup>2</sup> See the methodological remarks of Narbonne 2011, who challenges the notion of a discrete Gnostic “crisis” to which Plotinus responded solely in the *Großschrift*-tetralogy, and proposes instead that Plotinus’ engagement with the Gnostics takes the form of a continuous discussion running throughout the entirety of his corpus. The idea that subtle traces of a dialogue with the Gnostics could be found outside the *Großschrift* and as early as 4.8 [6] was apparently first suggested by Puech 1960, 182–184.

<sup>3</sup> One should note that from Porphyry’s comments (in *Vit. Plot.* 4 and 26), we have no way of knowing with certainty that it was actually the first treatise Plotinus wrote.

<sup>4</sup> In light of the controversy surrounding the term “Gnostic,” I use it advisedly, to include a broadly-defined (yet historically specific) complex of inter-related religio-philosophical currents of thought of the sort evident in the Platonizing Sethian tractates *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) and *Allogenes* (NHC XI,3)—homonymous with the Greek apocalypses that were read

even go so far as to propose that a curious tension between a positive and a negative attitude to Gnostic thought comprises the entire substrate of the treatise, although—to be sure—this tension remains almost entirely subtextual, embedded within scholastic arguments against rival Stoic and Aristotelian conceptions of beauty, and concealed beneath an opaque veneer of traditional language that appears at first glance to be entirely Hellenic and especially Platonic. In previous work I have suggested that intimations of a profound and occasionally even quite positive engagement with Gnostic thought may be found throughout Plotinus' corpus.<sup>5</sup> If such a positive engagement can be shown already in treatise 1.6 [1], it suggests a closer relationship than has usually been supposed between Plotinus and the Gnostics, even in his earliest period of literary production: a relationship certainly much closer than he himself would have later wanted to admit.

#### 1. THE ANTI-GNOSTIC BACKGROUND OF PLOTINUS' DEFENSE OF BEAUTY IN 1.6 [1] 1–6

The essential thesis of treatise 1.6 [1] is that all beauty ultimately derives from the intelligible beauty of the hypostatic Being-Intellect or even the One-Good. In an extended argument running through the first six chapters of the treatise, Plotinus insists that every instance of beauty “down here”—including both the beauty in bodies and other physical objects perceived by the

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and critiqued in Plotinus' circle, according to Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16—as well as in texts that have been variously designated as Sethian, Valentinian, Simonian, Thomasine, etc., which share with one another several overlapping aspects, including technical terminology, mythologoumena, and divine nomenclature, including many themes derived from both Greek philosophy and Judeo-Christian sources.

<sup>5</sup> This is the case especially with regard to his conception of the contemplative ascent, which, I believe, depends largely on prior Gnostic schemata of ritualized and/or visionary ascent. In my dissertation (Mazur 2010), I suggested that the precise structure of Plotinus' accounts of the ascent to the One demonstrate striking and noncoincidental similarities of detail to certain Gnostic schemata: schemata most evident in the Platonizing Sethian “ascent-pattern” tractates *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, but also foreshadowed in a wide variety of earlier Gnostic and Hermetic texts as well. Although this is not the place to present the argument, in my opinion, the entire Platonizing Sethian corpus is pre-Plotinian and shows influence only of second-century Platonism, not that of Plotinus or his successors. Therefore, I concur with the conclusion of Tardieu 1996, 112: “Le *Zostrien* que Plotin et ses disciples ont connu était donc bien le même que celui que nous lisons aujourd'hui en copte. L'hypothèse de deux rédactions de l'Apocalypse de Zostrien, l'une préporphyrienne (perdue), l'autre porphyrianisante (NHC VIII, 1), est une vue de l'esprit.” However, I would go further than Tardieu in suggesting that this applies to the remainder of the Platonizing Sethian corpus, which includes *Allogenes* as well.

senses (chs. 1–3), and also that beauty which can only be perceived by the soul (chs. 4–6)—always remains in a participatory or even anagogic relationship with its divine source “up there.” His demonstration draws primarily on the *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*,<sup>6</sup> but the intent of the treatise differs considerably from that of these Platonic dialogues, wherein the nature of beauty—and its connection with the Good—is assumed to be more or less self-evident. By contrast, in 1.6 [1] Plotinus is attempting to provide an account of beauty itself, and in the process, to rehabilitate sensible beauty, perhaps to defend it from the suspicions of some unmentioned interlocutor or rival school of thought.

It is therefore significant that much later in Plotinus’ corpus, in the specifically anti-Gnostic context of the *Großschrift*-tetralogy, he makes very similar arguments defending both natural and artistic beauty against Gnostic criticism.<sup>7</sup> The specific target of these latter arguments appears to be a subversive Gnostic reading of Plato’s theory of artistic imitation.<sup>8</sup> We may recall Plato’s essential objection to art in *Resp.* 10.596B–598D and *Soph.* 233E–236C: specifically, that the artist (or sophist) reproduces an image of an intelligible form while in ignorance of the form itself, and thus produces mere images of images at a threefold remove from reality.<sup>9</sup> It is not coincidental that several Gnostic sources level this very charge, often formulated in recognizably Platonic language, at the demiurge of the cosmos,<sup>10</sup> thus deliberately reinterpreting the mimetic activity of the demiurge

<sup>6</sup> Darras-Worms 1997, 17 ff., demonstrates the influence of several other Platonic dialogues as well, including the *Hippias major*.

<sup>7</sup> Plotinus returns repeatedly to the defense of both cosmic and divine beauty throughout the *Großschrift*, especially in 5.8 [31] 1; 5.5 [32] 12; and 2.9 [33] 16–17.

<sup>8</sup> I attempted to demonstrate this in a paper entitled “Plotinus’ Response to Demiurgic *Mimēsis* in Platonic Gnosticism” presented at the conference of the International Society for Neoplatonic Studies at the University of Maine at Orono in 2002.

<sup>9</sup> That Plotinus might at times seem to share the Gnostics’ revulsion for the replication of images is suggested by the famous anecdote about his refusal to sit for a portrait on the grounds that it would be a mere εἰδῶλου εἰδῶλον (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 1.8–10), on which see especially Pépin 1992a. Porphyry’s own anecdote itself, however, possibly derives from a Gnostic topos, as the same expression pejoratively describes demiurgic production at *Zost.* 10.4–5 (οὐρανοῦ ἡγετοῦ εἰδῶλου; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.27). Moreover, in *Acts of John* 28.5–6 (Bonnet), we find a similar anecdote about the unwitting subject of a portrait deriding the portrait as οὐκ ἐμοί ... ἀλλὰ τῷ σαρκικῷ μου εἰδῶλῳ.

<sup>10</sup> The Valentinians conceived of the demiurge as ignorant in a specifically Platonic sense (i.e., as ignorant of the forms); consider this passage of Irenaeus preserved by Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31.18.9 (1.414.4–8 Holl = Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.5.3): οὐρανὸν (γὰρ) πεποιημένα μὴ εἰδόμενα οὐρανῶν καὶ ἀνθρωπῶν πεπλακέναι, ἀγνοοῦντα [τὸν] ἀνθρωπῶν· γῆν τε δεδειχέναι, μὴ ἐπιστάμενον [τὴν] γῆν· καὶ ἐπὶ πάντων οὕτως λέγουσιν ἠγνοημένα αὐτὸν τὰς ἰδέας ὧν ἐποίησε καὶ αὐτὴν τὴν Μητέρα, αὐτὸν δὲ μόνον ᾤησθαι πάντα εἶναι (“For he made the heavens not having known the heavens; he



in the *Timaeus* (29A and 50C) in terms of Plato's own critique of human artistic mimesis in the *Republic*.<sup>11</sup> They do so, one may presume, in order to provide a quasi-philosophical justification for their denigration of the cosmos as an ontologically mediocre product of an ignorant creator. It is therefore reasonable to suppose that Plotinus' response in the *Großschrift*-tetralogy—especially in 5.8 [31] and 2.9 [33]—is actually an attempt to short-circuit the Gnostic critique of demiurgic mimesis by (a) rehabilitating the notion of artistic creation that Plato had criticized,<sup>12</sup> and by (b) emphasizing the dynamic link between intelligible archetype and sensible image (incidentally, it is curious that at least with respect to the theory of art, Plotinus opposes a position shared by both the Gnostics and Plato). Yet his conception of artistic reproduction depends upon a particular theory of beauty. According to Plotinus, sensible beauty is the accurate reflection, or even presence, of form,<sup>13</sup> and thus provides precisely the type of connection between the cosmos and the Divine that the Gnostics deny.<sup>14</sup> As he insists

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molded the human being, being ignorant of the human being; he revealed the earth, not understanding the earth; and with respect to the forms of all things he made, they declare him to be similarly ignorant, and even (ignorant) of his own Mother; but he thought he alone was all things.”)

<sup>11</sup> The deprecation of the demiurge's creative activity as the mediocre replication of second or third-order images—or of dimly-perceived reflections in water—may be found among Sethian and related sources, e.g., *Ap. John* (NHC II,1) 12.33–13.5 = (NHC IV,1) 19.9–18; (NHC III,1) 22.2–14 = (BG 8502,2) 48.8–49.6 = (NHC II,1) 14.33–15.10 = (NHC IV,1) 23.12–28; *Hyp. Arch.* (NHC II,4) 87.12–32; *Orig. World* (NHC II,5) 100.19–101.9; and also among Valentini-ans, *Tri. Trac.* (NHC I,5) 77.11–79.11; cf. *Ep. Pet. Phil.* (NHC VIII,2) 136.5–15. Undoubtedly due to its pejorative connotations, the language of *mimēsis* itself was used to describe demiurgic production by the Valentinian Marcus (Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.54.1.6), Basilides (*Ref.* 7.22.9.1 [= 10.14.4.2]), and Saturnilus (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 23.1.4). The demiurge was, on occasion, explicitly described in terms of a painter by the Peratae (Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.17.5) and the Valentini-ans (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 4.13.89.6–90.1); cf. also Cod. Bruc. *Untitled* 53 (266.22 Schmidt-MacDermot), on which see Pépini 1992b.

<sup>12</sup> Even the theory of contemplative production proposed in 3.8 [30] may be understood as a propaedeutic foundation for the defense of artistic (demiurgic) production in the subsequent three treatises; see O'Meara 1980.

<sup>13</sup> 1.6 [1] 2.11–13: Τίς οὖν ὁμοιότης τοῖς τῆδε πρὸς τὰ ἐκεῖ καλά; καὶ γάρ, εἰ ὁμοιότης, ὅμοια μὲν ἔστω· πῶς δὲ καλά κάκεινα καὶ ταῦτα; Μετοχῇ εἶδους φαμὲν ταῦτα. 2.27–28: Οὕτω μὲν δὴ τὸ καλὸν σῶμα γίνεται λόγου ἀπὸ θείων ἐλθόντος κοινωνία. 5.8 [31] 1.32–38: Εἰ δὲ τις τὰς τέχνας ἀτιμάζει, ὅτι μιμούμεναι τὴν φύσιν ποιοῦσι, πρῶτον μὲν φατέον καὶ τὰς φύσεις μιμεῖσθαι ἄλλα. "Ἐπειτα δεῖ εἰδέναι, ὡς οὐχ ἀπλῶς τὸ ὁρώμενον μιμοῦνται, ἀλλ' ἀνατρέχουσιν ἐπὶ τοὺς λόγους, ἐξ ὧν ἡ φύσις. Εἶτα καὶ ὅτι πολλὰ παρ' αὐτῶν ποιοῦσι καὶ προστιθέασιν δέ, ὅτω τι ἐλλείπει, ὡς ἔχουσαι τὸ κάλλος. 2.14–16: Ἄρ' οὐκ εἶδος μὲν πανταχοῦ τοῦτο, ἦκον δὲ ἐπὶ τὸ γενόμενον ἐκ τοῦ ποιήσαντος, ὡσπερ ἐν ταῖς τέχναις ἐλέγετο ἐπὶ τὰ τεχνητὰ ἵεναι παρὰ τῶν τεχνῶν. On Plotinus' curious equation of beauty with the immanence of form itself, see Stern-Gillet 2000, 38–63.

<sup>14</sup> E.g., 2.9 [33] 16.11–12: Πῶς γὰρ ἂν ἀποτημθῆις ὅδε ὁ κόσμος ἐκείνου ἦν; πῶς δὲ οἱ ἐν αὐτῷ θεοί;

in 5.8 [31]—and also here in 1.6 [1]—the beauty “down here” summons the soul back up to its intelligible archetype because of the consubstantiality of the beauty of this world with that of the intelligible realm.<sup>15</sup> This specific theory of beauty, which we find already fully formulated in his first treatise, is thus profoundly implicated in his anti-Gnostic argumentation.

That the Gnostics were deeply suspicious of sensible beauty is confirmed not only by Plotinus’ explicit testimony,<sup>16</sup> but also by several Gnostic tracts from Nag Hammadi which refer to natural beauty as a kind of diabolical deception, utterly divorced from true divinity.<sup>17</sup> Now one may wonder: did the Gnostics just happen to hold a view of beauty diametrically opposed to that expressed by Plotinus already in 1.6 [1], a view that he later came to criticize in the *Großschrift*-tetralogy by redeploing his own earlier arguments about beauty? Rather, it appears considerably more plausible that even Plotinus’ earliest discussion of beauty—supported by a reverent, if not always entirely accurate, reading of Plato—was *already* a reaction against prior Gnostic ideas which he understood (more or less correctly) to be a mischievous interpretation of Plato. The fact that 1.6 [1] so closely foreshadows the explicit anti-Gnostic arguments in the *Großschrift*-tetralogy suggests that the Gnostics lurk tacitly in the background of this early treatise as well.

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<sup>15</sup> Aubin (1953) noted that imagery and imitation are extremely important to Plotinus’ thought precisely because they provide a means of sympathetic contact with the upper world, and consequently the terminology of image-making occurs frequently in his mystical passages; see esp. his conclusion, p. 372: “En résumé, on voit comment la sympathie universelle est la conséquence de ce fait que tout vient d’une même origine et que tout a une ressemblance de famille.”

<sup>16</sup> E.g., 2.9 [33] 17.25: ἔταν λέγωσι καταφρονεῖν τοῦ τῆδε κάλλους ...

<sup>17</sup> E.g., *Ap. John* (BG) 56.5 = (NHC II,1) 21.20; *Gos. Truth* (NHC I,3) 17.20; *Thom. Cont.* (NHC II,7) 140.22; *Orig. World* (NHC II,5) 109.7. The Valentinian author of the *Tri. Trac.* (NHC I,5) takes a rather more nuanced approach to beauty, and appears to have engaged in relatively sophisticated aesthetic theorization in order to explain the existence of cosmic beauty despite the imperfect production by the Logos “in shadows with reflections with likenesses” (77.16–17 [Attridge-Pagels]: εἰς εἰκασίας | ἢ [ἢ] εἰκασίαν ἢ εἰκασίαν). The imperfect copies “are beautiful as a likeness, for the face of a reflection typically receives beauty from that of which it is the reflection” (79.9–12: εἰς εἰκασίας εἰς εἰκασίαν | [ἢ] εἰκασίαν | [ἢ] εἰκασίαν). The Valentinian author of the *Tri. Trac.* (NHC I,5) takes a rather more nuanced approach to beauty, and appears to have engaged in relatively sophisticated aesthetic theorization in order to explain the existence of cosmic beauty despite the imperfect production by the Logos “in shadows with reflections with likenesses” (77.16–17 [Attridge-Pagels]: εἰς εἰκασίας | ἢ [ἢ] εἰκασίαν ἢ εἰκασίαν). The imperfect copies “are beautiful as a likeness, for the face of a reflection typically receives beauty from that of which it is the reflection” (79.9–12: εἰς εἰκασίας εἰς εἰκασίαν | [ἢ] εἰκασίαν | [ἢ] εἰκασίαν).

## 2. THE POSITIVE USE OF GNOSTIC IMAGERY TO DESCRIBE CONTEMPLATIVE ASCENT IN 1.6 [1] 7–9

The hypothesis that an encounter with the Gnostics underlies 1.6 [1] is further supported by several hints in the final chapters of the treatise (chs. 7–9), in which Plotinus exhorts one to undertake a contemplative ascent so as to obtain a direct experience of the ultimate origin of beauty in the Good itself. In the course of the discussion, Plotinus employs several evocative motifs which, I suggest, derive from Gnostic sources. Significantly, he does not condemn these motifs but instead employs them positively in support of the discursive argument in the first part of the treatise (chs. 1–6). This bespeaks a far more ambivalent and complex attitude towards the Gnostics than one of straightforward repudiation. The preponderance of Gnostic motifs occurs in two crucial passages describing the final stages of ascent,<sup>18</sup> to which we will now turn.

### 2.1. Analysis of Enn. 1.6 [1] 9.7–25

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Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6 [1] 9.7–25  
(Henry-Schwyzler)

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Ἄναγε ἐπὶ σαυτὸν καὶ ἴδε· καὶν μὴ-  
παῦ σαυτὸν ἴδης καλόν, οἷα ποιητῆς  
ἀγάλματος, ὃ δεῖ καλὸν γενέσθαι, τὸ  
μὲν ἀφαιρεῖ, τὸ δὲ ἀπέξεσε, τὸ δὲ λεί-  
ον, τὸ δὲ καθαρὸν ἐποίησεν, ἕως ἔ-  
δειξε καλὸν ἐπὶ τῷ ἀγάλματι πρό-  
σωπον, οὕτω καὶ σὺ ἀφαιρεῖ ὅσα πε-  
ριττὰ καὶ ἀπεύθυνε ὅσα σκολιά, ὅ-  
σα σκοτεινὰ καθαίρων ἐργάζου εἶ-  
ναι λαμπρὰ καὶ μὴ παύση τεκται-  
νων τὸ σὸν ἀγάμμα, ἕως ἂν ἐκλάμ-  
ψειέ σοι τῆς ἀρετῆς ἢ θεοειδῆς ἀ-  
γλαία, ἕως ἂν ἴδης σωφροσύνην ἐν ἀ-  
γνῷ βεβῶσαν βάρβω. Εἰ γέγονας τοῦ-  
το καὶ εἶδες αὐτὸ καὶ σαυτῷ καθαρὸς  
συνεγένου οὐδὲν ἔχων ἐμπόδιον πρὸς  
τὸ εἶς οὕτω γενέσθαι οὐδὲ σὺν αὐτῷ

Go back upon yourself and look; and if you  
do not yet see yourself as beautiful, just as  
the maker of a statue (which needs to become  
beautiful) cuts some (parts) away and pol-  
ishes others and makes some smooth and  
others pure until he has revealed the beau-  
tiful face in the statue, so also you cut away  
whatever is excessive, and straighten what-  
ever is crooked, and purify whatever is dark  
and make it shiny, and not stop crafting your  
statue until the godlike glory of virtue shines  
out on you, until you should see temperance  
mounted upon a holy pedestal. If you have  
become this, and see it, and you, pure, come  
together with yourself, having no impediment  
to thus coming into one, nor having with  
it anything else mixed within, but wholly

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<sup>18</sup> As very often throughout his corpus, Plotinus' rational argumentation culminates with an appeal to direct and/or visionary experience; thus also 4.7 [2] 10.30–52; 6.9 [9] 7–11; 5.1 [10] 12.12–21; 6.5 [23] 7.11–17; 12.3–36; 3.8 [30] 9.21–34; 5.8 [31] 9–11; 5.5 [32] 8.3–27; 2.9 [33] 17.5–9; 1.5 [36] 7.25–30; 6.7 [38] 22; 34–36; 6.8 [39] 15.9–24; 5.3 [49] 17.15–39.

ἄλλο τι ἐντὸς μεμιγμένον ἔχων, ἀλλ’ ὄλος αὐτὸς φῶς ἀληθινὸν μόνον, οὐ μεγέθει μεμετρημένον οὐδὲ σχήματι εἰς ἐλάττωσιν περιγραφῆν οὐδ’ αὖ εἰς μέγεθος δι’ ἀπειρίας αὐξηθέν, ἀλλ’ ἀμέτρητον πανταχοῦ, ὡς ἂν μείζον παντὸς μέτρου καὶ παντὸς κρείσσον ποσοῦ· εἰ τοῦτο γενόμενον σαυτὸν ἴδοις, ὅψις ἤδη γενόμενος θαρσήσας περὶ σαυτῶ καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἤδη ἀναβεβηκῶς μηκέτι τοῦ δεικνύντος δεηθεὶς ἀτενίσας ἴδε· οὗτος γὰρ μόνος ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς τὸ μέγα κάλλος βλέπει.

yourself, only true light, not measured by magnitude or circumscribed into diminution by shape or, conversely, expanded into magnitude by unboundedness, but everywhere immeasurable because greater than all measure and better than all quantity—if you see yourself having become this, at this point, having become vision, you have confidence with respect to yourself, and in this very moment, having ascended, you have no further need of a demonstrator; look intently; for this alone is the eye that beholds the great beauty.

### 2.1.1. *The Interiorization of the Transcendent*

We may begin with the most general observation. Throughout the treatise, Plotinus has reconceptualized the erotic ascent of the *Symposium* (210A–211D) as an inward journey into one’s own self.<sup>19</sup> In the present passage (*Enn.* 1.6 [1] 9.7–25), he has similarly internalized Plato’s metaphorical statue (ἄγαλμα) of *Phaedrus* (252D7)—the statue into which one must sculpt (τεκταίνεσθαι) one’s beloved—into a purified aspect of one’s own soul.<sup>20</sup> Yet this is only a very early formulation of the theme of interiorization and ἐπιστροφή πρὸς ἑαυτὸν that recurs repeatedly throughout his corpus; in subsequent treatises, Plotinus typically describes the contemplative ascent to the supreme principle in terms of spatial metaphors that connote introversion and recursive self-seeking (or even autoeroticism, as in this passage). Now it has long been noted that Plotinus’ robust internalization of the entire superstructure of the Divine in some sense within the subjective consciousness represents an original development in Greek philosophy,<sup>21</sup> and it is

<sup>19</sup> Previously (at 1.6 [1] 5.5–9; 8.1–6; 9.1–7), Plotinus had insisted that one must use one’s faculty of inner vision to retrace beauty back to its source within one’s own soul, since (following the *Symposium*) it is only through the propaedeutic experience of the beauty of soul that one may attain the ultimate apprehension of the Good.

<sup>20</sup> Perhaps there is also a reminiscence here of *Symp.* 216D–E, in which Alcibiades compares Socrates’ soul to a beautiful golden statue of a god concealed within a grotesque figurine of Silenus.

<sup>21</sup> See, for instance, Hadot 1997, 31: “[C]e qui nous interesse ici, c’est que tout ce langage traditionnel sert à exprimer une expérience intérieure, c’est donc que ces niveaux de réalité deviennent des niveaux de la vie intérieure, des niveaux de moi. Nous retrouvons ici l’intuition centrale de Plotin: le moi humain n’est pas irrémédiablement séparé du modèle éternel du moi, tel qu’il existe dans la pensée divine. Ce vrai moi, le moi en Dieu, nous est intérieure.” See also Puech 1978, esp. 68 ff.; Dodds 1960, 1–7.

therefore intriguing to find such a well-developed and powerful evocation of this motif already here in his first treatise.<sup>22</sup> Yet I suggest that this Plotinian schema closely resembles prior Gnostic currents of thought, whose preeminent characteristics include both the localization of the Transcendent itself deep within the interior of the human being<sup>23</sup> and a concomitant emphasis on self-reversion and self-knowledge.<sup>24</sup> This notion is prevalent in the Platonizing Sethian corpus,<sup>25</sup> as illustrated by the following passages:

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*Zoostrianos* (NHC VIII,1) 44.1–5 (Barry et al.)

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πῖρωμε δε ετεωαυηαρημεϋ | πε πη ετ-  
κωτε ἴσωϋ ἡἵπεϋ|νοϋς αϋω ἡϋϋνε  
ἡπο[ϋ]α πογα | ἡμοϋ· αϋω ϋεοϋἡτ[α]ϋ  
ἡ[αϋ ἡ] | οϋηρ ἡϋοη:

The person that can be saved is the one that seeks himself and his *nous* and finds each one of them. And how much power this one has!

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*Zost.* 44.17–22

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εωϋπε εϋωα[νοϋ]ωϋ παλιν οη ε[ω]αϋ-  
πωρ[ϋ ἡ]|ϋ[α]βολ ἡηαἰ τηροϋ· αϋω  
ἡ[τοϋ] | ἡῤῥαηααωρ[η]ε[ροϋ] αϋα[αϋ] |  
παἰ γαρ ωα[ϋω]ωπε [ἡ]νοϋ[τε] | εαῤῥα-  
ηααω[ρη]η επηοϋτε[.]

When he wishes, again he separates from them all and he withdraws to himself, for this one becomes divine, having withdrawn to God.

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<sup>22</sup> To be sure, the philosophical tradition had long considered the human soul to be, in some weaker sense, divine, and the notion of an indwelling fragment of the divine or a personal *daimōn* can be found especially in Stoics and Middle Platonists, e.g., Cicero, *De legibus* 1.22.59; *De republica* 6.22.24; Epictetus, *Ench.* 1.14.11–14; 2.8.11; Seneca, *Ep.* 120.14; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.4, 9, 13; 3.5–6, 12; 5.10, 27; 12.2, 26; Apuleius, *Socr.* 155–156; cf. *Corp. Herm.* 1.6 (*Poimandres*); 12.1.

<sup>23</sup> This observation is hardly new; it has been made long ago primarily by phenomenological scholars of Gnosticism, e.g., Puech 1962, 199–201; Jonas 1969. One should note that although both Plotinus and the Gnostics generally believe the essential core of the human being to contain a fragment or trace of the transcendent first principle, there are also important differences between their views. In typical Gnostic systems, the pneumatic seed within the human being has fallen completely away and remains entirely cut off from the Divine, thus requiring more radical soteriological measures to reintegrate with its source. By contrast, Plotinus maintains that the apex of the individual remains always, if not always consciously, in contact with the hypostatic intellect. Narbonne (2008, 691–708) suggests that Plotinus developed this doctrine—that of the “partial non-descent” of the soul—as a self-conscious reaction against the more pessimistic Gnostic view.

<sup>24</sup> The terminology of ἐπιστροφή πρὸς ἑαυτόν was employed primarily by the Gnostics prior to Plotinus; see Aubin 1963, 96–111; on the centrality of the Delphic exhortation to self-knowledge in Gnostic thought, Courcelle 1974, esp. 69–82; also *idem* 1971.

<sup>25</sup> The entire structure of the Platonizing Sethian ascent—e.g., the visionary ascent of *Allogenes* 59–61 and the salvific ascent of *Zost.* 44–46—is described in terms of contemplative self-reversion and self-discovery; see also *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) 9.21–28.

*Allogenes* (NHC XI,3) 56.14–20 (Funk et al.)

<p>ε[ ]ωρπε εκωδ[ ]νωμε ε̄νωγ[ ]   ωμε εϛ-                  χη[κ εβολ· τοτε]   εκεεμε επ[ ]αγαθον                  ε̄τ̄η[ ] ρη̄τ̄κ· τοτε ε[ ]κεεμε εροκ[ ]   ρωακ·                  πη ετ[ ]ωροπ εβολ ε̄η[ ]   πνωγτε ε̄τ̄ρ[ ]ωρ̄η                  ἡωροπ[ ]   οντωα·</p>	<p>If you [seek with a perfect] seeking,                  [then] you will know the [Good that                  is] within you; then [you will know                  your]self, the one who is [from] the God                  who truly [pre-exists].<sup>26</sup></p>
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The theme of inner divinity is also widespread in Gnostic anthropology. For example, in Irenaeus’ account of Valentinian thought we find the notion of a pneumatic “inner man” (ἐνδον ἄνθρωπος) inhering within the souls of the elect.<sup>27</sup> According to a fragment of Valentinus himself, the divine Anthropos (the transcendent prototype of the human being) “stands firmly” (καθεστῶτος)—like a statue, one might say—within Adam.<sup>28</sup> Similar ideas may be found in Sethian literature; in the *Apocryphon of John*, for instance, a salvific reflection (ἐπίνοια) of the primordial light of the supreme Invisible Spirit remains concealed (as the luminous Eve) within the prototypical human being (Adam), who attains salvation when he recognizes the Epinoia within himself as his own οὐσία.<sup>29</sup> The general structure of Plotinus’ search for the Divine within the self thus appears to be very much at home in a Gnostic context.

<sup>26</sup> The text is badly damaged; here I follow Turner’s reconstruction in the BCNH edition (see Funk et al. 2004); see also *Allogenes* 52.15–18.

<sup>27</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.14.3.13–19.

<sup>28</sup> Valentinus (*frg.* C Layton = *frg.* 1 Völker) in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.8.36.3.1–4.4 (Früchtel-Stählin-Treu): οὕτω και ἐν ταῖς γενεαῖς τῶν κοσμικῶν ἀνθρώπων φόβοι τὰ ἔργα τῶν ἀνθρώπων τοῖς ποιοῦσιν ἐγένετο, οἷον ἀνδριάντες και εἰκόνες και πάνθ’ ἃ χεῖρες ἀνούουσιν εἰς ὄνομα θεοῦ· εἰς γάρ ὄνομα Ἀνθρώπου πλασθεῖς Ἀδάμ φόβον παρέσχεν προσόντος Ἀνθρώπου, ὡς δὴ αὐτοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ καθεστῶτος ... (“Just as also in the worldly races of humans, the works of humans became objects of awe for their makers, like statues of men and images and all those things [human] hands accomplish in the name of God, [so also] Adam, modeled in the name of the Human Being, produced [in the angels] the awe of the pre-existent Human Being, as precisely this stood firmly within him ...”)

<sup>29</sup> *Ap. John* (NHC III,1) 25.9–26.3 = (BG) 53.7–55.9 = (NHC II,1) 20.17–31. Another very striking statement of this notion may be found in the doctrine of Monoïmus in Hippolytus, *Ref.* 8.15.1.2–22 (Marcovich): καταλιπὼν ζητεῖν θεὸν κατὰ κτίσιν και τὰ τούτοις παραπλήσια, ζήτησον αὐτὸν ἀπὸ (σ)εαυτοῦ, και μάθε τίς ἐστίν ὁ πάντα ἀπαξαπλῶς ἐν σοὶ ἐξειδιοποιούμενος και λέγων· ὁ θεός μου, ὁ νοῦς μου, ἡ διάνοιά μου, ἡ ψυχὴ μου, τὸ σῶμά μου (“Leaving behind the search for God in Creation (and such things that accompany it), search him out [instead] from yourself, and learn who it is who comprehensively appropriates everything within you and says, ‘my God, my intellect, my reason, my soul, my body.’”)

### 2.1.2. *The Autophany of the Transcendental Self*

In lines 15–21, Plotinus describes the culmination of the contemplative self-reversion in terms of a luminous, reflexive apprehension of one's innermost self. His insistence upon the immeasurable, unbounded, and formless nature of the object of this vision suggests its proximity less to soul or even intellect—normally characterized by measure, limit, and shape<sup>30</sup>—than to the supreme One-Good itself.<sup>31</sup> This corresponds to a schema that can be found in many of Plotinus' subsequent accounts of ascent. These accounts typically describe a sudden self-apprehension at the penultimate moment of ascent, immediately prior to the attainment of the supreme principle itself.<sup>32</sup> In this moment—which one might call an autophany—one apprehends one's own divinized form—or transcendental self<sup>33</sup>—which has become an effulgent image (εἰκλῶν) of the One-Good, beyond both being and intellect.<sup>34</sup> Plotinus exhorts one to come to complete unity with this in-

<sup>30</sup> E.g., *Enn.* 6.9 [9] 3.36–40; 5.1 [10] 7.23–27; 6.7 [38] 17.39–40; 33.37–38; 6.2 [43] 21.11–16.

<sup>31</sup> This passage (1.6 [1] 9.19–22) echoes the apophatic description of the absolute One of the first hypothesis of Plato, *Parm.* 139B–140D, a passage which Plotinus similarly draws upon to embellish his accounts of the One in later treatises, e.g., at 6.9 [9] 3.36–45 and 6.7 [38] 32–34. One might also compare this to his refusal to predicate either limit or unlimitedness of the One at 5.5 [32] 10.19–11.6, and his insistence that it is not confined by shape at 5.1 [10] 7.20. On the allusion to the supreme principle in this passage see Darras-Worms 1997, 233: “La manière dont Plotin décrit la vision dans le *Traité* implique que cette vision est précisément vision du ‘sans forme,’ c’est-à-dire de l’Un et non pas d’Intellect qui, lui, est défini et limité dans sa partie supérieure.” Also Susanetti 1995, 161: “La luce in cui l’anima si transforma—luce non misurabile da alcuna grandezza, non soggetta a diminuzione per effetto di una figura che la circoscriva né, all’opposto, soggetta ad accrescimento per mancanza di limite (*apeiria*)—è alla identica all’infinità stessa del principio primo.” That the experience described here is not the ultimate vision of the One-Good itself and only the penultimate phase is confirmed by Plotinus' statement that this transcendental self is “the eye that sees the great beauty”: that is, the faculty by which the transcendent principle is apprehended, not quite that principle itself. We may note that the negative-theological interpretation of the first hypothesis of *Parmenides* was already current in pre-Plotinian Gnostic thought; see Whittaker 1969; Jufresa 1981; Turner 2006.

<sup>32</sup> E.g., *Enn.* 4.8 [6] 1.1–11; 6.9 [9] 4.18; 9.55–56; 11.43–44; 6.5 [23] 7.9–17; 5.8 [31] 10.40–44; 5.5 [32] 8.12–13; 6.7 [38] 31.8–9; 34.12–13; 35.19; 6.8 [39] 15.14–23; 19.1–2. Even in treatises whose principal topic is not beauty, Plotinus often describes the autophanous self in terms of an extraordinary beauty, e.g., at 5.5 [32] 8.12–13: “He (the aspirant having assimilated to intellect) sees, first of all, himself, having become more beautiful and glistening” (εἶδε μὲν τὰ πρῶτα καλλίω γενόμενον ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἐπιτιλίβοντα); see also 5.8 [31] 11.1–5 and 6.7 [38] 34.1–25. These accounts may also be brought into connection with Plotinus' ritual evocation of his personal *daimōn* (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 10.15–33), which he believed in some sense to represent the higher self; see *Enn.* 3.4 [15] 3.17–20.

<sup>33</sup> To borrow the term from Hans Jonas (1958, 123).

<sup>34</sup> E.g., 6.9 [9] 3.20–26; 4.27–28; 8.14–15; 5.1 [10] 5–6; 11.13–14; 3.8 [30] 9.22; 11.22; 6.7 [38] 31.8; 6.8 [39] 15.14–21; 5.3 [49] 14.15.

dwelling εἰκῶν and proceed thence to the One-Good itself, “as from image to archetype.”<sup>35</sup> Significantly, a similar schema may be found in a wide variety of roughly contemporaneous Gnostic sources. Although this is not the place to present the full dossier of evidence,<sup>36</sup> some examples will be illustrative. For instance, in the hymnic conclusion of the *Holy Book* (NHC III,2), we find an invocation in which the aspirant declares that (in a manner similar to the Plotinian autophany) he has apprehended the deity within himself, that he has himself become light, and that he has been remade in the shape (μορφή) of the Divine:

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*Holy Book* (NHC III,2) 66.22–67.10  
(Böhlig-Wisse)

πειναδ̄ ἦραν | ε̄τ̄ιτακ̄ ριχ̄ωεῑ πατ-  
 ρωωτ̄ | ἦδ̄υτοε̄νης̄ πᾱῑ ε̄τ̄ιπαβολ̄ δ̄ν |  
 ε̄ειναδ̄ ε̄ροκ̄ πατ̄ναγ̄ ε̄ροϋ̄ ἦ|ἠαδ̄ρ̄π̄ν̄ ο̄γ̄ον̄  
 (ἦ)ἠἠ ... τ̄ενογ̄ | δ̄ε̄ δ̄εισογ̄ω̄νκ̄ δ̄ει-  
 μογ̄χ̄τ̄ ἦμο|εῑ ε̄πετε̄ μεϋω̄ιβε̄ δ̄ειροπ̄λιζε̄  
 | ἦμοεῑ ρ̄ἦ ο̄γ̄ροπ̄λον̄ ἦογ̄οεῑν̄ | δ̄ειρ̄ογ̄οεῑν̄  
 ... δ̄ειδ̄ῑ μορφη̄ ρ̄ἦ π̄κ̄κ̄λος̄ | ἦτ̄ιἦτ̄ρ̄ἦἠα-  
 ο̄ ἦπογ̄οεῑν̄ ε̄ρ̄ἦ | κογ̄ογ̄ντ̄

This great name of yours is upon me, O indivisible self-begotten one, who are not outside of me. I see you, the one who is invisible before everyone ... Now that I have recognized you, I have mixed myself with that which is unchanging; I have armed myself with an armor of light; I have become light ... I was given shape (μορφή) in the circle of the wealth of the light which is in my bosom.

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The Platonizing Sethian tractates appeal to a similar notion during the visionary ascent, as in the following examples:<sup>37</sup>

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*Zost.* 11.9–14

ε̄ωωπε̄ δ̄ε̄ ε̄γ̄ω̄δ̄|δ̄ιογ̄οε̄[1]ἦ ἦσ̄[1]ἠιγ̄χ̄η  
 ε̄βολ̄ ρ̄ἦἦ | πογ̄οε̄[1]ἦ ε̄τωωοπ̄ ἦρητογ̄  
 ἦἦ | π̄ιτ̄γ̄π̄[οσ̄] ε̄τεω̄δ̄αϋωωπε̄ ἦρη|τογ̄  
 ἦ[ογ̄]ἠἠηω̄ε̄ ἦσοπ̄ ρ̄ηογ̄ἠἠτ̄|[δ̄]τ̄χ̄[1]-  
 ἦκ̄[δ̄].

But if [s]ouls are enlightened by the light within them(selves) and (by) the impression (τύπος) which comes into being within them when [they are] in a state of impassibility ...

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<sup>35</sup> 6.9 [9] 11.44–45: ὡς εἰκῶν πρὸς ἀρχέτυπον. This phrase, which occurs in a mystical context, has a close parallel in Plotinus’ insistence upon the anagogic aspect of artistic representation at, for example, 5.8 [31] 3.1ff.; we may also note the resemblance to a Platonizing Sethian conception, evident at *Zost.* 12.4–18, in which the aspirant is said to ascend from the mere copy of each successive aeonic stratum to its truly existing archetype.

<sup>36</sup> I have adduced the Gnostic textual evidence in Mazur 2010, ch. 4.

<sup>37</sup> See also *Zost.* 44.1–22; 46.6–30; *Allogenes* 56.15–20; 60.12–61.22.



*Allogenes* 52.6–13

α[ς][[ῤῥῶ]αβρ[τ ἡσιταϕγ]χι· αγω | [α]ει-  
 ῤῥῶ[ολ λειωτ]ορῖῤ εμα|τε· αγ[ω δε]ι-  
 κοτῖ ερωει | ογα[ατ· α]ειναγ επιωγο|ειν  
 ε[τκω]τε ερωει ἡπι|αγαθον εῖτηρητ  
 αειῤνογ|τε·

[My soul became] weak and I escaped  
 (from it); I hastened greatly (or: was  
 very disturbed), and [I] turned to myself  
 alone; I saw the light that [surrounded]  
 me and the Good that was in me. I  
 became divine.

Analogous conceptions may also be found in other varieties of Gnostic and Hermetic literature, in which an εἰκὼν of the transcendent deity—an image consubstantial with that deity’s own ontogenetic self-apprehension—is concealed within the aspirant’s own soul and is revealed in a vision during the course of a salvific or visionary ascent.<sup>38</sup>

2.1.3. *The Obviation of the “Guide”* (δεικνύς)

At 1.6 [1] 9.23–24, Plotinus makes a curious remark referring to the moment of autophany: καὶ ἐνταῦθα ἡδὴ ἀναβεβηκῶς μηκέτι τοῦ δεικνύντος δεηθείς (“[I]n this very moment, having ascended, you have no further need of a demonstrator”). The only other use of the participle δεικνύς in the sense of “one who demonstrates” or “guide” in Plotinus’ corpus occurs at 1.3 [20] 3.3, where it refers to the instructor who guides a novice through the propaedeutic phases of philosophical ascent (i.e., training in mathematics and dialectic). It is therefore surprising to find the mention of the guide in the extremely elevated context of this passage, on the very threshold of the Good.<sup>39</sup> Ploti-

<sup>38</sup> E.g., *Ap. John* (NHC II,1) 23.4–11 = (BG) 59.20–60.7; *Trim. Prot.* (NHC XIII,1) 45.16–27; *Cod. Bruc. Untitled* 29 (247.22–24 Schmidt-MacDermot); *Gos. Phil.* (NHC II,3) 61.27–35; *Acts of John* 95–96 (Bonnet, *Acta apostolorum apocrypha*, vol. 2.1); *Acts Andr.* 38.9–18 (Priour); the *Hymn of the Pearl* in the *Syriac Acts Thom.* 76–78 (in Bevan 1897, 25–26). Hermetic sources of this motif include *Disc.* 8–9 (NHC VI,6) 57.28–58.17; 59.26–28; 60.32–61.1; *Corp. Herm.* 13.4.1–2, 13.1. Although there has been little discussion of the theme of Gnostic autophany *per se*, there has been a great deal of attention paid to Mani’s encounter with his heavenly σύζυγος; see *CMC* 23.10–15 (Koenen–Römer); Quispel 1967, 9–30; Fauth 1986, 41–68. For the possible apocalyptic parallels, see Orlov 2004, and, in connection with Plotinus himself, the cautious work of Sweeney 1992.

<sup>39</sup> One would have expected the guide to be unnecessary already at the initial stages of self-reversion described in ch. 8. Darras-Worms (1997, 233–234) notes that Plotinus uses the verb δεικνύσθαι repeatedly throughout the treatise, and suggests that the use of the noun here simply indicates the final stage of the treatise has been reached: “La figure du guide que Plotin, à la suite de Diotime ou de Socrate, a adoptée, s’efface.” Yet there is no such suggestion in *Symp.* or other Platonic sources where one might expect Plotinus to have borrowed it.

nus may be alluding here to the Gnostic theme of semi-divine and/or angelic guides who conduct the ascending soul through the successive cosmic and hypercosmic strata. If one is committed to detecting an anti-Gnostic motive, it is possible that Plotinus is specifically rejecting the notion that the final stages of ascent require assistance from a guide or savior in favor of a more autonomous process;<sup>40</sup> indeed, in both *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*—as in earlier apocalyptic literature—much of the visionary trajectory takes place under the tutelage of a multiplicity of heavenly revealers, and *Zostrianos* implies that a guide is required even at the very last phase of ascent.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, that Plotinus intends to reject the Platonizing Sethian notion of the revealer is by no means certain. For it might also be that he mentions the guide at this point precisely because he sees an identity, not a difference, between the transcendental self and a heavenly guide; having become one’s own guide—he seems to be saying—one is no longer in need of another. This possibility is supported by a passage of *Zostrianos* in which we find the statement that certain human souls are assisted in their salvific ascent out of the cosmos by means of luminous indwelling helpers (βοηθοί) within the human being,<sup>42</sup> and elsewhere (at *Zost.* 11.9–14) the text implies that these “helpers” are identical to certain luminous impressions (τύποι) that are apprehended within the aspirant’s own self by means of an autophany. Perhaps even closer to Plotinus, conceptually speaking, is a passage from *Allogenes* (50.24–36) in which the eponymous visionary is told that he has been invested with a supernatural power of discrimination so that he might

<sup>40</sup> Thus for instance Narbonne in Narbonne, Achard, and Ferroni 2012, 67n6: “Plotin s’opposait directement à la doctrine du *Zostrien* et de l’*Allogène*.”

<sup>41</sup> At *Zost.* 129.4–14 the eponymous visionary is led into the Protophanes Aeon by two divine assistants immediately prior to his ultimate vision of and/or mystical union with the Kalyptos Aeon and/or the Triple-Powered Invisible Spirit.

<sup>42</sup> These helpers are also described as impressions (τύποι) and thoughts (νοήματα). Thus *Zost.* 46.15–31: εἴτεβ[αί] | σετῆω ερραῖ εχῆπιουχαῖ ἦ[τε] | ναῖ· ἀγω ἦραῖ εἰνῆμαγ[το] | γενῆς κατὰ ποῦα ποῦα ἦτεν[ε] | ὠν σεαερα[το] | γ ἦσεγεθεοῦ | εἶνα χεεφeno[γ] | εἶν ἦσασιρ να[ῖ] | ἦσιππ εἴππ[ι]να· ἦ | θεοῦ δε ε[ἦ] | ἦσιππ να ἦτελ[ι] | ὠς εγῶν εἰ[ἦ] | ὠσῶ ἦσετακο χερενγπoc [νε] | ἦτεογούχαῖ· ετε εωαρ[ε]π[ο]γα | ποῦα χιτοῦ εφenoγῆ ερρ[αῖ] | ε | ποῦ· ἀγω εφχιγγπoc· εφ[ε] | χισῶν εβολ εἴππ[α]ῖ παῖ· ἀγ[ω] | εγῶταγ ἦπθεοῦ ἦογβῶθ[ε] | ἦππ[η]τε εαρε[ῖ] | ἦε ἦπκοσιoc | ἀγ[ω] ἦε | ὠν [ἦ] | ἦ· (“This is why they are appointed for their salvation. And these powers, they are in th[is] place; and within the ‘autogenous’ ones, corresponding to each one of the aeons, there stand glories, so that one who is in th[is] place might be saved alongside them. The glories are perfect, living thoughts. They cannot perish because they are *typoi* of salvation: that is, each one who receives them will escape up to them, and taking a *typos* will receive power from each of them, and having the glory as helper, will, in this way, transcend the cosmos and all the aeons.”)

discern the true realities and reascend to his true possessions, i.e., to his own truly divine self, “that which was previously saved and *which does not need to be saved*,”<sup>43</sup> (i.e., by means of a savior). So rather than rejecting the Gnostic motif of the revealer altogether, Plotinus may be in fact concurring with the Platonizing Sethians that the discovery of one’s own transcendental self obviates the need for a guide *external* to oneself.

#### 2.1.4. *The “Eye that Beholds the Great Beauty”*

On lines 24–25, Plotinus re-describes the transcendental self *qua* faculty of transcendental apprehension as ὁ ὀφθαλμὸς τὸ μέγα κάλλος βλέπει (the “eye that beholds the great Beauty”).<sup>44</sup> While this undoubtedly owes something to the “eye of the soul” with which one can study the Good in *Resp.* 7.518C–D, it is also one of several instances in which Plotinus may have adopted a Platonic image indirectly by way of a prior Gnostic reformulation. The notion of an “eye” that is uniquely able to apprehend the hypertranscendent first principle is already a virtual topos of classic Sethian literature.<sup>45</sup> In its Sethian context, the “eye” represents the inner human faculty—itself sometimes identified with the archetype of humanity, the spiritual proto-Adam or Pigeradama(s)—that preserves a spark of light from the first eternal moment of ontogenesis.<sup>46</sup> Generally speaking, in the Sethian ontogenetic schema, the second principle emerges as the recursive self-apprehension of the first. The “eye” thus represents the faculty of self-apprehension belonging simultaneously to the transcendent deity and the elect human being, a faculty that can be rediscovered in the depths of the self so as to enable the ultimate mystical vision.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> *Allogenes* 50.34–36: πη ε|ταφῶρορπῖ ἡνογῆῖ ἡν | πη ετεμαφῶχρια ἡναρμεφ.

<sup>44</sup> At *Enn.* 4.3 [27] 18.19–23, Plotinus himself compares the soul in the intelligible to an eye.

<sup>45</sup> Anne Pasquier has discussed the theme of the eye in an unpublished paper entitled “L’œil de la Lumière: la métaphore de l’eau et du miroir dans le rituel gnostique,” presented at a colloquium entitled “La Mystique dans la Gnose et chez Plotin” at the Université Laval (Québec) in March 2009.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, *Zost.* 13.4–6; 30.4–6; *Trim. Prot.* (NHC XIII,1) 38.5; 46.28; *Holy Book* (NHC IV,2) 61.8–11 ff.; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* (NHC III,4) 105.12–14 =BG 8502,3 100.12–15. Compare the non-Sethian *Paraph. Shem* (NHC VII,1) 28.3–4; *Testim. Truth* (NHC IX,3) 46.4–7. A similar conception, possibly with Hermetic influence, may be found in the Graeco-Egyptian alchemist Zosimos of Panopolis, Syriac Fragments, Book 12, *On Electrum* (trans. in Berthelot 1893, 263).

<sup>47</sup> Thus *Allogenes* 64.30–36: αφῶβλ|λε ἡσανβολ ἡπιβαλ ετρω|ρῖ ἡμοφ ἡτεπιπογῶνῆ | εβολ πη ετεγῶρενεργῖ | εροφ π εβολ ἡπιπογῶνῖ|σομ ἡτεφῶρορπ ἡενοο|α ἡτεμαζορατον ἡπιπα. (“He was blind, apart from the eye of manifestation that is at rest, that which is activated from the triple power of the First Thought of the Invisible Spirit.”)

2.2. *Analysis of Enn. 1.6 [1] 7.1–14*

We now may turn our attention back to an earlier passage that occurs at the beginning of ch. 7 and serves to introduce the more visionary and/or experiential portion of the treatise.

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Plotinus *Enn.* 1.6 [1] 7.1–14

Ἀναβατέον οὖν πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, οὗ ὁρέγεται πᾶσα ψυχὴ. Εἴ τις οὖν εἶδεν αὐτό, οἶδεν δὲ λέγω, ὅπως καλόν. Ἐφετὸν μὲν γὰρ ὡς ἀγαθόν καὶ ἡ ἕφεσις πρὸς τοῦτο, τεύξις δὲ αὐτοῦ ἀναβαίνουσι πρὸς τὸ ἄνω καὶ ἐπιστραφεῖσι καὶ ἀποδυομένοις ἅ καταβαίνοντες ἡμφιέσμεθα· οἷον ἐπὶ τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἱερῶν τοῖς ἀνιούσι καθάρσεις τε καὶ ἱματίων ἀποθέσεις τῶν πρὶν καὶ τὸ γυμνοῖς ἀνιέναι· ἔως ἂν τις παρελθῶν ἐν τῇ ἀναβάσει πᾶν ὅσον ἀλλότριον τοῦ θεοῦ αὐτῷ μόνῳ αὐτὸ μόνον ἴδῃ ἐλικρινές, ἀπλοῦν, καθαρὸν, ἀφ' οὗ πάντα ἐξήρτηται καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπει καὶ ἔστι καὶ ζῆ καὶ νοεῖ· ζωῆς γὰρ αἴτιος καὶ νοῦ καὶ τοῦ εἶναι. Τοῦτο οὖν εἴ τις ἴδοι, ποίους ἂν ἴσχοι ἔρωτας, ποίους δὲ πόθους, βουλούμενος αὐτῷ συγκερασθῆναι, πῶς δ' ἂν ἐκπλαγείῃ μεθ' ἡδονῆς;

And so one must reascend back to the Good, for which every soul longs. If someone has seen it, he knows what I am saying, (and) the manner in which it is beautiful. It is desired as good, and the desire is towards this, yet the attainment of it is for those ascending towards the above and is for those who have been converted and who shed what we put on while descending, just as for those who ascend to the sanctuaries of the temples, the purifications and taking off of the garments beforehand, and the going up naked, until—in the ascent passing everything by inasmuch as it is foreign to god—one should see, by himself alone, *this* alone, absolute, simple, pure, from which everything depends and looks to it (and *is*, and *lives*, and *intelligizes*; for it is cause of *life* and *intellect* and *being*). If someone should see it, what a love he would have, what a longing, wishing to be commingled with it; how it would strike one with pleasure!

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This passage is of particular interest because it apparently contains what is Plotinus' very first reference (chronologically speaking) to the ultimate vision and/or mystical union with the One-Good.<sup>48</sup> The erotic motif echoes

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<sup>48</sup> Given the importance of this early treatise for any rigorous chronological interpretation of Plotinus' oeuvre, it is somewhat surprising that this crucial passage still awaits a satisfactorily thorough interpretation. The tendency among scholars has been to overemphasize the pagan, and especially classical sources, a tendency perhaps self-consciously encouraged by Plotinus himself, e.g., in his use in the introduction of the passage of a phrase apparently suggestive of the Eleusinian mysteries: (1.6 [1] 7.1–3): Ἀναβατέον οὖν πάλιν ἐπὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν, οὗ ὁρέγεται πᾶσα ψυχὴ. Εἴ τις οὖν εἶδεν αὐτό, οἶδεν δὲ λέγω, ὅπως καλόν. (“And so one must reascend to the Good, for which every soul longs. *If someone has seen it, he knows what I am saying*, [and] the manner in which it is beautiful.”) Compare 6.9 [9] 9.46–47; Pausanias, *Descr.* 1.37.4–5. On the metaphorical use of the language of the Eleusinian mysteries among philosophers after Plato, see esp. Riedweg 1987.

that of the *Symposium*,<sup>49</sup> yet Plotinus chooses to illustrate the ascent with the addition of three interlaced metaphors that have no apparent Platonic source: (a) the shedding of extraneous corporeal and psychic accretions (“what we put on while descending”); (b) a curious ritual in which the devotees disrobe and enter into the inner sanctuary of a temple in the nude; and (c) erotic desire for sexual intercourse (i.e., συγκερασθήναι, to be commingled) with the supreme principle itself. In what follows, I will endeavor to demonstrate that this ensemble of themes reveals the fundamentally Gnostic background of Plotinus’ conception of ascent.

### 2.2.1. “Passing by All That Is Foreign to God”

Immediately evident in this passage is Plotinus’ allusion to a schema common in Gnostic and Hermetic thought, the so-called tunic-theory, according to which the body and the extraneous psychic faculties (passions, senses, etc.) are understood as accretions, sheathes, or coverings—sometimes described as garments or tunics (χιτώνες)—which envelop the true self.<sup>50</sup> In certain sources these are said to be shed at a corresponding celestial or archontic sphere during the salvific ascent.<sup>51</sup> By itself, the theme of undesirable accretions or χιτώνες on the soul is sufficiently commonplace as not to merit special attention—variants of this notion occur in Philo,<sup>52</sup> some pre-Plotinian Christian authors,<sup>53</sup> possibly (but not certainly) Nume-

<sup>49</sup> The specific terms ειλικρινές and καθαρὸν at 7.9–10 derive from *Symp.* 211E1. We may also recall Porphyry’s statement at *Vit. Plot.* 23.7–10 that his teacher πολλάκις ἐνάγοντι ἑαυτὸν εἰς τὸν πρῶτον καὶ ἐπέκεινα θεὸν ταῖς ἐννοίαις καὶ κατὰ τὰς ἐν τῷ Συμποσίῳ ὑφηγημένης ὁδοῦς τῷ Πλάτῳ (“frequently led himself into the first and transcendent god by means of thoughts and according to the path laid out by Plato in the *Symposium*”).

<sup>50</sup> The notion of bodies as “fleshly tunics” (δερμάτινοι χιτώνες) ultimately derives from Gen 3:21, although speculation on this theme was not restricted to Judeo-Christian authors. Among many other instances, this notion is shared by the Valentinians Theodotus (*apud* Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 55.1.1–2) and Julius Cassian (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.14.95.2). Both Basilides and his son Isidore posited a variant of this idea, referring to the passions as theriomorphic *προσαρτήματα* which envelop the soul (Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.20.112–114). See esp. the discussion of the term δερμάτινοι χιτώνες in Bouffartigue and Patillon 1977, 37–41; also, more generally, Beatrice 1985.

<sup>51</sup> E.g., *Corp. Herm.* 1 (*Poimandres*) 24–26; 10.16–18; note also *Gos. Mary* (BG 8502.1) 15.1–17.7. On the pre-Plotinian use of the image, see Wendland 1916, 481–485. On its occurrence in the Hermetica, Festugière 1950, esp. ch. 4, “L’Eschatologie,” pp. 119–174. On the later transformations of this theme into the various speculations on the subtle or pneumatic body as soul-vehicle in post-Plotinian Neoplatonism, Dodds 1963, 313–321; also Couliano 1984, esp. ch. 7, pp. 131–133.

<sup>52</sup> E.g., Philo, *Deus* 56; *Migr.* 192.

<sup>53</sup> Among Christian authors prior to Plotinus, this theme occurs in Methodius of Olympus, *Res.* 1.39.5 and Origen, *Sel. Gen.* PG 12:101A.

nius,<sup>54</sup> the *Chaldaean Oracles*,<sup>55</sup> post-Plotinian Neoplatonism,<sup>56</sup> and even, obliquely, later in Plotinus’ own corpus<sup>57</sup>—and yet the phrase *παρελθὼν ἐν τῇ ἀναβάσει πᾶν ὅσον ἀλλότριον τοῦ θεοῦ* (“during the ascent, passing everything by inasmuch as it is foreign to God”) is strikingly atypical in its seemingly un-Plotinian pessimism. This phrase appears to depend upon a specifically Gnostic conception of salvific ascent as a passage through the successive celestial spheres controlled by malevolent archons—entities which might well be considered “foreign to God.”<sup>58</sup> In Plotinus’ view, generally speaking, the heavens are superior to the terrestrial realm, and there would be nothing foreign or alien (*ἀλλότριος*) to God that one could pass by (*παρέρχεσθαι*) during an ascent.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, throughout 2.9 [33], he takes the Gnostics to task precisely for denying divinity to the stars.<sup>60</sup> The peculiarity of this passage is underscored by the fact that elsewhere, especially in middle- and late-period treatises,<sup>61</sup> Plotinus reacts specifically against the Gnostic conception of celestial evil by developing a virtual axiom according to which everything that is spatially and/or ontologically higher and more powerful is increasingly more divine, correlative with its greater proximity to the supreme cause, the One-Good.<sup>62</sup> Plotinus’ first account of contemplative ascent thus makes a substantial concession to a Gnostic conception that he would eventually come to disavow.

<sup>54</sup> Numenius, *frag.* 47 (Leemans), although the portion of the text of Macrobius (*Somn. Scip.* 1.11.11) that Leemans quotes is not accepted as Numenian by Beutler 1940, 676–677, or by des Places 1971. On the other hand, Dodds (1960a, esp. 8–10) argues for the Numenian origin of the entire Macrobius passage, as does de Ley 1972.

<sup>55</sup> *Chald. Or., frag.* 116 (des Places): οὐ γὰρ ἐφικτὰ τὰ θεῖα βροτοῖς τοῖς σώμα νοοῦσιν / ἀλλ’ ὄσσοι γυμνήτες ἀνω σπεύδουσι πρὸς ὕψος. (“For divine things are not accessible to mortals who intelligize with the body, but to all those who, naked, hasten upward towards the heights.”)

<sup>56</sup> E.g., Porphyry, *Abst.* 1.31; 2.46; *Antr. nymph.* 14.8–16 (Westerink et al.); Proclus, *El. Theol.* 209.

<sup>57</sup> E.g., 4.3 [27] 15 and 2.3 [52] 9.

<sup>58</sup> We find an example of this at *Zost.* 4.28–31, but it is also widely evident throughout Gnostic and Hermetic literature.

<sup>59</sup> In his analysis of the metaphor in 1.6 [1] 7, Rist (1967, 190–191) insists that Plotinus avoids use of the term *χιτών* itself precisely because of the Gnostic connotations: this would be making “a dangerous concession to the language—if not the ideas—of dualism.” Yet Rist fails to note such connotations in the phrase *ἀλλότριον τοῦ θεοῦ*.

<sup>60</sup> 2.9 [33] 5.1–14; 8.19–39; 13.1–34.

<sup>61</sup> Especially in 4.4 [28] and 2.3 [52]; in 2.9 [33] 18.17–38, he accuses the Gnostics of considering themselves superior to the astral deities.

<sup>62</sup> See Mazur 2005.

### 2.2.2. *Ritual Divestiture and the Ascent to the “Sanctuaries of the Temples”*

In lines 6–7, Plotinus compares the ascent to a cult ritual in which the participants must disrobe prior to ascending into the sanctuaries (or, more literally, “the holy [places] of the temples, τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἱερῶν”).<sup>63</sup> This phrase has long presented a challenge for interpreters, many of whom have taken this to refer to an obscure pagan mystery rite. In 1922, F. Cumont initially suggested that Plotinus was referring to an actual ritual performed in some Greco-Egyptian mystery cult, most likely that of Isis,<sup>64</sup> a suggestion that might at first seem reasonable in light of Porphyry’s anecdote about the evocation of Plotinus’ personal δαίμων in the Iseum of Rome.<sup>65</sup> It was not until 1964 that E.R. Dodds (with typical acumen) called attention instead to the intriguing similarity of this phrase to a passage of Philo.<sup>66</sup> In *Leg.* 2.15 [56], Philo formulates a Platonizing allegory on the basis of the passages of Leviticus that prescribe the ritual procedures to be performed by the high priest upon entering the tabernacle.<sup>67</sup> The priest, according to Philo, must remove his garments that symbolize the lower faculties of opinion (δόξα) and imagination (φαντασία) prior to entering the Holy of Holies, which apparently represents the intelligible realm;<sup>68</sup> at this point, “he will

<sup>63</sup> Rather than Armstrong’s “celebrations of the holy rites,” as noted by Dodds 1964, 94–95, and Susanetti 1995, 139n136.

<sup>64</sup> Cumont 1921–1922, 77–92, following Cochez 1911, 328–340. Rist (1967, 191) also tentatively accepts the Isis-hypothesis. On the basis of a parallel in a passage of Proclus citing the *Chaldaean Oracles*, *frag.* 116 (des Places)—*In Crat.* 155.4–5 (88.4–6 Pasquali); also *In Alc.* 1.104E (= 180.1–2, p. 83 Westerink)—both Henry 1938, 211, and Harder 1956, 379, suggest that Plotinus is alluding to Chaldaean ritual.

<sup>65</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 10.20–21. The only other piece of evidence in favor of this theory is a passage of Apuleius (*Metam.* 11.23) that mentions ritual divestiture, ablution, and re-investiture in connection with the mysteries of Isis. Cumont (1921–1922) saw in the phrase αὐτῷ μόνῳ αὐτὸ μόνον (at 1.6 [1] 7.9), a variant of the celebrated *monos pros monon* formula found not only elsewhere in Plotinus, at 6.9 [9] 11.51 and in Numenius (*frag.* 11) but also in a letter of the Graeco-Egyptian physician Thessalus of Tralles (at *Herb.* 22.4 Friedrich), where it is used to describe a ritually-evoked face to face encounter with a god (Asclepius); on this basis Cumont suggested a similar ritual context for the passage in question. However, Dodds (1960a, 16–17), argues that the *monos pros monon* formula is commonplace and does not necessarily indicate a cultic context.

<sup>66</sup> Dodds 1964, 94–95.

<sup>67</sup> The allegory is based upon Lev 16:2–3 and 23–24, in which Yahweh prescribes for the high priest a series of prohibitions and ritual acts including divestiture, ablution, and re-investiture.

<sup>68</sup> Rist (1967, ch. 14, esp. pp. 188–189)—who is anxious to absolve Plotinus of any hint of Gnostic dualism—points out that Philo’s allegory, and the χιτῶν-theory itself, may have an (indirect) Platonic origin: according to Dioscorides—as reported by Athenaeus

enter, naked, without colors or sounds, to offer up psychic blood, and to sacrifice the whole intellect to the salvific and beneficent God.”<sup>69</sup> Significantly, Dodds also adduced a clearly related passage of Clement’s *Excerpta ex Theodoto* that he believed to reflect the doctrine of the Valentinian hierarch Theodotus himself. Thus at *Exc.* 26.2–27.3, the high priest (identified with the Monogenes-Son) is said to remove not garments but a gold plate on which is inscribed the Tetragrammaton (the Name of God) at the precise moment he passes through the “second veil” which separates the antechamber (the “Holy Place”) of the tabernacle from the Holy of Holies itself.<sup>70</sup> The high priest is subsequently compared to the ascending soul, which, once “naked” (γυμνή), enters into the spiritual realm.<sup>71</sup> Dodds therefore suggested that a Valentinian allegory of the sort one finds in the text of Clement/Theodotus served as the more immediate source for Plotinus’ ritual imagery at 1.6 [1] 7.<sup>72</sup>

(*Deipn.* 11.507D)—Plato reportedly taught that the last χιτών shed at death is that of δόξα. Rist also adduces Plato’s own notion of postmortem judgment in the nude at *Gorgias* 523C–E.

<sup>69</sup> Philo, *Leg.* 2.56.1–57.1 (Cohn): τούτου χάριν ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς εἰς τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἁγίων οὐκ εἰσελεύσεται ἐν τῷ ποδήρει (cf. *Lev* 16:1 ff.), ἀλλὰ τὸν τῆς δόξης καὶ φαντασίας ψυχῆς χιτῶνα ἀποδυσάμενος καὶ καταλιπὼν τοῖς τὰ ἐκτὸς ἀγαπῶσι καὶ δόξαν πρὸ ἀληθείας τετιμηκόσι γυμνὸς ἄνευ χρωμάτων καὶ ἤχων εἰσελεύσεται σπείσαι τὸ ψυχικὸν αἷμα καὶ θυμιάσαι ὄλον τὸν νοῦν τῷ σωτήρι καὶ εὐεργέτη θεῷ. (“[T]he high priest will not enter into the Holy of Holies in a [long garment] reaching his feet, but sloughing off the tunic of opinion and imagination, and leaving them behind for those who love exterior things and who honor opinion before truth, he will enter, naked, without colors or sounds, to offer up psychic blood and to sacrifice the whole intellect to the salvific and beneficent God.”)

<sup>70</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 27.1.1–12 (Sagnard): Ὁ ἱερεὺς εἰσιὼν ἐντὸς τοῦ καταπετάσματος τοῦ δευτέρου, τὸ τε πέταλον ἀπετίθει παρὰ τῷ θυσιαστηρίῳ τοῦ θυμιάματος· αὐτὸς δὲ ἐν σιγῇ, τὸ ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ ἐγκεχαραγμένον Ὀνομα ἔχων, εἰσῆει· δεικνὺς τὴν ἀπόθεσιν (τοῦ σώματος) τοῦ καθάπερ πετάλου χρυσοῦ καθαροῦ γενομένου καὶ κούφου διὰ τὴν κάθαρσιν [τοῦ ὡσπερ σώματος] τῆς ψυχῆς [ἀπόθεσιν], ἐν ᾧ ἐγκεχάρακτο τὸ γάνωμα τῆς θεοσεβείας δι’ οὗ ταῖς Ἀρχαῖς καὶ ταῖς Ἐξουσίαις ἐγινώσκετο τὸ Ὀνομα περικειμένους. (“The priest, entering within the second veil, set aside the [gold] plate near the altar of incense. He himself entered in silence, having the name engraved in his heart, indicating the setting aside of the body, which is like the gold leaf having become pure and light through the purification of the soul [from the body] upon which is impressed the brightness of piety, [and] through which (the high priest) became known to the principles and authorities, [he] being enveloped by the Name.”)

<sup>71</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* 27.3.1–4: Γυμνή δὲ ἡ ψυχὴ ἐν δυνάμει τοῦ συνειδότητος, οἷον σῶμα τῆς δυνάμεως γενομένη, μεταβαίνει εἰς τὰ πνευματικά, λογικὴ τῷ ὄντι καὶ ἀρχιερατικὴ γενομένη ... (“Naked, the soul that is in the power of the one who is ‘aware’—having become, as it were, the ‘body’ of that power—passes into the pneumatic realm, having become ‘Logos-like’ and ‘high-priestly’ ...”)

<sup>72</sup> According to Dodds (1964, 96) Plotinus was not reading Clement himself but derived the image either directly from the Valentinians or (erroneously, in my opinion) via a putative lost text of Numenius.



As reasonable as this hypothesis might seem, however, it has been largely neglected by subsequent commentators,<sup>73</sup> in part, one may presume, because of the widespread but (in my view) overly-simplistic assumption of Plotinus' fundamental antipathy toward the Gnostics (which, if correct, would render such a borrowing implausible), but also because of the recognition that the process by which the motif was transmitted between its ostensibly Philonic origin and its eventual Plotinian iteration must have been considerably more complex than Dodds had originally supposed. In 1970, F. Sagnard observed that the allegorical interpretation of the high priest's ritual divestiture of the sort we find in the *Excerpta* occurs elsewhere in Clement, at *Strom.* 5.6.32.1–40.4, in a passage which clearly expresses Clement's own thought and not merely that of his Valentinian source:<sup>74</sup> "So the high priest, shedding his consecrated tunic ... bathes himself and puts on his other, so to speak, 'Holy of Holies' tunic, and he enters together into the *adyton* with it."<sup>75</sup> Sagnard further demonstrated that the entirety of this extended passage echoes another Philonic passage originally neglected by Dodds, *Mos.* 2.95–135, in which Philo allegorizes certain passages of the Pentateuch (especially Exod 25–31, 35–39, and Lev 8) that describe the sacrificial procedures and ritual paraphernalia attending the high priest's entrance into the Holy of Holies. Interestingly, Josephus (*A.J.* 3.180–187 Niese) also provides a similar (though perhaps somewhat less Platonic) interpretation of the tabernacle and priestly garments in terms of cosmic symbolism.<sup>76</sup> To these Jewish sources we may also compare a more distantly related allegorical interpretation of Leviticus 16 that occurs in the New Testament, at Epistle

<sup>73</sup> Thus Rist—who in 1967 was aware of Dodds 1964—mentions Philo and the Valentinians only briefly in connection with the *χιτών*-theory (op. cit., 190), but not the temple-image; Susanetti (1995, 139–141) notes Dodds' Valentinian parallel only in passing, and emphasizes the Eleusinian aspect; Darras-Worms (2007, 201–202nn177–178) makes no mention of Dodds or the Valentinians, but thinks the passage refers very generally to the mysteries and merely reflects a widespread notion of the purification of the soul from the body and the passions; finally, Narbonne (in Narbonne, Achard, and Ferroni 2012, 6inn2–3) follows Susanetti's Eleusinian suggestion (but also notes an important parallel with *Allogenes*, to be discussed below).

<sup>74</sup> Sagnard 1970, 220–223.

<sup>75</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.6.39.3.1–4.1: ταύτη τοι ἀποδὺς τὸν ἡγιασμένον χιτῶνα ὁ ἀρχιερεὺς (κόσμος δὲ καὶ ἡ ἐν κόσμῳ κτίσις ἡγιασται πρὸς τοῦ καλὰ συγκαταθεμένου τὰ γινόμενα) λούεται καὶ τὸν ἄλλον ἐνδύεται ἄγιον ἁγίου ὡς εἰπεῖν χιτῶνα, τὸν συνεισίσοντα εἰς τὰ ἄδυστα αὐτῷ.

<sup>76</sup> The allegorization common to these two relatively philosophical authors may correspond to a tendency already present in various mystical currents of Hellenistic Judaism to reconceptualize the temple in spiritual and/or celestial terms; see especially Rowland and Morray-Jones 2009; Barnard 2012.

to the Hebrews 9, in which the high priest—the only one able to penetrate into the Holy of Holies—is identified with Christ, who is uniquely able to enter the heavenly temple and abide in the presence of God for all eternity.<sup>77</sup> One should note that in the first of these examples (*Strom.* 5.6.32 ff.) there is a description of ritual divestiture immediately followed by ablution and re-investiture, while the latter three examples (Philo, *Mos.*; Josephus, *A.J.*; and Hebrews) make no mention whatsoever of nudity or ritual divestiture. We therefore seem to be dealing with a series of overlapping allegorical motifs—in fact, allegories upon allegories—all of which ultimately derive from Hellenistic Judaism, but whose precise historical interrelations are unclear.

Nevertheless, Dodds’ Valentinian hypothesis merits re-examination, since even a perfunctory survey of the sources—including those of which Dodds was apparently unaware<sup>78</sup>—reveals that the entire constellation of ritual motifs of which Plotinus avails himself in 1.6 [1] 7.1–14 is Gnostic *par excellence*. Indeed, despite the historical uncertainties, a wealth of evidence suggests that this allegorical complex had particular importance not only for the Valentinians but also for a broad range of other Gnostic sects as well.

First, and most generally, several Gnostic sources invoke the motif of ritual divestiture and re-investiture with sacral garments,<sup>79</sup> sometimes in a baptismal context,<sup>80</sup> and even without any explicit reference to the high priest or Holy of Holies. These images are apparently based upon the kinds of “spiritualized” ablutions and/or heavenly enthronement rituals commonly found in Jewish pseudepigrapha.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>77</sup> The close relation between the temple analogy as it occurs in Philo, Josephus, and Hebrews has been discussed by Daniélou 1957, MacRae 1978, and Tomson 2011.

<sup>78</sup> In 1964, Dodds knew of the existence of the Nag Hammadi corpus but was not yet familiar with its contents.

<sup>79</sup> E.g., *Gos. Truth* (NHC I,3) 20.28–34; *Gos. Phil.* (NHC II,3) 56.26–57.22; *Dial. Sav.* (NHC III,5) 138.14–20 (50); 143.15–23 (85); cf. also 148.18 ff. (104); *Paraph. Shem* (NHC VII,1) 38.32–39.24 *passim*; *Teach. Silv.* (NHC VII,4) 89.10–30; 105.13–19; *Trim. Prot.* (NHC XIII,1) 48.12–15; 49.28–32; *Acts Andr., frg.* in Pap. Copt. Utrecht N. 1 pp. 14.43–15.22 (published in Quispel 1956); *Odes Sol.* 11.10a–12a (Greek) Charlesworth (trans. in Latke 2009); Parthian Manichaean fragment M5569 (= T II D 79, in Andreas and Henning 1934, 860–862; trans. in Gardner and Lieu 2004, 88). In several Gnostic texts we also find the motif of sacral nudity without re-investiture; thus *Gos. Thom.* (NHC II,2) 39.27–40.2 (Log. 37; cf. Log. 21); 2 *Apoc. Jas.* (NHC V,4) 56.7–13; 58.14–24.

<sup>80</sup> In his analysis of the motif of disrobing and trampling one’s garments in *Gos. Thom.* logion 37, J.Z. Smith (1978, esp. 2–6) suggests an echo of actual baptismal ritual, a thesis challenged by DeConick and Fossum 1991, according to whom the motif reflects only the symbolic divestiture of the “tunics of flesh” without a baptismal context.

<sup>81</sup> Apocalyptic parallels include, *inter alia*, 2 *Enoch* 22:8–9 and 3 *Enoch* 10:1. On the relation

Moreover, various allegorical references to the high priest's entrance into the Holy of Holies—without mention of ritual divestiture as such—may be found in Valentinian tractates from Nag Hammadi, and clearly comprise part of the larger complex of interrelated allegories that includes those of Philo and Clement/Theodotus.<sup>82</sup> For instance, in the *Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2), the Monogenes-Son is equated with the high priest who is uniquely able to enter the Holy of Holies, precisely as we find in *Exc.* and Heb 9.<sup>83</sup> A similar image is used in an analogous passage of the *Gospel of Philip* (NHC II,3), 69.14–70.9, in order to explain the enigmatic (Valentinian) sacrament of the bridal chamber (νυμφῶν).<sup>84</sup> Although the surviving portion of the manuscript does not mention ritual divestiture *per se*, the passage describes three sacred enclosures within the Temple in Jerusalem, each of which symbolizes a sacrament of increasing sanctity: the chamber known as the Holy (πετογααβ) represents baptism, the Holy of the Holy (πετογααβ μ πετογααβ) represents redemption, and the Holy of the Holies (πετογααβ ἄπετογααβ)—to which only the high priest has access—represents the ineffable bridal chamber itself. At 70.3–9, this latter, supreme Valentinian sacrament is expressed in terms of (i) visionary or eschatological ascent, (ii)

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of this literature to the Gnostic tractates, see Scopello 1978 and 1980; on the divestiture/reinvestiture motif in Jewish apocalyptic, see Schulz 1971; also Himmelfarb 1993, esp. ch. 2, “Heavenly ascent and priestly investiture,” pp. 29–46. Interestingly, it is most likely from within just such a Jewish (or Jewish-Christian) mystical and/or apocalyptic milieu that the immediate ancestors of the more philosophically-inclined Platonizing Sethians known to Plotinus most likely emerged; see Sevrin 1986, 284–294; Turner 1998; Scopello 2009.

<sup>82</sup> The phrase “Holy of Holies” itself came to have widely differing meanings in various Gnostic systems. Simon Magus reportedly used the term ἄγια ἀγίων to refer to certain sexual practices (Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.19.5.5), while the Valentinian Marcus applied it to the primal Tetrad, known only to the Son (*Ref.* 6.49.2.2). As with the imagery of divestiture, the profusion of Gnostic variations on the theme of the Holy of Holies probably originated in an earlier tradition of Jewish mystical speculation, a topic which deserves far more attention than it can be given here. One might simply note that in the Hekhalot literature, according to Morray-Jones 1992 and 2006, the image of the Temple had come to be progressively “celestialized” and subsequently “internalized” in visionary praxis.

<sup>83</sup> *Val. Exp.* (NHC XI,2) 25.30–26.22. If we accept the reconstruction of 26.18–21, opted for by both John Turner (1990, CGL) and J. Ménard (1985, BCNH), the high priest not only is uniquely able to enter the temple but reveals *himself* to be the “original temple” ([απ]χαλιον ἄ[π]νεει) and treasury ([τ]ερο) of the All. This is curiously reminiscent of Plotinus 6.9 [9] 11.31, in which (i) the “wise priest” is said to know that the ἄδυστον is πηγὴν καὶ ἀρχήν, and (ii) the ἄδυστον itself is required by the image to represent the priest's inner self, as has been suggested by Hadot 1994, 209–210: “il me semble ... vraisemblable que le sanctuaire s'identifie avec l'âme dans laquelle l'Un est présent.” Hadot also adduces Porphyry, *Abst.* 2.52.4 as parallel.

<sup>84</sup> On the complex history of the interpretation of the bridal chamber in *Gos. Phil.*, see Buckley 1980; on sexual imagery in Gnostic ritual more generally, Turner 2000, esp. 111–120.

escape from malevolent intermediary powers, (iii) luminous re-investiture and finally (iv) union (ζωτῆ) with the Divine.<sup>85</sup>

Most importantly, however, in several Valentinian and other Gnostic sources, one finds the motif of divestiture in the context of a salvific or visionary ascent to a divine realm: a realm that is metaphorically described, if not explicitly as the Holy of Holies, then as at least some kind of sacred edifice. These examples are also clearly, albeit indirectly, related to the allegories in Philo and Clement/Theodotus, yet they seem considerably closer to the passage of Plotinus. Not only do they mention an act of divestiture unmoored from its original sacerdotal context, they also evoke salvation itself, like *Gos. Phil.*, in the erotic terms of sacred marriage: we may recall Plotinus’ strikingly vivid language of erotic longing (e.g., the desire to commingle with the One-Good).<sup>86</sup> For instance, according to Tertullian’s account of the Valentinian ascent, the spiritual elect must strip themselves of their psychic garments prior to the ascent to the “palace of the Pleroma,” at which point they become brides of the Aeons:

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Tertullian, *Val.* 32.1.4–3.19  
(Fredouille)

*Nihil in pleromatis palatium admittitur, nisi spiritale examen Valentiniani. Illic itaque primo dispoliantur homines ipsi, id est interiores—dispoliari est autem deponere animas quibus induti uidebantur—easque Demiurgo suo reddent quas ab eo auerterant; ipsi autem spiritus in totum fient intellectuales neque dentui neque conspectui obnoxii, atque ita inuisibiliter in pleroma recipiuntur. Furtim, si ita est. Quid deinde? Angelis distribuuntur, satellitibus Soteris. In filios putas? Non unus. Sed in adparitores? Ne istud quidem. Sed in imagines? Vtinam uel hoc! In quid ergo, si non pudet dire? In sponsas.*

*Nothing will be admitted into the palace of the Pleroma except for the spiritual swarm of Valentinians. So there the men—that is, the inner men—first strip themselves (to strip is to remove the soul with which they appear to be dressed and which they return to the demiurge from whom they carried it away). They themselves will become purely intellectual spirit, neither detained nor even noticed, and thus without being seen they will be received into the Pleroma, furtively, if it is (as they say). What then? They will be distributed among the angels as assistants to the Savior. As sons, do you suppose?—Not one. Then as servants?—Not even. Then as images?—If only! What, then, if it is not shameful to utter?—As brides!*

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<sup>85</sup> Sfameni Gasparro (1982) suggests an encratite background to the matrimonial imagery in this tractate. On the sacramental motif of the Holy of Holies, see DeConick 2001.

<sup>86</sup> On the Gnostic substrate of Plotinus’ use of erotic imagery to describe mystical union, see Mazur 2009.

Aside from the Valentinian evidence, a passage of Hippolytus attributes a similar doctrine to a Naassene or Phrygian Gnostic author. In the midst of a bewildering chaos of allegorical exegeses of biblical and Greek sources, the Naasene interprets the Greater Mysteries of Eleusis in terms of a heavenly ascent to the house of God (οἶκος θεοῦ) into which the spiritual elect may enter only after having shed their garments, at which point they are “emasculated” by the Virginal Spirit and become “bridegrooms.”

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Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.8.44.3–45.3  
(Marcovich)

οἱ γὰρ τοὺς ἐκεῖ, φησί, λαχόντες “μόρους μείζονας μοίρας λαγχάνουσιν”. Αὕτη δέ, φησίν, ἐστὶν “ἡ πύλη τοῦ οὐρανοῦ” καὶ οὗτος (ὁ) “οἶκος θεοῦ”, ὅπου ὁ ἀγαθὸς θεὸς κατοικεῖ μόνος· εἰς δὲ οὐκ εἰσελεύσεται, φησὶν, ἀκάθαρτος οὐδεὶς, οὐ ψυχικός, οὐ σαρκικός, ἀλλὰ τηρεῖται πνευματικοῖς μόνοις. ὅπου δεῖ γινόμενους βαλεῖν τὰ ἐνδύματα καὶ πάντας γενέσθαι νυμφίους ἀπηρεσυνόμενους διὰ τοῦ παρθενικοῦ πνεύματος. αὕτη δέ ἐστὶν, (φησίν,) ἡ παρθένος “ἡ ἐν γαστρὶ ἔχουσα καὶ συλλαμβάνουσα καὶ τίκτουσα υἱόν”, οὐ ψυχικόν, οὐ σωματικόν, ἀλλὰ μακάριον Αἰῶνα Αἰώνων.

For the ones there, he says, who receive “allotments (of initiation), obtain greater destinies” (cf. Heraclitus, *frag.* 25 Diels-Kranz). This, he says, is the gate of heaven, and this is *the house of God*, where the good God dwells alone, into which no one will be admitted, he says, who is impure—i.e., no psychic or fleshly one—but it is reserved for the spiritual ones alone. *It is necessary that those coming here shed their garments and that all become bridegrooms, emasculated through the virginal spirit.* For this is the Virgin, he says, who has in her belly and conceives and gives birth to a son, not psychic, nor corporeal, but the blessed Aeon of Aeons.

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The *Authoritative Teaching* (NHC VI,3) contains an allegory for the ascent of the soul that is also curiously reminiscent of Plotinus’ account of auto-phany:<sup>87</sup>

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*Aut. Teach.* (NHC VI,3) 32.2–11  
(MacRae)

ἴσχι σοογν επεσογοειν· ες|μοογε  
εσκηκ δρηογ ἡπει|κοσμοσ· ερετες-  
ρβωσ ἡμε|σολε ἡμοσ ἡπεσσανρογν·  
ερεπεσχιρβοοσ ἡφελεετ | το ριωωσ  
ρἡ ὀγμῆτσαειε ἡ|ρητ· ρἡ ὀγλαρλερ  
αν ἡσαραζ· | ἡσχι σοογν επεσβαοοσ  
ἡσ|πωτ ερογν ετεσαγλη· ερ[ε]πε-  
σπομνη δερατῆ επρο·

And she comes to know her light while going forth *stripping off this cosmos, since her true garment adorns her interior, while her bridal gown is invested upon her in the beauty of her mind*, not in the pride of flesh; and she comes to know her depth and *runs into her courtyard*, while her shepherd stands at the door.

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<sup>87</sup> On the identification of the intellectual background of this text, see van den Broek 1979.

Returning to Plotinus, we may perceive a distinct homology between the imagery of 1.6 [1] 7.1–14 and the ensemble of Gnostic examples presented above. In these latter examples, the salvific ascent is described in terms of (a) ritual divestiture, (b) ascent to and/or entrance into a sacred enclosure (the pleromatic palace, the house of God, the courtyard), and (c) erotic union with the divine (i.e., the nuptial imagery and/or hierogamy itself). Indeed, this cluster of motifs is so prevalent in Gnostic sources—and, it appears, so scarce elsewhere—that it is virtually inconceivable that Plotinus could have been innocent of its Gnostic associations.

### 3. THE GNOSTIC SOURCE OF PLOTINUS’ FIRST REFERENCE TO CONTEMPLATIVE ASCENT

At this point we may be tempted to confirm Dodds’ original suspicion that Plotinus had borrowed the ritual motif in 1.6 [1] 7 from a Gnostic allegorical topos. Yet here we encounter a further complication. Previous commentators seem not to have been concerned that Plotinus’ phrase “those who ascend to the sanctuaries of the temples” (ἐπὶ τὰ ἄγια τῶν ἱερῶν τοῖς ἀνιούσιν) explicitly refers neither to a literary topos nor to some venerable Jewish priestly ritual itself, but rather to a specific *ritual community*. Indeed, several aspects of this curious phrase—including (i) the present tense of the participle, (ii) the plurality of implied subjects of the ascent, and (iii) the fact that the entire image, introduced with οἷον, is intended as a comparandum rather than a direct description of his own practice—suggest that Plotinus is referring to the members of a contemporaneous (and, as we have seen, undoubtedly Gnostic) community that had *already* made use of a traditional allegorical interpretation of sacerdotal ritual in order to conceptualize their own soteriological praxis.<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in order for this allusion to function as a useful comparandum, the identity of the community would have to have been more or less self-evident to Plotinus’ audience without further specification. After all, Plotinus himself is sufficiently familiar with it as to employ the metaphorical imagery internal to the community itself. But to which community is he referring?

It is, of course, conceivable that οἱ ἀνιόντες ... refers to the Valentinian sectaries themselves (a possibility not even entertained by Dodds).<sup>89</sup> It could

<sup>88</sup> That is to say, their ritual ascent need not have involved actual disrobing or a physical temple, and may already have involved a form of interiorized ritual.

<sup>89</sup> Although there is no evidence to support the commonly repeated scholarly refrain

also refer to the “Gnostics” broadly speaking, if the generic category was indeed available to Plotinus (as it evidently was to Porphyry). But there is another, more compelling possibility which presents itself. For there is, in fact, one crucial identifying feature of the Plotinian passage that follows immediately on the description of the ultimate vision in the metaphorical temple. We may note the remarkable and even somewhat awkward phrase towards the end of our passage, at 1.6 [1] 7.10–12, that describes the supreme principle as that ἀφ’ οὗ πάντα ἐξήρτηται καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸ βλέπει καὶ ἔστι καὶ ζῆ καὶ νοεῖ· ζωῆς γὰρ αἴτιος καὶ νοῦ καὶ τοῦ εἶναι (“from which everything depends, and looks to it, and *is* and *lives* and *intelligizes*; for it is cause of *life* and *intellect* and *being*”). Here, already in Plotinus’ first treatise, we encounter an almost crystallized form of the so-called noetic (being-life-intellect) triad,<sup>90</sup> a triad which is, of course, known in later Neoplatonism, but which was already central to the conception of the transcendental realm among the Platonizing Sethian authors of *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*.<sup>91</sup> The inevitable suspicion arises that this passage relates in some way to Platonizing Sethian thought.

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that Gnostics ranked among Plotinus’ auditors in Rome (an overinterpretation of Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16.1ff. and Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.1–5), Valentinians were certainly present in the vicinity of Rome during Plotinus’ time. While Valentinus and his immediate followers Heracleon and Ptolemy had taught in Rome in the preceding century, tombs dating from the early third to fourth century that contain arguably Valentinian iconography were found on the Via Latina; see Lampe 2003, 292–313.

<sup>90</sup> It is significant that we find the noetic triad here in Plotinus’ first treatise so clearly formalized, and expressed in both of its possible orders, i.e., that of the three hypostases (being-intellect-life), and also that of the mystical trajectory by which the aspirant surpasses intellect to attain the transcendent first principle (intellect-life-being). Evidently there cannot have been a progressive development of the triad throughout his works if we already find it so formulaic in his first treatise. That the triad was in use prior to Plotinus was in fact already suggested by Hadot 1960, esp. pp. 119 ff.; although it should hardly need to be repeated at this point, this also means that it was not a Porphyrian (or post-Porphyrian) invention, as some more recently have supposed. The case for a pre-Plotinian origin of the triad was made by Corrigan 2000; Rasmus (2010, and his essay in this volume) has most recently proposed a specifically Sethian origin of the triad. The Platonizing Sethian associations of the triad are further supported by the fact that although the triad is alluded to imprecisely at 6.9 [9] 9.1–2, the next time we find such a clear expression of it in Plotinus’ corpus is not until much later, in the middle-period treatise, 6.4 [22] 3.31–34 (a treatise which I believe to be a tacit response to *Zost.*); a subsequent mention also occurs in the explicitly anti-Gnostic context of the *Großschrift*-tetralogy, at 5.5 [32] 10.13–14. Moreover, we find its very first use in Plotinus here—as in the Platonizing Sethians (e.g., throughout *Allogenes* 59–61)—in the context of contemplative ascent, and in a passage considerably more dependent on *Symp.* than *Soph.*, the ostensible Platonic source of the triad.

<sup>91</sup> Besides the triad’s central importance for the ascent through the Triple Powered in *Allogenes* 59–61, varieties of the triad are evident also in *Zost.* 15.4–9 and *Steles Seth* (NHC VII.5) 125.28–32. On this see especially Turner 2009, 177–179.

### 3.1. *The Platonizing Sethian Evidence*

This suggestion may be made more precise. It would appear that οἱ ἀνιόντες—the ritual community to whose praxis Plotinus enthusiastically compares his own contemplative ascent—refers specifically to the Platonizing Sethians who used *Allogenes*. We may consider the following passage, on pp. 58–59, in which the eponymous visionary is carried up out of his corporeal “garment” and through the various heavenly and aeonic strata towards the ultimate apprehension of the supreme Unknowable:

*Allogenes* 58.26–59.26

εταγορῶν | εβολ εἰτοοτῶ ἡπιουοειν |  
 ἡφαινεε· εβολ εἰτοοτῶ | ἡπιενδλμα ετ-  
 τοε εἰω|ωτ· αγω αχλιτ εεραῖ εχῆν | ογ-  
 τοπος εφογααβ· πη ε|τε ἡἡἡἡἡἡ ἡτεει-  
 νε ἡ|ταφ ογωῆε εβολ εἡπικος|μος· τοτε  
 εβολ εἡἡνογ|νος ἡἡἡἡἡἡκαριος αἡ|ἡαγ  
 εἡη τηρογ εταει|σωῆἡ εροογ αγω  
 αει|σμογ εροογ τηρογ αἡ|αερε]ατ  
 εἡἡἡἡἡἡἡἡἡἡ· α[ἡ]||[κωτ]ε ερογἡ ετ-  
 ἡἡἡἡἡἡ [ἡ]||[τε]ἡἡἡἡἡἡ· πειωἡ ἡβαρ-  
 β[ἡ]||[λω·] αγω αειἡαγ εερεἡἡἡἡ ε[γ]-  
 [αα]β εβολ εἡτοοτογ ἡἡἡἡ[ε]||[τη]ρ  
 ἡτε|βαρβ[ἡλ]ω ἡεοογ[τ] | ἡπαρἡεἡος  
 εγ[εω] ἡἡο[ε ἡαἡ] | [ε]ε ἡἡἡἡἡἡἡἡ πἡ-  
 ραν εταφ|ωἡἡε εἡἡἡἡἡἡ· παλλο|[ε]ε-  
 ἡἡε εἡαγ εἡἡἡἡἡἡκαρι|ος εἡἡἡἡἡ ἡἡε  
 ετωοοπ | εἡἡογἡἡἡ· τη ετεκειἡε ε|ροκ  
 ἡεἡἡἡε καταροκ· αγω αρ|ἡἡἡἡἡἡἡ εχῆἡ-  
 ἡἡἡἡἡἡ | εκκωτε ἡεωκ· τη ετεκἡἡἡἡἡἡ  
 ερος εσκἡ· αγω εἡἡἡ|εαἡ ἡἡερεραἡἡ·  
 ἡἡἡἡἡἡἡἡ | λααγ· αλλα εωἡἡε εκωἡἡἡ|ογ-  
 ωἡ εερεραἡἡ· αρἡἡἡἡἡἡἡ | εχῆἡἡεγἡἡἡἡ-  
 εἡε· αγω εκε|ρε ερος εεερεραἡἡ αγω  
 εε|εροἡἡ ἡἡος καταἡἡἡε ἡἡἡ|ετἡροἡἡ ἡἡοἡ  
 οἡἡἡἡ· αγω εφἡἡἡεἡε ἡἡἡἡ τηρογ | εἡἡογ-  
 καρωἡ ἡἡοἡἡἡἡἡἡ | τεἡεἡεἡἡἡἡ·

*When I was carried by the eternal light out from the garment that was upon me, and was taken up to a holy place, the one whose image cannot be revealed in this world, then, by means of a great blessedness, I saw all of those about whom I had heard. And I blessed all of them. I stood upon my [own] knowledge; I turned toward the knowledge of the universals, i.e., the Barbelo Aeon. And I saw the holy powers by means of the luminaries of Barbelo, the male virgin, saying to me these things: “O great power, O name which has come into the world, O Allogenes, behold your blessedness, the way it exists in silence, that by which you know yourself according to yourself. And withdraw upon the vitality by turning to yourself, the one (i.e., the vitality) that you will see moving. And if you are unable to stand, fear nothing. But if you wish to stand, withdraw upon the existence, and you will find it standing and at rest, according to the likeness of the one who is truly at rest and who possesses all of them in silence and inactivity.”*

This passage, which is closely related to the constellation of Gnostic motifs we have seen,<sup>92</sup> contains several parallels with our original Plotinian

<sup>92</sup> Besides the more obvious parallels, discrete terminological details link this passage of



passage: first, and most obviously, (a) the metaphor of the garment that must be removed to undertake the ascent; second, (b) the entrance into a holy place (οὔτοπος εφορᾶαβ), reminiscent of Plotinus' term τὰ ἅγια τῶν ἱερῶν and of the technical term the holy (place) (*ha-qodesh*) used to refer to the antechamber of the Holy of Holies (e.g., Exod 26:33);<sup>93</sup> and finally, most remarkably—in the course of the luminaries' instructions to Allogenes in the latter part of the passage (59.9–26)—(c) a reference to the triad of powers of the Triple-Powered (existence, vitality, and blessedness/mentality), through which the Barbelo Aeon had originally emerged from the supreme Unknowable itself, and through which, in turn, Allogenes must pass during his visionary ascent towards the supreme deity. This triad is, of course, homologous to the being-life-intellect triad to which Plotinus alludes, almost gratuitously, in a corresponding position (lines 10–12) of the passage in question.

It is therefore apparent that 1.6 [1] 7.1–14 and *Allogenes* 58ff. are non-coincidentally related. The most plausible explanation for this correspondence is that while composing his very first account of the contemplative ascent, Plotinus sought familiar comparanda with which to illustrate it, and therefore availed himself of an ascent-motif—i.e., ritual divestiture and ascent to the “holy place(s)” of the temples—that he knew from his acquaintance with the Platonizing Sethians. Plotinus' oblique allusion to the noetic triad—which does not have the immediate relevance to the procedure of ascent itself that it has in the corresponding passage of *Allogenes*—is almost certainly an afterthought, and ultimately reflects dependence, either

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*Allogenes* closely with the passage of Clement of Alexandria, *Exc.* discussed above, in which the Name occurs at 27.1.4 and 11, and δύναμις at 27.6.3.

<sup>93</sup> Several other more subtle aspects of this passage may also be noted. It appears that the temple-image lurks under the surface. Later, during Allogenes' post-factum account of his ascent (60.19–22), he describes the contemplative withdrawal upon the vitality (the middle term of the triadic Triple-Powered) in these terms: ἀγὼ ἀεὶράναλαχῶρι ἐξῆν ἱμῆτ' | ὠνῆ εἰκῶτε ἕκωε ἀγῶ | ἀεὶρῶνῆρ ἕβωκ ἐροῦν ἐροσ | ἡμῆμας (“and I withdrew upon the vitality as I turned to it, and I accompanied it [lit.: ‘became a companion’] to enter in together with it”). The Coptic undoubtedly renders a Greek phrase similar to one we have seen above, in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 5.6.39.3.4–4.1, in which the high priest is curiously said to “enter in together” to the *adyton* (τὸν συνεισιτόντα εἰς τὰ ἄδυτα αὐτῷ) with his specially-designated “Holy of Holies” robe. Moreover, re-investiture is implied at the phase of existence, at *Allogenes* 60.30–37: ἀεὶράναλαχῶρι ἐξῆν | ἱεργῶπαρζῖς τῆ ἐταεῖδῆτῖς | ἐσαρῆρατῖς· ἀγῶ ἐρορῶκ | ἡμῶς κατὰοὔρζικῶν ἡν | οὔεινε ἡτεπῆ ἐττοε ρῖω|ῶτ· ἐβολ ρῖῆνοῶνῆρ ἐβολ | ἡτεπατῆπαῶν ἡμῆν ἐτ|ρορῶκ ἡμοῦ (“I withdrew upon the existence, which I found standing and at rest according to an image and likeness of that which is invested upon me by a manifestation of the indivisible and the one who is at rest”).

direct or indirect, upon the very same passage of *Allogenes* or some other closely related Platonizing Sethian tractate.

We may thus interpret Plotinus’ reference to οἱ ἀνιόντες as a respectful acknowledgment of certain Platonizing Sethians in his broader milieu, perhaps his own erstwhile φίλοι,<sup>94</sup> who conceived of their own practice of ascent in terms of the traditional Gnostic eschatological allegory involving a metaphorical divestiture and entrance into a celestial analogue of the Holy of Holies.<sup>95</sup> The more general similarity between the latter part of 1.6 [1] and other features central to *Allogenes*—for instance, the theme of contemplative self-reversion throughout the final ascent on *Allogenes* 58–61—would also appear to suggest that while composing his first treatise Plotinus already had Platonizing Sethian tractates, among other Gnostic sources, close at hand.<sup>96</sup> Alternatively, it is conceivable that at some earlier point in his life, perhaps during his education in Alexandria, he had so thoroughly absorbed the ideas of the Platonizing Sethians that in his first written work he instinctively imitated their mode of expression. And his use of the motif is not limited to this single passage; the image of the temple (albeit without divestiture or triad) evidently remained of profound importance for his own thought, since it occurs not only in the subsequent chapter of this treatise,<sup>97</sup> but again in two of the more important early-period

<sup>94</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.3.

<sup>95</sup> Might we postulate a subset of Sethians, perhaps a community of “Allogenians” (i.e., the circle of disciples of pseudo-Allogenes)? I am assuming, of course, that the eponymous visionary’s mythical ascent served as a template for some *actual*, if interiorized, contemplative practice, whether individual or collective; see Turner’s discussion in the introduction to Funk et al. 2004, 32.

<sup>96</sup> That Plotinus had an awareness of other iterations of this Gnostic motif is suggested by the fact that erotic themes are present in 1.6 [1] 7.1–14 and in the other Gnostic parallels, but not in this passage of *Allogenes*. In this regard, one might also recall an intriguing but indeterminate parallel in a badly damaged passage of *Marsanes* (NHC X,1) 34.18–22 (Funk-Poirier-Turner): [ε]ψχοϋ ἡ|[παι]νιγῆς ο[1]ον ἡρη|[ἰ] γῆ π|αισῶντος κοσμος | [εφα]σοπ ἡσι πῆσει (“speaking the riddle just as if the temple exists in the perceptible cosmos”). This may be compared to Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9 [9] 11.28–32: σοφὸς δὲ ἱερεὺς τὸ αἰνίγμα συνιεὶς ἀληθινὴν ἂν ποιοῖτο ἐκεῖ γενόμενος τοῦ ἀδύτου τὴν θέαν. Καὶ μὴ γενόμενος δὲ τὸ ἀδύτον τοῦτο ἀόρατόν τι χρῆμα νομίσας καὶ πηγὴν καὶ ἀρχὴν, εἰδήσει ὡς ἀρχὴ ἀρχὴν ὄρα καὶ συγγίνεται καὶ τῷ ὁμοίῳ τὸ ὅμοιον. (“The wise priest, having understood the riddle, may make the contemplation true by coming to be there in the *adyton*; even if he has not come to be there, considering that *adyton* to be invisible, and the source and principle, he will know that he sees the principle by the principle and that like comes together with like.”)

<sup>97</sup> 1.6 [1] 8.1–6: Τίς οὖν ὁ τρόπος; Τίς μηχανή; Πῶς τις θεάσεται κάλλος ἀμήχανον οἶον ἐνδον ἐν ἁγίοις ἱεροῖς μένον οὐδὲ προῖον εἰς τὸ ἔξω, ἵνα τις καὶ βέβηλος ἴδῃ; Ἴτω δὴ καὶ συνεπέσθω εἰς τὸ εἶσω ὁ δυνάμενος ἔξω καταλιπὼν ὅψιν ὁμμάτων μῆδ’ ἐπιστρέφων αὐτὸν εἰς τὰς προτέρας ἀγλαίας σωμαίων. (“What is the way? What is the mechanism? How can one behold the ‘inconceivable beauty,’ which remains, as it were, within, in the ‘holy sanctuary,’ and does not come forth to

accounts of the vision of the supreme principle, at 6.9 [9] 11.16–33 and 5.1 [10] 6.12–15.

### 3.2. *The Role of the Platonizing Sethians in Plotinus' Argument about Beauty*

Yet if Plotinus' ultimate aim in 1.6 [1] is indeed to refute Gnostics who would disparage cosmic beauty, we may wonder why he would commend a Platonizing Sethian ritual of ascent without any apparent reservation by comparing it to the most exalted phase of his own contemplative praxis. I suspect that the answer might lie in his awareness of the Platonizing Sethians' positive attitude towards both beauty and image-making in the context of visionary ascent: an attitude which, of course, he shares.<sup>98</sup> For despite the fact that the Platonizing Sethians (like many Gnostics) vilify demiurgic *mimēsis* through the reproduction of images (note especially *Zost.* 10.4–5), nevertheless (as we have seen above) they exalt the εἰκὼν of the transcendent deity discovered within oneself at the penultimate phase of ascent (e.g., *Allogenes* 59.18–26 and 60.30–37). Moreover, one might consider the Platonizing Sethians' comparatively benevolent view of (at least) *divine* beauty, which similarly seems to reflect their Platonic background, and which perhaps even suggests inspiration from the *Symposium* itself.<sup>99</sup> For example, in *Allogenes*, we find beauty (μῆρτσαιε) repeatedly predicated of the supreme principle (the Unknowable),<sup>100</sup> and there is an intriguing statement (at 64.5–6) that this principle “greatly transcends in beauty all of those who are good.”<sup>101</sup> More importantly, however, at *Zost.* 4.21–5.17—a passage that seems to be both a distant relative of both *Allogenes* 58 ff. and

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the exterior so that someone who is defiled might see it? May the one who is able, follow, into the interior, leaving the sight of the eyes outside and not reverting himself to the previous glories of bodies.”)

<sup>98</sup> Despite certain hints here and there—such as the disparagement of demiurgy as the replication of images in *Zost.*—there is insufficient evidence in the extant tractates to ascertain the Platonizing Sethian view of sensible beauty *per se*. We thus cannot be sure they are the actual target of the polemic concerning beauty in either 1.6 [1] 1–6 or in 2.9 [33] 16–17.

<sup>99</sup> In several publications, Turner has suggested that the Platonizing Sethians borrowed their conception of contemplative ascent at least in part from *Symp.* itself, in which a vision of the Beautiful itself represents the goal of the ascent. Even well before the Platonizing Sethians, Gnostic thinkers (broadly speaking) were not averse to ascribing beauty to the supreme principle; thus, for example, Basilides paradoxically described his god—a god so transcendent as to be “not even ineffable”—as κάλλος (Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.22.8.5–6).

<sup>100</sup> *Allogenes* 47.38; 65.18; however, the lacunae prohibit any certain interpretation.

<sup>101</sup> One is reminded of Plotinus' own vacillation about the relative position of beauty and the Good at 1.6 [1] 9.39–43.

of Plotinus’ autophany—the luminous, vehicular cloud that replaces the eponymous visionary’s body during his ascent is said to possess an “ineffable beauty.”<sup>102</sup>

Zost. 4.21–5.17

ἔνωγνος νῆις ἠνωγνο[ς ἢ] οὔροτ ἠρη[τ]  
 αειλαε ἠῆμαα ερρ[αί] | ἐγνος ἠκλοο-  
 λε ἠογοε[ί]ν αεικ[ω] | ἠπαπλασμα εἰῆῆ-  
 πκα[ε] εὔαρ[ε] | εροφ εβολ εἰῆῆρεν-  
 εοογ· αὔω α[ν]ἠογρη εβολ [ε]ἠπικοςμος  
 τηρφ | ἠῆπῆῆ ἠ[ν]εων ετωσοπ | ἠρηῆφ  
 [ἠῆῆ]γῆῆῆταγελοσ | ἠπογναγ ερον[·]  
 αὔω πογαρ|χων αφωτορῆρ εαθῆ ἠτ[ε]-  
 εἰν ἠ|ἠοοφε· ἠσῆπε γαρ ἠογ[οειν]||[ε]-  
 ῆῆ[ταν ±4 ]γ[ ±4 ]εσσοῆῆ | ἠρο[γο  
 εκο]σῆκ[ον ἠ]ῆ· εὔατωαδε ἠνοφ πε  
 π[ε]σσα εσῆογ[ε]ῆ[ν] εὔῆτασ ἠογσομ  
 εσχωμο[εῆτ ε]ῆῆτογ ἠρεῆπῆ εὔογααβ |  
 [εσ]οοπ ἠογῆῆ[α] ἠρεφτανρο’ | [ἠῆ]ογ-  
 ωαδε ἠνοερον· ἠπρητε | [αἠ ἠ]ἠῆ ετ-  
 ωοοπ εῆπικοςμος | [ἠε]ῆῆ ἠτεογγλη  
 ετωασφβε | [ἠ]ἠογωαδε ετωατωδῆ·  
 αὔω | [τ]οτε αεισογωνῆσομ ετωο|[ο]π  
 ἠρηῆτ εῆεσκη εἰῆῆπικακε [ε]ῆῆῆτασ  
 ἠμαγ ἠπογοειν τηρφ· [α]εἰχωῆς ἠπι-  
 μα εῆῆῆαγ· αὔω|[α]εἰχωῆε ἠῆεοογ ετ-  
 εῆῆῆα | [ε]ῆῆῆαγ· αειωωπε ἠπρητε ἠ |  
 [ο]γα ἠῆοογ·

In great haste, and very eagerly, I (*Zos-  
 trianos*) ascended with him (the angel) to  
 a great luminous cloud; I cast my mod-  
 eled form upon the earth to be guarded by  
 glories, and we escaped from the entire  
 cosmos and the thirteen aeons within  
 it and their angelic ones. They did not  
 see us, and their archon was disturbed  
 by our [passage]. For the luminous cloud  
 [...] transcends any cosmic thing. It is  
 with an ineffable beauty that it illumi-  
 nates, having a power that guides holy  
 spirits, being a spirit savior, and an intel-  
 ligible word, not in the manner of those  
 that are in the cosmos—those things  
 of unstable matter—with a discourse  
 of (mere) persuasion. And then I knew  
 the power that was within me was estab-  
 lished over the darkness, having all the  
 light [within]. And I received baptism  
 there; and I took the form of the glories  
 there. I became like one of them.

It therefore appears that Plotinus’ allusion to the Platonizing Sethian conception of visionary ascent is a strategic attempt to defend sensible and/or cosmic beauty by appeal to these sectaries’ own positive conception of the experience of divine beauty. This possibility would seem to be confirmed in the lines that follow immediately upon our original passage in ch. 7. At 7.18–21, in a passage that has long perplexed scholars,<sup>103</sup> Plotinus exclaims that the beauty of the Good is so overwhelming that one who has attained the mystical vision is liable to

<sup>102</sup> In *Aut. Teach.* (NHC VI,3) 32.2–11 (quoted above), the noetic garment with which the soul is re-invested is similarly described in terms of its beauty.

<sup>103</sup> Much of the perplexity has surrounded the identity of the gods and *daimones* whose “forms” or “appearances” are encountered. Most recently, Alekniēn 2007 has suggested that Plotinus is alluding to a Homeric topos.

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Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6 [1] 7.18–21

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τῶν ἄλλων ἐρώτων καταγελάει καὶ τῶν πρόσθεν νομιζομένων καλῶν καταφρονεῖν· ὁποῖον πάσχουσιν ὅσοι θεῶν εἶδασιν ἢ δαιμόνων προστυχόντες οὐκέτ' ἂν ἀποδέχοντο ὁμοίως ἄλλων κάλλη σωματίων.

ridicule other loves and to despise those things previously considered beautiful, similar to what those who encounter the appearances of gods or *daimones* experience insofar as they can no longer appreciate the beauty of other bodies in the same way.

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This remarkable passage is Plotinus' only explicit admission in the treatise that someone might actually despise (*καταφρονεῖν*) the beauties “down here,” and it undoubtedly alludes, however concessively, to the Gnostics. We have already seen (n. 16) that later, in the much more eristic context of 2.9 [33], he derides the Gnostics for their claim to *καταφρονεῖν τοῦ τῆδε κάλλους* (17.25). But here he provides a surprisingly sympathetic aetiology for Gnostic kallophobia (so to speak): it is an unfortunate consequence of the vision of the transcendent principle.<sup>104</sup> It is interesting to note that he seems to implicitly concede that his unmentioned Gnostic interlocutors have, in fact, experienced this supreme vision. More importantly, however, this passage reveals the otherwise obscure logical connection between the poetic evocation of the visionary ascent in the final portion of the treatise (chs. 7–9) and the tacit defense of worldly beauty against those who revile it in the preceding chapters (chs. 1–6). Indeed, it is only by recognizing the tacit Gnostic context of both themes—kallophobia and visionary ascent—that we can finally understand the overarching structure of Plotinus' argument in the treatise as a whole.

#### 4. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A REASSESSMENT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF THE Gnostics IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF PLOTINUS' OEUVRE

In conclusion, I would like to offer the following three observations. First, it would appear that Plotinus exhibits a far more conciliatory attitude towards

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<sup>104</sup> Plotinus' language here alludes to the passage of *Symp.* 210A4–E1, in which Diotima exhorts Socrates to refocus attention away from the beauty in individual bodies and towards increasingly abstract manifestations; note esp. 210B4–6 (Burnet): τοῦτο δ' ἐννοήσαντα καταστήγει πάντων τῶν καλῶν σωματίων ἐραστήν, ἐνδὲ δὲ τὸ σφόδρα τοῦτο χαλάσαι καταφρονήσαντα καὶ μικρὸν ἡγησάμενον. At 2.9 [33] 17.1–4, Plotinus implies that the Gnostics derived their excessive antisomatism from a willful misreading and exaggeration of Plato's own disparagement of the body.

the Gnostics here in this early treatise than he does in his later writings. This is consistent with the hypothesis that Plotinus himself had emerged in his youth from an Alexandrian Gnostic milieu which he outwardly rejected well before he began to write (perhaps even before his arrival in Rome ca. 245 CE), and yet with which he nevertheless remained intellectually and spiritually very close throughout his life.<sup>105</sup> If this hypothesis is correct, it would appear that 1.6 [1] was composed at a crucial moment in the course of Plotinus’ personal development, at mid-trajectory between his original Gnostic background and the more dogmatic and staunchly anti-Gnostic identity he assumed during his middle (Porphyrian) period. One might imagine that at the time Plotinus wrote his first treatise, his renunciation of Gnostic thought had not yet become as absolute as it would in the mid-260s, during which period he composed the *Großschrift* itself as well as other less explicit yet equivalently impassioned anti-Gnostic works such as 6.4–5 [22–23].<sup>106</sup> Rather, Plotinus’ earliest anti-Gnostic arguments—arguments whose actual target remained, during that period, largely implicit—seem to have been primarily restricted to those aspects of Gnostic thought that came into direct conflict with the doctrines of Plato (at least as he himself understood them), such as their dissociation of beauty from the Good (which Plotinus disputes here in his first treatise, 1.6 [1]), their demotion of the soul with respect to the *pneuma* (which he disputes in his second, 4.7 [2] Περὶ ψυχῆς ἀθανασίας), their vilification of fate (which he disputes in his third, 3.1 [3], Περὶ εἰμαρμένης), their insistence upon the soul’s catastrophic decline (which he disputes in his sixth, 4.8 [6], Περὶ τῆς εἰς τὰ σώματα καθόδου τῆς ψυχῆς), and so forth. And yet in these early debates, despite their polemical context, Plotinus’ arguments were still largely based upon conceptions he shared with his Gnostic interlocutors; one might contrast the gentleness of the arguments in these early treatises with the sheer revulsion he professes in 2.9 [33] for even those Gnostic doctrines which closely resemble his own.

<sup>105</sup> In my doctoral dissertation (Mazur 2010, ch. 5), I conjectured that Plotinus himself had emerged from an Alexandrian Gnostic background very similar to that of the Platonizing Sethians, but that—perhaps under the pressure of burgeoning popular anti-Christian sentiment in mid third-century Alexandria—he had come to reject any affiliation with the Gnostics by the time of his arrival in Rome. This would have involved concealing his past from even his closest pupils and purging his writing of any explicitly Gnostic terminology in favor of a “purified” Platonism that nevertheless tacitly preserved several identifiably Gnostic conceptual structures under the surface.

<sup>106</sup> In a paper entitled “Traces of the Competition Between the Platonizing Sethian Gnostics and Plotinus’ Circle, Part I: The Case of *Zostrianos* 44–46,” presented at a colloquium entitled “Estratégias anti-gnósticas nos escritos de Plotino,” at the University of São Paulo, March 2011, I suggest that this long treatise reacts especially against *Zostrianos*.

Second, the positive references to Gnostic ritual themes in this treatise (1.6 [1]) have considerable importance for our understanding of the genesis of Plotinus' thought, since they occur in the immediate context of his first account of the ascent to the One-Good. The implication is that Plotinus understands his own variety of contemplative praxis to be a more thoroughly Platonized version of an earlier Platonizing Sethian conception of visionary ascent.<sup>107</sup>

And finally, assuming 1.6 [1] was indeed the first treatise he wrote, we might suspect that Plotinus' shifting attitude vis-à-vis Gnostic thought—and in particular, the beginning of his conversion therefrom towards a “purer” form of Platonism—played an extremely significant role in his life: not only in the course of development of his specific philosophical interests, but also in his seemingly arbitrary decision—a full decade after he had started teaching<sup>108</sup>—to begin to write at all.

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<sup>107</sup> Plotinus' awareness of a prior Gnostic practice of contemplative ascent is also confirmed later by his repeated complaints at 2.9 [33] 5.1–8; 9.45–60; and 18.30–38.

<sup>108</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 3.32–35.

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## JOHANNINE BACKGROUND OF THE BEING-LIFE-MIND TRIAD\*

Tuomas Rasimus

Pierre Hadot argued famously that whereas Porphyry received the being-life-mind triad from Plotinus, and went on to systematize it in light of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Plotinus himself received a relatively developed version of the triad from a piece of earlier, Platonic school exegesis of *Soph.* 248E–249A, presumably available to him in a now lost handbook.<sup>1</sup> While I do agree with Hadot that Plotinus must have inherited this noetic triad because he uses it from his earliest work onward without ever justifying its use or connection to the *Sophist* passage,<sup>2</sup> I do not agree with Hadot that the triad originated in Platonic school exegesis of *Sophist*, or that the systematization of the triad was carried out in light of the *Chaldaean Oracles* by Porphyry. Rather, a fresh look at Neopythagorean speculations, together with a study of Gnostic sources from Nag Hammadi that were not yet available to Hadot, shows the originators and systematizers of the being-life-mind triad to have been Sethian Gnostics (a branch of Classic Gnosticism)<sup>3</sup> who were influenced by Stoicizing<sup>4</sup> Neopythagorean monism and especially by Johannine Christology, interpreted in light of Gen 1–5.

In the following, I will first examine Plotinus' own use of the being-life-mind triad. I will then investigate the triad's use in four documents that are difficult to date precisely, but which are roughly contemporaneous with, though probably earlier than Plotinus, viz., the *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary*, the source common to Marius Victorinus and *Zostrianos*, as well as the two Sethian tractates read in Plotinus' seminars, *Allogenes* and

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\* It gives me great pleasure to dedicate this essay to John Turner whose ground-breaking work in the fields of Platonic and Gnostic studies has opened up exciting new avenues, including the one I have pursued here.

<sup>1</sup> See especially Hadot 1960; 1968, 1:482–493.

<sup>2</sup> Hadot 1960, 107, 110, 119, 130.

<sup>3</sup> For Sethianism, see the classic work of Schenke 1974; 1981, as well as its important development by Turner 2001. For Classic Gnosticism as an enlargement and remodeling of Schenke's Sethianism, see Layton 1987; and Rasimus 2009.

<sup>4</sup> I have argued earlier that Sethians were the probable originators of the being-life-mind triad, and, following Hadot, that the triad contains considerable Stoic influence. See Rasimus 2010a and 2010b.

*Zostrianos* itself. All these documents contain a developed version of the triad.<sup>5</sup> Next, I will analyze Neopythagorean monistic derivational schemes, developed from the first or second century BCE onwards. These were important precursors to the being-life-mind triad but, as of yet, show no traces of the triad itself. Finally, I will show that while a number of second-century CE sources from the “fringes” of Platonism (such as the *Chaldaean Oracles* and Valentinian texts) were greatly influenced by these Neopythagorean solutions, the Sethian *Apocryphon of John* shows a definite new development towards the being-life-mind triad, although it does not yet contain the systematized triad of the later documents. This early Sethian precursor to the triad grew out of the author’s peculiar interest in Johannine Christology and Genesis speculations, influenced by Neopythagorean monism which itself naturally abode well with biblical monotheism. The seeds of the triad sown in the *Apocryphon of John* then came to fruition in later Sethian texts, most notably in *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos* which circulated in Plotinus’ seminars. The maturation of the *Apocryphon’s* seminal speculations may have been partially catalyzed by a fruitful encounter between Sethians and the young Plotinus, with Plotinus himself most likely connecting the triad to the *Sophist* passage.

### 1. PLOTINUS AND THE BEING-LIFE-MIND TRIAD

Plotinus uses the being-life-mind (τὸ ὄν-ζωή-νοῦς) triad to describe the function and derivation of his second hypostasis.<sup>6</sup> While the first hypostasis, the One, is beyond being, intellect, and all opposition, the second hypostasis is a unity-in-multiplicity, a self-thinking intellect. The triad’s third member (νοῦς) denotes the thinking subject, the first member (τὸ ὄν) the object of its thinking, and the median member (ζωή) the thinking activity itself.<sup>7</sup> Without this mediating “life,” which is the vitalizing movement of thought, intellect could not exist. Indeed, “life” allows the very coming into being of the second hypostasis. Due to his insistence on the absolute transcendence

<sup>5</sup> I will not investigate the triad in Porphyry’s uncontested works, because I have done so elsewhere (Rasimus 2010a) and because I am here analyzing Hadot’s theory of the pre-Plotinian roots of the triad, which excludes Porphyry as a source. By Porphyry’s “uncontested works” I mean the Porphyrian corpus minus the *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary* and the 89 fragments Hadot (1968) identified in Victorinus’ works.

<sup>6</sup> See Hadot 1960, esp. 130–141.

<sup>7</sup> Hadot 1960, 130–132. See, e.g., *Enn.* 5.1 [10] 4; 6.7 [38] 13.28–42; 6.2 [43] 8.23–25. The text I have used is that of Henry-Schwyzler, reprinted in Armstrong 1966–1988.

of the One, Plotinus was faced with a dilemma: how could anything originate in the One if it is completely aloof and unaffected by everything else. Taking his inspiration in natural phenomena, as O'Meara has shown,<sup>8</sup> Plotinus noted, first, that all living things tend to procreate after they reach maturity or perfection.<sup>9</sup> Second, all productive things appear to have an external, secondary activity (ἐνέργεια) that is different from their internal, primary activity that in turn is proper to themselves. As examples of such secondary activities, Plotinus mentions the sun giving off light and fire giving off heat.<sup>10</sup> These phenomena, Plotinus reasons, must apply to the One as well. The One must produce something of itself as its secondary, external activity. Since the secondary activities are always something other than what is proper to the things producing them, the secondary activity of the One must be none other than *otherness* itself. Plotinus sometimes identifies this overflowing (ὑπερέρρῳ) otherness<sup>11</sup> as intelligible matter<sup>12</sup> or the indefinite dyad,<sup>13</sup> but sometimes calls it "life."<sup>14</sup> This "life," then, becomes the self-thinking intellect, having turned around to gaze intellectually at its source.<sup>15</sup> But because its ultimate source, the One, cannot actually be thought, the object of the intellect's gaze here is a thinkable and existing representation or image (εἰκῶν)<sup>16</sup> of the One, i.e., the intellect itself.<sup>17</sup>

Plotinus thus seems to place the being-life-mind triad outside and below the One, on the level of the second hypostasis.<sup>18</sup> While he at times speaks of the triad in a veiled or implicit manner,<sup>19</sup> examples of being, life, and mind expressed as a formulaic triad can be found, for example, in *Enn.* 1.6 [1] 7.12 (God is the cause of life and mind and being); *Enn.* 5.4 [7] 2.43–44 (being is not a dead thing, nor is it not life or not thinking); *Enn.* 5.6 [24] 6.20–22 (being is fulfilled when it has the form of thinking and living); *Enn.* 6.7 [38]

<sup>8</sup> O'Meara 1995, 63–64.

<sup>9</sup> *Enn.* 5.4 [7] 1.25–30.

<sup>10</sup> *Enn.* 5.1 [10] 6.28–35; 5.4 [7] 2.27–33.

<sup>11</sup> *Enn.* 5.2 [11] 1.7–13. Zeke Mazur (2010, *passim*, e.g., 90–106) has aptly called it "pre-noetic efflux."

<sup>12</sup> *Enn.* 2.4 [12] 5.

<sup>13</sup> *Enn.* 5.4 [7] 7–8.

<sup>14</sup> *Enn.* 6.7 [38] 17.6–43.

<sup>15</sup> *Enn.* 5.2 [11] 1.7–13; 6.7 [38] 17.6–43.

<sup>16</sup> *Enn.* 5.1 [10] 6–7. See also Mazur 2010, 140–141; and the conclusion to this essay.

<sup>17</sup> O'Meara 1995, 64.

<sup>18</sup> There are, however, certain passages (e.g., *Enn.* 3.9 [13] 1; 5.5 [32] 5; 6.8 [39] 16.34) where the One's transcendence seems to be compromised and where, consequently, the triad may be seen as having a seminal existence in the One.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. the occurrences given in note 51 below.



23.24–25 (the Good inspires thought, and living, and, if something cannot live, being); and *Enn.* 3.6 [26] 6.22–27 (unless real being is defined as being in every way ... *being will be lifeless and devoid of intellect*).

As this last example shows, Plotinus sometimes connects the triad with *Soph.* 248E–249A. Here is the passage from Plato:

But for heaven's sake, shall we let ourselves easily be persuaded that motion and life and soul and mind are really not present to absolute being (παντελῶς ὄν), that it neither lives (ζῆν) nor has intelligence (νοῦς), but awful and holy, devoid of mind, is fixed and immovable?

(ed. Burnet; trans. Fowler, slightly modified)

Here, then, are some additional examples of Plotinus' exegesis of the *Sophist* passage: In *Enn.* 5.9 [5] 10, Plotinus argues that real being is life, intelligence, motion, and rest; in *Enn.* 6.9 [9] 9, that the soul sees the spring of life and of intellect, the principle of being, the cause of good, and the root of soul; in *Enn.* 6.2 [43] 6, that the being of soul is both being and life, and it makes itself many by contemplation and movement; and in *Enn.* 1.8 [51] 2, that the Good gives from itself intellect, real being, soul and life.

Because Plotinus never justifies why only three items (i.e., being, life and mind) should be chosen from this passage, leaving thus *motion* and *soul* out of the actual, formal triad, and because he also uses the triad from his first *Ennead* onwards, never properly explaining or justifying its use, Hadot was led to the conclusion that Plotinus must have inherited the triad from an earlier piece of *Sophist* exegesis, and that it must have been an already well-known and classical device.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, there are certain other features in Plotinus' use of the triad that Hadot suspected were likewise part of the inherited exegesis. These are: (1) the use of the *Sophist* passage and the triad against Stoic materialism, (2) the triad's connection with the Aristotelian concept of the *living* nature of the divine *intellect* (*Metaph.* 12.7 1072B27), and (3) the triad's connection with *Tim.* 39E.<sup>21</sup>

Let us examine these three features in more detail. The first one essentially consists of the use of an anti-Stoic slogan, found also in Numenius.<sup>22</sup> According to it, true existence is not material and bodily, as the Stoics claim, because material, bodily objects like stones are dead. Rather, true existence

<sup>20</sup> Hadot 1960, 107, 110, 119, 130.

<sup>21</sup> Hadot 1960, 108–119, 130.

<sup>22</sup> See especially *frgs.* 4a.11–18 (des Places): matter or material bodies are not true being; bodies are inanimate and dead; and 6.6–7: the name of the incorporeal is essence or being (τὸ ὄν).

is its opposite: immaterial and not dead, and thus, by implication, alive.<sup>23</sup> Both Plotinus and Numenius identify this living, incorporeal and true existence as “being.” Such an anti-Stoic slogan—that true being is not corporeal and dead, but incorporeal and alive—is likely to have been a traditional Platonic *topos*.<sup>24</sup> So, from this statement arises the proposition that being is life.<sup>25</sup>

The second feature is an Aristotelian notion that defines intellect as life. In *Metaphysics* 12, Aristotle has this to say:

For the actuality of thought is life (ἡ γὰρ νοῦ ἐνέργεια ζωή), and God is that actuality; and the essential actuality of God is life most good (ζωὴ ἀρίστη) and eternal. (Metaph. 12.7 1072B26–28; ed. Ross; trans. Tredennick)

In *Enn.* 6.9 [9] 9.1–17, Plotinus, having first mentioned the noetic triad, speaks of life, in Aristotelian terms, as an *act of intellect* (τὸ δὲ ἐκεῖ ζῆν ἐνέργεια μὲν νοῦ). Elsewhere, Plotinus combines the notion with another Aristotelian one, that of the divine mind not sleeping:<sup>26</sup> “the nature there is sleepless (ἄγρυπνος), and life, and the *best life* (ζωὴ ἀρίστη), the noblest *actualities* (ἐνέργειαι) would be there” (*Enn.* 2.5 [25] 3.36–37). Both the Aristotelian notion of intellect as life and the anti-Stoic one of being as life were probably well-known to Middle Platonists. Interestingly, the *Sophist* passage confirms the veracity of both statements in that “life” is intimately connected to both true being and intellect.

While these first two features were more or less common knowledge, Plotinus’ exegesis of *Tim.* 39E originally owed much to Numenius. Here is, first, the passage from Plato’s *Timaeus*:

Intellect perceives the ideas existing in the truly living being (νοῦς ἐνούσας ἰδέας τῷ ὃ ἔστιν ζῶον); such and so many as exist therein he deemed (διεισήθη) that this world also should possess. (ed. Burnet; trans. Bury, modified)

Numenius, and following him Plotinus (in his early works),<sup>27</sup> concluded from the passage that beyond intellect there is the “living” one which is the object (νοητόν) of the intellect’s thinking. (They also discovered a third entity from this passage, existing on a lower plane than the other two, namely, the

<sup>23</sup> *Enn.* 4.7 [2] 9.23; 5.4 [7] 2.44. See Hadot 1960, 108–109.

<sup>24</sup> Hadot 1960, 108.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Hadot 1960, 113; Turner 2001, 409.

<sup>26</sup> *Metaph.* 12.9 1074B17: if the divine Mind thought nothing, it would be like someone who sleeps.

<sup>27</sup> Numenius, *frgs.* 20–22 (des Places); Plotinus, e.g., *Enn.* 3.9 [13] 1. Cf. also Amelius’ three intellects: he who is, he who has, and he who sees (*apud* Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.306.1–14). See Turner 2001, 387–388.

one who “deemed” or engaged in discursive, demiurgic thinking.) Again, *Soph.* 248E–249A seems to confirm such an interpretation. There, life is mentioned before intellect, which can be taken to mean that it also exists prior to the intellect. Although Plotinus later rejected such an interpretation (in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6.14–24) because it compromised the One’s transcendence and partitioned the intellect in three, he still maintained the connection between the “living one” of *Timaeus* and the “life” of the triad, placing now, however, “life” in the third place, thus, below intellect (esp. in *Enn.* 6.6 [34]).

All these three additional features that Hadot identified in Plotinus’ use of the being-life-mind triad appear to fall under the organizing principle of the *Sophist* passage. But must we assume that the triad which Plotinus does seem to have inherited came in this package of traditional notions about “life” and a Numenian interpretation of *Tim.* 39E, all perhaps already organized under the umbrella of *Soph.* 248E–249A?

Further, Hadot had originally suspected that the later Neoplatonic systematization of the triad into an ennead was also part of this inherited package, although it is missing from Plotinus.<sup>28</sup> This enneadic structuring, where each member of the triad already contains the other two, but predominates in turn, would have been inspired by the tripartitioning of *paideia* and of the philosophical curriculum, as found in Augustine’s use of a Platonic handbook in *Civ.* 8.4. The structuring would ultimately go back to the Stoics, whose theory of mixture by total blending was used to explain how the three parts of philosophy were ultimately one, and how virtue was ultimately one but manifested various aspects of itself (such as courage) under different circumstances.<sup>29</sup> Again, must we assume that such an enneadic structuring of the triad was part of the pre-Plotinian package, and that the enneadic structuring that we do find in post-Plotinian sources<sup>30</sup> was based on the tripartitioning of *paideia* and of the philosophical curriculum, ultimately inspired by the Stoic theory of mixture? In order to answer these questions, we must investigate the versions of the triad that are more or less contemporary with Plotinus but probably pre-date him, as well as the triad’s early precursors.

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<sup>28</sup> Hadot 1960, 121–130. See, however, the ensuing discussion (pp. 142–157, esp. 144–145) where Hadot admitted that the enneadic structuring of the triad is not actually attested before Victorinus (Hadot was unaware of the Nag Hammadi treatise *Allogenes*).

<sup>29</sup> Hadot 1960, 121–130; Hadot 1968, 1:239–246. See also Rasimus 2010b, 262–263.

<sup>30</sup> E.g., Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* 4.5.23–6.17; 4.21.26–22.6; Proclus, *El. Theol.* 103.

## 2. THE TRIAD IN SOURCES ROUGHLY CONTEMPORARY WITH PLOTINUS

None of the four roughly contemporary documents clearly connects the being-life-mind triad to *Soph.* 248E–249A. They also seem to be lacking any direct attack against Stoic materialism and an exegesis of Aristotle’s *Metaph.* 12.7 1072B27. However, influence of a Numenian-style interpretation of *Tim.* 39E can be detected, and the triad itself is well developed in all these documents, although it differs in some cases considerably from Plotinus. Perhaps the most striking difference is the use of the term “existence” (ὑπαρξις), in these texts to denote the first member of the triad; this seems to imply a pre-, hyper-, or non-existence above determinate being (τὸ ὄν) that is already seminally present within the One.

### 2.1. *The Anonymous Parmenides Commentary*

In the *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary*<sup>31</sup>—ascribed by Hadot to Porphyry, but nowadays increasingly regarded as pre-Plotinian<sup>32</sup>—the use of the triad comes close to Plotinus in many ways. In order for the intellect to think itself, the thinking must proceed out of existence (the object of intellect) via life to that which thinks (the subject, intellect itself), and turn back towards the object of its thought, that is, itself. These three stages are also all described as acts (ἐνέργεια), with existence being an act of rest, life that of passing out of existence, and mind an act of turning to itself (14.16–26). It is not quite certain whether this triad is imagined as existing only on the level of the second hypostasis (the second One or the “One-Being”), as usual in Plotinus, or as connecting the first and second ones, as seems to be the case in the Sethian texts. On one hand, the anonymous author states that whereas the One is simple and one in relation to itself, it is not simple and one on the level of existence and life and intelligence (14.10–16). But on the other hand, the first One’s transcendence seems to be somewhat compromised by allowing it to have an infinitival, undetermined being (εἶναι) as opposed to the second One’s participial, determined being (τὸ ὄν) (12.22–35).

<sup>31</sup> The only known manuscript of this fragmentary work was lost in a fire in 1904, but it had been already published in 1892 by Kroll. Subsequent editions and translations are based on Kroll’s edition and one photograph of the original manuscript. See especially Hadot 1968, 2:61–113; and Bechtle 1999, 17–65. I have used Bechtle’s edition.

<sup>32</sup> Hadot 1961; 1968, 1:102–143. See also Majercik 1992; 2001. For arguments for the pre-Plotinian dating, see Bechtle 1999, e.g., 77–91; Corrigan 2000; Turner 2001, 724–736; Cazelaïs 2005, esp. 209–212; and Rasimus 2010a.

In addition, the second One is said to have “let itself down from the (first) One” (ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐνὸς γεγονὸς ὑφειμένον) (12.15–16), which might be taken to imply that it had a seminal, pre-figurative existence within the first One. If this is the case, then at least the second One’s highest instance, the “existence,” could be seen as somehow coeval and identical with the first One, or rather with its undetermined existence above determined being. In its use of the noetic triad, the *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary* thus resembles Plotinus, especially his early works, which also compromised the One’s transcendence (e.g., *Enn.* 3.9 [13] 1).

## 2.2. *The Source Common to Victorinus and Zostrianos*

Michel Tardieu discovered in 1996 that a section in Marius Victorinus’ *Adversus Arium* (1.49.7–50.21) is practically identical with material found in certain sections of *Zostrianos*.<sup>33</sup> Tardieu proposed that the parallel material indicates a common, Middle Platonic source, probably by Numenius.<sup>34</sup> As a result of the discovery, Hadot himself admitted that at least this section in Victorinus cannot go back to Porphyry,<sup>35</sup> but very probably to a Middle Platonic source that could well have been Gnostic or Gnosticized.<sup>36</sup> Tardieu further suggested that the common source is earlier than the *Anonymous Parmenides Commentary* because the latter may be dependent on both the common source and the *Chaldaean Oracles*.<sup>37</sup> Be that as it may, the section in Victorinus (thus, the common source) first describes the One as a pre-existent Monad, who has no existence, substance or intelligence, but is beyond all these (*Adv. Ar.* 1.49.7–18). He is rather said to be the first cause of all existent things, and an intellect beyond intellect (1.49.26–29). But he is also described as the truly existing one, who contains in him the totality of existing ones (1.49.36–37). He is then characterized also as God and Father, and a triple-powered (*tripotens*) Spirit (1.50.1–6), who, both not breathing and breathing towards himself (1.50.5–7), is one and simple but also unites

<sup>33</sup> Tardieu 1996. The parallel material is found in *Zost.* 64.11–68.26; 74.8–21; 75.6–24; 84.18–22.

<sup>34</sup> Tardieu 1996, 112–113.

<sup>35</sup> Hadot had earlier (1968) maintained that Victorinus was completely dependent on Porphyry in his use of Neoplatonic materials. Hadot identified some 89 sections in Victorinus’ theological works that he suggested were borrowed from Porphyry. I have argued (Rasimus 2010a) that while Porphyry may be Victorinus’ principal source, the innovative ideas found in the sections in question cannot originate with Porphyry but more likely with the Sethians.

<sup>36</sup> Hadot 1996.

<sup>37</sup> See Tardieu 1996, 100–101.

in himself universal existence, universal life and blessedness (*existentiam omnem, vitam omnem, et beatitudinem*) (1.50.10–11). By predominance the power of existence contains in itself the powers of life and blessedness (1.50.12–14). It is also said to contain “vitality” (*vitalitas*) and the capacity “to live” (*vivere*) (1.50.14–21). This idea, though not formulated explicitly as in *Allogenes* 49.26–38 or Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* (*Institutio theologica*) 103, suggests the author may have thought of his triad also as an ennead, where each member contains the other two but predominates in turn, and where degrees of hierarchy are expressed with cognates of the same word (e.g., “to live,” “vitality” and “life”—the method of paronyms).<sup>38</sup> Such enneadic structuring may well be inspired by the Stoic theory of mixture by total blending,<sup>39</sup> of which the tripartitioning of *paideia* and philosophy, as well as the mutual implication of virtues, would be applications. The usage, however, of these applications themselves in the Platonic handbook known to Augustine seems irrelevant for the being-life-mind triad, as these Augustinian triads (*pars naturalis–pars rationalis–pars moralis; causa subsistendi–ratio intelligendi–ordo vivendi; natura–doctrina–usus*)<sup>40</sup> are quite different from our noetic one.<sup>41</sup>

The source common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos* effectively describes the One itself as consisting of a triad of existence, life, and blessedness (including various degrees of life). The One here is a hyper-existent Spirit, who seminally contains not only life and blessedness but also the totality of everything. This description seems to be based, in part, on the Stoic concepts of God as a fiery spirit seminally containing the cosmos between the world cycles,<sup>42</sup> and of the tensile movement of the spirit (ultimately a breathing-metaphor), which, when expanding outward, produces quantity and quality, while its inward contraction produces unity and substance (Nemesius, *Nat. hom.* §18).<sup>43</sup> However, there is also probable Johannine influence at work in that the Fourth Gospel describes God as a Spirit (4:24) who has “life in him” (5:26; cf. 1:4). I shall discuss the Johannine contribution to the noetic triad in more detail below. Needless to say, the source common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos* uses the triad quite differently from Plotinus

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Turner 2001, 742.

<sup>39</sup> See Rasimus 2010b, 262–263.

<sup>40</sup> Hadot 1960, 123.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Hadot 1960, 143–145 (discussion).

<sup>42</sup> See, for example, Aëtius, *De placitis reliquiae* 1.7.33 (SVF 2.1027); Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 7.135–136 (SVF 1.102); Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 15.14.2 (SVF 1.98).

<sup>43</sup> Hadot 1968, 1:225–234; Turner 2001, 740; Rasimus 2010b, 261–262.



the One and turns around to gaze at itself as the intellect, and even more the later Neoplatonic scheme of permanence-procession-and-return (μo-νῆ-πρόδος-ἐπιστροφή), which adds the idea of a seminal existence within the source.<sup>50</sup> In *Zost.* 15.1–17, the three phases of Barbelo's emergence are further connected with the Spirit's triple-power of existence, blessedness and life. This probably means that the three moments of Barbelo's exteriorization coincide with these three powers. At the very least, her first, hidden moment seems to be identical with the Spirit's first power, the (pre-existing) existence. Here, as elsewhere in *Zostrianos* (and in Plotinus), there is variation in the order of the second and third powers,<sup>51</sup> but probably they, too, should be taken as corresponding to phases in Barbelo's exteriorization, i.e., her manifestation and self-establishment. Barbelo's tripartitioning also seems to correspond to a tripartitioning of intellect.<sup>52</sup> Her first moment is a self-duplication of the Spirit's knowledge, the last moment that of self-knowledge, while the median one is often called the first-manifesting intellect (πρωτοφάνης ἡγεῖος ἦνος).<sup>53</sup> In relation to earlier Sethian mythology (e.g., *Ap. John*) where the Spirit, Barbelo and Autogenes form a father-mother-son triad, in *Zostrianos* the son-figure has been absorbed into the aeon of Barbelo as its third phase, and, to an extent, even been replaced by another, ambiguous figure, the Triple Male Child.<sup>54</sup> In fact, the pattern of Barbelo's tripartitioning seems to have been superimposed on the father-mother-son triad, in that her first moment coincides with the father (Spirit) and the third one with the son (Autogenes), while she herself properly speaking is the median entity, the first-manifesting intellect. The fact that specifically this median, πρωτοφανῆς aeon is identified as intellect may be due to an influence of a Numenian-style reading of *Tim.* 39E, where the contemplating intellect (intellect proper) occupies the median place in the scheme of three intellects.

<sup>50</sup> See Krämer 1967, 312–337; Turner 2001, 395, 423.

<sup>51</sup> The so-called “canonical order” (being-life-mind) is attested, e.g., in *Zost.* 20.22–24; 66.16–17; 66.23–67.2; 68.1–7; 73.8–11; 75.7–10; 79.10–15; 86.15–22; and in Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6 [1] 7.11–12; 5.4 [7] 2.17–18; 5.4 [7] 2.43–44; 6.9 [9] 2.24; 5.6 [24] 6.20–22; 3.6 [26] 6.10–17; 3.6 [26] 6.23–24; 5.5 [32] 1.38; 6.6 [34] 9.27–29; 6.7 [38] 23.22–25; 5.3 [49] 16.38–42; 1.8 [51] 2.5–7. The so-called “non-canonical order” (being-mind-life) is attested, e.g., in *Zost.* 14.13–14; 15.5–11; 15.13–17; and in Plotinus, *Enn.* 1.6 [1] 7.12; 5.9 [5] 10; 6.9 [9] 9; 3.9 [13] 6.3–6; 6.4 [22] 3.31–35; 5.6 [24] 6.20–22; 3.6 [26] 6.23–24; 3.6 [26] 7.7–8; 3.8 [30] 8.8–12; 3.8 [30] 10.1–2; 5.5 [32] 10.12–14; 6.6 [34] 8.1–2; 6.6 [34] 8.9–10; 6.6 [34] 8.11–13; 6.6 [34] 8.15–17; 6.6 [34] 8.17–23; 6.6 [34] 9.29–32; 6.6 [34] 15.1–3; 6.6 [34] 18.35–36; 6.6 [34] 18.51–53; 6.7 [38] 13.42–43.

<sup>52</sup> See Turner 2001, 533–539.

<sup>53</sup> E.g., *Zost.* 44.27–29; 54.19–20; 124.21–22; 129.4–5; *Allogenes* 45.33–35; 58.16–18.

<sup>54</sup> See Turner 2000, 103–107.



In *Allogenes*, the divine hierarchy and the exteriorization of Barbelo are described in a manner very similar to *Zostrianos*.<sup>55</sup> The main difference is the stronger emphasis on the Triple-Power, which John Turner takes here as a separate, median hypostasis between the Invisible Spirit and Barbelo.<sup>56</sup> In addition, the author of *Allogenes* has arranged the noetic triad into a clear ennead, where, as noted above, each member contains the other two but predominates in turn, and where the degrees of hierarchy are expressed with the method of paronyms:

He is Vitality (ΤΗΝΤΩΝῆ < ζωότης), and Mentality (ΤΗΝΤΕΙΜΕ < νοήτης) and That-Which-Is (ΠΕΤΑΘΟΙ < ὀντότης/οὐσιότης). For then That-Which-Is constantly possesses its Vitality and Mentality (νοήτης), and (...) Vitality possesses non-Being and Mentality. Mentality possesses Life and That-Which-Is. And the three are one, although individually they are three.<sup>57</sup>

The *locus classicus* of this kind of arrangement of the triad is Proposition 103 of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, and earlier scholarship generally thought it to be a post-Plotinian invention. However, Tardieu's discovery of the source common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus (where existence contains life and blessedness and "to live" and "vitality"), as well as the explicit and clear occurrence of the ennead in *Allogenes*, seems to vindicate Hadot's original suspicion that the enneadic structuring of the triad was a pre-Plotinian invention. While *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes* do not appear to connect the being-life-mind triad to *Soph.* 248E–249A in any way, Zeke Mazur has shown that the two texts do contain traces of exegesis of other *Sophist* passages for other purposes.<sup>58</sup> This might mean that the Sethian authors purposefully avoided connecting the triad to *Soph.* 248E–249A, perhaps exactly because they had derived it from elsewhere.

<sup>55</sup> See especially *Allogenes* 45.8–46.35.

<sup>56</sup> See Turner 2000, 81–94.

<sup>57</sup> The Coptic text is emended slightly by both Turner (1990, 200–201, 252–253) and Funk (2004, 198, 246–247). But while both editors prefer to drop the extraneous word πωνῆ at 49.31 (Turner drops also the following εογῆτε; Funk keeps it but drops the preceding λγω), Funk conserves the ἡτηντατοιγια at 49.32–33 ("non-Being") *pace* Turner who had emended it to ἡτοιγια ("Being"). According to Funk and Poirier, the "non-Being" could be taken as an equivalent of ἡτηντατοιγια ("non-substantial existence") occurring later at 53.31–32. Thus, the passage at *Allogenes* 49.26–38 would be perfectly in line with the *locus classicus* in Proclus, *El. Theol.* 103 (Funk and Poirier 2004, 247). For the underlying Greek terms, see Turner 1990, 252–253; and Majercik 1992, 481–482. Νοήτης (possibly a corruption—or "strange neologism," as Turner puts it—of νοότης) occurs as such in the Coptic (*Allogenes* 49.30–34).

<sup>58</sup> Mazur 2012.

### 3. PRE-PLOTINIAN PRECURSORS TO THE TRIAD

We have thus far seen that the triad is found in a well-developed form in four documents that are roughly contemporary with, though probably slightly earlier than, Plotinus. All these documents seem to compromise the transcendence of the One by allowing it to have at least undetermined, seminal existence (Plotinus, in his early works, had also compromised the One's transcendence by allowing it to be noetic, e.g., in *Enn.* 3.9 [13] 1). With the exception of the common source, which, however, Victorinus and *Zostrianos* probably preserve only partially, these documents describe this seminal existence proceeding out and establishing itself as the second hypostasis (the second One or Barbelo). But since all four texts contain a well-developed form of the triad, we are still far from solving the problem of the origins of the triad itself. However, as all variants of the triad we have examined so far are used to explain the derivation of multiplicity from unity, we must turn to the Neopythagoreans who invented monistic derivation *per se*.

#### 3.1. *The Monistic Neopythagoreans*

Pythagoras and the Old Pythagoreans, as well as Plato and the Old Academics, were dualists. They derived multiplicity from the interaction of two primordial principles, known variously as, for example, form and matter, monad and dyad, or limit and unlimited.<sup>59</sup> But the Neopythagoreans, starting perhaps in the second century BCE, came up with the notion that everything, even the dyad or matter, must derive from one single principle. The reasons behind this innovative notion remain obscure, but one could hypothesize that the tetractys had much to do with it. Greek mathematics had a strong visual aspect to it. Arranging small pebbles (*calculus* in Latin) in patterns was an important part of learning arithmetic.<sup>60</sup> The tetractys itself consists of four rows of points (or pebbles) in the shape of a triangle, with the top row consisting of only one point or pebble:

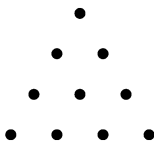


Figure 1: The Pythagorean Tetractys

<sup>59</sup> See Turner 2001, 305–343.

<sup>60</sup> Critchlow 1988, 11.

This shape alone could suggest that the dyad, represented by the two pebbles of the second row, must be subordinate to the monad. Further, applied to geometry, the four rows of the tetractys correspond to point, line, plane and solid.<sup>61</sup> Since solids are three-dimensional bodies (cf. *Tim.* 31B–32C), and the sense-world is made up of these, one could theoretically work one's way up from this three-dimensional, fourth level of sensible bodies, arriving thus at the conclusion that there is something unitary beyond the fourth, third and second levels of body, soul and intellect, respectively. Yet additional hypotheses could be brought forward. Some of the earliest evidence of monistic Neopythagoreanism comes from Alexandria, where it may indeed have originated.<sup>62</sup> The city had a somewhat important Jewish minority, as well as ready access to native Egyptian myths. Knowledge of biblical monotheism and monistic Egyptian cosmogonies such as the Heliopolitan one<sup>63</sup> may have been additional sources of inspiration for Neopythagorean monism. Finally, one cannot rule out the possibility of influence of the *Parmenides* and the One of its first hypothesis.<sup>64</sup>

Whatever the reason behind it, the monistic tendency brought about a new problem: how to derive that fertile duality from original unity? Or, to put it bluntly, how to make two out of one? As the evidence shows, the Neopythagorean thinkers had already come up with all the basic answers, and they can be divided, on the basis of Krämer's classification, into three groups: (1) duplication, (2) division, and (3) exteriorization.<sup>65</sup> We may think of them as basic metaphors underlying the sometimes complex solutions. One should also note Einar Thomassen's suggestion that old myths, such as Orphic cosmogonies, may have been used to justify the paradigm shift from dualistic to monistic models.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>61</sup> See, e.g., Pseudo-Iamblichus, *Theol. arith.* 29.

<sup>62</sup> Eudorus came from Alexandria, and his near-contemporary Philo of Alexandria was likewise influenced by Neopythagorean monism (see Dillon 1996, 114–183). Cf. Huffman 1999, 67, "Neopythagoreanism ... started in the first century B.C. in Rome and Alexandria."

<sup>63</sup> See, e.g., Hart 1990, 9–28; Lesko 1991, 88–122.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. Whittaker 1969; Turner 2001, 352, 371–372.

<sup>65</sup> Cf. Krämer 1967, 320: "a) Die Monas erzeugt die Dyas durch Selbstverdoppelung und Selbstaddition ... gleichsam einen Akt metaphysischer Arithmetik; b) Die Dyas tritt in einer nicht weiter begründeten Separation aus der Monas heraus und setzt sich von ihr ab und ihr gegenüber ... wie sie den auch in der Folge als Prinzip der Trennung und Entzweiung auftritt ...; c) Das Heraustreten wird genauer als Emanzipation einer Ur-Bewegung verstanden, die in der Monas virtuell enthalten war und die sich beispielweise in der Lehre vom 'Fluß' ... der aus dem monadischen Punkt hervorgehenden Linie (Dyas) äußert."

<sup>66</sup> Thomassen 2006, 307. The appearance of Phanes from the egg would thus justify models utilizing the exteriorization metaphor. One could then hypothesize further that the myth of the splitting of the primal androgyne (e.g., in Plato, *Symp.* 189D–193D; and even Gen 1–2)

The earliest datable testimony of this monistic tendency comes from around 80 BCE, when Alexander Polyhistor (*apud* Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 8.24–33) summarized a Pythagorean doctrine of first principles. According to it, the principle of all things is the monad, out of which arises the indefinite dyad as matter. From these two, then, arise number and everything else. Here the precise nature of the derivation is left unexplained, but according to another summary of Pythagorean doctrine by Sextus Empiricus (*Math.* 10.261), the monad, when conceived in otherness (as opposed to self-identity), is added to itself and thus gives rise to the dyad—an example of the duplication metaphor. Sextus also knows of another Pythagorean doctrine, which derives everything from the point (10.282). This presupposes the geometrical extension of point into line, which spreads out to a plane, and finally expands into a solid. It is thus an expression of the exteriorization metaphor. A somewhat similar idea is present in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies* (224.34 Rehm et al.), according to which the monad gave rise to the dyad through the process of extension (ἔκτασις) and contraction (συστολή). This process is, effectively, the Stoics' tonic movement of the *pneuma*, whose outward expansion produces quantity and quality, while its inward contraction produces unity and substance (Nemesius, *Nat. hom.* §18). This Stoic concept seems to be used by other Neopythagoreans, too, to explain the mechanics of monistic derivation (see below).

All these *testimonia* presuppose that the dyad arises directly out of the monad in which it must have had some sort of seminal existence (cf. Nicomachus in Pseudo-Iamblichus, *Theol. arith.* 3), by means of some arithmetic duplication or geometrical extension. However, another monistic model, which places a unitary principle above both monad and dyad as the ultimate source of both, is encountered in Eudorus of Alexandria (*apud* Simplicius, *In Phys.* 181.10–30 Diels) in the first century BCE as well as in the teachings of Archytas, Archaenetus (who maybe the same as Archytas) and Brotinus.<sup>67</sup> For them, the ultimate principle, instead of containing the dyad seminally in itself, altogether transcends both monad and dyad. The exact mechanism of derivation is, unfortunately, left unclear.

However, Moderatus' (first century CE) exposition of the first principles, which is preserved by Simplicius (*In Phys.* 230.34–231.27 Diels), may

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could have been used to justify a use of the division metaphor, and the story of Narcissus to justify a use of the duplication (by mirror) metaphor encountered in Gnostic sources (*Ap. John, Eugnostos, Soph. Jes. Chr.*; for the mirror metaphor, see below).

<sup>67</sup> See Dillon 1996, 117–121.

shed light on these earlier schemes involving a wholly transcendent first principle. Simplicius' testimony consists of two passages of which the former (230.34–231.5) greatly resembles Plotinus' world view, while the latter (231.5–27) is transmitted through Porphyry and is not only different from the first but also clearly Neopythagorean in outlook. While some scholars have defended the authenticity of the whole account,<sup>68</sup> Hubler has argued that Simplicius, in the first passage, has interpreted Moderatus' teaching in light of Neoplatonic ideas, and that only the latter passage transmitted by Porphyry may be authentic.<sup>69</sup> However, despite the probable Neoplatonic filter present in the first passage, one should not completely dismiss its contents as inauthentic. In any case, according to the first, Neoplatonizing passage, Moderatus posited three Ones, below which lies the realm of nature. The first One is beyond being and essence—presumably also beyond intellect<sup>70</sup>—while the second One is truly existent and, as the object of intellection, to be identified with the forms. The third One is the level of soul and it participates in the first and second Ones. Nature below does not participate in the higher levels, but is a mere reflection of them, with sensible matter (or nature)<sup>71</sup> being a shadow cast forth by non-being, which is the primal quantity. While all this is known later from Plotinus, the basic four-level world view could have been derived from speculations on the tetractys, perhaps with the help of the *Parmenides*, as suggested above.

The second passage is of even more interest to us, not only because it is probably more authentic than the first one, but also because it concerns the actual ontogenesis of the first principles. According to this somewhat puzzling account, the Unitary Logos (ὁ ἐνιαῖος λόγος) wished to produce the origin of beings out of itself. It withdrew itself (κατὰ στέρησιν αὐτοῦ)—a division metaphor—and thus left room for (ἐχώρησε) the primal quantity, depriving it of all its *logoi* and forms. This resulted in the separation of form and matter (231.15–18). Indeed, forms constitute the second One, and the archetype of matter (cf. Plotinus' intelligible matter) is quantity (see 230.34–231.5). Thus, the end result of the withdrawal-process brings us to the level of the second One. But what about the starting point; what is the Unitary Logos and towards what does it withdraw? Clearly this Logos originally contained in itself both forms and matter. While John Turner suggests that the Unitary Logos is the second One which, due to its withdrawal, gave rise to the first

<sup>68</sup> Especially Dodds 1928; and Dillon 1996, 347–351.

<sup>69</sup> Hubler 2010.

<sup>70</sup> Thus Dillon 1996, 348.

<sup>71</sup> See Hubler 2010, 122.

One,<sup>72</sup> I feel Gerald Bechtle is closer to the answer in suggesting that the whole description concerns the second level, and that the Unitary Logos corresponds to the One-Being of Plato's *Parmenides*. The withdrawal would then have to be imagined as a removal of the "one-ish" element from the compound One-Being, leaving thus mere being behind as undetermined, unlimited quantity.<sup>73</sup> I think this is essentially correct. I would suggest, however, that the withdrawal be understood as the systolic (contracting) phase of the Stoic tonic movement, which produces unity and substance, whereas the diastolic expansion back towards matter produces quantity and quality.<sup>74</sup> If I am right, the direction of this withdrawal-contraction must then be somehow "inwards," perhaps to be understood as a movement towards the first One, the source of unity *par excellence*. Moderatus' solution would then be similar to that of Eudorus in positing a first One beyond the monad and dyad on the second level.

Perhaps the most important source for Neopythagorean monistic derivational solutions is the pseudo-Iamblichean *Theologumena arithmeticae*. This work quotes extensively from Nicomachus' work by the same name.<sup>75</sup> For Nicomachus (first half of the second century CE),<sup>76</sup> the first principle is God and a self-producing monad who seminally (*σπερματικῶς*) contains everything (3.2–3 de Falco). In fact, this monad is androgynous, and through division (*διφορηθῆῖσα*) gives birth to the dyad, to male and female (4–5). Here, the division and exteriorization metaphors work in unison, and have a clear aspect of sexual reproduction imagery. Another passage then explains how the dyad was the first to separate itself (*διεχώρισεν*) from the monad, whence its name "daring" (*τόλμα*) (9.5–6). The dyad is also characterized as a movement towards being, the coming-to-be and extension from a seminal principle (*κίνησις γὰρ εἰς τὸ εἶναι ἐστὶν αὐτῆ καὶ ὅον γένεσις τις ἀπὸ λόγου σπερματικοῦ (καὶ) ἔκτασις*; 13.15). The dyad is even said to have caused the procession (*πρόσοδος*) of the monad (13.7). Indeed, the dyad is compared to the turning-point (*καμπτήρ*) in a "procession-and-return" (*προόδου καὶ ἐπανόδου*) race from the monad as the starting point (*ὑσπληξ*) to the monad as the finishing line (*νύσσα*) (9.21–22). This language suggests the presence of something like the procession-and-return scheme in Nicomachus' thinking,<sup>77</sup> although the logic here seems to be somewhat different. While in the

<sup>72</sup> Turner 2001, 365.

<sup>73</sup> Bechtle 1999, 218–219. Cf. also Hubler 2010.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Nemesius, *Nat. hom.* §18. See also section 2.2 above.

<sup>75</sup> See Waterfield 1988.

<sup>76</sup> See Dillon 1996, 352–361.

<sup>77</sup> As noted by Dillon 1996, 355–358.

Neoplatonic procession-and-return scheme the exteriorization culminates in the turning around and intellectually gazing at the source (which leads to self-constitution), in the Nicomachean version the culmination is an actual return into the source, not a gazing at it. This Nicomachean logic, however, comes as a natural consequence from a cosmic application of the Stoic tonic movement: between the world cycles the cosmos is seminally contained by God who then brings it out through expansion and condensation, with the cosmos ultimately returning back to him through contraction and dissolution.<sup>78</sup> The metaphors underlying the Neoplatonic scheme are different, and we shall deal with them below.

### 3.2. *The Chaldaean Oracles*

The *Chaldaean Oracles* are often classified as belonging to the “fringes” or “the underworld” of Middle Platonism.<sup>79</sup> While clearly Platonic in their world view, the *Oracles* also contain Stoic and Neopythagorean influence.<sup>80</sup> On top of the metaphysical hierarchy there is the famous triad of father, power and intellect. Later Neoplatonists interpreted the triad as an ennead where each member contains the other two but predominates in turn.<sup>81</sup> However, this sort of structuring does not appear to be fully developed in the surviving *Oracles* themselves. What we seem to have is a slightly different organization. The first principle is the father, the monad, who, while an intelligible (νοητόν), can only be apprehended super-intellectually, with the “flower of the mind” (*frg.* 1 Majercik). However, the father is a *triadic* monad (*frg.* 26), who already seminally or intelligibly contains power and intellect (cf. *frgs.* 3–4; 20–21). There is a close connection between the intellect and father as similar epithets are used of both. Each one is identified as “father,”<sup>82</sup> “intellect,”<sup>83</sup> and “fire,”<sup>84</sup> and *both* of them might be called *pater-*

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, Aëtius, *De placitis reliquiae* 1.7.33 (SVF 2.1027); Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 7.135–136 (SVF 1.102); Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 15.14.2 (SVF 1.98).

<sup>79</sup> See, e.g., Dillon 1996, 384–396.

<sup>80</sup> See Majercik 1989, 1–46. The Stoic influence is visible, for example, in the characterization of the first principle as “fiery” (*frgs.* 3 and 37). Numenian parallels are also often pointed out (Majercik 1989, 3n11; Dillon 1996, 392–396; Turner 2001, 390), e.g., between *Chaldaean Oracles*, *frgs.* 7 and 8, and Numenius, *frgs.* 17 and 15 (des Places), respectively. For other Neopythagorean influences, see the discussion below.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., Johannes Lydus, *De mensibus* 4.122.

<sup>82</sup> See *frgs.* 16; 50.

<sup>83</sup> See, e.g., *frgs.* 5; 7.

<sup>84</sup> See, e.g., *frgs.* 3; 5; 6.

nal intellects.<sup>85</sup> Their intimate relationship is also stressed in fragment 20, according to which “intellect does not exist without the intelligible, and the intelligible does not exist apart from intellect” (logical in itself). The median member of the triad, power, is then identified as Hecate and Rhea (e.g., *frgs.* 32; 35; 50; 56). Her “center” is said to be located “between the fathers” (μέσσον τῶν πατέρων Ἐκάτης κέντρον πεφορήσθαι; *frg.* 50) and she is a “membrane” (ὑπεζωκῶς) between them (*frg.* 6). The above-said thus gives us a starting point and the end result of the ontogenesis of the first *Chaldaean* principles: the starting point is the (first) father who seminally/intelligibly contains power and intellect. The end result is the triad where the power-Hecate is situated between the fathers, i.e., the first father and the intellect proper. The mention of her “center” being located between the fathers gives us a further clue as to how the author envisaged the interrelations in the triad. In fragment 167, “center” is defined as the center of a circle where the distance to the rim is equal in all directions. Since the center of Hecate is said to lie between the fathers, one has to understand the relationships of the three principles of father, Hecate-power, and intellect imagined as a series of interlocking circles, where the center of Hecate’s circle is situated at the exact point where the circles of father and intellect touch:

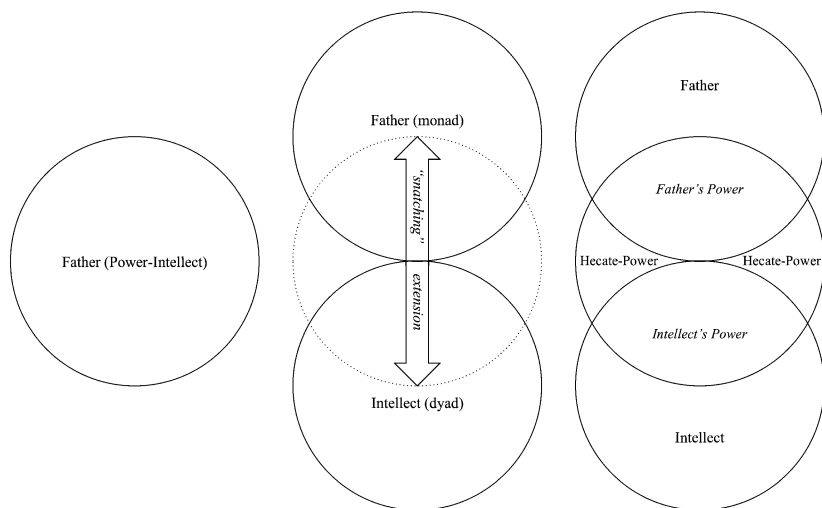


Figure 2: The Ontogenesis of the Supreme Triad in the *Chaldaean Oracles*

<sup>85</sup> Cf. *frgs.* 39; 49; 108; 109.



The process by which this end result is achieved is, on the one hand, explained as the monad (father) extending itself into a dyad (intellect)—a typical Neopythagorean derivation model (*frg.* 12). On the other hand, fragment 3 explains how the father “snatched himself away” (a division metaphor; cf. Moderatus’ “withdrawal”) and “did not enclose his own fire in his intellectual power.” I suggest that these two movements, extension and “snatching away,” are to be understood as the simultaneously occurring diastolic and systolic phases of the Stoic tonic motion, which, as we have seen, is used in Neopythagorean sources to explain the mechanics of monistic derivation.

Figure 2 also explains how the power is *with* (σύν) the father, but intellect is *from* (ἀπο) him (*frg.* 4): the circle of power is partially contained within that of the father (it is thus *with* him), whereas the circle of intellect is not; the latter does, however, derive *from* the father through his extension. A demonstration that such a system of circles is not a mere fancy is provided by the so-called Ophite diagram (known through descriptions by Celsus and Origen; see Origen, *Cels.* 6.24–38) that in a similar manner depicts the relationships among the first principles of a Gnostic system with interlocking circles.<sup>86</sup>

Monistic derivation is thus here imagined as having taken place through exteriorization (monad’s extension) and division (the snatching away) metaphors, interpreted in light of the Stoic tonic movement. The principle of mutual implication is included in the former metaphor in that the monad seminally contains everything, but the triad does not yet seem to be imagined as a complete enneadic and cyclic permutation in the *Oracles* themselves, although later Neoplatonic interpreters read such a notion in them. The *Chaldaean* triad does not, then, resemble very closely the being-life-mind triad: the terminology is different, the Plotinian/Neoplatonic procession-and-return scheme seems to be absent, and the *Oracles* use different metaphors and mechanics in their concept of monistic derivation, closely akin to what is found in Neopythagorean sources.

### 3.3. *Second-Century Christian Sources*

Neopythagorean influence is also found in Valentinian texts.<sup>87</sup> Certain Valentinian followers of Ptolemy (*apud* Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.1–8) describe the

<sup>86</sup> For reconstructions, see Rasimus 2009, 15–20, 244–255, and Tables 1–9.

<sup>87</sup> See especially Thomassen 2006, 269–314.

first principle as a pre-existing (προόντα) Forefather and Depth (βυθός) who exists (ὑπάρχοντα) invisibly and incomprehensibly (1.1.1 Rousseau-Doutreleau). There was disagreement among these Valentinians as to whether the Forefather-Depth originally existed alone or had been accompanied by his thought (ἔννοια), also called Silence (σιγή), i.e., whether the ultimate reality was monistic or dualistic (1.2.4).<sup>88</sup> The Forefather, in any case, decided to bring forth the beginning of all things through the thought and deposited his production in her, as if depositing a seed in the womb. The thought, as it were, became pregnant and gave birth to intellect (νοῦς) (1.1.1). The fact that intellect proper comes into being below the Forefather, implies that the latter is, at least somehow, pre-noetic.<sup>89</sup> In the Valentinian scheme in question, truth came into being along with intellect, and these four (forefather-depth, thought-silence, intellect, and truth) comprise the Pythagorean tetrad, i.e., the tetractys (1.1.1). Many Valentinians also connected their first principles to the Johannine prologue, perhaps deriving some of them from the prologue itself.<sup>90</sup>

Apart from alluding to the Pythagorean tetractys, Valentinians were also generally influenced by Neopythagorean derivational schemes in their protologies, as Einar Thomassen has shown.<sup>91</sup> Thomassen argues that the Valentinian protologies can be classed under two main types, A and B. Of these, type A is older, and was probably invented by Valentinus himself. It is a monistic system, whereas type B (including the Ptolemaean version discussed above) contains both monistic and dualistic variants.<sup>92</sup> The main derivational metaphor employed in type A—whose chief representatives are the *Gospel of Truth* and the *Tripartite Tractate*—is exteriorization. The first principle, Father, seminally contains the All in him as in a womb (in type A protologies the Father himself is or has a womb). Through his will, he manifests the All through the Son's self-extension and spreading out into the fully developed Pleroma.<sup>93</sup> Thomassen further suggests that the *Tripartite Tractate* (probably a third-century text) employs the procession-and-return scheme in a fairly long description of the Pleroma's exteriorization and

<sup>88</sup> The terms βυθός and σιγή are also found in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, frgs. 18 and 16, respectively.

<sup>89</sup> A similar notion is found among the followers of Basilides (*apud* Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.24.3).

<sup>90</sup> See Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.8.5; Clement, *Exc.* 6.1–7.3. See recently Thomassen 2006, 211–218 (with reference to further bibliography in 211n24, 213n27); and Rasimus 2010c, 158–169.

<sup>91</sup> Thomassen 2006, 269–314.

<sup>92</sup> Thomassen 2006, 263–268.

<sup>93</sup> Thomassen 2006, 261–268, 291–293.

constitution out of its original hiddenness within the Father (51.8–67.34).<sup>94</sup> The actual being-life-mind triad, however, is not found in Valentinian texts.<sup>95</sup>

While Valentinians employed the exteriorization metaphor, especially one based on embryological and childbirth imagery, another derivational scheme is encountered in other second-century Christian sources. As Krämer and Mazur have noted, Simonians and Naassenes, among others, entertained a notion according to which the first principle duplicated through self-manifestation, achieved by self-reflection.<sup>96</sup> How exactly this was envisaged is not clear in these sources, but the Classic Gnostic tractates *Eugnostos* and its rewriting *Sophia of Jesus Christ* use similar imagery and explain that the reflexive self-manifestation of the first principle appeared in a mirror.<sup>97</sup> This is an important notion developed in the closely related *Apocryphon of John*,<sup>98</sup> and derives from speculations about the image (εἰκὼν) of God in Genesis (see below). Despite the emphasis on negative theology,<sup>99</sup> the first principle in *Eugnostos* and *Sophia of Jesus Christ* remains an intellect (“He is all mind, thought and reflecting, considering, rationality and power”).<sup>100</sup> This is, of course, common for pre-Plotinian thinkers. While no clear traces of the being-life-mind triad are found in these second-century Christian texts, the monistic derivational schemes based on childbirth and mirror metaphors are important precursors to the Neoplatonic procession-and-return scheme, and we shall discuss them shortly in more detail.

### 3.4. Numenius

Although a Neopythagorean, Numenius (*floruit* ca. 150 CE) remained a dualist.<sup>101</sup> For Numenius, matter is a principle independent from God, and as such, evil (*frg.* 52 des Places). Numenius envisaged three gods, or three intellects, which he derived at least partially from *Tim.* 39E, as we have seen, perhaps partially also from the *Second Letter* 312E, and even from the first three hypotheses of *Parmenides*.<sup>102</sup> Strictly speaking, the three seem to be merely

<sup>94</sup> Thomassen 2006, 298–307.

<sup>95</sup> As noted by Thomassen 2006, 305.

<sup>96</sup> Krämer 1967, 254–264; Mazur 2010, 232–238.

<sup>97</sup> Also noted by Mazur 2010, 234.

<sup>98</sup> For the Classic Gnostic character of *Eugnostos* and *Soph. Jes. Chr.*, and for their close relationship to the *Apocryphon of John*, see Rasimus 2009, esp. 9–62.

<sup>99</sup> *Eugnostos* NHC III 71.13–72.22 parr.

<sup>100</sup> πετῖμαγ γαρ οὐνοῦς τῆρῆ οὐενοια ηῆ οὐενογιησις ο(γ)φροησις ογλογιςμος ηῆ ογΔγ-ηησις (*Eugnostos* NHC III 73.8–11 Parrott; cf. V 3.10–13; *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 96.3–7; BG 86.16–19).

<sup>101</sup> See Dillon 1996, 361–379; des Places 2003, 7–36.

<sup>102</sup> Thus Turner 2001, 385.

aspects of the one god, who is eternally opposed to, but also constrains, the evil matter. The highest (aspect of) god is Good, primal intellect (πρώτον νοῦν) and essential being (αὐτόν) (*frgs.* 16–17). Numenius identifies this god with the “living one” of *Tim.* 39E, which, for Numenius, is above intellect proper. In fact, Numenius’ highest god intelligizes only by utilizing the second god (*frg.* 22) who is the contemplative intellect of *Tim.* 39E. Numenius then explains that this second god, intellect, was itself divided in two when it became preoccupied with matter. This split is the origin of the third god (as the lower aspect of the second), who, as we have already seen, does the “deeming” in the *Timaeus*-passage (see esp. *frg.* 22).

The origin of the second god is left slightly obscure, but it is said to be an imitator of the Good and be good by participating in the Good (*frgs.* 16; 20). Interestingly, the second god is said to self-produce its own idea (αὐτοποιεῖ τὴν τε ἰδέαν ἑαυτοῦ; *frg.* 16.10–11). What this means exactly is unclear, but similar language of *self*-constitution is found in connection with the being-life-mind triad in Plotinus and the Sethians when the proceeding “life” turns around to gaze at its source and self-establishes as the intellect or the *Autogenes* aeon. In that context, the self-constitution was preceded by an overflow (Plotinus) or a manifestation (Sethians) of something out of the first principle. Here in Numenius, we may assume that the second god arose out of a division of the object and subject of intellection into two separate entities (i.e., into first and second gods). Because Numenius was a dualist (he criticized those—Moderatus is probably in view here—who derive the dyad from the monad, *frg.* 52), it might be possible that some interaction between the two primordial principles, God and matter, was responsible for this higher-level split of the primal intellect into first and second gods (or into object and subject), similarly to what happened with the lower-level split of the second god in two.

Numenius thus presents a theory of three intellects, with the highest one existing beyond intellect proper, a concept at least partially based on *Tim.* 39E. The additional description of the first god having an innate “static motion,”<sup>103</sup> as opposed to the commonly accepted Aristotelian notion of the “unmoved mover,” may then in fact be based on *Soph.* 248E–249A and its concept of motion belonging to the true being, as John Dillon suggests.<sup>104</sup> As Numenius also utilized the anti-Stoic slogan (*frgs.* 4a.11–18; 6.6–7) encountered in Plotinus, he may be the main influence behind Plotinus’ connection

<sup>103</sup> *Frq.* 15.7–9: κινήσεως τὴν προσοῦσαν τῷ πρώτῳ στάσειν φημί εἶναι κίνησιν σύμφυτον.

<sup>104</sup> Dillon 1996, 368–369.

of the being-life-mind triad with these Platonic passages and to the anti-Stoic slogan. However, Numenius does not seem to know of the triad itself, although implicit, scattered traces may be found: the first god is essential being (ἀντοόν; *frg.* 17), the second one the intellect (νοῦς; *frg.* 22) of *Tim.* 39E, and when, as the third god, he looks towards the world, bodies live (ζῆν τε καὶ βιώσκεισθαι τότε τὰ σώματα; *frg.* 12). One could derive from these traces the so-called non-canonical order, sometimes found in Plotinus in somewhat similar contexts where he discusses the relations between the One, intellect and soul.<sup>105</sup> However, clearer traces of the triad, as well as of the mechanics behind the procession-and-return scheme can be found in the Classic Gnostic (Sethian) *Apocryphon of John*, which possibly even predates Numenius.<sup>106</sup>

### 3.5. The Apocryphon of John

The *Apocryphon of John*—which exists in four Coptic copies representing two slightly different recensions, and which is also known through a paraphrase by Irenaeus ca. 180 CE<sup>107</sup>—is presented as a revelation from the risen Christ to John the son of Zebedee, the putative author of the Fourth Gospel.<sup>108</sup> The revelation begins with a description of God, who is characterized as the Father of the all, the One, a unitary monad<sup>109</sup> and Invisible Spirit. The author then ascribes to him both negative and affirmative attributes. The One is said both to exist eternally (ἀεὶ),<sup>110</sup> and not to be someone among those who exist but superior to them.<sup>111</sup> He is “eternity-giving eternity.”<sup>112</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Turner 2001, 409–413.

<sup>106</sup> Irenaeus, ca. 180 CE, paraphrases a version of the *Apocryphon of John* (*Haer.* 1.29). For the dating of the Greek *Vorlagen* of the Coptic versions of the *Apocryphon of John* to the second century, see Logan 1996, xx, 26–69, 191, 283; and Turner 2001, 257–292. For its dating specifically to the first half of the second century in relation to the so-called Johannine schism, see Tardieu 1984, 10, 37–39; and Rasimus 2009, 255–277.

<sup>107</sup> The so-called short recension is found in NHC III,1 and BG 8502,2. The long recension is found in NHC II,1 and NHC IV,1. Irenaeus’ paraphrase is found in *Haer.* 1.29.1–4. The long recension is usually taken to be a later expansion of the short one. See Waldstein 1995b, 388–393; Barc and Painchaud 1999; and Turner 2001, 141.

<sup>108</sup> For the question of the authorship of the Fourth Gospel, as well as of the identity of the beloved disciple, see Brown 1966, lxxxvii–civ; Hengel 1989; Culpepper 1994; Dunderberg 2006.

<sup>109</sup> *Ap. John* II 2.26–27 (Waldstein-Wisse): τῆ[ο]νὰς [εὐγῆμοναρχία]; BG 22.17–18: [τῆντοῦ] ἀεγῆμοναρχία τε.

<sup>110</sup> *Ap. John* BG 24.2: εἶτωοοπ ἀεῖ; cf. BG 22.23–23.1: εἶ[τωοοπ ἡ] πογῶἰν ἡτῆββο (“he exists in pure light”).

<sup>111</sup> *Ap. John* BG 24.20–22: οὐλααγ (ἀ)ν επτηρη εἶτωοοπ ἀλλα οὐζωβ εἶσο[τπ] εροογ πε.

<sup>112</sup> *Ap. John* BG 25.13–14: πῶα ενεζ πρεφτ ἡτῆἡτῶα ενεζ; II 4.3: οὐλαω[η πε εφτ ἡογαιων]; IV 5.27: [οὐλαωη πε ε]φτ ἡἡογαιων.

He is also described as “life-giving life”<sup>113</sup> and “blessedness-giving blessedness,”<sup>114</sup> although he himself does not need life (BG 23.9) and is said to surpass blessedness (BG 24.10–13).<sup>115</sup> In other words, the One is the source of (eternal) being, life and blessedness, but is properly speaking itself beyond them, possessing higher, “hyper”-forms of these. The One is also said to *think* (νοεῖν) himself in his own (ἴδιον) light that surrounds him, which is the spring (πηγή) of spiritual, living water. In every direction he saw his own image (εἰκλών) in the surrounding water (BG 26.15–27.4). This is a duplication metaphor, namely, duplication by reproduction in a mirror, the surface of water being the most readily available mirror in the ancient world. However, as the whole process is here described as noetic, the image appeared as a thought. This first thought (τεροεργετῆ ἡνεννοῖα) is also identified as forethought or providence (πρόνοια), called Barbelo (BG 27.4–19). The short recension of the *Apocryphon of John* then specifies how Barbelo gazed intently into the Father, turning herself toward him.<sup>116</sup> This is, of course, part of the mirror metaphor: when you turn, your mirror image turns and when you look at it, it looks back at you. Barbelo, as a result of this (noetic) gaze, conceived<sup>117</sup> and gave birth to a spark of blessed (μακάριον) light. The light-spark is the self-generated (αὐτογενής) Son, the only-begotten (μονογενής) of the Father, who is Christ (BG 29.18–30.8).

Here another metaphor is introduced to ontogenetic derivation: conception of and giving birth to a child. In fact, this combination of metaphors seems to be presupposed also in the Neoplatonic procession-and-return scheme, although there it is one and the same entity who is born and turns back to gaze at its source, whereas in the *Apocryphon* one entity, Barbelo, gazes back (as a mirror image) and gives birth to another, the Son. Nonetheless, both metaphors seem to be at play in the Neoplatonic scheme: First, the idea of manifestation of an earlier hidden/seminal existence as a now separate, independent entity can easily be seen as a birth metaphor.<sup>118</sup> In terms of Krämer’s classification, this would be an instance of exteriorization (of a child from the womb). Second, whereas the idea that the newly

<sup>113</sup> *Ap. John* BG 25.15–16: πῶνε πρεφτ ὄνε.

<sup>114</sup> *Ap. John* BG 25.16–17: πμακαριος πρεφτ ἡτηῖτημακαριος.

<sup>115</sup> *Ap. John* BG 24.10–13: οὐδε νογηῖταῖατq αν πε νογηῖτηνογητε αν πε αλλα οὐρωβ εφσοτ[π] ηρογο εροογ πε; cf. II 3.21: οὐῖτημακ[αριος αν].

<sup>116</sup> Alternatively, the long recension (*Ap. John* II 6.9–10 par.) has the Father gaze at Barbelo, and no turning is presented.

<sup>117</sup> The notion of *conception* is only articulated in the long recension (*Ap. John* II 6.12–13 par.), which also treats Barbelo as a passive receptacle of the Father’s action and spark.

<sup>118</sup> Cf. Thomassen 2006, 293–314.

manifested entity *turns around to gaze at its source* cannot be easily derived from the birth metaphor, it does follow quite naturally from the mirror metaphor. The combination of these two metaphors thus seems to form the structure underlying the procession-and-return scheme, where the new entity self-establishes in three phases.

Interestingly, the *Apocryphon of John* offers an explanation as to why the two metaphors are combined in the first place to explain the ontogenesis of the supreme triad. As we saw above, the concept of a mirror image is expressed here by the term εἰκών.<sup>119</sup> Already Philo spoke of his “second God,” *Logos*, as the εἰκών of God.<sup>120</sup> In Philo, as well as in the *Apocryphon of John*, the εἰκών denotes, of course, the image of God after which Adam was created (Gen 1:26–27). Consequently, Barbelo, the εἰκών of God in the *Apocryphon of John*, is the androgynous First Man (BG 27.19–20). One biblical passage then specifically connects the notion of the first man as εἰκών with that of childbirth, namely, Gen 5:1–3, describing the birth of Seth: God created Adam in his image, and *Adam begot Seth in his own image*. Obviously, this passage was of great interest to Sethian Gnostics,<sup>121</sup> and speculation on the passage seems to provide a good explanation as to how the mirror image, the εἰκών (itself an instance of monistic derivation by duplication), can produce a son. While in the *Apocryphon of John* the son is Christ, and not Seth, the author of the *Apocryphon* was, nevertheless, influenced by (Sethian) Gnostic speculations about Seth: Seth is presented as a heavenly being and an originator of a special race, although he is here subjected to Christ.<sup>122</sup> This subjugation is most likely due to the author’s special interest in Johannine Christianity with its exclusive “Jesus Christology” (as opposed to Seth Christology).

In fact, the whole description of the triadic godhead and its ontogenesis in the *Apocryphon* seems to be an attempt to express the Johannine Father-Son relationship in a philosophical, specifically Neopythagorean, manner. In the Fourth Gospel, Jesus repeatedly expresses his essential identity with the Father: “Father and I are one” (John 10:30); “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” (10:38; 14:10–11); “who has seen me has seen the Father”

<sup>119</sup> One of the connotations of εἰκών is specifically that of a mirror image, e.g., in Plato, *Resp.* 3.402B. See LSJ, “εἰκών.”

<sup>120</sup> *Logos* as “(second) god”: *QG* 2.62; *Somn.* 1.229; *Logos* as εἰκών: e.g., *Opif.* 31; *Spec.* 1.81.

<sup>121</sup> See Stroumsa 1984, 49–53; Pearson 1990, 52–83; Turner 2001, 58–59, 230–238, 286.

<sup>122</sup> *Ap. John* BG 35.20–36.15; 63.14–64.13. For the change in the role of Seth, see Rasimus 2009, 198–202.

(14:9); “anyone who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him” (5:26); and, famously, in the prologue: “the Logos was with God, and the Logos was God” (1:1). Such statements, first of all, express mutual implication. But the Father-Son language also logically requires the presence of a mother-figure and thus, a triadic concept of godhead. In terms of Pythagorean-Platonic language, she would be the indefinite dyad, matter, or the receptacle, identified as a “mother” (μήτηρ) in Plato’s *Tim.* 50D—in the same passage, Plato identified forms as “father” and the phenomenal images as their “offspring.”<sup>123</sup> Similarly, Philo sometimes spoke of the Logos as the son of God and of Sophia,<sup>124</sup> with Sophia acquiring epithets of the receptacle from *Timaeus*.<sup>125</sup> One obvious candidate for the role of such a “mother”-figure in the Fourth Gospel would be “life” (ζωή) (a feminine word in Greek). There is, first of all, an intimate connection between the Son and life in the Fourth Gospel: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6); “I am the resurrection and the life” (11:25); “I am the bread of life” (6:35, 48; cf. the entire bread of life discourse in ch. 6); as well as “just as the Father has life in himself, thus he has granted the Son to have life in himself” (5:26) and the prologue’s “in him was life” (1:4).<sup>126</sup>

If one reads Johannine material together with the first chapters of Genesis, as we know the author of the *Apocryphon of John* did, one may easily be led to the conclusion that “life” is indeed a mother-figure: according to Gen 3:20 (LXX), Eve was called “life (ζωή) because she was the mother of all the living.” In fact, for the part of the *Apocryphon* that follows the description of the supreme godhead and describes the events in Eden instead,<sup>127</sup> the author has drawn heavily on the Ophite form of Classic Gnostic mythology that essentially presents God as an androgynous heavenly projection of Adam and Eve.<sup>128</sup> While the author of the *Apocryphon* has replaced such

<sup>123</sup> See Turner 2001, 310–314.

<sup>124</sup> Philo, *Fug.* 108–109.

<sup>125</sup> “Mother” (μήτηρ) in Philo, *Det.* 116 and Plato, *Tim.* 50D; “foster-mother” in Philo, *Det.* 115 (χοιροτρόφος) and Plato, *Tim.* 40B, 88D (τρόφος); and “wet-nurse” in Philo, *Det.* 115 (τιθηνοκόμος) and Plato, *Tim.* 49A, 52D, 88D (τιθήνη). See Dillon 1996, 164–165.

<sup>126</sup> The “him” in verse 4 seems to refer back to the Logos. In addition, whether or not the preceding ὁ γέγονεν in verse 3 belongs together with the ἐν αὐτῷ ζωὴ ἦν of verse 4 is debated (see, e.g., Brown 1966, 6–7; Haenchen 1984, 112–115). A Valentinian commentator, for example, took these verses to mean that Life was the syzygos of Logos, coming into being in him (see Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.8.5). John 5:26, however, shows that life was in the Father too, and hence could still be seen as a mother of the Logos.

<sup>127</sup> Especially *Ap. John* BG 47.14–64.13 parr.

<sup>128</sup> See Rasimus 2009, e.g., 10–14, 118–128, 151–154, 163–165.



an Ophite concept of godhead with his “Barbeloite” one (retaining, however, the essentials of the Ophite story of creation and fall), traces of the Ophite godhead are still visible in the *Apocryphon’s* Pythagorean-Johannine system, including the presentation of Barbelo.<sup>129</sup> According to the mythological, heavenly-court language employed by the author of the *Apocryphon*,<sup>130</sup> new entities have to ask for their own attributes from the Father which he then grants them. One of the attributes of Barbelo is “eternal *life*” (πΩΝΞ ΥΑ ΕΝΞΞ; BG 29.3–4), and consequently, as we have seen, the Father is described as a life-giving life (cf. John 5:21, 26; 7:38–39). In the Fourth Gospel, “life” is also regularly qualified as “eternal” (αἰώνιος).<sup>131</sup>

Later in the *Apocryphon’s* story, the spiritual Eve (ζωή) is sent to assist the earthly Adam in his struggle against the evil archons (BG 52.17–54.4). She is identified as “reflection (ἐπίνοια) of light,” as is Providence-Barbelo (BG 72.17–19); the spiritual Eve, “life,” can thus be seen as a cosmic manifestation of Barbelo, who herself is the ultimate and eternal life. Further, in the description of the appearance of Barbelo herself, the *living water* (μοογ κΩΝΞ; BG 26.18) served as the mediating mirror surface, the receptacle in which the Father’s image appeared.<sup>132</sup> The notion of *living water* is, of course, a well-known Johannine theme (John 4:10–14; 7:38–39).<sup>133</sup> The *Apocryphon* thus puts a definite emphasis on Barbelo’s connection with divine life. Consequently, in the *Apocryphon’s* Father-Mother-Son triad, Barbelo can be seen as the median “life,” although she has other attributes as well, such as foreknowledge and indestructibility (BG 28.4–29.18). Her connection with Eve, however, emphasizes Barbelo’s role as a life-principle. This also explains why the author connected life with the Mother and not the Son, as one might otherwise expect from a writer claiming Johannine authorship.

<sup>129</sup> Barbelo is the androgynous First Man, the image of God. In addition, a heavenly Adam (BG 35.5), also called Adamas (III 13.4) or Piger-Adamas (II 8.34–35) exists on a lower level. See Rasimus 2009, 159–188.

<sup>130</sup> Waldstein 1995a, e.g., 154, 162–164, 178, 183.

<sup>131</sup> John 3:15, 16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54, 68; 10:28; 12:25, 50; 17:2, 3; cf. also John 6:51, 58; and 1 John 2:25; 3:15; 5:11, 13, 20.

<sup>132</sup> Although inherently a triadic scheme, the mirror as a separate, third entity, is strictly speaking missing here, because the Father is said to see himself in his own water, which is of the same, spiritual and luminous essence as the Father himself (*Ap. John* BG 26.15–27.4). The Father is thus his own mirror and the author has seemingly managed to avoid falling back into the dualism of the Old Academy.

<sup>133</sup> See, e.g., Brown 1966, 178–180, 320–329. In the New Testament, the expression occurs only in John (4:10–14; 7:38–39) and Rev (7:17; 21:6; 22:1, 17).

The Johannine stress on the *eternal* nature of “life” may also explain the *Apocryphon’s* statements that the Father is “eternity-giving eternity” and exists eternally. That the biblical God is eternal (αἰώνιος) is, of course, familiar knowledge.<sup>134</sup> That he exists in some special way, or is existence or being *par excellence*, is then most famously expressed in the LXX translation of Exod 3:14, where Moses inquires after God’s name, and receives an answer from the burning bush: Ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὢν, “I am *the* being.”<sup>135</sup> The Fourth Gospel repeatedly places the absolute *egō eimi* formula on Jesus’ lips, thus stressing Jesus’ divinity and identity with the Father.<sup>136</sup> This implies that Jesus and the Father are or have existence *par excellence*. However, taking into account Johannine statements about the Son’s dependence on and obedience to the Father,<sup>137</sup> the Father’s existence can be taken to be even superior to that of the Son. This is aptly expressed by the negative theology of the *Apocryphon’s* author, according to which the One both exists and is superior to the existent ones. Of course, such a characterization may simply derive from an interpretation of Plato’s *Resp.* 6.509B<sup>138</sup> or the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*,<sup>139</sup> but the Johannine ascription of *egō eimi* statements to Jesus and Jesus’ seeming subordination to the Father may at least have catalyzed the notion of the Father/One as beyond being.

As for the “mind,” intellect proper comes into being only on the third ontological level in the *Apocryphon of John*. According to the heavenly-court language employed by the author, the Son asks the Father for intellect (νοῦς) and receives it as a “fellow-worker” (II 6.33–7.4).<sup>140</sup> In addition,

<sup>134</sup> The expression θεὸς αἰώνιος/αἰώνιος θεός occurs, for example, in LXX Gen 21:33; Isa 26:4; 40:28; and in Rom 16:26. Cf. also the statements about the eternal covenant in, e.g., LXX Gen 9:16; 17:7, 13, 19; Exod 31:16; Lev 24:8; Num 25:13; 2 Sam 23:5; Isa 24:5; 55:3; 61:8; Jer 27:5; 39:40; Ezek 16:60; 37:26; Sir 17:12; 44:18; 45:7; and in Heb 13:20. That God *exists eternally* is expressly stated in LXX Ps 54:20 (ὁ ὑπάρχων πρὸ τῶν αἰώνων).

<sup>135</sup> Brown 1966, 535–538. In the Judaism of Jesus’ time, this “I am” had effectively become a divine name. Cf. also Philo, *Mos.* 1.75.

<sup>136</sup> John 7:24, 28, 58; 13:19; cf. 6:20; 18:5; and the figurative formulas in 6:35, 51; 8:12; 10:7, 9, 11, 14; 11:25; 14:6; 15:1, 5. See Brown 1966, 533–538. See, however, Dunderberg 2006, 68–115.

<sup>137</sup> See, for example, John 13:16: “The slave is not greater than the master nor is the messenger greater than the one who sent (πέμψαντος) him”; that Jesus was “sent” (πέμπω) by the Father is stated repeatedly, in John 4:34; 5:23–24, 30, 37; 6:38–39, 44; 7:16, 28, 33; 8:16, 18, 26, 29; 12:44–45, 49; 13:20; 14:24; 15:21; 16:5; 20:21. Many of these verses emphasize the idea that Jesus’ actions and words are not his own but those of the Father who sent him. See especially John 5:30: “I can do nothing on my own initiative.”

<sup>138</sup> The Good is “beyond being” (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας).

<sup>139</sup> The One neither was, is, nor will be, and it has no being (esp. *Parm.* 141D–142A).

<sup>140</sup> The BG version of *Ap. John* lacks the notion of a “fellow worker,” although it is present in the other versions: *Ap. John* II 6.33; III 10.10; IV 10.13.

Father and Barbelo are described as noetic: the Father thinks (νοεῖν)<sup>141</sup> and Barbelo appears as his first actual thought (ἔννοια, τερογετε ἦνενοια < πρωτέννοια) or forethought (πρόνοια).<sup>142</sup> With the Father, Barbelo, and Son all being noetic, the *Apocryphon* effectively presents a scheme of three intellects that resembles to an extent the Numenian one derived from an exegesis of *Tim.* 39E. In both cases, the third intellect is the demiurgic one, as the Son in the *Apocryphon* is said to have created everything through the word (λόγος) (BG 31.16–18); like the mind, word is one of the Son's attributes. Obviously, this is based on the Johannine concept of the Son as the Logos (John 1:1, 14). While νοῦς and λόγος are not identical concepts, they are semantically quite close to each other, and thus Johannine Logos Christology might explain why intellect proper was specifically connected with the Son, the third member of the *Apocryphon's* supreme triad.

There are further possible contributing factors to the *Apocryphon's* scheme of three intellects. That God is noetic and thinks himself is, of course, standard Middle Platonism. The Johannine concept of mutual implication of Father and Son then suggests that the latter is also noetic, and, consequently, the mother between them must be too. One could also arrive at a three-intellect scheme from a preoccupation with the concept of God's providence. To be more precise, the scheme might derive from wordplay on πρόνοια, "providence," which also means "fore-thought," or even "pre-thought." Understood in the latter sense in a Pythagorean-Platonic context, πρόνοια must necessarily be located beyond νοῦς (cf. Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.415.19–416.5), as must God, the ultimate source of this πρόνοια. But because the term πρόνοια implies noetic activity as a *fore-* or *pre-*thought, its emergence must presuppose some ultimate, superior noetic activity. This is God's very act of thinking himself, expressed at first verbally (νοεῖν), as opposed to the nouns πρόνοια (or ἔννοια) and νοῦς that describe actualized thought and intellect coming into being on lower levels. This is, of course, reminiscent of the Neoplatonic use of paronyms to express higher forms of existence, life, and/or mind with verbal, and lower ones with nominal cognates of the same words.<sup>143</sup> The Neoplatonic technique is anticipated here in the *Apocryphon*, deriving from the notion that in thinking himself, God's first thought appeared and gave rise to intellect proper, the Logos. (Note that for Philo, Logos was the container of God's thoughts or ideas.)<sup>144</sup>

<sup>141</sup> *Ap. John* BG 26.15.

<sup>142</sup> *Ap. John* BG 27.4–19.

<sup>143</sup> See Hadot 1968, 1:352–375.

<sup>144</sup> See, e.g., Philo, *Opif.* 20.

Finally, that God is an Invisible Spirit is also a Johannine idea. According to John 4:24, God is Spirit (πνεῦμα ὁ θεός), and according to 1 John 4:12, no-one has ever seen God (John 1:18 and 6:46: no-one except the Son). Relating to this, one may think of John 20:29 as a possible source for the idea of God as “blessedness-giving blessedness”: “*Blessed* (μακάριοι) are those who have *not seen* and yet have believed.”<sup>145</sup> While beautitudes abound in the New Testament, this Johannine saying specifically connects blessedness with the theme of not seeing God (or, in fact, Jesus). However, Philo (*Spec.* 2.53), Josephus (*C. Ap.* 2.190) and 1 Timothy (1:11; 6:15) do speak of God himself as μακάριος, which the Fourth Gospel does not,<sup>146</sup> but this simply means that the concept of a blessed God was familiar to biblical thinkers—no need to evoke Porphyry as the originator of the concept as Hadot originally maintained.

Below the level of the Son come into being four lights: Harmozel, Oroaiel, Daveithe and Eleleth (*Ap. John* BG 32.19–34.9). The rest of the noetic entities are then arranged within this fourfold structure. In effect, the *Apocryphon's* hierarchy appears to be arranged according to the Pythagorean tetractys: God is a monad, whose duplication brings forth Barbelo, the dyad; she then completes the triad by giving birth to the Son, who in turn has his own tetrad, the four lights. Neopythagorean influence is also visible in the characterization of the Father as a monad and in the general monistic derivation of reality. But the innovative material that anticipates the being-life-mind triad and the procession-and-return scheme is largely based on biblical speculations, viz., combining Johannine ideas with Genesis.

We have seen that the *Apocryphon of John* presents a supreme triad of Father, Mother and Son, and that their ontogenesis is expressed with the same metaphors that underlie the Neoplatonic procession-and-return scheme. In addition, the terminology of the being/existence-life-mind/blessedness triad is also present: The first member of the *Apocryphon's* triad exists beyond being, is the source of life and blessedness, and engages in pre-noetic thinking. The second member is characterized as life and pre-thought, while the third one is blessed and the mind proper. The later Sethian terminology of καλυπτός–πρωτοφανής–αὐτογενής is also partially present in the *Apocryphon*: the third member of the triad is αὐτογενής, whereas Barbelo, the second one, is (in the long recension, II 8.32)

<sup>145</sup> This is echoed in Luke 10:23 (“Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!”; cf. Matt 13:16), lacking, however, the notion of invisibility.

<sup>146</sup> The idea that God himself is μακάριος occurs in the New Testament only in 1 Timothy.

“first-appearing” (πρωτη ογωνη; probably translating πρωτοφανής). What is more, some specific terminology encountered in the source common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos*, and which puzzled Hadot already in 1968,<sup>147</sup> namely, God as a *blessed triple-powered Spirit*, is likewise attested in the *Apocryphon*. We have already seen that God is Invisible Spirit and blessedness-giving blessedness. But it is his image, Barbelo, who is then characterized as triple-powered (τρω[μ]ητε ἴσοι < τριδύναμος).<sup>148</sup> In fact, there is a clear emphasis on her tripleness. She is thrice-male, thrice-named, thrice-powerful,<sup>149</sup> as well as thrice-begotten<sup>150</sup> and thrice-praised.<sup>151</sup> As Christ explains to John in the *Apocryphon*'s frame-story, he himself is Father, Mother and Son (BG 21.19–21). The *Apocryphon* contains a clear triadic understanding of God, and perhaps the stress on Barbelo's triplicity derives from the fact that it is through her that the divine triad becomes complete. She is the womb (μήτρα; II 5.5) or power (δύναμις) of the Father that allows the Son to appear; it is through her that God's potential triplicity becomes fully actual.

Be that as it may, the terminology of the being/existence-life-mind/blessedness triad as well as the metaphors underlying the procession-and-return scheme, are present in the *Apocryphon of John*. There is, however, no formalized triad, and from a later, Neoplatonic point-of-view the triad is only implicitly or seminally present in the *Apocryphon*. However, all the basic building blocks are there, which is not the case with the *Chaldaean Oracles* or Neopythagorean sources—these contain different terminology and different derivational schemes. The triad then becomes *explicitly formalized* in later Sethian texts, *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*,<sup>152</sup> as well as in one of the sources of *Zostrianos*, namely the source it shares with Victorinus. In fact, from the *Apocryphon of John*, there is only a short step to what we find in this common source. The following table illuminates the close correspondence between the two texts:

<sup>147</sup> See Hadot 1968, 1:293–297; but also his 1996 article, where he admitted that the common source is probably Middle Platonic, even Gnostic or Gnosticized.

<sup>148</sup> *Ap. John* BG 27.21–28.1.

<sup>149</sup> *Ap. John* BG 27.21–28.1; III 8.1–3; II 5.8–9; IV 7.22–23.

<sup>150</sup> *Ap. John* BG 28.2.

<sup>151</sup> *Ap. John* III 8.1–2.

<sup>152</sup> Also in the *Three Steles of Seth* and *Marsanes*. I have, however, concentrated here only on the two Platonizing Sethian treatises that are known to have circulated in Plotinus' seminars, viz., *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*.

Victorinus, <i>Adv. Ar.</i> 1.49–50 <sup>153</sup>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
1a. God is One and monad	1b. God is a unitary monad (II 2.26–27 parr.)
2a. God is before the truly existent ones ... before all existence, before being (ὅν) ... God is without existence ... a pre-existing pre-existence ... a non-existing existence	2b. God exists eternally (BG 24.2), although he is not someone who actually exists, but something superior to them (BG 24.20–22)
3a. God is pre-knowledge of all knowledge	3b. God is knowledge who gives knowledge (BG 25.17–18)
4a. God is the pre-principle of every principle	4b. God is prior to everything and the head of every aeon (BG 26.8–10)
5a. God is Father	5b. God is the Father of all (BG 22.19–20)
6a. God has blessedness	6b. God is blessedness-giving blessedness (BG 25.17–18)
7a. God is Spirit ...	7b. God is Invisible Spirit ( <i>passim</i> , e.g., BG 29.7–8; 30.9–10; 31.2–3; 31.7)
8a. ... having a unity in triple power	8b. The Spirit's image, Barbelo, is the triple-power (BG 27.21–28.1)
9a. God's simplicity unites three powers ...	9b. God is a unity (II 2.26–27 parr.) and a triad of Father, Mother and Son (BG 21.19–21; 26.15–32.19); God's image, the Mother Barbelo, is the triple-power (27.21–28.1)
10a. ... universal existence, universal life, and blessedness	10b. God exists beyond the existent ones (BG 24.20–22), and is a life-giving life (BG 25.15–16), and blessedness-giving blessedness (BG 25.17–18)
11a. In the power of being or existence are present, by predominance, the powers of life and of blessedness	11b. God, the first member of the triad, has “hyper-existence,” and is the source of life and blessedness (BG 24.20–22; 25.15–18) that are characterizations of the second (Barbelo) and third (Son) members of the triad, respectively (BG 28.21–29.14; 30.2–9) (cf. also 10b above).

<sup>153</sup> Paralleled by *Zost.* 64.11–68.26; 74.8–21; 75.6–24; 84.18–22.

The only major difference between the *Apocryphon of John* and the common source is that, in the latter, the triad is explicitly formulated and located inside the first principle. However, Victorinus and *Zostrianos* may not preserve the common source in its entirety, and this may explain the lack of a derivational application of the triad in their common material—elsewhere in Victorinus and *Zostrianos* the triad is, after all, found in derivational contexts.<sup>154</sup> In any case, to my mind the most natural explanation is that the author of the common source formalized and systematized the speculations he found in the Sethian *Apocryphon of John*, into an explicit triad. This source was then used by the author of a later Sethian text, *Zostrianos*, where a formalized version of the triad is likewise found. Given these Sethian links, it is not unreasonable to assume that the source common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus was also Sethian. In fact, Hadot admitted in 1996, after Tardieu's discovery of the common source, that it was probably Gnostic or Gnostitized.<sup>155</sup>

Certain scholars have defended Hadot's original thesis and argued that Porphyry was Victorinus' source (not only here but throughout his theological treatises) and that all instances of the being-life-mind triad and related concepts in Sethian texts result from these texts being re-edited in light of Plotinus and Porphyry's criticism.<sup>156</sup> While this argument is theoretically applicable to those texts where the triad and the accompanying ideas are found in an explicit, systematized, and thus "Porphyrian" form (viz., *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* and even the source common to *Zostrianos* and Victorinus), it fails to explain why the redactor of the *Apocryphon of John* would have added such material in an implicit and non-systematized form—especially when the *Apocryphon's* material derives naturally from a reading of the Johannine gospel. Dylan M. Burns has then argued that because Irenaeus' paraphrase of the *Apocryphon of John* from ca. 180 CE lacks such features (that others have identified as "Porphyrian"), they must have been added to the (Greek *Vorlagen* of our) Coptic versions only afterwards,<sup>157</sup> presumably after Plotinus and Porphyry's criticism. However, Irenaeus was not quoting verbatim, but paraphrasing and summarizing his source: the section corresponding to the ontogenesis of the supreme triad is about four times shorter in Irenaeus than in the Coptic versions. Irenaeus may thus have left out

<sup>154</sup> E.g., *Zost.* 15.1–17; 81–82; Victorinus, *Ad Cand.* 2.21–30; *Adv. Ar.* 4.5–6.

<sup>155</sup> Hadot 1996.

<sup>156</sup> Abramowski 1983; Majercik 1992; 2001.

<sup>157</sup> Burns 2011a, 299–300.

much of the relevant terminology, although even in his paraphrase “eternal life” (*vita aeterna*, ζῶν αἰώνιος)<sup>158</sup> is ascribed to Barbelo and “intellect” (*nus*, νοῦς) to the Son (*Haer.* 1.29.1).

It seems most practical to assume that these ideas were invented by Sethians, and developed from their seminal form found in the *Apocryphon* into the explicit triads found in the common source, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes*. What is more, many important aspects of this material in the *Apocryphon* stem from the author’s reading of the Johannine gospel in light of Genesis, two texts that were of paramount interest to him in any case. Against this backdrop, a school-Platonic and non-biblical background for the triad seems very unlikely.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

The evidence suggests that Plotinus received the noetic triad from Sethians, but probably himself connected it with *Soph.* 248E–249A, as well as to the Aristotelian and anti-Stoic notions that intellect and true being are alive. Even if the Sethians had already connected the triad with *Tim.* 39E, Plotinus was happy to do so as well. For the most part, these passages and notions were familiar to him already from Numenius,<sup>159</sup> and couching the triad in them gave the Gnostic-biblical triad philosophical respectability and a Platonic connection, which, for Plotinus, justified its use.<sup>160</sup> The true precursor to the triad, the *Apocryphon*’s Father-Mother-Son, seems to have been largely based on an attempt to explain the Johannine Father-Son relationship in terms of Pythagorean monism and Genesis speculations. The attempt had led to the use of Johannine-inspired terminology that prefigured the being-life-mind triad, as well as to derivational techniques and metaphors that prefigured the procession-and-return scheme. These seminal ideas were then formalized into the actual being-life-mind/blessedness triad, perhaps first by the author of the source common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos*. As for the enneadic structuring of the triad, it may well have been a pre-Plotinian invention, as Hadot originally suspected, although more likely a Sethian than a school-Platonic one; it is first clearly attested in a Sethian text, *Allogenes*, and the idea of mutual implication can be easily derived from the Johannine Father-Son relationship, although

<sup>158</sup> The Greek is from Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Haer. fab. comp.* 1.13 (PG 83:362C–363C).

<sup>159</sup> Numenius’ influence on Plotinus was considerable. See Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 3; 14; 17–18.

<sup>160</sup> Cf. Rasimus 2010a, 103–108.



Stoic and Neopythagorean influence cannot, of course, be underestimated. How exactly the Valentinian speculations about the first principles and the Johannine prologue fit in this picture needs further study, although it is to be noted that the Valentinians never spoke of the being-life-mind triad.

It is probable that not only *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, but also their Sethian advocates—perhaps including the very author(s) of these texts—attended Plotinus’ seminars during his middle period in the 260s CE, and that Plotinus clashed with the hardliners among them.<sup>161</sup> However, Plotinus’ early works show positive affinities with Sethian ideas,<sup>162</sup> and he had Gnostic friends.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, as Zeke Mazur has shown, Plotinus even uses the term *εἰκῶν* (and *ὁμοίωσις*, “likeness,” another term from Gen 1:26–27) in a manner similar to the Sethians, to denote both the intellect<sup>164</sup> and the mystic’s transcendent self at the penultimate stage in a mystical union with the One (the transcendent-self-as-*εἰκῶν* coincides with the first moment of ontogenesis from the One).<sup>165</sup> It is likely that Plotinus was here influenced by the Sethians, who had derived the concept of God’s first manifestation as an *εἰκῶν* from their readings of Genesis.

In addition to Plotinus’ middle period when Gnostics seem to have been present in his circle, there are two earlier periods in Plotinus’ life when he could have encountered Sethians: the first ten years of lecturing in Rome when he did not yet write anything himself (ca. 245–254 CE), and the decade of his formative period in Alexandria as a student of Ammonius Saccas (ca. 233–243 CE).<sup>166</sup> Zeke Mazur has suggested that Plotinus’ initial, fruitful encounter with the Sethians may have taken place in Ammonius’ circle in Alexandria.<sup>167</sup> Be that as it may, it seems quite likely that the Sethian sys-

<sup>161</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16; Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33]. See also note 163 below.

<sup>162</sup> E.g., the Numenian-style three-intellect theory in *Enn.* 3.9 [13] 1 (refuted later, and ascribed to the Gnostics, in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6.14–24); the being-life-mind triad (*passim* in Plotinus and Sethians); the related idea of the traversal of life from the One into the intellect (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 11; *Allogenes* 49.5–21); the doctrine of the intellect containing the intelligibles (*Enn.* 5.5 [32]; cf. *Vit. Plot.* 18; *Zost.* 21; 115–116); and the notion of learned ignorance (*Enn.* 6.9 [9] 3–4; 3.8 [30] 9.29–32; 6.7 [38] 36.15–16; 6.8 [39] 21.25–33; *Allogenes* 59.26–60.12; 61.1–19); cf. also the audacity (*τόλμα*), sin (*ἄμαρτία*), or stupidity (*ἄφρων*) of the soul that leads to its fall (*Enn.* 4.8 [6] 5; 5.1 [10] 1; 5.2 [11] 2); and the concept of an evil matter (1.8 [51]). For discussion, see Sinnige 1984; Rasimus 2010a, 103–108; and especially Mazur 2010.

<sup>163</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10. For recent discussion on Plotinus’ Gnostic “friends,” see Turner 2011, 709–744; Mazur 2010, 309–320; Rasimus 2010a, 103–108; Burns 2011b, 78–84, 138–143; and Narbonne 2011, e.g., 68–69.

<sup>164</sup> See, e.g., *Enn.* 5.1 [10] 7.1–4.

<sup>165</sup> Mazur 2010, e.g., 140–141.

<sup>166</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 3.

<sup>167</sup> Mazur 2010, 293–329.

tematization of the being-life-mind triad—that is, the leap from the *Apocryphon*'s seminal, biblical-Neopythagorean speculations to the formalized triad in the common source, *Zostrianos*, and *Allogenes*—took place under the influence of a charismatic teacher of Platonism, either Ammonius or Plotinus. The source common to Victorinus and *Zostrianos*, which appears to contain the earliest explicit version of the triad, may then well stem from Alexandria in the 230–240s or from Rome in the 240–250s. This systematization, in any case, does not betray influence of the *Chaldaean Oracles* (as Hadot and his followers maintain), but is rather a natural development from the speculations found in the Sethian *Apocryphon of John*, a development perhaps catalyzed by Ammonius or Plotinus. Since also the first clear enneadic structuring of the triad is encountered in a Sethian document, *Allogenes*, the being-life-mind triad, from its seminal form to its full systematization appears to be essentially Sethian handiwork, ultimately inspired by Johannine Christology.

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THE NEOPYTHAGOREAN BACKDROP TO THE FALL  
(ΣΦΑΛΜΑ/ΝΕΥΣΙΣ) OF THE SOUL IN GNOSTICISM AND ITS  
ECHO IN THE PLOTINIAN TREATISES 33 AND 34\*

Jean-Marc Narbonne

At the start of ch. 4 of his treatise 33, *Against the Gnostics*, Plotinus contests the idea, upheld by his opponents, according to which it would have been through its own *fall* that the soul of the All produced the world. Thus, he writes:

But if they are going to assert that the soul made the world when it had, so to speak, “*shed its wings*,” this does not happen to the Soul of the All; but if they are going to say that it made the world as the result of a [fall] (σφαλείσαν), let them tell us the cause of the [fall] (σφάλματος). But when did it [fall] (ἐσφάλγη)? If it was from eternity, it abides in a [fallen] state (ἐσφαλμένη) according to their own account. If it began to [fall], why did it not begin before?<sup>1</sup>

(*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 4.1–6)

Following this passage, the noun σφάλμα, as well as its corresponding verb σφάλλασθαι, disappears entirely from the treatise, and Plotinus, surprisingly enough, pursues his description of the problem of the descent of the soul, henceforth employing another term, νεύσις, as a sort of equivalent for σφάλμα. He proceeds, without any transition, to provide the following explanation:

But we say that the making act of the soul is not a declination (νεύσιν) but rather a non-declination (μὴ νεύσιν). But if it declined (ἔνευσε), it was obviously because it had forgotten the intelligible realities; but if it forgot them, how is it the craftsman of the world? For what is the source of its making, if not what it saw in the intelligible world? But if it makes in remembrance of those intelligible realities, it has not declined at all (ἔνευσεν), not even if it only has them dimly present in it. Does it not rather incline (νεύσει) to the intelligible world, in order not to see dimly?

(*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 4.6–11)

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\* I should like to thank Simon Fortier and Brian Monast for their meticulous translation and revision of the present essay.

<sup>1</sup> All quotes from Plotinus are from Armstrong 1966, modified in this instance where Armstrong translates σφάλμα and its derivatives not by referring to the notion of a fall, but by referring to a notion of *failure*, notably, moral failure. All emphases are mine.



Considering this excerpt as a whole, one is therefore left with the impression that the term νεῦσις is a substitute, even a strict synonym, of σφάλμα, which can be employed without any particular precautions. We now know, thanks to a detailed study of the term,<sup>2</sup> that νεῦσις bears the mark of Gnosticism, as its Coptic counterpart can be found in a treatise from the Nag Hammadi Library, and not just any treatise, but none other than *Zostrianos* (NHC VIII,1), which we know, thanks to Porphyry, was read in Plotinus' circle, and which also had been, at Plotinus' request, the object of a refutation produced by his disciple Amelius.<sup>3</sup> In this text, the matter pertains at one point to "Sophia who looked down (σωφῳτ επεσητ)" (*Zost.* 27.12). Now, as Paul-Hubert Poirier notes, the Coptic verb employed here, σωφῳτ, being followed by the word επεσητ, is used regularly to render the Greek νεύειν κάτω; and this, according to him, indicates that this could be one of the sources—if not the source—that Plotinus is drawing on in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.19.<sup>4</sup> In fact, in ch. 10 of this same treatise, Plotinus again criticizes this supposed *inclination* of the soul, or of Sophia:

For they say that Soul declined to what was below it, and with it some sort of "Wisdom," whether Soul started it or whether Wisdom was a cause of Soul being like this, or whether they mean both to be the same thing, and then they tell us that the other souls came down too, and as members of Wisdom put on bodies, human bodies for instance. But again they say that very being for the sake of which these souls came down did not come down itself, did not decline, so to put it, but only illumined the darkness, and so an image from it came into existence in matter. (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.19–23)

The idea that *Zostrianos* may have been used here as a source by Plotinus finds additional support from two other passages drawn from the same text where the theme of *looking downward* or of *inclining downward* appears already, associated each time with the issue of the production of the sensible world. Let us consider the first passage:

The airy-earth came into being by a word, yet it is the begotten and perishable ones whom it reveals by its indestructibility. In regard to the coming of the great judges, (they came) so as not to taste perception and to be enclosed in creation, and when they came upon it and saw through it the works of the world, they condemned its ruler to death because he was a model of the world, a [...] and an origin of matter begotten of lost darkness. When

<sup>2</sup> Poirier 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16. On this chapter, one would have to first read Tardieu 1992.

<sup>4</sup> Poirier 2012, 620.

Sophia *looked* (ᾠδῶν) [(*downward*)] at [...] them she produced the darkness, as she [...] she] is beside the [...].<sup>5</sup> (Zost. 9.2–18)

It is interesting to note that, in this text, the idea of *inclination* is related to that of *illumination*—or of “darkness” produced by Sophia’s “looking” downward—when we know that Plotinus specifically intends to dissociate at all costs these two acts, the illumination of matter (or of the sensible) implying in no way the downward inclination of the soul, as when he states categorically in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 11.1–6:

First of all then, if it did not come down (κατήλθεν), but illumined (ἐνέλαμψε) the darkness, how can it rightly be said to have declined (νενευκέναι)? For if something like light streamed from it, it is not proper to say that it declined when that happened; unless the darkness lay somewhere below it and it moved spatially towards it and illumined it when it came close to it.<sup>6</sup>

The second passage from *Zostrianos*, following closely the preceding excerpt, attributes this time the downward inclination to the archon (= the demiurge) rather than to Wisdom itself:

But to Sophia a place of rest was given in exchange for her repentance. Thus, there was in her no prior reflection, pure in itself beforehand. After they had already come into being through it, he (= *the archon*) used his imagination (and) produced the remainder, for the image of Sophia was always being lost because her countenance was deceiving. But the archon [...] and made a body which [...] concerning the greater [...] [*looked/inclined*] down (ᾠδῶν ἐπέστη). (Zost. 10.7–20)

Let us note as well that the theme of imagination, associated here with the inclination of the archon, is also one of those which Plotinus will object to in treatise 33, claiming instead that “all possibility of a soul of this kind creating through imagination and, still more, through rational activity, is taken away.” (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 11.22–23). These two parallel passages hence confirm the role, undoubtedly decisive, that *Zostrianos* has played, in terms of a foil, in the elaboration of Plotinus’ thoughts on this point. Other than *Zostrianos*, only the *Apocryphon of John*<sup>7</sup> makes any reference to the same teaching, a text with respect to which, as has been noted,<sup>8</sup> all our heresiological sources remain mute.

<sup>5</sup> Trans. Turner, in Robinson 1996, 406. Emphasis and emphasized insertions are mine.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *Enn.* 1.1 [53] 12.22–31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ap. John*, short version: BG 48.6–10; long version: II 14.30–34.

<sup>8</sup> Poirier 2012, 621n8.

What could be said now about the term *σφάλμα*? Many questions emerge in relation to this. Why is it evoked in treatise 33? What might its role be with respect to *νεῦσις*, and why would it disappear as suddenly as it appears? Let us consider some elements that may be of help in answering these various questions.

### 1. ΣΦΑΛΜΑ IN PLOTINUS' WRITINGS

We might begin by highlighting the fact that the term *σφάλμα* only appears twice in Plotinus' writings (treatises 33 and 52), and that the second occurrence turns out to be, also, *anti-Gnostic*, insofar as it confirms the rejection, already stated in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 8.11, of the hypothesis of the fall of a world soul. Whatever might be subject to a fall, Plotinus explains in treatise 52, is not a world soul—which, on the contrary, “is set upon doing its own work; for soul, since it has the status of a principle, does everything” (*Enn.* 2.3 [52] 8.1–2)—but our own soul, that is, our individual soul: “We, however, do the works of soul according to nature, as long as we do not *fail* (ἕως μὴ ἐσφάλημεν) in the multiplicity of the All; if we *fail* (*σφαλέντες*) we have as just penalty both the failure (*σφάλμα*) itself and our being in a worse position afterwards.” (8.9–12)

What now of the verb *σφάλλῃσθαι*? A quick overview of its various occurrences, which are hardly numerous (only nine outside of treatise 33), leads to the conclusion that the technical use of the term observed in treatise 33 is unique in the entire Plotinian corpus. Everywhere else, *σφάλλῃσθαι* which, besides *falling*, can naturally mean *being frustrated* or *disappointed*, or *erring*, etc., indicates not the *fall* of the world soul (or of *Sophia*) alluded to in treatise 33, but something else entirely. The introduction of this term in this precise sense, as associated with the discussion bearing on *νεῦσις* (which, as we will recall, represents, according to Plotinus, what is most inadmissible in Gnosticism),<sup>9</sup> is assuredly not fortuitous.

Now, although heresiologists have remained silent on the question of the *νεῦσις*, they nevertheless refer several times to *σφάλμα*, in order to decry the activity of soul-*Sophia* with respect to the sensible. I will first quote an excerpt where Irenaeus of Lyons takes aim at Marcus the Magician's arithmology:

<sup>9</sup> This teaching, insists Plotinus, “surpasses all the rest of their doctrine in absurdity” (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.18).

These men associate the origin of their Aeons with the straying and finding of the sheep (= *Sophia*), as they make it into one thing and endeavor to explain it in a more mystic manner by reducing all things to numbers. They assert that all things consist of monads and dyads. They add up the numbers from one to four and thus beget the Decad. In fact, one, two, three, and four added up bring forth the number ten of the Aeons. Again, when the Dyad proceeded [by twos] from itself up to Symbol [Six] (ἑπίσημον), that is two plus four plus six, it manifested the Dodecad. Further, if in the same way we add up the numbers [by twos] from two until ten, the number thirty is manifested, in which are contained the Ogdoad, Decad, and Dodecad. But the Dodecad they call passion (πάθος = *Sophia*) because it contains the symbolical number [six] (ἑπίσημον) which accompanies it [the Dodecad]. For that reason a *fall* (σφάλματος) occurred in regard to the number twelve. The sheep skipped away and went astray. Then, they assert, the apostasy (ἀπόστασιν) from the Dodecad took place. In the same way, they divine one Power perished when it defected from the Dodecad. This is the woman who lost her coin and, having lighted a candle, found it again.<sup>10</sup>

To fully understand this latest development, it is absolutely necessary to spell out the Pythagorean speculations which underpin them. The couple forming the opposition of the monad and the dyad can be found in Pythagorean literature from at least Plato's time.<sup>11</sup> The number 4, for its part, corresponds to the famous Tetractys (τετρακτύς) which, for the Pythagoreans, was the source of all numbers and, to begin with, of 10, the complete number (as  $1 + 2 + 3 + 4 = 10$ ).<sup>12</sup> Considering now the Dodecad, it is the result of the repeated addition of the Dyad onto itself ( $2 + 2 = 4$ ;  $4 + 2 = 6$ ), since  $2 + 4 + 6 = 12$ . The Dodecad results therefore from the natural progression of the Dyad, ending with the number 6, which is the first perfect number, as its divisors—1, 2 and 3—also add up to 6.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, if we let the Dyad progress beyond

<sup>10</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.16.1.1–20 (Greek *frag.* 10.504–524 Rousseau and Doutreleau; trans. Unger and Dillon 1992, 68–69); here, the translators rendered σφάλματος by “defection,” which I have corrected to “fall”; regarding σφάλμα, cf. Hippolytus of Rome, *Ref.* 6.52.4.3 (Marcovich); Epiphanius, *Pan.* 34.12.1–6 (2:23.19–24.13 Holl). Macmahon translates σφάλμα as “error” (in Roberts and Donaldson 1994, 5:98), but the context suggests rather a *fall*, as from the heavens above. Hence, Siouville (1988, 87): “à cause de cela, la chute (the fall) ayant eu lieu autour du nombre douze ...”

<sup>11</sup> Cf., for example, the texts collected in Dörrie and Baltés 1996, Baustein 120, p. 155 ff.

<sup>12</sup> Photius, *Bibliotheca* 249: “[i]ls proclamaient que tout est nombre et que le nombre complet est dix; le nombre dix est un composé des quatre premiers nombres que nous comptons dans leur ordre; c’est pourquoi ils appelaient Tétractys le tout constitué par ce nombre (They would proclaim that all is number and that the complete number is ten. The number 10 [the decad] is composed of the four first numbers, counted in order. This is why they would call Tetractys the whole constituted by this number).” (Trans. Henry 1959–1977.)

<sup>13</sup> The second perfect number, after 6, is 28, as  $1 + 2 + 4 + 7 + 14 = 28$ .

this first perfect number and up to 10, we obtain the Triacontad, or 30 (as  $2 + 4 + 6 + 8 + 10 = 30$ ), that is, the total number of aeons in the Pleroma, comprised of all perfect beings. If then the aeon Sophia, the very last aeon of the Dodecad as well as of the Triacontad, must produce anything, this offspring must necessarily move beyond the Limit (ἄρος)<sup>14</sup> of the Pleroma and naturally be imperfect. Sophia's eventual moving beyond the Pleroma (as the last result of the first perfect number), implies then a *fall* (σφάλμα), also called a *passion* (πάθος), which is perfectly natural, given the disruption and the break, the *drama* we might then say, which she introduces into the Pleroma. From that point on, it was possible to symbolize the *fall* using parables in Luke such as that of the lost lamb, or again of the woman who had lost, and then found again her silver coin.<sup>15</sup>

Schematically, the Pleroma could be represented as in Figure 3.

Hence Pythagorean arithmology, in this Gnostic context, is not at all adventitious, but intimately constitutive of the very structure of the Pleroma, that is, in Platonic terms, of the intelligible world. As Irenaeus puts it, the Gnostics applied these doctrines *word for word* to their Pleroma:

Again, as to the desire they exhibit to refer this whole universe to numbers, they have learned it from the Pythagoreans. For these were the first who set forth numbers as the initial principle of all things, and [described] that initial principle of theirs as being both equal and unequal, out of which [two properties] they conceived that both things sensible and immaterial derived their origin. And [they held] that one set of first principles gave rise to the matter [of things], and another to their form. They affirm that from these first principles all things have been made, just as a statue is of its metal and its special form. Now, the heretics have adapted this to the things which are outside of the Pleroma. The [Pythagoreans] maintained that the principle of intellect is proportionate to the energy wherewith mind, as a recipient of the comprehensible, pursues its inquiries, until, worn out, it is resolved at length in the Indivisible and One. *They further affirm that Hen—that is, One—is the first principle of all things, and the substance of all that has been formed. From this again proceeded the Dyad, the Tetrad, the Pentad, and the manifold generation of the others. These things the heretics repeat, word for word, with a reference to their Pleroma and Bythus.*<sup>16</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.2.2.35 (Greek *frag.* 1.170 Rousseau and Doutreleau).

<sup>15</sup> Luke 15:1–7, 8–10.

<sup>16</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 2.14.6.101–117 (Rousseau and Doutreleau; trans. Roberts and Donaldson 1994, 1:377, emphasis added).

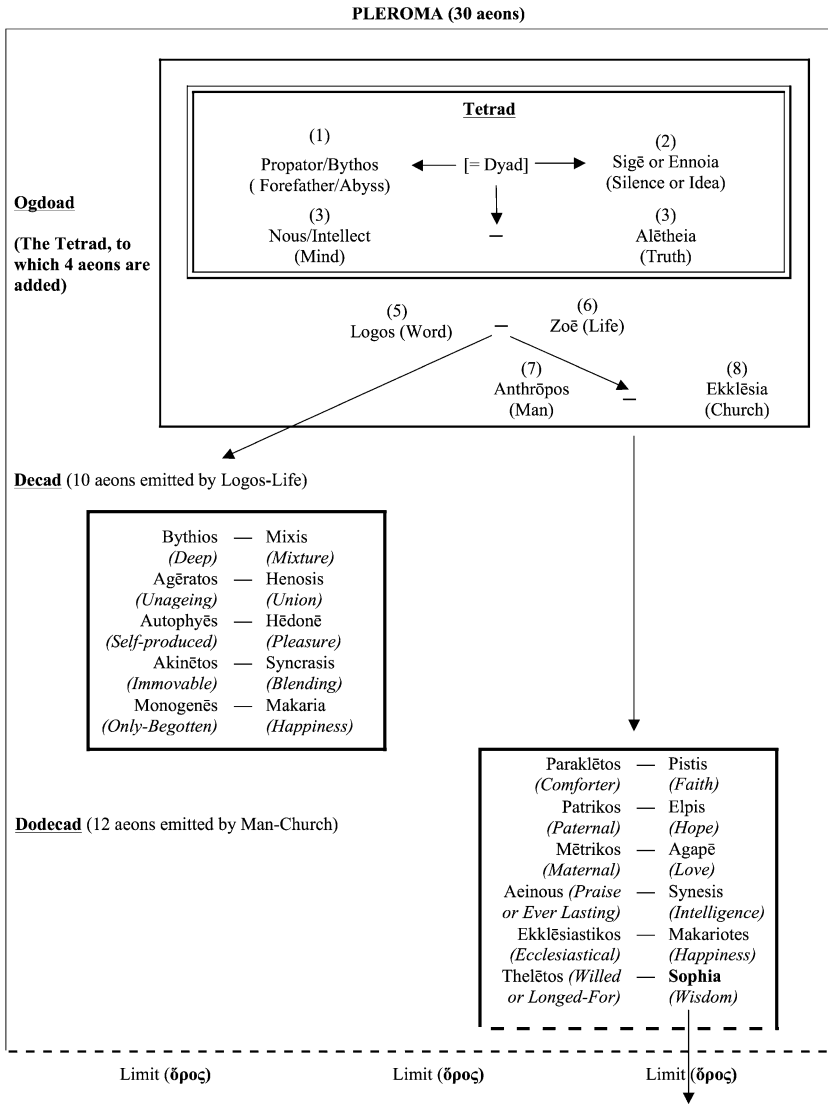


Figure 3: Valentinian Pleroma

If the general theme of the descent of Sophia (or more likely, that of her offspring) is evidently well-attested in the Nag Hammadi literature and elsewhere, the arithmological backdrop to the *fall* (σφάλμα), as reported by the various heresiologists, does not seem to be as visible, despite occasional

references to it, as in the *Valentinian Exposition* (NHC XI,2), where we read (but the text is unfortunately substantially deficient): “[Moreover], it is the one [from the Triacontad] of the [Aeons who bear fruit] from [the Triacontad]. [They] enter [jointly but they] come forth [singly, fleeing from] the Aeons [and the Uncontainable Ones ...]” (30.21–25).<sup>17</sup>

Plotinus therefore seems to have wanted to set side by side, in his refutation in treatise 33, two versions of this cosmogonic drama which he may have cast his eyes on at one point or another: First, that of the Valentinian tradition—with which we are afforded relatively direct contact through Irenaeus and other heresiologists—, based as it is on Pythagorean speculations in which Sophia’s fall (again, more likely that of her offspring), technically referred to using the term *σφάλμα*, is linked to arithmological considerations; and, second, that of the Sethians, nearer to Plotinus, where the departure from the Pleroma is now translated by the term *νεῦσις*, two versions equally inadmissible for him, as both introduce an element of drama into the production of the cosmos and imply a form of *unhitching* or *break* within the ordered deployment of beings. Were there any dissonance or breaking away from order where principles rule, then evil might be said to be already among such principles, which might then in turn avowedly be considered the source of evil of this world, an assumption which Plotinus cannot accept under any circumstances. Secondly—and this is another regrettable consequence of such a break—the worth of the sensible world (a world which would then be the *result* of the presumed rupture) could no longer be adequately defended, and therefore objections against the dissolution of the world, as predicted and anticipated by the Gnostics, could no longer be raised. Let soul-Sophia (or an entity coming from her) *fall* or *incline*, and she will lose thereby, even if only momentarily, her intelligible ground and her natural connection with the divinities up above. Plotinus’ only option, at this point, is to claim that *she does not descend*—individual souls themselves, for that matter, never descend entirely either, and hence never lose contact with the divine!<sup>18</sup>—, but remains content to solely illuminate from a distance that which lies below and benefits from this intervention. If, in these developments, Plotinus does not seem to show any concern regarding possible nuances in meaning between *σφάλμα* and *νεῦσις*, it can only be that, with respect to the task at hand, namely, that of cutting short this

<sup>17</sup> Trans. Turner, in Robinson 1996, 484. Cf. *Val. Exp.* 31.34–36.

<sup>18</sup> On this partial non-descent of the individual soul and its relation to Gnostic teachings, see Narbonne 2011, 55–78 (= Narbonne 2008, 691–708).

“melodrama of terrors (τῆς τραγωδίας τῶν φοβερῶν)” (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 13.7), the two expressions bear more or less the same meaning.

## 2. WHY, AFTER TREATISE 33, A SPECULATION IN TREATISE 34 ON NUMBERS?

Given these circumstances, we might rightly ask if the particular role of the *Περὶ ἀριθμῶν* in the Plotinian corpus as a whole has been sufficiently questioned, being the only text in this corpus to focus expressly on numbers. This subject has been broached occasionally,<sup>19</sup> but to my knowledge has never as such been made the object of an independent enquiry. Nonetheless, we could ask, it would seem, not only why Plotinus took it upon himself one day to write a treatise on numbers, but why he chose to do so precisely at that moment, that is, immediately following his counter-attack of treatise 33—a treatise also unique in nature.

In fact, our inquiry into *sphalma* and *neusis* has already set us on the path of an underlying link leading from the first treatise to the other. Plotinus, as we have observed, pleads, in treatise 33, for an harmonious cosmogony; and where else but in numbers might we find assurances with respect to the order prevailing in the intelligible and from which the sensible may also benefit? The arithmology which Plotinus will then reveal will obviously not be the perilous one foreseen by Gnostic Pythagoreanism, but an ordered one based on *authentic* or *essential* number, as inherited through Plato. Plotinus writes: “But the essential number is that contemplated in the forms and sharing in their generation, and, primarily, the number in Being and with Being and before the beings. The beings have their foundation in it, and their source and root and principle.” (*Enn.* 6.6 [34] 9.35–39). Hence it is indeed on the grounds of the presence in the intelligible world of this *structuring* number, as essential number is, that Plotinus will be in a position to claim that “nothing puts it (the universal intellect) out (ἐξίστησι) of itself or alters (τρέπει) it or makes it deviate (παρὰκινεῖ)” (18.36–37), and this is also why, even with respect to the sensible world, the number of beings will not be left to chance:

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. Harder 1936, 6: “Es ist keine Frage, daß sie [die Schrift Nr. 34] *gedanklich* aus dem Zusammenhang unserer Gesamtschrift 30–33 hervorgewachsen ist” (emphasis added); Slaveva-Griffin 2009, 19: “we should take the treatise more seriously and reevaluate its place in the *Enneads*, since VI.6 continues the major themes of the *Großschrift*.”



But if the beings came into existence before number, and the number was observed in them as the numbering nature was moved to a total corresponding to the things numbered, they would be so many by chance (συντυχίαν), and not as many as they are by deliberate predisposition (πρόθεσιν). If then they are not as many as they are just casually, number is a cause which pre-exists their being so many. (Enn. 6.6 [34] 10.9–13)

To an arithmology of the *analogical* sort, which draws cosmogonical consequences from certain properties of numbers—a practice which Plotinus expressly attributes to the Pythagoreans in treatise 34—, can rightly be opposed a Plotinian *eidetic* arithmology, linking intimately the metaphysics of the idea and Platonic *authentic* (or *essential*) Number.

More symptomatic yet, we see Plotinus extending in treatise 34 the formal disavowal of the Gnostic cosmogony stated in treatise 33, as the resurgence of the theme of inclination previously criticized can attest to right from ch. 1 of treatise 34:

For a thing is multiple when, unable to *tend to itself* (νεύειν),<sup>20</sup> it pours out and is extended in scattering; and when it is utterly deprived of the one in its outpouring it becomes multiplicity, since there is nothing to unite one part of it to another;<sup>21</sup> but if something comes to be which abides in its outpouring, it becomes a magnitude. But what is there dreadful about magnitude? Now, *if a thing perceived it* (ἤσθηνετο), it would be dreadful; for *it would perceive* that it had come to be out of itself and had gone far away from itself. For everything seeks not another, but itself, *and the journey to the exterior is foolish or compulsory* (μάταιος ἢ ἀναγκαία). A thing exists more, not when it comes to be many or large, but when it belongs to itself: and it belongs to itself in *tending to* (νενευκός) itself. But the desire (ἔφεσις) to be great in this way (τὸ οὕτως μέγα) is the property of something which does not know what true greatness (τὸ ὄντως μέγα) is and is hastening not where it should but to the exterior; but the direction towards itself was inward. (Enn. 6.6 [34] 1.4–16)

It is not impossible to recognize, in these last lines, a categorical condemnation of Sophia's, or her offspring's, *exit* from the Pleroma, as it is indeed she who, as a *perceiving* or *conscious* being (Enn. 2.9 [33] 4.11, 13, 17; 10.20), decides<sup>22</sup> to leave her place and venture outward. The reference to the inclination leaves little room for doubt. This manner of “being great” corresponds

<sup>20</sup> The verb found in the manuscripts is, in fact, μένειν, and has been changed by W. Theiler to νεύειν, and adopted since by Henry-Schwyzler.

<sup>21</sup> This multiplicity thence becomes pure infinity (ἀπειρία).

<sup>22</sup> As has been pointed out: “l'élément de volonté est fondamental dans la description de l'erreur de Sophia [will is an essential element in the description of Sophia's error]: ἐνθύμησις, Irénée, *AH*, I, 2, 4; ἔννοια, *ExtTh*, 32, 2; 33, 3; ἠθέλησε, Hippolyte, *El*, VI, 30, 7; βουλήθεις, *ExtTh*, 31, 3; *ExpVal*, 31, 33–34.” (Painchaud and Thomassen 1989, 329–330).

indeed to a desire to set out from the Pleroma, a coming out which results either in the emergence of matter and the formation of cosmos or again in the formation of the cosmos itself, but from a pre-existing obscurity which soul will then light up and inform. One only needs to compare this text with Irenaeus' description of Sophia's errings to confirm the Gnostic nature of the analysis pursued here by Plotinus:

But the last and youngest Aeon of the Dodecad emitted by Man and Church, namely, Wisdom, advanced far ahead of all of them and suffered passion, though without the embrace of Desired, her consort. The passion began in Mind and Truth but spread as by infection to this estranged Aeon [Wisdom] under the pretense of love, but in reality out of temerity, because he had no fellowship with perfect Father, as even Mind did. The passion consisted in seeking after Father; for he wished, so they say, to comprehend his greatness. But then he was not able, inasmuch as he undertook an impossible affair, and he fell into extreme agony because of the immense height and unsearchable nature of Father and because of the affection for him. Since he was ever stretching forward to what was ahead, he would at last have been swallowed up by his charm and resolved into the entire substance unless he had met the power that strengthens all things and safeguards them outside the unspeakable greatness. This power they also call Limit. By it they say he was restrained and strengthened, and when with difficulty he had been brought to his senses and was convinced that Father is unfathomable, he laid aside the first Intention together with the subsequent passion which had arisen from that amazing admiration [for Father].<sup>23</sup>

The tale, as reported by Irenaeus, goes on moreover to reveal additional details regarding the destiny of this Intention which gets banned from the Pleroma:

They claim that Wisdom was purified by this Limit and strengthened and restored to her own consort [Desired]. For, after Intention, together with her subsequent passion, had been separated from her, she herself remained within the Fullness, but her Intention with her passion was separated by Limit and fenced out and kept outside of it.<sup>24</sup>

To my knowledge, this Irenaean excerpt is the only text to establish such a relation between two types of greatness, one being interior and, so to speak, intensive, the other being exterior and extensive, opposing a right and a wrong greatness and present also in Plotinus' treatise 34. It also makes

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<sup>23</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.2.2.16–39 (Rousseau and Doutreleau; trans. in Unger and Dillon 1992, 25).

<sup>24</sup> Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.2.4.61–67 (Rousseau and Doutreleau; trans. in Unger and Dillon 1992, 26).

reference to a *deviation* or to an *alteration* within Sophia (παρὰτραπέντα), which is precisely the type of event which Plotinus judges to be inadmissible within the intelligible: “nothing puts it out of itself or alters it (τρέπειν) or makes it deviate” (*Enn.* 6.6 [34] 18.36–37). And it is on this basis, as we know, that Plotinus put before the Gnostics a decisive dilemma. Either the *decision* or the *desire* of Sophia runs in conformity with nature, in which case there would be no grounds on which one could ever criticize the world, it being the fruit of a decision taken in conformity with the order of things; or this decision breaks with nature, in which case the evils that the world bears would in fact have their source in a *deviation* that would have intervened in the realm of the intelligible beings, that is, within the Pleroma, an assumption naturally unacceptable.

And this would be the danger to which Plotinus, shortly before moving to treatise 34, was drawing attention in ch. 12 of treatise 33:

For their “illumination of the darkness,” if it is investigated, will make them admit the true causes of the universe. For why was it necessary for the soul to illuminate, unless the necessity was universal? It was either *according to soul’s nature* or *against it*. But if it was according to its nature, it must always be so. If, on the other hand, it was against its nature, *then there will be a place for what is against nature in the higher world*, and evil will exist before this universe, and the universe will not be responsible for evil, but the higher world will be the cause of evil for this world, and evil will not come from the world here to the soul, but from the soul to the world here; *and the course of the argument will lead to the attribution of responsibility for the universe to the first principles ...*  
(*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 12.30–39)

From Plotinus’ point of view, the Gnostic soul-Sophia would by way of consequence be at fault, whether she were content to illuminate a pre-existing obscurity, or whether she produced this obscurity herself and then illuminated it:

For the soul which declined saw, they say, and illuminated the darkness already in existence. Where, then, did the darkness come from? *If they are going to say that the soul made it when it declined*, there was obviously nowhere for it to decline to, and the darkness itself was not responsible for the decline, but the soul’s own nature. But this is the same as attributing the responsibility to preexisting necessities; so the responsibility goes back to the first principles.  
(*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 12.39–44)

Contrary to this, Plotinus, in treatise 34, stresses the point that for a *conscious* being—which is precisely what *Sophia* is—the journey to the exterior proceeds either from *vanity* or from *necessity*: “the journey to the exterior is *foolish* or *compulsory* (μάταιος ἢ ἀναγκαία)” (*Enn.* 6.6. [34] 1.11–12). Were this journey to be *necessary*, it could no longer be judged to be evil without in

turn making the cause of evil flow back to the principles, as Plotinus had taught immediately before, in treatise 33. But the hypothesis of an *arbitrary* action emanating from above was energetically rebutted in treatise 33, with the claim that the work of the intelligible realities proceeds in accordance with what is necessary (e.g., 3.11–12: “Of necessity, then, all things must exist for ever in ordered dependence upon each other: those other than the First<sup>25</sup> have come into being in the sense that they are derived from other, higher, principles”; or 9.23, where gods are “leading all things in order from beginning to end”). With this alternative, reformulated again at the start of treatise 34, between a *bad necessity* and a *futile initiative*,<sup>26</sup> we would clearly still be dealing with the issues that were the focus of treatise 33.<sup>27</sup>

As has been shown elsewhere,<sup>28</sup> the Plotinian solution to the problem of the origin of matter and evil turns out to be very different from that of the Gnostics, as criticized in treatise 33. Matter-evil is, for Plotinus, the result of a breakaway by infinity which, flowing from the intelligible, flees below. This escape of the unlimited (*ἀπειρία*) constitutes a process that is both *natural* and *necessary*, and is absolutely neutral in value. The role of the divine realities, and more specifically of the soul, consists in limiting and containing the negative effects of this dispersion of infinity. Thus their role is exclusively *positive*. This, very precisely is (in opposition to the Gnostic thesis exposed in treatise 33) the teaching of treatise 34, where we learn that: “This infinity, certainly, in itself runs away from the idea of limit, but is caught by being surrounded externally” (*Enn.* 6.6 [34] 3.15–16). This is a remarkable doctrine, which once again takes up the idea of the encirclement of the world’s becoming by the world soul, found in *Tim.* 34B3. The first advantage of this thesis is that, being *surrounded externally*, infinity remains infinity, with its original intrinsic nature unchanged, thus enabling it to continue to play, from *within* the world, the role of a real opponent to the limit, that is, to form, as is seen notably in *Enn.* 1.8 [51] 14, heralded by the famous statement at 6.33–34, according to which “both are principles, one of evils, the

<sup>25</sup> That is, the intellect and soul just mentioned.

<sup>26</sup> What matters is, as Plotinus indeed indicates, that the Gnostics “be taught, if only they would endure the teaching with a good will, what is the nature of these beings, so as to stop them from abusing what are worthy of all honour, which they frivolously (*εὐχερῶς*) do instead of showing the reverent care which would be becoming. For it is not right to disapprove of the management of the All, first of all because it manifests the greatness of the intelligible nature.” (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 8.6–9).

<sup>27</sup> Regarding the futility of the Gnostic model of the intelligible, cf. *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 5-33.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Narbonne 2011, 11–54 (= Narbonne 2007).

other of goods (ἀρχαὶ γὰρ ἄμφο, ἡ μὲν κακῶν, ἡ δὲ ἀγαθῶν).” *Infinite-matter-evil* then is now in an enclave, an enemy bound within the totality of being itself, a rebellious counter-principle, admittedly, yes, but one that remains subordinate to being: *subordinate*, because it remains within the purview of being, which itself remains a good totality; *rebellious*, nonetheless, because it persists in working actively against being and because its nature, being that of the infinite, and being opposed to form and to limit, remains unchanged and untamed, as that of a prisoner who, though covered with chains and, as such, being *wrapped up and surrounded by the exterior*,<sup>29</sup> yet represents a permanent danger.

Given these circumstances, one can understand that the orchestrated critique of treatise 33 against the *fall* and the *inclination* of the soul might have found a natural complement in the Platonic counter-arithmeticology of treatise 34, providing an unwavering refusal to the Pythagorean Gnostic analogical arithmeticology. Both cosmologies call on numbers; but where number is, in the one case, a pretext for fault and accident, it serves in the other as a ground and guarantor of regularity. By opposing one arithmeticology to another, Plotinus showed that Pythagorean sources were susceptible to a different exegesis than that proposed by the Gnostics, one that was more faithful to the letter of Platonic teachings.

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<sup>29</sup> *Enn.* 1.8 [51] 15,23 ff.: “But because of the power and nature of good, evil is not only evil; since it must necessarily appear, it is bound in a sort of beautiful fetters, as some prisoners are in chains of gold ...”

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## ÉCHO ET LES ANTITYPES

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Le 27 août 1957, lors de la discussion qui suivit l'intervention d'Henri-Charles Puech (1902–1986) aux entretiens de la Fondation Hardt sur les sources de Plotin (Vandoeuvres, Suisse), le jésuite belge de Louvain, Paul Henry (1906–1984), co-auteur avec le philologue de Zurich, Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer (1908–1993), de l'édition critique des *Ennéades* de Plotin, posait au conférencier la question suivante : « Pourriez-vous éventuellement nous donner le sens d'ἀντίτυπος à l'intérieur d'un système gnostique ? ». Puech répondit ceci :

Un ἀντίτυπος est une « empreinte », par rapport à un τύπος ayant valeur de παράδειγμα ; c'est, en quelque sorte, une « réplique ». L'emploi de ces deux mots est assez incohérent. Ἀντίτυπος peut être le modèle et τύπος le reflet, l'empreinte, l'image, ou inversement. Dans une lettre dogmatique, d'origine valentinienne, que cite Épiphane (*Pan.* XXXI, 5), ἀντίτυπος est employé dans le second sens, dans le sens de « reflet », de « réplique ». De même, chez les Basilidiens, qui, d'après saint Irénée (*adv. haer.*, I, 24, 3), font des ciex inférieurs les *antitypi* de « ceux qui sont au-dessus d'eux ». Le passage du papyrus de Bruce auquel j'ai fait allusion<sup>1</sup> contient la description d'un lieu céleste, transcendant ou métaphysique : les ἀντίτυποι (*Gegenbilder*, traduit Carl Schmidt<sup>2</sup>) pourraient être, si l'on accepte l'interprétation de Charlotte A. Baynes, « les représentations des éons qui appartiennent aux espaces de l'Ἀύτογενής<sup>3</sup> ».

La réponse de Puech s'inscrit dans le cadre conceptuel des ἀντίτυποι tel que le concevait alors la recherche sur les *gnostica* du Traité 33 de Plotin, où apparaît la suite de termes dont se gausse le philosophe : παροικήσεις καὶ ἀντιτύπους καὶ μετανοίας<sup>4</sup>. En complément de Plotin, la série était bien connue aussi à cette époque par le témoignage direct de l'*Anonyme*

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<sup>1</sup> Puech 1960, 168–169, à propos de l'*Apocalypse de Nicothée* mentionnée par Porphyre, *Vit. Plot.* 16 ; également Puech 1935, 123–124.

<sup>2</sup> Seulement Schmidt 1905, 361–362 car Schmidt 1892, 308 ne traduit pas.

<sup>3</sup> Puech 1960, 181–182 ; Baynes 1933, 184n8 : « These antitypes are representations of the Aeons that belong to the Spaces of the *Self-alone-begotten*, i.e., to the place of the *Midst* ».

<sup>4</sup> Plotin, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6.2.



de Bruce<sup>5</sup>. Le traité *Zostrianos* des NHC VIII en fournit aujourd'hui maints autres exemples<sup>6</sup>. Comme le montrent les exemples dans la réponse de Puech à Henry ou encore les traductions du Traité 33 et des textes gnostiques en usage de nos jours, les interprétations reçues mettent en perspective visuelle le terme ἀντίτυπος, en concevant la reproduction sous forme de copie pour le peintre ou le poète, ou d'empreinte pour le graveur de monnaies et de sceaux. Mon but en hommage amical à John D. Turner est d'attirer l'attention, parmi les façons de reproduire un modèle, sur une autre forme de mimesis, à laquelle on ne pense pas spontanément mais qui, me semble-t-il, a joué un rôle dans l'élaboration de la mythographie philosophique des gnostiques. La particularité de cette mimesis est de s'exercer, non plus en fonction de la vision, art des lignes sur un support, mais selon la sensation auditive, plaisir de l'ouïe à des sons qui créent la chaîne des retours en même temps que de nouveaux espaces vocaux en se répétant par rebonds. Pour reprendre une formule célèbre de Zumthor, c'est en vertu des harmonies de la voix que le *texte* existe<sup>7</sup>.

## 1. LES HARMONIES DE LA VOIX

Le Traité 33 constitue un bon repère sur l'importance de la vocalité dans les controverses de philosophie religieuse à la fin de l'Antiquité. Son intérêt immédiat est de situer le statut de la voix comme question débattue dans les écoles à l'époque des gnostiques. L'un des arguments de Plotin à l'encontre des traités gnostiques consiste à assimiler leur composition et leur écriture particulière à des recueils de magie à base de prières incantatoires. Celles-ci s'adressent à l'Âme, comme le font tous les *magica*, c'est-à-dire au domaine cosmique, mais sont destinées surtout à atteindre les êtres qui transcendent l'Âme, ceux d'en-haut (14.3, τὰ ἐπάνω), ainsi que les dénomme Plotin, autrement dit le domaine des entités spirituelles. Une telle oralité endimanchée de métaphysique ne peut que susciter l'exclamation indignée du philosophe : « Mais comment est-ce possible que les incorporels soient soumis à des voix ! », ἀλλὰ πῶς φωναίς τὰ ἀσώματα ; (14.8–9). La position de Plotin, persiflant ici la croyance commune à l'influence exercée sur le monde divin

<sup>5</sup> Schmidt 1892, p. 263, 19–22 (copte), p. 627 (commentaire) = Baynes LXI 7–12 (copte), 180–190 (traduction et commentaire).

<sup>6</sup> Barry 2000, 672 ἀντίτυπος, « copie », 675 μετάνοια, « repentance », 676 παροίησεις, « séjour ».

<sup>7</sup> Zumthor 1987, 205.

par le langage humain, est clairement celle d'un philosophe rationaliste se situant dans la ligne de l'école stoïcienne, pour laquelle la voix est un corps. Le point de vue opposé, considérant la voix comme un incorporel, était considéré dans la culture doxographique comme relevant de l'ontologie propre à « Pythagore », « Platon » et « Aristote ». C'est de ce côté-là, c'est-à-dire vers les tenants de l'incorporité de la voix, que Plotin rejette les gnostiques. Comme nous allons le vérifier, ce jugement est fondé.

Le débat qu'on voit ainsi émerger du Traité 33 prend un nouveau développement avec les prises de position contradictoires de Porphyre et de Jamblique sur la prière. Rien d'étonnant à ce que l'éditeur des *Ennéades* et biographe de Plotin s'en tienne à la stricte orthodoxie du maître : Porphyre reprend, en effet, presque littéralement les termes du Traité 33 en se demandant dans la *Lettre à Anébon* « comment il est possible que l'incorporel entende une voix (πῶς φωνῆς ἀκούει τὸ ἀσώματον) et que ce qui est dit dans les prières puisse avoir besoin d'une sensation et d'oreilles<sup>8</sup> ». Ce à quoi Jamblique réplique dans *Les Mystères d'Égypte* que, la voix n'étant pas un corps, « les dieux contiennent en eux la mise en acte des biens inclus dans les paroles et particulièrement dans les paroles de ceux qui, par le rituel sacré, se trouvent établis parmi les dieux et unis à eux<sup>9</sup> ». Pour Jamblique, mais aussi pour les gnostiques, le divin est en relation avec lui-même dans la voix qui l'*invoque* ou l'*évoque*, sur l'étendue complète de l'harmonie vocale, depuis la parole qui l'exprime par des sons articulés jusqu'à la répétition partielle de ceux-ci par l'écho. La sentence pythagoricienne : « Quand les vents soufflent, adore Écho », ἀνέμων πνεόντων τὴν ἦχὼ προσκύνει, laquelle transfère au rituel cosmique l'oralité sacrée, aboutit à l'interprétation qu'avance Jamblique dans le *Protreptique* : « On a là aussi avec ce symbole une façon de reconnaître la sagesse divine. Il laisse entendre, en effet, qu'il faut aimer la similitude (ὁμοιότητα) des essences et puissances divines, et que, lorsque celles-ci agissent, il faut savoir respecter et vénérer avec grand soin la parole qui est en accord avec leurs propriétés<sup>10</sup> ».

La similitude des essences et puissances est l'image invisible et immatérielle de la voix divine provenant de la pensée. Une fille de l'esprit en quelque sorte, non représentable, si ce n'est sous un mode allégorique par la

<sup>8</sup> Cité par Jamblique, *De mysteriis* 1.15 (46.17–19) Parthey (des Places 1966, 65).

<sup>9</sup> Jamblique, *De mysteriis* 1.15 (47.5–8) Parthey (des Places 1966, 66) ; traduction Broze-van Liefferinge 2009, 45.

<sup>10</sup> Jamblique, *Protrepticus* 21 (107.5 Pistelli), énoncé du symbolon (non repris dans la *De vita pythagorica*) ; commentaire de Jamblique, *Protrepticus* 21 (112.18–23 Pistelli) ; Romano 2006, 448–449 ; Gély-Ghedira 2000, 200–201.

figure féminine de l'Écho, que la croyance populaire faisait résider au creux des précipices et parler de l'intérieur des rochers pour donner la réplique à ceux qui chantent ou crient. Dans le *De domo* de Lucien de Samosate, où est construite une allégorie savante de la parole et du style, la même figure féminine est installée au bout de la chaîne des mots comme étant « la voix revenant en écho (τῆς φωνῆς ἐπανιούσης κατὰ τὸ ἀντίτυπον) et se retournant vers elle-même<sup>11</sup> ». Ce retour de la voix, qui définit un antitype, a les mêmes caractéristiques que la voix. Au masculin (ἦχος) ou au féminin (ἦχώ), figure mythique féminine, écho/Écho est du côté des incorporels, son invisible (ἀ-θηήτου)<sup>12</sup>, et, en raison de la chambre d'échos, pluriel.

Fille de la voix, Écho est « celle qui échappe à tout regard », ainsi que la caractérisent déjà Théocrite, *νηλέυστω*, terme unique qui constitue le dernier vers de *La syrinx*<sup>13</sup> et, à la suite de la poésie alexandrine, l'allégorisme néoplatonicien : *nullius oculis obnoxia*, « celle qui n'est exposée aux yeux de personne », dit Macrobe<sup>14</sup>. L'invisibilité étant la preuve d'une voix divine, cela posera quelque problème aux élèves néoplatoniciens écoutant la leçon de leur professeur. Comment être certain que la voix qu'on entend commenter Platon mais qu'on ne voit pas vient d'en haut ? Un subterfuge à l'invisibilité fut d'imaginer, à l'instar des peintres chrétiens, un nimbe lumineux entourant la tête de l'enseignant<sup>15</sup>. La preuve de la sacralité immatérielle de la voix par le nimbe visible achève ici, en quelque sorte, le portrait du philosophe en antitype de l'intellect divin et corps parfait de théurge, immunisé contre la maladie et communiquant avec l'harmonie du monde<sup>16</sup>. L'incorporité de la voix peut se marquer aussi par la miniaturisation de la tête, voire la suppression totale de celle-ci. Le premier cas est représenté par le *παράδοξον* du pois chiche que raconte Damascius dans la *Vie d'Isidore* : le philosophe néoplatonicien Hiéros d'Athènes, qui était le fils de Plutarque d'Athènes, le vieux maître de Proclus, et qui enseigna la philosophie à Athènes sous la direction de Proclus lui-même, avait vu dans la maison dite de Kyrinus (Quirinus ?) une tête humaine toute seule (*κεφαλήν μόνην ἀνθρώπου*), dont la taille si petite et la forme ne différaient en rien d'un pois chiche. Pourvue d'yeux et de cheveux, cette tête réduite faisait entendre par sa bouche « une voix aussi

<sup>11</sup> Lucien, *De domo* 3; Bompaire 2001, 157; interprétation de l'allégorie par le style de la description d'art: Laplace 1996.

<sup>12</sup> Épithète traditionnelle d'Écho jusqu'à Nonnos, *Dionysiaca* 48.491.

<sup>13</sup> Théocrite, *Syrinx* 20, dans *Anthologie grecque* 15.21; Buffière 1970, 132.

<sup>14</sup> Macrobe, *Saturnalia* 1.22.7; Willis 1970, 122, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Marinus, *Procl.* § 23.22-29 (Saffrey-Segonds 2002, 28).

<sup>16</sup> Seng 2006, 851-852; Zago 2010, 153n27.

grande (φωνήν μεγάλην), est-il dit, que celle d'un millier d'hommes<sup>17</sup> ! Le second cas, voix acéphale, est un trait propre aux révélations divines ou à l'hagiographie : ainsi, ce mystique musulman décapité, al-Ḥallāj, qu'un dévot voit en songe après son exécution, donc sans tête, mais qui lui parle<sup>18</sup>. Voix sans corps aussi lors de la décapitation de Jean : la bouche prophétique ne cesse de proférer des imprécations lorsque la tête est posée sur le plat qui passe de la fille à la mère, tel l'écho d'Orphée démembré entre les rives du fleuve<sup>19</sup>.

Ressemblance des essences et puissances divines, selon le mot de Jamblique cité plus haut, l'antitype-Écho est pure image. Voix décalée (ὑπερόφωνον)<sup>20</sup>, toujours en retard d'un temps après les mots en raison des obstacles qui les font rebondir, Écho n'est pas un logos puisqu'elle est ἄγλωσσος, « sans langue », presque muette et illusion trompeuse, une *imago uerbi*, ainsi que la qualifie Lucrèce<sup>21</sup>, ou encore « l'image heurtée de la voix » (*uocisque offensa imago*), selon l'expression de Virgile<sup>22</sup>. Elle est au sens fort une « image », c'est-à-dire un antitype qui résonne et infléchit le son. Le théoricien de l'économie rurale, Varron (I<sup>er</sup> s. av. J.-C.), soucieux d'améliorer la production de miel au Latium, recommande de placer les ruches « d'abord de préférence près de la villa, dans un endroit où ne résonnent pas les images<sup>23</sup> » (*ubi non resonant imagines*), c'est-à-dire en un lieu sans écho. Les termes : antitype, image, écho, reflet, sont synonymes<sup>24</sup>. Columelle, également, reprenant la recommandation de Varron, demande d'éviter pour les ruches les parois rocheuses et les vallons, « que les Grecs appellent *ēchos*<sup>25</sup> » (*quas Graeci ἠχοῦς uocant*), tout comme, à la même époque, Pline l'Ancien pour qui « l'écho est l'ennemie des abeilles en raison du son qui rebondit<sup>26</sup> » (*inimica et echo est resultanti sono*). L'expression *resultans sonus* est la traduction littérale de l'antitype qui définit Écho dans une épigramme attribuée à Lucien de Samosate ou à Archias (II<sup>e</sup> s. ap. J.-C.), comme « sonorité

<sup>17</sup> Damascius, *Vit. Is.*, Epitoma Photiana § 88; Zintzen 1967, 122; R. Henry 1971, 26–27.

<sup>18</sup> Apophtegme rapporté par Ritter 1955, 532–533.

<sup>19</sup> Virgile, *Georgica* 4.523–527 (*Eurydicen referebant ripae*); sur la tête coupée de Jean : Tardieu 2012.

<sup>20</sup> Probablement une création lexicale de Satyros d'Olynthe (II<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C.), *Anth. Plan.* 153.2; Aubreton-Buffière 1980, 139.

<sup>21</sup> Lucrèce, *Nat.* 4.571.

<sup>22</sup> Virgile, *Georgica* 4.50.

<sup>23</sup> Varron, *Rust.* 3.16.12.

<sup>24</sup> Sur l'écho εἶδωλον et la catégorie du double, voir Gély-Ghedira 2000, 21 et 64.

<sup>25</sup> Columelle, *Rust.* 9.5.

<sup>26</sup> Pline, *Nat. h.* 11.65.

rebondissante» (ἀντίτυπον φθογγήν) et «image bavarde<sup>27</sup>» (λάλον εἰκόνα), en raison de la chaîne des répliques de la voix<sup>28</sup>.

## 2. LES DEMEURES DE LA SAGESSE

Revenons au Traité 33. Lorsque Plotin ironise sur les grands airs que se donnent les gnostiques en s'imaginant faire passer la boursoufflure du langage pour de la profondeur de pensée, il prend, comme nous l'avons vu, comme exemple d'emphase détestable, la série *παροικήσεις και ἀντιτύπους και μετανοίας*. Selon le raisonnement de Plotin, ce vocabulaire ampoulé a deux caractéristiques. Il s'agit d'abord, dit-il, d'«hypostases», ὑποστάσεις (6.1). Ensuite, parmi les mêmes hypostases, les unes, les *Metanoiai*, relèvent des «passions» (πάθη) de l'âme, quand celle-ci se trouve dans un état de μετάνοια (6.3); les autres, les *Antitypoi*, concerne des passions de l'âme, lorsque celle-ci ne contemple «en quelque sorte» (οἶον) que des «images» (εἰκόνας) des étants, «mais», est-il précisé, «pas encore les étants eux-mêmes» (6.4–5). Plotin livre ici des informations qui, quoique partielles et partiales, méritent examen car elles sont au contact du fait gnostique.

L'impression immédiate face à cette réaction plotinienne est que le philosophe se trouve en présence d'un univers de pensée différent du sien et qu'il n'en retient que ce qu'il peut acculturer. Ainsi, des trois termes de la série, les seuls sur lesquels il a quelque chose à dire sont les *Metanoiai* et les *Antitypoi*. Il ne reparle pas des *Paroikeseis*, vraisemblablement parce que le terme est sans référent dans son propre système culturel. Cette absence laisse à penser qu'on a probablement affaire à une spéculation juive<sup>29</sup>.

Le second trait de la réaction plotinienne est la qualification générique d'*hypostases* appliquée à l'ensemble de la série. Le terme n'est pas à prendre au sens technique qu'il a dans les exposés plotiniens ou porphyriens sur l'auto-constitution, et *a fortiori* n'est pas réductible anachroniquement à son acception théologique diverse qu'il a revêtu au cours des controverses trinitaires ultérieures. Plotin utilise le mot de façon ironique. Il se moque des gnostiques qui l'emploient à tout va, pour signifier une réalité concrète

<sup>27</sup> *Anth. Plan.* 154.2–3; Aubretton-Buffière 1980, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Écho sextuple/septuple observé par Lucrèce, sans localisation (*Nat.* 4.577). Deux «Portiques d'Écho» sont signalés par Pausanias, triple à Hermion (*Descr.* 2.35.10), septuple à Olympie (5.21.17).

<sup>29</sup> Sur ces noms divins grecs ou grécisés qui trahissent une origine juive: Turner 2000a, 141n103, repris dans Turner 2000b, 165n85.

physique ou anthropologique, comme le siège corporel d'une sensation ou d'une faculté<sup>30</sup>, aussi bien qu'au sens abstrait pour qualifier une personification psychologique ou bien une propriété ontologique<sup>31</sup>. Dans le passage de Plotin en question, *hypostases*, conformément à son usage dans la culture commune, est synonyme de « résidences » ou « demeures », lieux d'habitation terrestres mais aussi, au sens métaphorique, célestes. Ainsi, la mention de trois « autres hypostases » dans le Traité 33 (6.1) implique que la « Terre nouvelle », habitat des anges et des élus évoqué au chapitre précédent (5.24), est l'hypostase première englobant les réalités que le chapitre suivant différencie par une série à trois termes.

Le « mais-pas-(eux-mêmes)-encore » (ἀλλὰ μὴ αὐτὰ πω) du texte indique que la conception de l'espace divin chez les adversaires visés est perçue par Plotin comme des lieux à étapes ou stations, et que le progrès des âmes dans la connaissance du divin consiste à pouvoir (ou savoir) passer d'un palier à l'autre. John Turner a perçu cet aspect compartimenté des lieux célestes des âmes, souvent en rapport avec leur transfert dans l'outre-tombe, ou bien avec leur descente vers ici-bas : « In *Zostrianos*, the realms above the atmospheric realm are apparently inhabited by disembodied souls during the period between their various incarnations. They each represent different levels of spiritual attainment beyond confinement to the corporeal realm and its thirteen aeons<sup>32</sup> ». De la sorte, les *Metanoiiai* (the Repentances) désigneraient les hauts degrés des âmes dans le processus de repentir, les *Paroikeseis* (the Sojourns) l'après-repentance au cours de laquelle les âmes séjourneraient dans le zodiaque, les *Antitypoi* (the Aeonic Copies) l'étape planétaire des âmes avant l'incarnation. Je nuancerais la question de la localisation cosmologique car il me semble difficile que la série de termes persiflée par Plotin réponde à une classification des âmes dans leur montée ou leur descente selon un schéma platonicien : Plotin eût reconnu l'emprunt.

La série correspondrait plutôt à une tentative de hiérarchisation céleste par ce qu'Henry Corbin appelait « une sorte de phénoménologie de la

<sup>30</sup> Ainsi, dans *Silvanos* (NHC VII 99.22–24), il est dit que, « par rapport à l'emplacement (κατα ὀνομασία), l'intellect est dans un lieu, c'est-à-dire dans le corps ». La traduction habituelle « selon la substance » est erronée et anachronique. Pareillement, quelques lignes plus haut, p. 99.13–14 : comprendre « le Christ a une réalité unique », et non une seule substance.

<sup>31</sup> Également, *Silvanos* (NHC VII 102.2–4) sur le Christ : « Si on l'appréhende du point de vue de sa réalité (κατα τελεσιονομασία, et non selon sa substance), il ne peut être appréhendé ». Le sens est classique : opposition du réel (καθ' ὑπόστασιν) et de l'apparence (κατ' ἔμφασιν), voir Ps.-Aristote, *De mundo* 4.395A29–31.

<sup>32</sup> Turner 2000a, 109.

conscience angélique<sup>33</sup> ». Ce dont il est question est l'être de l'ange, ou éon, non séparé des âmes humaines, situation que le truchement d'abstractions divinisées permettait d'imaginer. Or, comme nous le savons, Plotin a compris que les *Metanoiai* représentaient seulement des passions de l'âme en état de *μετάνοια*, et les *Antitypoi* des passions de l'âme face à des images. En ce qui concerne les premières, l'erreur d'interprétation du philosophe provient du fait qu'il situe la *μετάνοια* par rapport au seul contexte qu'il connaît : la pensée grecque courante (stoïcienne), où le terme ne signifie pas repentir/repentance, mais regret/remords : dans cette perspective, la *μετάνοια* prend place parmi les *πάθη*, au même titre que la pitié ou le chagrin, c'est-à-dire en tant qu'affliction de l'âme<sup>34</sup>. Chez les gnostiques, ainsi que le révèlent les diverses versions du mythe de Sophia, le sens de *μετάνοια* n'est pas univoque. Le terme conserve les caractéristiques de la *Metanoia* (*Metanoea*) divinisée, telle celle qui forme couple avec *Kairos/Occasio* (l'Instant propice) dans l'ecphrasis d'art de la poésie alexandrine et de ses continuateurs latins : *Metanoia* en déesse réfléchie, préoccupée, pensive, peut-être un peu triste et en retrait, *Kairos* en dieu plutôt primesautier, toujours gai, rapide comme le vent, tournoyant sur la roue de la Fortune<sup>35</sup>. Mais cette *Metanoia* païenne, que les gnostiques n'ont pas voulu faire taire, entre chez eux en combinaison avec les spéculations juives de la *Metanoia* doublure hypostasiée de Sophia aux nombreuses demeures<sup>36</sup>, figure divine de la repentance réussie et de la plénitude démiurgique<sup>37</sup>. Le roman juif *Joseph et Aséneth* campe, en effet, *Metanoia* en fille de Dieu, au sommet du monde céleste, adulée par la cour des anges et apprêtant pour ses bien-aimés la chambre nuptiale où elle-même viendra les servir<sup>38</sup>. C'est dans cette figure féminine que confluent les diverses *Metanoiai* de la littérature gnostique ainsi que celles du témoignage de Plotin, même en dépit du contre-sens.

<sup>33</sup> Corbin 1954, 1 : 59.

<sup>34</sup> Sur la *μετάνοια* comme *πάθος* : Norden 1912, 135.

<sup>35</sup> Ausone, *Epigrammata* 12.10–14 ; analyse mythographique de *Metanoia/Metanoea* renouvelée par Mattiacci 2011, 138–145, et fig. 4–7. Un *Kairos* hilare, antonyme de *Metanoia*, constitue la sixième manifestation hypostasiée du démiurge dans la cosmopée du *PGM XIII* 186 = 508.

<sup>36</sup> *Proverbes* 9,1 ; I *Hénoch* 42,1–2.

<sup>37</sup> Ainsi dans *Évangile Égyptien* NHC III 59.9–18 ; aspects psychologiques et éthiques bien analysés par Scopello 1985, 83–93.

<sup>38</sup> *Joseph et Aséneth* 16.7–8, versets remarquablement commentés par Standhartinger 1995, 189–204, et 208 ; diagramme (quasi-lacanien) de *Metanoia* à la jonction des mondes célestes, 197.

En vis-à-vis du groupe des *Metanoiai* dans la hiérarchisation céleste, Plotin et les traités gnostiques mentionnent un autre statut d'entités qui porte le nom de *Paroikeseis*. Le silence de Plotin à leur sujet est, me semble-t-il, l'indice d'une spéculation juive étrangère à son monde culturel. Au sens littéral, *παροίκησις* désignait en grec commun la résidence à l'étranger. Dans les exégèses allégoriques des récits du cycle d'Abraham, l'abstraction est personnifiée par la figure biblique de la servante égyptienne du patriarche, Agar, dont le nom hébreu était interprété Résidence (*παροίκησις*)<sup>39</sup>. Le *πάροικος* est l'étranger résident, un allogène. L'exégèse chrétienne, qu'amplifieront les premiers commentateurs de l'*Épître aux Galates*, verra dans Agar, femme fertile et esclave, une personnification du mont Sinaï ou servitude de la Loi, enfermée dans la Synagogue ou Jérusalem terrestre, par opposition à l'épouse stérile et libre, Sara, personnification de la Jérusalem d'en haut, que préfigure l'*Ecclesia quae de gentibus congregata est*, comme dit Jérôme<sup>40</sup>. Telle n'est pas la construction exégétique qui sous-tend l'antithèse *Paroikeseis-Metanoiai*, mais celle de la symbolique juive. Agar n'y est pas opposée à Sara. Elle figure la résidente étrangère, la *πάροικος*, en formation dans les arts du raisonnement avant d'accéder au statut de *κάτοικος*, d'habitante fixée dans la cité parfaite comme en sa propre cité, à savoir la Sophia<sup>41</sup>. Dans la topographie symbolique de la Terre aérienne, les Résidences (*Paroikeseis*) sont autant d'étapes en vue de la fixation des âmes dans les *Metanoiai* de la Sagesse. Le roman de *Joseph et Aséneth* présente un itinéraire et une propédeutique analogues à travers les demeures de la Sagesse hypostatique : le nom d'Aséneth comme Cité-de-refuge (*πόλις καταφυγής*) conduit à la prosopopée de la Metanoia/Sophia en fille du Très-Haut<sup>42</sup>.

### 3. RÉSONANCES GNOSTIQUES ET NÉOPLATONICIENNES

Le nom intermédiaire des demeures de la Sagesse, attesté par Plotin et la littérature gnostique, est celui d'antitypes (*Antitypoi*). Comme nous l'avons vu, cette dénomination est à prendre dans son acception courante de résonances créées par les rebonds de la voix au désert ou dans un décor

<sup>39</sup> Philon, *Leg.* 3.244; *Sacr.* 43; *Congr.* 20.

<sup>40</sup> Pour l'*In ad Galatas* 4.24–25; Marius Victorinus dans Gori 1981, 274–275; *Ambrosiaster*, *PL* 17: 384B; Jérôme, *PL* 26: 390C.

<sup>41</sup> Exégèse philonienne analysée par Alexandre 1967, 65–68; I. Hadot 2005, 282–285.

<sup>42</sup> *Joseph et Aséneth* 15.6–7; Philonenko 1968, 182–185.



bucolique. Elle a pour synonymes les termes d'images et d'échos, phénomènes acoustiques que décrivent avec précision les poèmes et récits relatifs à la nymphe Écho. Il s'agit ici aussi d'un monde féminin fait d'espaces vœux invisibles, qui sont le propre de la poésie religieuse et des liturgies célestes<sup>43</sup>. Sorties des résidences (*Paroikeseis*) et des résipiscences (*Metanoiai*), les antitypes sont partie intégrante de la Terre nouvelle imaginée par les gnostiques pour y loger leurs âmes angéliques et leurs éons. D'après les deux traditions mythologiques concernant Écho, la nymphe musicienne et poétesse est aimée de Pan que tantôt elle aime tantôt pas (de Callimaque à Longus), ou bien elle est la compagne de Narcisse qu'elle aime mais qui ne l'aime pas (Ovide)<sup>44</sup>. Les deux traditions ont en commun de représenter la nymphe en mime de la parole (μιμολόγον) et résidu de la voix (φωνῆς τρύγα), attachée aux derniers sons entendus, autrement dit aux queues de mots<sup>45</sup>.

La figure biblique interprétée en référence à la nymphe Écho est Jean-Baptiste, la voix témoin (Jn 1,7.23), en vis-à-vis de Jésus qui a rang de logos (Jn 1,14)<sup>46</sup>. Ainsi que l'observe Turner, « while Christ appears as the fully articulate Logos, John the Baptist only appears as a mere "Voice crying in the wilderness" to prepare the way of the Lord (Jn 1,23; cf. Is 40,3). The Baptist thus represents a less articulate stage of revelation in preparation for the advent of Jesus as Word<sup>47</sup> ». Mais comme ce dernier est un Logos qui préexiste à celui qui rend témoignage (Jn 1,15), Jean peut être dit voix d'avant aussi bien que voix d'après, tel l'écho brouilleur de sons et artisan d'équivoque. Cet aspect de Jean-Baptiste en écho est clairement attesté, en tout cas, dans une tradition exégétique transmise par Marius Victorinus à propos de l'âme :

*Animae autem quod alia substantia sit, manifestum. Facta enim a tripotenti spiritu, neque pure vox, neque verbum, sed sicut ἤχώ, audit ut loquatur, imago magis vocis quam vox. Et hoc est Iohannis: vox exclamantis in deserto: dirige*

<sup>43</sup> Caricaturées en « incantations » par Plotin (2.9 [33] 14.2). Voix divine (ὁμφῆ) accompagnant la poésie : Synésius, *Hymni* 1.108–112 ; hymnes à Dieu chantées d'une voix douce par les puissances siégeant au-dessus de la nature ogdoadique : *Poimandrès* 26.

<sup>44</sup> Trois monographies ont renouvelé la mythographie d'Écho : Vinge 1967, Loewenstein 1984, Gély-Ghedira 2000. Sur Écho en métamorphose du langage et la mise en scène de l'amphibologie dans le poème d'Ovide, voir en particulier Gély-Ghedira 2000, 30–43 et 177–180.

<sup>45</sup> Épigramme d'Euhodos (peut-être II<sup>e</sup> s. ap. J.-C.), *Anth. Plan.* 155,1 (Aubretton-Buffière 1980, 140) ; Ovide, *Metam.* 3.368–370.

<sup>46</sup> Mais non associé à Pan pourtant déclaré logos (Platon, *Cratylus* 408D3 ; Cornutus, *Compendium* 27). Chez les Naassènes, Pan est Christ, parce qu'il est un Attis, dieu mort/ressuscité (Hippolyte, *Elenchos* 5.9.9).

<sup>47</sup> Turner 2005, 418.

*viam domini. Anima enim in deserto, hoc est in mundo, exclamat quoniam scit dominum deum et vult mundari ut domino fruatur deo. Et ista dicit testimonium de deo et praemissa est in mundum ad testimonium testimonii. Testimonium enim dei, Iesus Christus. Filius ergo dei, filius Iohannes domini. Etenim Iohannes non erat lumen, sed venit ut testimonium diceret de lumine.*

Que l'âme est substance différente, c'est évident. Car elle est créée par l'Esprit à triple puissance, et elle n'est pas une voix ou une parole purement et simplement, mais, comme Écho, elle écoute pour pouvoir parler, image de la voix plutôt que voix. Et c'est le sens du passage de Jean : La voix qui crie dans le désert : préparez le chemin du Seigneur (Jn 1,23). Car l'âme crie dans le désert, c'est-à-dire dans le monde, qu'elle connaît le Seigneur Dieu et qu'elle veut être purifiée pour jouir de Dieu son Seigneur. Et elle rend témoignage au sujet de Dieu : elle a été envoyée en ce monde pour témoigner du témoignage. Car le témoignage de Dieu (1Jn 5,10–11), c'est Jésus-Christ. Jésus-Christ est donc Fils de Dieu, tandis que Jean est fils du Seigneur. En effet Jean n'était pas la lumière, mais il est venu pour rendre témoignage à la lumière (Jn 1,8)<sup>48</sup>.

Pierre Hadot a mis en évidence le lien de ce développement sur Jean-Baptiste avec la tradition patristique<sup>49</sup>. L'exposé de métaphysique commun à Marius Victorinus et au *Zostrien* incite, cependant, à le rattacher de façon plus précise à l'exégèse gnostique du prologue johannique<sup>50</sup>. Car, outre le témoignage d'Héracléon sur lequel Pierre Hadot a attiré l'attention, la perspective gnostique est corroborée par la *Protennoia trimorphe* (NHC XIII,1). Il est reconnu aujourd'hui que ce traité gnostique copte dépend du prologue johannique<sup>51</sup>. On peut même dire qu'en articulant sa structure sur celle de l'hymne final de l'*Apocryphon de Jean* et en mettant en comparaison les deux figures de Jean et de Jésus, la *Protennoia* commente les commentateurs du prologue<sup>52</sup>. Le traité a la particularité de tirer argument des deux conceptions qu'on se faisait de la voix, un corps selon l'ontologie stoïcienne, ou bien un non-corps comme le veut le recueil médio-platonicien de définitions : « flux passant par la bouche en provenance de la pensée » (ῥεῦμα διὰ στόματος ἀπὸ διανοίας)<sup>53</sup>. L'application de l'incorporel à la représentation

<sup>48</sup> Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* 1.56.4–15, texte P. Henry 1960, 362, traduction P. Hadot 1960, 362.

<sup>49</sup> P. Hadot 1960, 867 renvoie à Héracléon, *frag.* 5, Völker 1932, 65, (parole vs voix-écho, Sauveur vs Jean-Prophètes) et à Augustin, *Conf.* 7.9.13 et *Civ.* 10.2 (Jean âme); également P. Hadot 1968, 1: 342n2.

<sup>50</sup> Tardieu 1996, 11a.

<sup>51</sup> Poirier 2006, 98–105.

<sup>52</sup> À propos de l'hymne final de l'*Apocryphon de Jean*: Tardieu 1984, 340 « pastiche gnostique du prologue johannique ».

<sup>53</sup> Pseudo-Platon, *Definitiones* n° 98, 414D1. Dans le même sens: Némésius, *Nat. hom.* § 43; Morani 1987, 4, 20–21; Charles-Saget 1998, 254.

duelle du prologue, féminine (Jean-Baptiste, l'âme), masculine (Jésus, l'intellect), se lit ainsi dans la *Protennoia*: «Elle [= la figure androgyne] est écho (ἠχώ) en provenance de la pensée (μεεγε) et aussi parole (λογος) en provenance de la voix (σμη), laquelle (parole) a été envoyée illuminer ceux qui sont dans la ténèbre<sup>54</sup>». La mythographie assimilant Jean à du son dépourvu de corps, autrement dit à de l'écho/Écho, fait apparaître Jésus en Narcisse, mourant d'amour dans son rapport avec lui-même et dont le corps restera absent, *nusquam corpus erat*<sup>55</sup>. D'après les lignes citées de la *Protennoia* et leur contexte, l'envoi dans le monde humain (la ténèbre) concerne non seulement le Dieu qui s'y trouve caché comme parole (Jésus), mais aussi le Prophète qui s'y manifeste comme écho (Jean). Les deux métonymies présentent la même marque de la divinisation par l'invisibilité, celle de Jean se plaçant en antitype angélique du Dieu caché<sup>56</sup>, celle de Jésus en oracle de nouveau-né se proclamant Logos alors qu'il est incapable de parler<sup>57</sup>. Dans le néoplatonisme ultérieur, l'invisibilité d'Écho sera traduite en allégorie de l'harmonie du ciel (*harmoniam caeli*) inaccessible aux sens<sup>58</sup>, «vraie philosophie qui restitue très fidèlement les voix du monde lui-même» (*vera Philosophia, quae mundi ipsius voces fidelissime reddit*)<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> *Protennoia* NHC XIII 46.29–31; sur Jésus, par ailleurs, dans la *Protennoia*: Dubois 2011, 172–175.

<sup>55</sup> Ovide, *Metam.* 3.509. Sur le même et l'autre dans la mort de Narcisse: P. Hadot 1976, 93–94 = 1999, 237–238; Susanetti 2005, 129–130.

<sup>56</sup> La tradition du Précurseur en ange, à la suite de la prophétie de Malachie (3,1, reprise dans Mt 11,10) est attestée par Origène, *Comm. Jo.* 2.31 § 186.

<sup>57</sup> Valentin, *frg.* 7; Völker 1932, 59.

<sup>58</sup> Macrobe, *Saturnalia* 1.22.7; Willis 1970, 122, 3–4.

<sup>59</sup> F. Bacon, *De Sapientia Veterum* 6; Cavaillé 1997, 84.

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## PLOTINUS AND THE MAGICAL RITES PRACTICED BY THE Gnostics

Luc Brisson

Since the publication of John Turner's great book,<sup>1</sup> some interpreters have tried to show that Plotinus, despite his critique, did not condemn the magic practiced by the Gnostics, and was even influenced by it in the case of what is described as "mystic experience."<sup>2</sup> I have already reacted against this interpretative hypothesis,<sup>3</sup> and I would now like to go further, by examining a well-known passage from treatise 33 (*Enn.* 2.9) *Against the Gnostics*.<sup>4</sup>

### 1. PLOTINUS AND THE Gnostics

Between 263 and 268 CE, Christians who can be identified as Sethian Gnostics<sup>5</sup> from the Apocalypses they claimed to follow<sup>6</sup> came to hear Plotinus, and radically criticized him.<sup>7</sup>

Plotinus hence often attacked their positions in his lectures, and wrote the treatise to which we gave the title *Against the Gnostics*;<sup>8</sup> he left it to us to

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<sup>1</sup> Turner 2001.

<sup>2</sup> Mazur 2003; 2004; Narbonne 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Brisson 2009; 2010.

<sup>4</sup> It should be recalled that this title was not given by Plotinus, but by his readers and especially Porphyry, who declares in his *Vita Plotini*: "These were the writings, to which, since he gave them no titles himself, each gave different titles for the several treatises. The following are the titles which finally prevailed." (4.16–19, trans. Armstrong.)

<sup>5</sup> "From these works, one may characterize the Sethian system in terms of a self-identification of these Gnostics with the spiritual 'seed' of Seth (the third son of Adam and Eve), their spiritual ancestor, who intervened twice in the course of primordial history to save his progeny from the clutches of an angry world creator and had appeared for a third time in recent history bearing a revelation and baptism which would secure their final salvation." (Turner 2001, 4).

<sup>6</sup> They possessed apocalypses of Zoroaster, Zostrianos, Allogenes, Nicotheus, Messos, and many others (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16.5–7).

<sup>7</sup> Tardieu 1992. See also Poirier and Schmidt 2010.

<sup>8</sup> The refutation written by Plotinus *Against the Gnostics* corresponds, it seems, to treatise 33 (*Enn.* 2.9) alone, *pace* the hypothesis of Roloff 1970 (based on Harder 1936), who considered that *Against the Gnostics* included these four treatises, which follow one another in chronological order: 30 (*Enn.* 3.8), 31 (*Enn.* 5.8), 32 (*Enn.* 5.5) and 33 (*Enn.* 2.9).



assess what he passed over (ἤμιν τὰ λοιπὰ κρίνειν καταλέλοιπεν). Amelius went to forty volumes in writing against the book of Zostrianus. I, Porphyry, wrote a considerable number of refutations of the book of Zoroaster, which I showed to be entirely spurious and modern, made up by the sectarians to convey the impression that the doctrines which they had chosen to hold in honour were those of the ancient Zoroaster.<sup>9</sup> (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16.9–18)

Plotinus refuted the Gnostics in one of his courses, as attested by treatise 33 (*Enn.* 2.9) and he encouraged Amelius and Porphyry to do the same. Two similar phrases, “The rest of their teachings I leave to you to investigate by reading their books (τὰ δ’ ἄλλα ὑμῖν καταλείπω ἀναγινώσκουσιν ἐπισκοπεῖσθαι), and to observe throughout that the kind of philosophy which we pursue ...” (14.36–37), and “you are to use philosophy of this kind as a standard of comparison for the rest (τὰ δὲ ἄλλα τῷ τοιούτῳ παραβάλλειν)” (14.43), lead one to believe that in ch. 14, we find ourselves in the context evoked by Porphyry in his *Vita Plotini*.

### 1.1. *The Magic Practiced by the Gnostics According to Plotinus*

Like Richard Dufour,<sup>10</sup> I consider treatise 33 (*Enn.* 2.9) not to be part of a set of four treatises against the Gnostics,<sup>11</sup> as Harder<sup>12</sup> and most interpreters after him have believed. I tend, moreover, to think, like Wolters,<sup>13</sup> that this treatise is made up of disparate pieces. It opens with preliminary considerations (chs. 1–3), followed by a series of criticisms: of the Gnostics’ relation to the world (4–9), of their myths and rituals (10–14), and finally, of their negligence with regard to virtue (15–18). At the end of ch. 14, which is in the third part, we read “I would not like to say more; this is the way in which it would be suitable for us to speak about them,”<sup>14</sup> which gives a good indication that for Plotinus it was the end of the treatise, and that the third part (chs. 15–18) was added afterwards.

Chapter 14 constitutes a violent critique of the Gnostics’ magical practices:

But they themselves most of all impair the inviolate purity of the higher powers in another way too. For when they write incantations (ἐπαοιδάς),

<sup>9</sup> All translations of Porphyry’s *Vita Plotini* and Plotinus’ *Enneads* are by A.H. Armstrong, usually slightly modified.

<sup>10</sup> See Dufour 2006.

<sup>11</sup> That is, treatises 30 (*Enn.* 3.8), 31 (*Enn.* 5.8), 32 (*Enn.* 5.5) and 33 (*Enn.* 2.9). See *supra*, note 8.

<sup>12</sup> Harder 1936.

<sup>13</sup> Wolters 1981.

<sup>14</sup> Lines 44–45.

intending to address them to those powers, not only to the soul but to those above it as well,<sup>15</sup> what are they doing except making the powers obey the word and follow the lead of people<sup>16</sup> who say spells (γοητείας) and charms (θέλξεις) and conjurations (πείσεις), any one of us who is skilled in the art of saying precisely the right things in the right way, songs (μέλη) and cries (ῥήχους) and aspirated (προσπνεύσεις) and hissing sounds (σιγμούς τῆς φωνῆς) and everything else which their writings say has magic power (μαγεύειν) in the higher world? But even if they do not want to say this, how are the incorporeal beings affected by sounds (φωναίς)? So by the sort of statements with which they give an appearance of majesty to their own words (λόγους),<sup>17</sup> they, without realizing it, take away the majesty of the higher powers.

But when they say they free themselves from diseases, if they meant that they did so by temperance and orderly living, they would speak well, just as the philosophers do;<sup>18</sup> but in fact they assume that the diseases are evil spirits (δαίμονία), and claim to be able to drive them out by their word: by this claim they might make themselves more impressive in the eyes of the masses, who wonder at the powers of magicians, but would not persuade sensible people that diseases do not have their origin in strain or excess,<sup>19</sup> or deficiency or decay, and in general in changes which have their origin outside or inside.<sup>20</sup>

(*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 14.1–20; the reader should consult Richard Dufour’s extensive notes to his 2006 French translation.)

To understand this chapter, it is appropriate first to investigate what Plotinus understood by “magic” on a theoretical and a concrete level, and then to investigate what, in the Nag Hammadi treatises, might correspond to it.

### 1.1.1. *Magic (γοητεία) according to Plotinus*

Although in ch. 14, the term γοητείας is in the plural, and must be translated by “magical formulas,” Plotinus is essentially talking about magic (γοητεία) in this chapter.<sup>21</sup> Chapter 40 of treatise 27 (*Enn.* 4.3) gives a very clear

<sup>15</sup> That is, to the celestial bodies in particular.

<sup>16</sup> Note that λέγουσι is the dative plural of the present participle.

<sup>17</sup> Instead of οἷ retained by Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1983), we read οἷς with the manuscript Q and the manuscript A before correction, as does J. Igal (1982).

<sup>18</sup> In Plato’s *Republic* and *Timaeus*.

<sup>19</sup> The only occurrence of the term πλησμονή (repletion, satiety) in the Plotinian treatises.

<sup>20</sup> Plotinus links himself to the teaching of Hippocrates, upon which Galen, in particular, commented. See, for instance, the long quotation of Hippocrates in Galen, in which illness is linked to repletion, evacuation, and fatigue (*In Hipp. Nat.* 15.110.1–9 Kühn). The “rationalist” and “scientific” explanation of illness thus receives Plotinus’ approval, to the detriment of popular and superstitious beliefs. We are far from the pronounced taste of the later Neoplatonists, such as Iamblichus, for magic, demons and other highly unscientific theories.

<sup>21</sup> On magic in Plotinus, Brisson 1992; on prayer, see Laurent 1999.

formulation of what Plotinus thought of magic, which was inseparable from the notion of “sympathy.”

According to Plotinus, it is only in a particular cosmological context that one may speak of “sympathy.” The English term “sympathy” renders the Greek term *συμπάθεια*, which is synonymous with *συμφωνία*, “accord.” The compound term *συμπάθεια* indicates that every state that affects (*πάθη* or *πάθος*) one entity in this world is in solidarity (as indicated by *σύν*) with all the effects that affect all the other entities of that world. The philosophical use of the term at the origin of the notion of “sympathy” is Stoic. The “breath” (*πνεῦμα*) that is in a different state of tension in all bodies is subject to a kind of continuous “undulatory” motion, which implies that every effect felt in a part is felt by the whole. Plotinus rejects this doctrine as such, because he thinks that it takes only bodies into consideration. For him, “sympathy” only has meaning if it is situated on the level of the soul. Indeed, for Plotinus, it is the vegetative soul that produces and administers all bodies within the world. Therefore, since all bodies depend on one and the same soul for their production and administration, and since all souls are one, the chain of causes and effects forms a unique totality in which, as I said, every effect felt in a part is felt by the whole.

In this world, each body is thus in relation with all the others through the intermediary of the lower part of the world soul. In any case, it is the “reasons” (*λόγοι*) that the lower part of the world soul implants within matter, which ultimately account for the constitution and organization of both parts and wholes. And since the “reasons” are the “forms” (*εἶδη*) on the level of the soul, it follows that the unity that characterizes the intellect in the intelligible world is present in the sensible world, albeit in an attenuated form.<sup>22</sup> In this perspective, one may say<sup>23</sup> that all souls are of the same species (*ὁμοειδές*), just as all bodies<sup>24</sup> are parts of the whole that constitutes the world. And if the soul as such is one, the parts of the whole that constitutes the world cannot help but interact with each other, since every effect is in solidarity with all the others of which it is the consequence and of which it will become the cause.<sup>25</sup> By virtue of “sympathy,” therefore, it is possible to intervene at a distance upon bodies by magical practices.

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<sup>22</sup> This is an argument that Plotinus advances in treatise 28, when he emphasizes that, “our universe has a share in the higher realities” (*Enn.* 4.4 [28] 39.1–5).

<sup>23</sup> With treatise 27 (*Enn.* 4.3).

<sup>24</sup> According to treatise 28 (*Enn.* 4.4).

<sup>25</sup> This is what Plotinus explains in *Enn.* 4.9 [8] 3.1–9.

According to Plotinus, however, the world soul in its higher parts—the celestial bodies and the other gods—is not sensitive to magic, owing to its proximity to the intelligible, because, as Plotinus explains: “Contemplation alone remains incapable of enchantment (ἀγοήτευτος) because no one who is self-directed is subject to enchantment; for he is one, and that which he contemplates is himself, and his reason is his own life and work” (*Enn.* 4.4 [28] 44.1–3). Only the lower part of the world soul—nature, the demons, and the non-rational part of the human soul—are, for Plotinus, susceptible of being affected by magic (*Enn.* 4.4 [28] 43.12–24).

To talk about human souls is to talk about souls that are temporarily present within an earthly body.<sup>26</sup> In view of its mobility and its multiple character, the soul does not always feature the same kind of union with the body. The soul may be closer to the body or closer to the intellect, to which it remains attached. When it is closer to the body, it becomes a demon, like the malevolent demons of the kind whose attacks it must fight off, whereas when, as in the case of the sage, it is closer to the intellect, it becomes a god, and can victoriously resist malevolent attacks, as Plotinus resists the maneuvers of Olympius (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 10.1–15, see *infra*, note 31). The efficacy of magic can be explained by “sympathy,” which itself corresponds to the action of the lower part of the world soul—nature—which connects all things to one another in the world of bodies.

### 1.1.2. *The Theological Background of Chapter 14*

In ch. 14, Plotinus attacks two types of magical practices carried out by the Gnostics, one type intended for the soul and beings higher than it, and the other for the demons. One can get an idea of the theology that constitutes the context of this passage by referring to Porphyry’s *Abst.* 2.37–39, where we find this hierarchical order:

- the first god (37.1)
- the world soul (37.2)
- the gods of the world (37.3), the world, the fixed and wandering stars
- the invisible gods (37.4)
  - those who have a name
  - those who have no name

<sup>26</sup> This association of a soul with a body that corresponds to what is called a living being (ζῶον), is quite naturally qualified as a “compound” συναμφότερον and as κοινόν (*Enn.* 4.3 [27] 26.1–3) or as σύνθετον (*Enn.* 6. 8 [39] 2.13).

the demons (37.5)  
 good demons (38.2–3)  
 bad demons (38.4)

In this list, we find the division carried out by Plotinus in our passage between the soul and the higher beings, on the one hand, and the demons on the other. Magic claims to act on these entities through discourse, or a series of sounds, whether articulated or not, modulated or not.

### 1.2. *The Magical Formulas*

Three types of magical formula are mentioned in the first part of ch. 14: ἐπαιδιάς, θέλξεις and πείσεις.

#### 1.2.1. ἐπαιδιάς

An incantation is modulated discourse (ῥῥῆ) that is sung over (ἐπί) a patient to cure him, or is addressed to (ἐπί) a higher being, a soul or a demon with a view to seduction. In both cases—soul and the higher beings, on the one hand, and the demons, on the other—incantations are addressed orally to these entities, but are written down. The use of incantations is attested since the beginning of the *Charmides*,<sup>27</sup> when Socrates offers Charmides a remedy, accompanied by an incantation, to cure him of his headache:

CHARMIDES: What is this remedy? he said.

SOCRATES: And I said that it was a certain leaf, and that there was a charm to go with it. If one sang the charm while applying the leaf, the remedy would bring about a complete cure, but without the charm the leaf was useless.

CHARMIDES: And he said Well, then I shall write down the charm at your dictation.<sup>28</sup> (Plato, *Charm.* 155E–156A, trans. Rosamond Kent Sprague)

The context in the *Charmides* is one of healing, as it is in the second part of ch. 14, whereas incantation plays a role in both cases in this chapter, both that of the soul and higher beings and that of the demons. One also notes a curious mixture of writing and orality in these lines from the *Charmides*: the incantation is written down, but it is directed out loud to the beings on whom one wishes to act.

<sup>27</sup> On this, see Brisson 2000.

<sup>28</sup> I have transformed the reported dialogue into direct speech.

1.2.2. *Θέλξεις*

The only occurrence of *θέλξεις* in Plotinus is found in ch. 14. In contrast, the verb *θέλγειν* appears several times in the passage just cited, as well as in ch. 43 of the same treatise 28:

But how is the excellent man (*σπουδαίος*) affected by magic (*γοητείας*) and drugs (*φαρμάκων*)?<sup>29</sup> He is incapable of being affected in his soul by magic, and his rational part would not be affected, nor would he change his mind; but he would be affected in whatever part of the irrational in the All there is in him,<sup>30</sup> or rather this part would be affected; but he will feel no passionate loves provoked by drugs, if falling in love happens when one soul assents to the affection of the other. But just as the irrational part of him is affected by incantations (*ἐπωδαίς*), so he himself by counter-chants (*ἀντάδων*) and counter-incantation (*ἀντεπάδων*) will dissolve the powers on the other side.<sup>31</sup> But he might suffer death or illnesses or anything bodily from such incantations for the part of the All in him<sup>32</sup> would be affected by another part or by the All, but he himself would be unharmed ... But spirits (*δαίμονες*) themselves, also, are not incapable of being affected in their irrational part; it is not out of place to ascribe memory and sense-perception to them and to grant that they are charmed (*θέλγεσθαι*) by attractions appropriate to their nature and that those of them who are nearer to the things here below hear the prayers of those who call upon them according to the degree of their concern with things here below. For everything which is directed to something else is under the magic influence (*γοητεύεται*) of something else; for that to which it (*πρὸς ὃ*) is directed has magic power (*γοητεύει*) over it and draws it; but only that which is self-directed (*πρὸς αὐτό*) is free from

<sup>29</sup> This is how I translate *φάρμακα*; see also *Enn.* 1.4 [46] 5-3. Chs. 43 and 44 seek to answer this question: how can one escape the influences that sorcerers try to draw down upon us? Only contemplation, which places one in relation with oneself, allows one to escape these influences, which affect only the lowest part of the soul, the vegetative soul it shares with the world.

<sup>30</sup> This is its vegetative soul, which derives from the vegetative soul of the world. On the fact that the *ἄλογον* comes from the world, see *supra*, ch. 10.

<sup>31</sup> On this point, one recalls this astonishing testimony given by Porphyry in his *Vita Plotini*: "One of those claiming to be philosophers, Olympius of Alexandria, who had been for a short time a pupil of Ammonius, adopted a superior attitude towards Plotinus out of rivalry. This man's attack on him went to the point of trying to bring a star-stroke upon him by magic (*μαγεύσας*). But when he found his attempt recoiling upon himself, he told his intimates that the soul of Plotinus had such great power as to be able to throw back attacks on him on to those who were seeking to do him harm. Plotinus was aware of the attempt and said that his limbs on that occasion were squeezed together and his body contracted 'like a money-bag pulled tight.' Olympus, since he was often rather in danger of suffering something himself than likely to injure Plotinus, ceased his attacks." (10.1-15) Plotinus does not need counter-chants (*ἀντάδων*) and counter-incantation (*ἀντεπάδων*).

<sup>32</sup> See *supra*, lines 3-4.

enchantment (ἀγοήτευτον). For this reason all practical action is under magic influence (γεγοητεύται), and the whole life of the practical man: for he is moved to that which charms (θέλγει) him. (Enn. 4.4 [28] 43.1–20)

Plotinus is very clear about how the sage can escape the power of magic practices, and especially charms (θέλξεις). Only contemplation can oppose this power, for only contemplation, by placing the soul in relation with itself, and therefore with the intelligible to which it remains attached, allows it, by isolating it, to escape the chain of causes and effects in the world of bodies. This world, in which all practical activity is carried out, is governed by the lowest part of the world soul, and is the domain of sympathy. This indicates that magic can intervene only in the world of bodies, which is the domain of the lowest part of the world soul and of the irrational parts of the human soul. It is because he can rise above the world of bodies and establish himself within the intelligible that the sage can escape the influence of magic.

### 1.2.3. *πείσεις*

This is the only occurrence of *πείσεις* in the *Enneads*. The term could refer to prayers intended to persuade (*πειθεῖν*) the soul or the higher beings, which, according to Plotinus, is in the power of magic, the efficacy of which he explains by means of the sympathy that reigns in the universe. The celestial bodies do not hear the prayers that people address to them, and therefore do not retain any memory of them (*Enn.* 4.4 [28] 26 and 41–42).

### 1.3. *The Expression of These Magical Formulas*

In ch. 40 of treatise 28 (*Enn.* 4.4), one finds a description of the goal and implementation of these magical formulas. Once again, the relation between magic and sympathy is recalled. There can be sympathy only in this world, a closed ensemble constituted by the bodies and souls that fashion and organize them. Sympathy constitutes a system closed upon itself, upon which one cannot intervene from outside.

For if anyone put a magician outside the All,<sup>33</sup> he could not draw or bring down (ἔλξειεν ... καταγάγοι) the higher powers by attractive or binding spells (ἐπαγωγαῖς ἢ καταδέσμοις).<sup>34</sup> But now, because he does not operate as if he

<sup>33</sup> One will find a similar thought experiment, this time applied to vision, in the following treatise, *Enn.* 4.5 [29] 3.22 ff. In this other case as well, the goal is to point out the need for sympathy.

<sup>34</sup> Here we find the same terms (ἐπαγωγαῖς and καταδέσμοις) as in *Resp.* 2.364C3–E4; see also *Leges* 11.933D7.

were somewhere else, he can work on his subjects knowing by what way one thing is drawn to another in the living being.<sup>35</sup> And there is a natural drawing power in incantations (ἐπωδαίς) wrought by the tune (μέλει), and the particular intonation (ἤχη) and posture (σχήματι) of the magician, for these things attract, as pitiable (ἐλεεινά) postures (σχηματά) and tones (φθέγματα) attract.<sup>36</sup> For it is the irrational soul, not the power of choice (προαίρεσις) or reason (λόγος), which is charmed by music (μουσική) and this kind of magic causes no surprise.<sup>37</sup> (Enn. 4.4 [28] 40.17–25)

Magicians, Gnostic or not, tried to attract the higher beings to force them to act in the sense they wanted. As we have just seen, however, Plotinus considers that magic can act only on the irrational soul. We can therefore understand the indignation that opens ch. 14 of treatise 33: “But they themselves most of all impair the inviolate purity of the higher powers in another way too.”

### 1.3.1. *Attractive or Binding Spells* (ἐπαγωγαίς ἢ καταδέσμοις)

The magician must be within our world in order to play upon sympathy. In this context, he must attract the higher divinities by evoking them, in order to make them come down and make them sensitive to the needs of the person evoking them and to bind them to his demands. This attraction must therefore last, and be followed by effects: this is why one speaks of formulas that bind. To achieve this goal, he makes use of an incantation that plays upon words and gestures. Yet in what does this incantation consist? In songs (μέλη), sounds (ἦχους), breaths (προσπνεύσεις), intonations of the voice (σιγμοὺς τῆς φωνῆς) and φθέγματα.

### 1.3.2. *Songs or Tunes* (μέλη)

Song or tune is explicitly linked to incantations. An incantation, as has just been said, is a modulated discourse (ᾠδή) that is sung over (ἐπι) a patient to cure him, or that is addressed to (ἐπι) a higher being or a soul with a view to seduction. The term indicates a modulation of the voice, whether or not it is accompanied by music (see line 24).

<sup>35</sup> That is, the world.

<sup>36</sup> This passage features important textual problems. The translation is *ad sensum*.

<sup>37</sup> The text retained by Armstrong seems more natural, by eliminating ἀλλ' ἢ ψυχῆ as a gloss, at line 23, and preserving the text intact at lines 24–25.



1.3.3. *Sounds* (ἤχοι or ἤχαί)

Incantations involve voice, whether modulated (μέλει) or unmodulated, and whether music is involved or not. The term ἤχος or ἤχη designates a noise or a sound, whether articulated or not: “when a sound of the voice (φωνῆς) has a meaning (λόγον), some animals partake of the meaning (λόγου) along with the noise (ἤχης), some only of the sound of the voice (φωνῆς) and its impact (πληγῆς)” (*Enn.* 6.4 [22] 15.6–8). One might think here of a series of vowels, as we shall see below.

1.3.4. *Pantings* (προσπνεύσεις)

It is hard to know what is to be understood by this word: perhaps panting. Only one other occurrence of this term is to be found in Greek literature, in Origen, *Mart.* 46.12.

1.3.5. *Stridulations* (σιγμοὺς τῆς φωνῆς)

This is the only occurrence in Greek literature. One might think of vocal stridulations.

1.3.6. *Postures* (σχήματα)

This sound is susceptible of being modulated, with or without musical accompaniment, but it is associated with postures. One might think of a specific position of the hands, kneeling, or prostration. In short, the entire body can be mobilized to make the incantation more effective.

1.3.7. *Tones* (φθέγματα)

The term φθέγματα, itself qualified by ἐλεεινά, seems to designate tones; one adopts a tone of submission, of supplication, or of request. The incantation, which is a prayer, is recited or sung in a tone that inspires piety in the person to whom the invocation is intended.

## 2. THE RITUALS IN THE NAG HAMMADI TREATISES

What relation, then, can be established between the Gnostics, particularly the Sethians, and magic? Irenaeus had already denounced the magical practices of Simon (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.23.4)—whom he considered to be the ancestor of the Valentinians—, Basilides (1.24.5) and Carpocrates (1.25.3). One may imagine that such denunciations were normal among the oppo-

nents of Gnosticism. But what is the true situation in the Nag Hammadi papyri? John Turner has established an inventory of the ritual practices that can be related to magic, as Plotinus understood it, in Sethian Gnostic literature.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.1. *Baptisms*

Baptism plays a central part in Sethian literature. Yet baptism with earthly water is replaced by baptism in the water (= light?) of celestial spheres. In *Zostrianos*, the soul's ascent into the aeon Barbelo implies three baptisms at three levels: Kalyptos, Protophanes, and Autogenes (*Zost.* NHC VIII 15; 22; 24; 58). In this context, baptism is associated with visions. Each baptism constitutes a level of purification, and allows access to spiritual knowledge (23). Baptism in the waters of Autogenes allows one to contemplate the reality of souls; baptism in the waters of Protophanes makes one able to discover the unity that links souls and forms (22; 23); and baptism in the waters of Kalyptos gives one the power of recognizing absolute unity and the principle of all things (19; 23). John Turner considers that this transition from a conception of baptism in the terrestrial world to a spiritual level is a result of the change imposed by the destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem in 70 CE.

### 2.2. *Prayers*

In *Zostrianos* (86.13–23; 88.9–22; 51.24–52.8), *Allogenes* (NHC XI 54.6–37) and the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VI 126.5–13), we find several prayers that can be associated with magical rituals that promote the soul's ascent. As we have just seen, the entities invoked, moreover, belong to the aeon Barbelo, and are associated with Kalyptos, Protophanes and Autogenes. These prayers may take the form of hymns<sup>39</sup> or magical songs.<sup>40</sup>

In *Zostrianos* (118), we find a prayer that contains graphical and sonorous symbols that play the part of passwords (συνθήματα). These are series of letters “aaa eee” intended to be modulated or sung three or five times. A bit further on (127) we find a series of terms concerning life, “Zoe, Zeoe, Zēoe, Zosi, Zosi, Zao, Zeooo, Zesen, Zesen,” then a series of vowels, “eooooooooeo.”

In *Marsanes*, we find the most complete account in all of Sethian literature. According to this teaching, the structure of the soul and that of the

<sup>38</sup> Turner 2001, 608–635.

<sup>39</sup> See the hymns addressed to Seth in the *Three Steles of Seth* (NHC VII,5).

<sup>40</sup> *Holy Book* (NHC III,2) 66.8–22.

Zodiac feature a specific configuration symbolized by phonetic and graphic elements: in Greek, στοιχεῖα means both elements and letters of the alphabet. The soul features five configurations. The first, made up of simple vowels, refers to the world soul. The second, consisting in double vowels, refers to the female soul, while the third, made up of triple vowels, refers to the male soul. The fourth and fifth refer to individualized souls. In addition, the consonants symbolize the soul's incarnation. One finds this kind of speculation among the Valentinians as well (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.14.5).

### 2.3. Cures

The link between illness and the presence of a demon is not attested in the documentation currently available on the Gnostics. The Valentinians thought that demons could come to establish themselves inside material man.<sup>41</sup> The Sethians also accepted the presence of demons throughout the body, which provoke the passions that give rise to sorrow, envy, pain, pleasure, anger, and a multitude of other affects.<sup>42</sup> One should also recall the three passages from the New Testament in which illness is mentioned at the same time as demons to whom one can speak.<sup>43</sup> In the *Gospel of Thomas*<sup>44</sup> and the *Acts of Peter and the Twelve Apostles*,<sup>45</sup> Jesus orders the apostles to cure the sick. Finally, the *Acts of Peter* opens with Peter curing the sick. One can therefore imagine that the Gnostics Plotinus knew did practice magic to obtain a cure, even if one cannot find testimonies to this effect in Gnostic literature.

## 3. PLOTINUS AND THE GNOSTICS: AN OPPOSITION WITHOUT CONCESSION

I do not believe one can affirm, with Zeke Mazur that, “[t]hus Plotinus criticizes the Gnostics not for their use of ritual *per se*, but for what he sees as their arrogant, impious, and entirely futile attempts to manipulate their superiors.”<sup>46</sup> Yet what use could a magic be that would have no influence? Zeke Mazur answers as follows: “what I would like to propose instead—

<sup>41</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.34.4–6; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 2.20.114.3–6.

<sup>42</sup> *Ap. John* (NHC II,1) 18.2–19.1.

<sup>43</sup> Mark 1:34; Matt 4:24; Luke 9:1.

<sup>44</sup> NHC II 35.24–25 (logion 14).

<sup>45</sup> NHC VI 10.19–26.

<sup>46</sup> Mazur 2004, 38.

following the excellent suggestions of Gregory Shaw—, is that the highest phase of Plotinus' contemplation was not only structurally homologous to certain theurgical rituals, but that it had in fact been derived from some prior ritual of this type; and indeed that its only substantive difference with later theurgy was its exclusively 'interior' performance.<sup>47</sup> This answer is not appropriate, for the soul's union with the intellect takes place through contemplation, and union with the One takes place by means of the intellect's union with the One. We always remain on a theoretical level: the soul raises itself toward the intelligible through study, not by rising up through the sensible world by means of passwords, prayers, or baptisms. Yet study has nothing to do with magical rituals, even if we suppose that such rituals are interior.

What, moreover, does the formula "inner ritual" mean? Zeke Mazur offers this definition: "Inner ritual—of which Plotinus' praxis is a prime example—would thus occupy a liminal position between the cognitive processes employed in discursive philosophy and the physical actions which comprise religious ritual."<sup>48</sup> He then gives as examples the rituals attached to Tantra. The problem is that Tantra has nothing to do with the Platonic doctrine of the intelligible, and still remains attached to the sensible, which, from a Plotinian perspective, allows it to have recourse to "magical" practices.

Yet Zeke Mazur goes further still: "We have seen that in the final stages of ascent Plotinus rejects discursive reason in favor of a kind of meditation. He usually describes this phase in evocative but apparently metaphorical terms; in a few cases, however, he directly enjoins the reader to engage in specific visualization exercises."<sup>49</sup> Following Gregory Shaw, Zeke Mazur cites several passages from the Plotinian corpus. The problem is that none of these passages seems to be attached to a religious ritual, or even a religious context. In treatise 10 (*Enn.* 5.1), the subject is first (2.12–23) the soul, which penetrates the body like the sun that illuminates the world; then (4.1–11) the contemplation of the intelligible world that is the model of the sensible world; and finally the contemplation of the One (6.9–15). In these passages, one finds once again the metaphor associating the intelligible with light,<sup>50</sup> the association of the intuition of the vision of the forms with the vision of the sacred objects of the mysteries, and as far as the One is concerned, an allusion to the famous text of *Resp.* 6.509B9. In *Enn.* 6.4 [22] 7, *Enn.*

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<sup>47</sup> Mazur 2004, 45.

<sup>48</sup> Mazur 2004, 44.

<sup>49</sup> Mazur 2004, 45.

<sup>50</sup> Beierwaltes 1961.

6.5 [23] 7, and *Enn.* 5.8 [31] 11–12, Plotinus encourages his auditors to see the intelligible world through the sensible world; the latter then appears as an empty, luminous sphere. It should be noted that the image of the sphere, associated with the intelligible world, is already found in Diogenes Laërtius (*Vit. phil.* 3.72): since the sensible world has the form of a sphere, the intelligible world, which is its model, must also have the form of a sphere. We find this image of a sphere once again in *Enn.* 6.7 [38] 15.25–34: if this sphere has several faces, it is because the model of the sensible world is a Living Being in itself that contains all the species of living beings (*Tim.* 39E–40A).

One does not find a reference to a Gnostic ritual in any of these passages. The idea of light and of a sphere, used to evoke the intelligible world, can be traced back to Platonic passages; the atmosphere of the Mysteries, associated with the description of the intellect and the One, goes back to the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*. It cannot be excluded, moreover, that reminiscence of images in contemporary Latin literature can be found in Plotinus.

This lack of interest in any ritual can be explained, in the first instance, by a philosophical position that is proper to Plotinus: the soul always remains attached to the intelligible. Therefore, only study, which leads to the contemplation of the intelligible, enables the soul to rise back up to its principle. By rejecting this presupposition at the beginning of his *De vita pythagorica*, Iamblichus opened the way to theurgy as the instrument of the soul's ascent toward its principle, and all subsequent Neoplatonists were to follow him.

Plotinus knew some Gnostics, but disapproved of their rituals. In treatise 33 (*Enn.* 2.9) he gives the theoretical reasons that justify this opposition, which was shared by his disciples Amelius and Porphyry. Might one not imagine, however, that he could have been influenced by the practices and doctrines of the Gnostics, as he was by the Stoic system, which he never ceased to criticize? A superficial influence is always possible, and even probable. But there is a fundamental philosophical reason that led Plotinus to reject the Gnostic dramaturgy of the soul's re-ascent through the stars with the help of various divinities: this is the fact that the soul, every soul, remains attached to the intelligible. Thus the sage whose soul remains strongly attached to the intellect does not need rituals or the myths justifying these rituals to rise back to the principle. When Iamblichus came to criticize Plotinus' position, the necessity was felt for rituals that enabled the passage from one world to another.

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WHERE DID MATTER APPEAR FROM?  
A SYNTACTIC PROBLEM IN A PLOTINIAN  
ANTI-GNOSTIC TREATISE\*

Lorenzo Ferroni

Here is the text<sup>1</sup> of *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 12.30–40 as established by Henry and Schwyzer (*editio minor*):

30 ἢ γάρ  
ἔλλαμψις ἢ εἰς τὸ σκότος ἐξετασθεῖσα ποιήσει ὁμολογεῖν  
τάς ἀληθείς τοῦ κόσμου αἰτίας. Τί γάρ ἐλλάμπειν ἔδει, εἰ  
μὴ πάντως ἔδει; ἢ γάρ κατὰ φύσιν ἢ παρὰ φύσιν ἀνάγκη.  
Ἄλλ' εἰ μὲν κατὰ φύσιν, αἰεὶ οὕτως· εἰ δὲ παρὰ φύσιν, καὶ  
35 ἐν τοῖς ἐκεῖ ἔσται τὸ παρὰ φύσιν, καὶ τὰ κακὰ πρὸ τοῦ  
κόσμου τοῦδε, καὶ οὐχ ὁ κόσμος αἴτιος τῶν κακῶν, ἀλλὰ  
τάκει τούτῳ καὶ τῇ ψυχῇ οὐκ ἐντεῦθεν, ἀλλὰ παρ' αὐτῆς  
ἐνταῦθα· καὶ ἦξει ὁ λόγος ἀναφέρων τὸν κόσμον ἐπὶ τὰ  
πρῶτα. Εἰ δὲ δῆ, καὶ ἡ ὕλη, ὅθεν φανείη. Ἡ γάρ ψυχὴ ἡ  
40 νεύσασα ἤδη ὄν τὸ σκότος, φασίν, εἶδε καὶ κατέλαμψε.

*Enn.* = w (= A E) x (= B R J) y (= U S M) Q

38 τὸν κόσμον *Enn.* : τὸ κακὸν Heigl Theiler || 39 ὕλη scil. ἀναφέρεται || φανείη subiectum  
ὁ κόσμος : (ἄν) φανείη Theiler

Here is the translation by A.H. Armstrong:

For their (i.e., the Gnostics') "illumination of the darkness," if it is investigated, will make them admit the true causes of the universe. For why was it necessary for the soul to illuminate, unless the necessity was universal? It was either according to soul's nature or against it. But if it was according to its nature, it must always be so. If, on the other hand, it was against its nature, then there will be a place <sup>35</sup> for what is against nature in the higher world, end evil will

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\* This essay is gratefully dedicated to Prof. John Turner, to whom I and many others owe a deeper comprehension of Gnostic thought and culture.

<sup>1</sup> The apparatus of Henry and Schwyzer (1964–1983) has been slightly modified in order to make it clearer and closer to the following discussion. The medieval manuscripts employed by Henry and Schwyzer in order to reconstruct the archetype have the following *sigla*: A = Laur. Plut. 87.3; E = Paris. Gr. 1976 [family w]; B = Laur. Plut. 85.15; R = Vat. Reg. Gr. 97; J = Paris. Gr. 2082 [family x]; U = Vat. Urb. Gr. 62; S = Berol. Gr. 375; M = Marc. Gr. 240 [family y]; Q = Marc. Gr. 242 [family z]. More information on these fundamental textual witnesses are available in Henry 1948.



exist before the universe, and the universe will not be responsible for evil, but the higher world will be the cause of evil for this world, and evil will not come from the world here to the soul, but from the soul to the world here; and the course of the argument will lead to the attribution of responsibility for the universe to the first principles: and if the universe, then also the matter, from which the universe on this hypothesis would have emerged. For the soul which <sup>40</sup> declined saw, they say, and illuminated the darkness already in existence.

The difficulty I would like to point out here is the syntactic structure of the sentence on line 39: εἰ δὲ δῆ, καὶ ἡ ὕλη, ὅθεν φανεῖη.

Following the apparatus of Henry and Schwyzer, ἡ ὕλη is the subject of an implied ἀναφέρεται which should be inferred on the basis of the ἀναφέρων on line 38. A similarly understood ὁ κόσμος should be the subject of the optative φανεῖη.

Harder's translation goes (lines 38–40): “und so muß konsequentes Schließen das Böse hinaufrücken bis zu den obersten Kräften. Und wenn das, so auch die Materie, welche den Kosmos in Erscheinung treten ließe.”<sup>2</sup>

Theiler accepts an ancient proposal by Heigl<sup>3</sup> (line 38 κακὸν for the attested τὸν κόσμον) and adds a conjecture of his own, ἄν before φανεῖη (line 40).<sup>4</sup> His text could be translated by modifying Armstrong in the following way: “and the course of the argument will lead to the attribution of responsibility for evil to the first principles: and if evil, then also matter, from which evil, on this hypothesis, could emerge.”

Igal follows, for once, the general meaning rather than the syntactic structure of this sentence and translates: “Y si esto es así, también aparecerá de dónde provino la materia.” Exceptionally, the Spanish scholar does not add notes here explaining the reasons for his interpretative choices.

Given that the analysis of our passage is made very difficult by the extreme complexity of both Plotinian style and syntax, I think it could be useful to start with a few grammatical remarks.

<sup>2</sup> See Harder 1964. It is well known that Richard Harder unfortunately died before having finished his work on Plotinus' treatises; he had time to complete the translation of the entire corpus, but he was able to edit the Greek text and add a commentary only up to treatises 1–22. So in *Em.* 2.9 [33], Harder's translation is earlier than Theiler's editorial and interpretative choices; this is why several discrepancies can easily be found in this book between the Greek text (edited by Theiler) and Harder's translation.

<sup>3</sup> See Heigl 1832, *ad locum*.

<sup>4</sup> See Theiler's textual note *ad locum* (Harder 1964, 432–433): “Das unsinnige τὸν κόσμον bestenfalls vom ‘Kosmos in seiner Unvollkommenheit’. τὸ κακὸν konjizierten Heigl und Bréhier; es ist auch Subjekt zu ὅθεν (ἄν) φανεῖη. Die Materie ist also der Platz des Bösen. Zu ὕλη 39 (dafür 40 τὸ σκότος, vgl. I.8 [51] 5, 2 ff.) zu denken ἀναφέρεται εἰς τὰ πρῶτα (H.-S).”

Firstly, in the *Enneads* and, more generally, according to the *usus* of philosophical Greek prose, εἰ δὲ δὴ is usually found at the beginning of the sentence. It is often followed by an optative and introduces the protasis of a hypothetical period where the verb, however, is always explicitly stated or can be very easily inferred from the context.<sup>5</sup> So, our passage would be the only Plotinian case where εἰ δὲ δὴ, alone, constitutes the protasis. Furthermore, if one understands φανείη as the verb of the apodosis, just as Igal does, one is obliged to insert ἄν before the optative. As we have just seen, this is Theiler's conjecture: but, apart from the difficulty of understanding εἰ δὲ δὴ, alone, as a protasis, this proposal conflicts with the potential meaning of the optative φανείη, which is completely out of place here. According to Theiler, in short, the passage means "if this is so, this is also so for matter, from which evil could appear"; but this is very far from providing an acceptable meaning, given that in the context of Plotinian thought the fact that evil and matter are connected is simply not a possibility at all. On the contrary, the links between matter and evil are always, in Plotinus, extremely strong: sometimes, especially from treatise 2.9 [33] on, matter is not only "der Platz des Bösen" but is *itself* evil.<sup>6</sup>

A similar incongruity prevents me from taking Henry and Schwyzer's solution for granted. Let us read again Armstrong's translation: "and if the universe, then also the matter, from which the universe on this hypothesis would have emerged": but, as Plotinus has just pointed out, the responsibility for the production of the world is to be assigned to the first principles, which makes the presence here of the optative φανείη very difficult to explain.

This passage is very difficult to interpret. All of the proposals I took into consideration require the reconstruction of understated parts of the sentence and sometimes even conjectural corrections, but no one seems to have reached a satisfactory interpretation or a convincing syntactic explanation. It is a sentence which does not admit an easy solution.

<sup>5</sup> Let us look at a few Plotinian passages containing εἰ δὲ δὴ: *Enn.* 3.2 [47] 15.58: εἰ δὲ δὴ και παίζει Σωκράτης, παίζει τῷ ἕξω Σωκράτει (Armstrong: "And even if Socrates, too, may play sometimes, it is by the outer Socrates that he plays"); 3.3 [48] 3.34: εἰ δὲ δὴ και πλεον ἔδωκεν ἢ ὅσον ἔχουσι κτήσασθαι, ἔτι μάλλον ἀποδεκτέον (Armstrong: "But if indeed he has given more than they are able to appropriate, it ought to be approved still more"); 4.4 [28] 25.14: εἰ δὲ δὴ και ἐπιστρέφεισθαι δι' ἄμφω, οὐκ ἄλλογος ἢ θέσις (Armstrong: "Certainly, if one supposes that they [i.e., the sun and the other heavenly bodies] pay attention [to the world below] by means of both these senses, the supposition would not be unreasonable").

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, *Enn.* 3.6 [26] 11.28–29 and 41–43; 6.7 [38] 28.12; 3.2 [47] 15.9; 1.8 [51] 8.42.

I would like to propose a completely different approach to the question. I will start from the unique use of εἰ δὲ δὴ we find in 1.4 [46] 5.2: εἰ δὲ δὴ μὴ δ' ἑαυτῷ παρακολουθοῖ; Armstrong translates as follows: "And suppose the good man is not even conscious?" εἰ δὲ δὴ introduces here a direct interrogative sentence with a present optative (παρακολουθοῖ) and without ἄν. As one can see, it is a syntactic structure very close to 2.9 [33] 12.39. On this basis, I will read our passage in this way: εἰ δὲ δὴ (τὰ πρῶτα, easily understandable from the end of the previous sentence, see lines 38–39) φανείη ὅθεν καὶ ἡ ὕλη (ἐστὶ or ἦν); I think that, starting from a similar syntactic structure, Plotinus placed the verb at the end of the phrase and emphatically put ἡ ὕλη, subject of the relative sentence introduced by ὅθεν, before ὅθεν itself. Moreover, he left understood the form of εἰμί which should function as the verb of this relative sentence. The final result was our εἰ δὲ δὴ (τὰ πρῶτα) καὶ ἡ ὕλη ὅθεν (ἐστὶ or ἦν) φανείη;

Obviously, we have here a rhetorical question. The idea of bringing back to the first principles the evil along with matter appears to Plotinus absolutely unacceptable. One could translate: "And what if they (τὰ πρῶτα) appear<sup>7</sup> to be the place from where also the matter emerged?" And a hypothetical answer could be: "No one could accept such an odd consequence."

Surely we have here a very hard anastrophe; but this is not the only case where we can find something like this in the prose of the *Enneads*. For example, we have a very hard inversion between the article and the negative particle in 1.6 [1] 4.7–8 (μὴ τοῖς ἀποδεξαμένοις instead of τοῖς μὴ ἀποδεξαμένοις); Schwyzer<sup>8</sup> cites also 4.7 [2] 8.13 (ἀρμονία δὲ οὐκ ἂν οὖσα ταῦτα ποιοῖ instead of the normally expected ἀρμονία δὲ οὖσα οὐκ ἂν κτλ.). A similar syntactic phenomenon is also implied by Igal's interpretation.<sup>9</sup>

The development of Plotinus' argument is, however, clear. After having attributed the origin of the world back to the first principles, Plotinus attacks Gnostic theories regarding the inclination of soul toward matter: for, if soul creates by her νεῦσις, how could she incline bringing light to a matter she has not yet created? So, lines 32–44 carry out the research program announced at lines 30–32: only a deep analysis of the ἔλλαμψις εἰς τὸ σκότος could take back the Gnostics to a correct comprehension of world's true causes.

<sup>7</sup> For a similar meaning of φαίνεσθαι see, for example, *Enn.* 1.4 [46] 8.10–11; 1.6 [1] 1.14–15 (and see also 38); 5.7 [18] 2.19–20.

<sup>8</sup> See Schwyzer 1951, 521.

<sup>9</sup> This syntactic structure is very hard and almost unbearable. One could think of a conjecture like εἰ δὲ δὴ καὶ ἡ ὕλη ὅθεν (ἦν) φανείη; However, it is not easy to explain how such an error could have occurred here.

And Plotinus' aim here is to show that it is impossible to bring back the world together with matter and evil to the first principles. Certainly, matter did not appear from τὰ πρῶτα.

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PLOTINUS, EPICURUS, AND THE Gnostics:  
ON PLOTINIAN CLASSIFICATION OF PHILOSOPHIES

Andrei Cornea

1. When we try to figure out what Plotinus might have looked like, it is a Byzantine icon that usually comes up in our mind: a slim, tall, highly-spiritualized figure, floating in out-of-this-world space, intensively gazing upon us, totally detached from the things below. Yet such an image oversimplifies this philosopher's life. For instance, although one does not expect a Byzantine icon to be involved in heavy polemic, polemic plays an important role in Plotinus' life and philosophy. So the icon has got cracks. In fact, because Plotinus, like many in his epoch, denied that his ideas had any basic originality,<sup>1</sup> considering them (despite obvious and essential innovations) to be but the unfolding of one master's ultimate truth, polemic mainly concerned the question of whether or not his own interpretation of this master, Plato, was the most faithful of all. Besides, Plotinus believed, Plato had to be defended against all misinterpretation and outright contestation which were never in short supply. So Plotinus had a lot of potential adversaries; but of course he could not afford to take on all of them at once. Therefore, he needed politics.

In fact, there is no polemic without some politics, and that prompts me to invoke Carl Schmitt's famous definition: *The political is the art of distinguishing friends from enemies*. In other words, politics usually establish a divide between the former and the latter that must be appropriate to the occasion. If this is the case, then even a philosopher cannot avoid pursuing a certain policy about who his friends and his enemies in philosophy should be at a certain moment. So he needs to be "opportunistic" to some extent, regardless of how unpolitical his philosophy in itself may be. Therefore, it is meaningful to ask: (1) where did Plotinus consider fit to draw the major

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<sup>1</sup> See *Enn.* 5.1 [10] 8. The Gnostics, his enemies, were not different in this respect, for they claimed to be the interpreters of some old savior like Zoroaster. The real trouble for someone like Plotinus would not have been a lack of originality with respect to Plato but with respect to some more recent philosophers. To emulate a wise man of old was considered noble and necessary, while to emulate a "modern" was paramount to plagiarism. Plotinus was actually accused of plagiarizing Numenius of Apamea (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 17).

dividing line between “we” (his friends and allies) and “they” (his major adversaries) in philosophy? (2) Did these “we” and “they” remain the same throughout his whole career? (3) In case we answer “no” to the second point, how can we account for the resulting shift in terms of Plotinus’ policy on alliances in philosophy?

2. Plotinus speaks rarely explicitly about how philosophy in general should be divided up into major trends or schools, or about the number of these trends and the criteria for the most appropriate classifications of them. In fact, there are just two places within the whole *corpus Plotinianum* where such a discussion occurs—the former in *Enn.* 5.9 [5] 1 (from now on, classification A), and the latter in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 15 (classification B).<sup>2</sup> Let us examine both:

(a) At the beginning of his early fifth treatise (*Enn.* 5.9 [5] 1), Plotinus portrays three kinds of philosophers (unnamed but easy to identify) and likens each of them to a species of bird. The most despicable “birds” are the Epicureans who have only a pretense of rationality (οἱ γε λόγου μεταποιούμενοι). Because they hold, like the common people, that pleasure is the τέλος (the end) of life, they are “like the heavy sort of birds who have taken much from the earth and are weighed down by it and so are unable to fly high, although nature has given them wings.”

The next kind of “birds” (the Stoics) are said to be better, still not good enough: “they have risen a little from the things below, because the better part of their soul has urged them on from the pleasant to a greater beauty; but since they are unable to see what is above ... they are brought down, with the name of virtue, to practical actions ...”

Only the third kind is really perfect: so these philosophers are thought to be “divine”: “they see the glory above and are raised to it as if above the clouds and the mist of this lower world ...”<sup>3</sup> Of course, these “high-flying birds” are the Platonists like Plotinus himself.

A.H. Armstrong rightly remarks that this classification of philosophical schools has nothing original, except, possibly, for the image itself.<sup>4</sup> It has all

<sup>2</sup> Plotinus comments on solutions introduced by other philosophies elsewhere as, for instance, in *Enn.* 4.7 [2] 2–8; yet, apart from those two places there are no others where he produces any classification as such of philosophies.

<sup>3</sup> Trans. Armstrong 1966–1988.

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong 1966–1988, 5:286–287n1. Bréhier (1924–1938, 5:154) had commented in the same vein: “Il est visible que Plotin suit d’assez près les commentateurs platoniciens classiques ...”

the likelihood of a piece of common, traditional Platonic school-polemic against the Epicureans and the Stoics. The presence of this kind of polemic in an early treatise of Plotinus is hardly fortuitous. In fact, Plotinus' earliest treatises look more or less didactic: at that stage the philosopher often reminds the student of the main points of the "common" Platonic stock, while defending the "orthodox" doctrine with traditional arguments against the competing "outer" philosophies, such as those of the Stoa, the Garden, or the Peripatos.<sup>5</sup> So for some time Plotinus only gradually addresses some controversial issues among Platonists themselves, such as the relation between intellect and the One, the partial "fall" of soul, the place of the intelligible forms inside intellect or the role of matter as the ultimate evil. In any case, only as late as the seventh treatise (*Enn.* 5.4) does Plotinus begin to state his own doctrine on the three "primordial hypostases" and the transcendence of the One—that is the core of his whole philosophy. Therefore, a traditional classification of the major philosophical schools, with Platonism raising above all the rest, comes naturally within the scope of this early stage.<sup>6</sup>

The characteristics of classification A are as follows:

- It is trichotomic and gradual and it epitomizes common Platonic polemic against non-Platonic philosophers, such as the Stoics and the Epicureans. It is worth noting that the Aristotelians seem to have been included in the "Platonist family," although Plotinus was often not very keen on Aristotle.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> There has been much discussion about how to assess the early treatises: do they suggest a certain evolution of the thought of Plotinus who, at least on the transcendence of the One, departed from a position not very much unlike Numenius', as Meijer (1992) believes? Or, rather, as Schwyzer, Armstrong and others held, was Plotinus in possession of most of his doctrine even before starting to put them in writing? In the latter case, some "primitive" peculiarities of treatises 1 through 9 are due merely to their didactic and protreptic character: Plotinus wants to prepare his audience for the innovations of his system (which he nevertheless saw as faithful Platonic interpretation), and so he only gradually reveals them. My own view tends to be closer to the former hypothesis, merely on psychological grounds: the process of writing is never neutral with respect to its content.

<sup>6</sup> It can be no coincidence that the next treatise (*Enn.* 4.8 [6] 1) outlines a "history of philosophy" in three stages: some noteworthy, yet insufficient, pre-Socratic achievements are first mentioned (such as Heraclitus', Pythagoras' and Empedocles'); then philosophy is said to have peaked with the "divine Plato" who was followed by a steady decline that allegedly lasted till Plotinus. Classification A and this "history of philosophy" are consistent. It has been also noticed that Plotinus, unlike Numenius of Apamea and other Middle Platonists, and unlike Iamblichus later as well, showed only lukewarm interest in Pythagoras.

<sup>7</sup> Plotinus reproaches Aristotle for having assigned the first rank to intellect rather than to the One (*Enn.* 5.1 [10] 9.11). Unlike many of his Platonic predecessors, such as Albinus, and



- Because it places Platonism in the highest position, *the main divide lies between Platonists in general and the rest* who more or less failed to attain real philosophy.
- The dividing criterion is predominantly metaphysical: it focuses on the capacity of philosophy to disentangle itself from “earth,” i.e., from sensualist materialism: accordingly, the Epicureans, as materialist hedonists, do not even deserve the noble name of “philosophers.”<sup>8</sup> The Stoics, as they extol virtue, allegedly fare better, yet they lag behind the Platonists who, as the only ones completely severed from matter, can accede to “the true region” (τῷ τῶπι ἀληθινῷ), i.e., to the world of intellect.

(b) The second classification (B) is in treatise 33 (*Enn.* 2.9.15), which Porphyry (Plotinus’ editor and student) first entitled “Against the Gnostics” and later “Against those who say the Maker of the World and the World to be evil.”<sup>9</sup> This treatise belongs to Plotinus’ middle and most original but also most troubled period of literary production.<sup>10</sup> Actually, especially during these years, Plotinus embarked on a policy of defense of his own interpretation of Plato against various philosophical rivals, among which a few were to be found from the Platonic family, such as the so-called Middle Platonists, like Cassius Longinus, Porphyry’s former teacher in Athens. But the most dangerous enemies he had to face were some newcomers, the Gnostics

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of his successors, such as Porphyry, Iamblichus, and Proclus, Plotinus was not a promoter of the so-called “harmonization” between Plato and Aristotle. See Romano 1985, 1:223–224.

<sup>8</sup> The Epicureans only *pretend* to share in the *logos*, but they do not really share in it. Plotinus was not the only one at that moment to expel Epicureans from philosophy. In his *Vit. Plot.* 20, Porphyry tells us about a polemical writing that Longinus, his former teacher, wrote against Plotinus. In the preface (reproduced by Porphyry), while evoking the names of many contemporary philosophers—Platonists, Stoics, and Peripateticians—Longinus mentioned no Epicurean, suggesting by his telling silence that for him these were actually no philosophers at all.

<sup>9</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 5 and 24. The former title (“Against the Gnostics”) is included in Porphyry’s chronological list of Plotinus’ writings, whereas the latter (“Against those who say the Maker of the World and the World to be evil”) comes up in his systematic list (of the *Enneads*). Because Plotinus himself gave no titles to his writings, it was Porphyry who took upon himself to do it, finally selecting those titles that had prevailed with Plotinus and his students (*Vit. Plot.* 4.19). The shorter title is very likely the earlier. In fact, the longer title not only describes the content of the treatise but also justifies its inclusion in the second *Ennead*, which, according to Porphyry, was meant to contain τὰ περὶ κόσμου καὶ τὰ τῷ κόσμῳ ἀνήκοντα. Such an editorial concern for systematic division could be but Porphyry’s, a couple of decades after Plotinus’ death.

<sup>10</sup> Narbonne (in Narbonne, Achard, and Ferroni 2012, 12) counted no less than ten polemics only during this relatively short period of six years when Porphyry was with Plotinus in Rome.

(a sect of Sethians who had established communities in Rome and elsewhere).<sup>11</sup> The trouble with them was, Plotinus argued in treatise 33, that, while these people had taken up a few major ideas from Plato, they actually degraded and abused them, and even tried to overthrow this philosopher's fundamental principles. Moreover, Plotinus went on, they dared to seduce some former disciples and friends of Plotinus "by disparaging and insulting the Greeks," i.e., the whole major Greek philosophical tradition.<sup>12</sup>

But let us see how classification B reads:

Since there are two philosophical options (δυσὸν οὐσῶν αἰρέσεων)<sup>13</sup> about attaining the end (τέλος), one puts forward the pleasure of the body as the end, while another chooses beauty and virtue (τὸ καλὸν καὶ τὴν ἀρετὴν), for whose members desire depends on God and leads back to God (as must be studied elsewhere): Epicurus, who abolishes Providence, exhorts to pursue pleasure and its enjoyment, which is what is left. But this doctrine (the [Sethian] Gnosis) censures the Lord of Providence and Providence itself still more offensively and despises all the laws of this world and the virtue whose winning extends back to all time ... (trans. Armstrong, slightly modified)

Classification B has the following characteristics:

- It is dichotomic and antithetical and not trichotomic and gradual, like A.
- It overtly singles out Epicureanism among the traditional philosophies, on the one hand, and opposes it against all the rest, on the other. It is important to observe that, wretched though it is, Epicureanism has become a real αἵρεσις now, that is, a genuinely philosophical choice. The possession of reason is no more denied to it, as was the case in classification A.

<sup>11</sup> For the intricate relation between Plotinus and the Sethian Gnostic texts (especially such as *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*), see Turner 2000a. I only quote here these conclusive words (which sum up a study by Kevin Corrigan): "the Platonizing Sethian texts not only provoked mere refutation on the part of Plotinus and others, but acted as a catalyst in his own philosophical development" (Turner 2000a, 156). I consider, for instance, that the doctrine of contemplation Plotinus presents in the thirtieth treatise (*Enn.* 3.8), a doctrine he never spoke of previously in comparable terms, is such a new development provoked by the necessity to refute the Gnostics as effectively as possible.

<sup>12</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6.44. Moreover, Plotinus reproves the Gnostics for "imposing their own αἵρεσις, as if they had no contact with the old Greek one" (6.7–8). This anticipates classification B inasmuch as the "old Greek" refers to all philosophers but the Atomists.

<sup>13</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 15.4–10. Harder translates: "es gibt zwei Ansichten"; Armstrong: "two schools of thought"; Igal: "dos escuelas"; Bréhier: "deux doctrines"; Dufour (in Brisson et al. 2006): "deux écoles." One cannot help hesitating between the institutional and the doctrinal meaning of the word αἵρεσις.

- Platonism and Stoicism (both unnamed) *form a common block*. (As in classification A, Aristotelism is included in Platonism.) No indication of superiority of either of these two schools is given so far, and the reader is referred to further analysis. In the sentence “it chooses beauty and virtue,” “beauty” stands for the end of the Platonists and “virtue” for that of the Stoics, as Thomas A. Szlezák rightly noticed.<sup>14</sup>
- The allegedly genuine “Hellenic” tradition is considered to be under attack (“they despise the virtue whose winning extends back in time”).
- There are two distinct dividing criteria now: (a) an ethical one: the *end* of life (pleasure vs. good and virtue); and (b) a theological one: denial vs. affirmation of a divine *Providence* and *its Lord*. A dependence of the ethical criterion on the theological one is clearly suggested.<sup>15</sup>
- Plotinus points out that while Epicureanism, a traditional philosophy, and a newcomer, the Gnosis, share some basic traits, the latter turns out to be even more offensive than the former.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to all this, it is worth mentioning that this place contains the only literal mention of Epicurus’ name in all Plotinus’ work (a *hapax Plotinianum*). And within the same short passage we find another Plotinian *hapax*—the comparative adverb *νεανικώτερον*, which I translated into English as “more offensively.”

One may well be surprised to see how little interest classification B has stirred among scholars, despite looking odd enough. A.H. Armstrong leaves it without comment.<sup>17</sup> J. Igal has no comment about it, either.<sup>18</sup> R. Beutler and W. Theiler just rapidly pass over it suggesting that it is “artificial”; however, they compare it to another classification of philosophies by Cicero in *De finibus bonorum et malorum* that they think (without giving any reason) was even “more artificial” (gekünsteltere Einteilung).<sup>19</sup> R. Dufour ignores

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<sup>14</sup> Szlezák 1979, 41n140: “Namentlich genannt sind weder die Platoniker noch die Stoiker ... Dass die ersteren das Richtige anstreben, versteht von selbst; die Formulierung macht es jedoch so gut wie sicher, dass auch die Stoiker mitgemeint sind.” Τὸ καλὸν points to the *Symposium*, as well as to Plotinus’ own first treatise, *Περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ*, a sort of preface to his entire philosophy. Τὴν ἀρετὴν is indicative of Stoic ethics.

<sup>15</sup> It was commonly believed that the abolition of Providence entailed a relaxation of morals. Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.2.3–4. Cf. Plutarch, *Adv. Col.* 27.1123A; Epicurus, *frag.* 368, p. 248 Usener.

<sup>16</sup> At least, Epicurus was an outspoken enemy of Plato, while the Sethian Gnostics claimed they were interpreting or improving Plato, so they could attract more attention on the part of Plotinus’ students.

<sup>17</sup> Armstrong 1966–1988, 2:282–283.

<sup>18</sup> Igal 1982, 1:356–357.

<sup>19</sup> Harder, Beutler, and Theiler 1971, 3:435: “Eine gekünsteltere Einteilung der philosophi-

the fact that in classification B Stoics and Platonists are included in one and the same class and so he partly misses the point of the whole classification B, since he claims that “cette dichotomie sert à classer dans les premier groupe les Épicuriens et les Gnostiques et, dans le second, les Platoniciens.”<sup>20</sup> As I have mentioned, T.A. Szlezák is an exception, for he remarks the unusual fact that the Stoics and the Platonists (the Aristotelians are already included in Platonism) constitute a common block here, opposed to both the Epicureans and the Gnostics. Yet he did not deem it necessary to search for Plotinus’ reasons for this unusual classification. As for Émile Bréhier, I shall address his comment below.

Of course, what we are interested in is how a late antique philosopher rather than a modern historian of philosophy might have reflected on the question of classifying philosophies. What seems “artificial” or irrelevant to us may not have appeared so to Plotinus and his contemporaries. But one thing is sure: classification B remains unusual, inasmuch as it was produced by a Platonist who, about ten years earlier, had extolled Platonism above anything else. So, it makes sense to ask: what prompted Plotinus to adopt a new policy about how philosophical schools might relate to one another? What was just “politics” and what real philosophy behind this strategic *new alliance* between traditional rivals Platonism and Stoicism, now placed on equal footing and opposed as a single unit to both Epicureanism and the Gnosis, as the “designated enemy”?<sup>21</sup> And what about the source of classification B?

3. To begin with: did Plotinus himself produce classification B or, rather, as in classification A, did he draw on traditional school material?

Émile Bréhier was convinced of the latter alternative: “C’ est la classification banale des doctrines, par laquelle débutent tous les cours de morale, depuis Chrysippe; cf. Cicéron, *Acad. pr. II*, 138–139; le cours de morale stoïcien était devenu de pratique courante dans toutes les écoles.”<sup>22</sup>

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schen Schulen ... betr. *de finibus bonorum et malorum* Cicero in der gleichnamigen Schrift, 5,17 ff.” They note further that “Epicurus is the black sheep in the philosophy of the Empire period ...”

<sup>20</sup> R. Dufour in Brisson et al. 2006, 275n254.

<sup>21</sup> Exceptionally, it was not impossible to profess Platonism and Stoicism at the same time, like a certain Trypho who informed Amelius about the calumnies spread by the “people of Greece” against Plotinus (Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 17). But it was quite impossible to be both a Platonist and an Epicurean.

<sup>22</sup> Bréhier 1924–1938, 2:131n2.

Despite the great authority of the French scholar, I doubt his conclusion: firstly, as we have already noticed, B is both morally- and theologically-grounded; the latter was not the case of the Stoic “cours de morale.” Secondly, the main difficulty endures: what made Plotinus replace classification A, which must have been quite popular with Platonists, with classification B that must have been much less so, irrespective of whether it really was inspired by Chrysippus? But was it?

To find out, let us go to Chrysippus’ “classification banale” Bréhier was pointing to (Classification C). Here is the text of Cicero’s *Acad. pr.* 2.138–139:

*Testatur enim Chrysippus tres solas esse sententias, quae defendi possint, de finibus bonorum: circumcidit et amputat multitudinem; aut enim honestatem esse finem aut voluptatem aut utrumque ...*

(Chrysippus affirms that there are *only three* doctrines on the ultimate end of life one can defend, i.e., that either virtue constitutes the end, or pleasure, or *both*. He curtails and amputates the multitude of doctrines.)

Of course, Epicurus and Aristippus the Cyrenaic who both held pleasure to be the *finis bonorum* belong to Chrysippus’ second class, while the Stoics who put virtue above anything else belong to the first, Cicero explains further. As for the third class of philosophers, it comprises both the Peripatetics, like Callippus, and the Platonists, like Polemon, because all these thinkers posited a composite end of life.<sup>23</sup>

Now it is obvious that classification C (which is avowedly Stoic) looks very different from classification B, despite Bréhier’s allegation:

- C is trichotomic instead of dichotomic.<sup>24</sup>
- It implicitly separates Stoicism from Platonism and Aristotelianism, on the one hand, inasmuch as their *end* is different *qua* form (simple vs. composite). And, on the other hand, it also sets Stoicism and Epicureanism apart, inasmuch as the *end* of each of them is different *qua* content (pleasure vs. virtue).
- It has neither a unique divide nor an outspoken hierarchy. (Although we suspect that the Stoic position was considered to be the best.)
- Its criterion is purely ethical. There is no hint of any theological or metaphysical criterion, as in B or A.

In view of such a difference between B and C it is unlikely that in classification B Plotinus made use either of a common Stoic school-classification,

<sup>23</sup> Cicero, *Acad. pr.* 2.131.

<sup>24</sup> Stoics enjoyed building up trichotomies of this kind: x is either A or B, or neither A nor B. See, for example, Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 7.95, 98 etc.

as Bréhier believed, or of any other traditional school-classification; so the idea of drawing a new dividing line between Epicurus and *all other Greek philosophers* could be his own. Thus, classification B has all the likelihood of an *ad hoc* classification Plotinus invented primarily for some particular “political” purpose.

4. What could this be? I think it has some strong connection with his new policy of *repelling the Gnostics as effectively as possible*. The ever-increasing influence of the Gnosis on his students made Plotinus reconsider older classifications of the philosophical schools. He could not help but start a new struggle that was unlike those of the past, not least because of this new event. Dated school-categories could not suffice anymore, so he had to adopt a new policy of re-defining his enemies and of finding new allies wherever he could. This new policy may have had a twofold aim:

(a) First and foremost, our philosopher may have intended to symbolically rally against the Gnostics all the suitable “Greek” philosophers, i.e., Platonists, Peripatetics, *and* Stoics, because all of them, no matter how different they were, at least accepted Providence and “the Lord of Providence,” i.e., they all believed that an active and benevolent God created the world in tune with man’s nature. (This point is what I.P. Culiano called “the anthropic principle.”)<sup>25</sup> So all of them were opposed to Gnostic *anticosmism* which saw no harmony between man and the *cosmos*.<sup>26</sup> (This, Plotinus believed, also entailed negative moral consequences.) Therefore, the Stoics could be thought fit to enter a larger symbolical alliance against those people whom Plotinus charged with the crime of “disparaging and insulting the Greeks.” In contrast, Epicurus and his followers stood apart from the other Greek philosophers on the issue of Providence,<sup>27</sup> so that Plotinus could present

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<sup>25</sup> The Stoics defended a harder version of the anthropic principle, holding that the cosmos was made *for the sake* of man, while, according to Plato’s softer version from *Tim.* 44D, the cosmos and man were created to fit together, in order to make up the best possible world: “The divine revolutions which are two, they (the gods) bound within a sphere-shaped body, in imitation of the spherical form of the All, which body we now call the ‘head’ ...” (trans. Bury).

<sup>26</sup> For instance, Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 7.88, speaking about the Stoics: “the end is to live in accordance with nature (ὁμολογουμένως φύσει), that is in accordance with one’s own nature and with the nature of all.”

<sup>27</sup> “Among celestial phenomena movement, turning, eclipse, rising, setting and the like should not be thought to come about through the ministry and present or future arrangements of some individual who at the same time possesses the combination of total blessedness and imperishability ...” (Epicurus, *Ep. Her.* 76–77, trans. Long and Sedley 1997, 1:23C).

them as outright enemies siding with the Gnostics.<sup>28</sup> But we shall address this issue more thoroughly later.

(b) Secondly, once Plotinus designated the Gnostics and the Epicureans as a major threat to Platonism, he could force on the Gnostics a clear-cut *philosophical identity* many people would find repulsive. Indeed, as a relatively new and “un-Greek” phenomenon, the Gnosis had succeeded, Plotinus thought, in hiding under the guise of Platonism and so it had allegedly misled a good many people.<sup>29</sup> But once its participation in the enemy camp along with the detestable Epicurus was exposed, one would know exactly what that “wretched” sect stood for and how a good Platonist could most appropriately fight it.

In particular, if we suppose that Plotinus wanted to scare his pupils from being attracted to the Gnostics, a clever policy to endorse would be to tell these pupils—who were self-declared Platonists—not only that the Gnostics resembled the Epicureans but also that they were even worse than the philosophers of the Garden. Indeed, what more effective rhetorical means of vilifying a Gnostic in the eyes of a Platonist could ever exist than to state that he was “more offensive” than Epicurus himself, that arch-enemy of Plato?

5. However, had the Epicurean presence in this anti-Gnostic period of Plotinus been restricted to *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 15, we might hesitate to take it seriously and might consider it nothing more than a mere accident or, at the most, a rhetorical formula. But as a matter of fact, *Epicurus is present five times* in the same work (or at least in the same cycle), if only explicitly so on one occasion, and such an occurrence can hardly be accidental.

As a general rule, the Epicureans are much less visible in Plotinus’ work than the Stoics, let alone than Aristotle or some Middle Platonists. For instance, Stoicism is, on the one hand, more or less extensively criticized

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<sup>28</sup> Needless to say, this is a cultural definition of Hellenism, for Epicurus was as Greek (and Athenian) as Plato. Yet earlier, as is well-known, Isocrates had re-defined Hellenism in terms of common *paideia* rather than of common origin (Isocrates, *Panegyricus* 50.7). On the other hand, unlike the other major philosophers, Epicurus was very critical of the *paideia* and even urged some disciples to get rid of it, so that they might truly philosophize (Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 10.6; Cicero, *Fin.* 2.4.12; cf. *frgs.* 227–229 Usener). He also showed no interest in *polis*, a pillar of the Greek *paideia*, and a constant preoccupation of Platonism, Aristotelism, and Stoicism (Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 10.119 [*fig.* 8 Usener]).

<sup>29</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16; Turner 2000a, 148–149.

in treatises 2, 3, 5, 12, 20, 26, 35, 41, 42, 45 and 46 (according to the chronological order transmitted by Porphyry). A special mention has to be made of the forty-second treatise, where Plotinus discusses in detail the so-called Stoic categories. On the other hand, Plotinus draws, though unavowedly, a good deal on the Stoics, especially in treatises 28 and 29 (*On difficulties concerning the Soul* II, III), as well as in treatises 47 and 48 (*On providence* I, II).<sup>30</sup> And of course, he promoted the aforementioned “new alliance” policy (i.e., classification B) which he presents in the thirty-third treatise.

The case of the Epicureans is different: apart from critical references to this school which appear in the early, more didactic treatises, like the third and the fifth (and perhaps in addition to that there are one or two other fleeting references elsewhere, as in *Enn.* 3.2 [47] 4), in most of the remaining corpus Plotinus seems to care little about the opinions of the Epicureans. However, as I have noted, I think there are a few very significant exceptions that have been almost completely overlooked: most if not all of them appear in the so-called *Großschrift* (as the series of treatises 30–33 has been usually called since Richard Harder, because many interpreters have considered these treatises to have originally formed one single work which Porphyry edited as four separate writings), where I think there are no less than *five references* to Epicureanism, including classification B from treatise 33. And there is another interesting detail—the first four of them appear in one and the same treatise: the thirtieth (*Enn.* 3.8), the name of which is *On nature, contemplation, and the One*.

It is true that all the above-mentioned references except classification B are *not explicit*, a circumstance that may explain why they have escaped detection so far. Yet covert references to the opinions of his adversaries are very common with Plotinus. This discretion of his makes all the more noteworthy the reference from treatise 33 (classification B) that, as mentioned above, once and for all *overtly calls Epicurus by name*. It should be added that not only is this the sole occurrence of Epicurus' name in Plotinus' whole work but also the sole occurrence in it of the name of *any* post-Aristotelian philosopher!<sup>31</sup>

6. Now let us closely examine the four passages of treatise 30 (3.8) and see why it is a fair assumption to consider them to refer covertly to Epicurus and Epicureanism.

<sup>30</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 14.5: τὰ Στωικὰ λαμβάνοντα δόγματα.

<sup>31</sup> See Schwyzer 1951, 571.



(a) Treatise 30 (the first part of the so-called *Großschrift*)<sup>32</sup> abruptly begins with what is generally believed<sup>33</sup> to be a paraphrase of a quotation of a text that, in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle ascribed to Eudoxus of Cnidus: Eudoxus had argued, Aristotle said, that pleasure is the supreme end, because all living beings, “the rational as well as the irrational strive for pleasure.”<sup>34</sup> Now in his paraphrase Plotinus simply replaces “pleasure” with “contemplation” and claims that “the rational as well as the irrational living beings strive for contemplation.”<sup>35</sup> What is the point of this paradoxical paraphrase? Surely, not to refute Eudoxus whose philosophical importance in the third century CE was insignificant. But if Eudoxus did not deserve a refutation, Epicurus certainly did. In fact, Epicureanism was still alive at that moment, for otherwise how could one account for Lactantius’ ferocious attacks against it, for instance? Now Epicurus had taken up Eudoxus’ argument: he claimed that the decisive proof that pleasure was “the principle and the end of the happy life”<sup>36</sup> was the empirical fact that “pleasure brings the same good to beasts and humans.”<sup>37</sup>

So Plotinus seems to argue both against Aristotle and Epicurus: on the one hand, he reproaches the former for sticking to a species of contemplation limited to rational beings (some humans and the gods). On the other, against Epicurus he ironically suggests that if universality testifies in favor of the alleged supremacy of pleasure, the same argument holds for contemplation as well, because, as he will show later in his treatise, nothing at all is devoid of contemplation.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, while one can ascribe contemplation not only to all humans and beasts but also to “the earth itself, and trees, and plants in general,” and to nature as a whole, no one, and Epicurus least of all, dared to share the benefits of pleasure with trees!<sup>39</sup> So in terms of universality, contemplation is a better candidate for principle and end of all things

<sup>32</sup> Porphyry first called this treatise *On contemplation* (Περὶ θεωρίας). But in the systematic list its title is *On nature, contemplation, and the One* (Περὶ φύσεως καὶ θεωρίας καὶ τοῦ ἑνός).

<sup>33</sup> Bréhier 1924–1938, 3:153n; Henry and Schwyzer 1951–1973, 1:395n1; Armstrong 1966–1988, 3:383n1.

<sup>34</sup> *Eth. nic.* 10.2 1172B10.

<sup>35</sup> The very rare term ἐλλογα in association with ἄλογα has been seen as evidence that Plotinus is paraphrasing here.

<sup>36</sup> Epicurus, *Epistula ad Menoecium*, apud Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 10.128.

<sup>37</sup> Cicero, *Acad. post.* 1.2.6 (*frg.* 398 Usener); *Fin.* 1.9.29 (*frg.* 397, p. 264 Usener).

<sup>38</sup> Armstrong (1966–1988, 3:361n2) notes that perhaps Plotinus wanted to emphasize that “his own conception of it (contemplation) is much more universal than Aristotle’s.” Yet he fails to notice that by means of the paraphrase Plotinus actually claimed that his own conception of the ultimate end was also much more universal than that of Epicurus.

<sup>39</sup> Epicurus denied plants have a soul because of their lack of sensivity (*frg.* 309 Usener).

than pleasure, on the condition that one parts with the limitation imposed upon it by Aristotle.

(b) At the end of the first chapter of the same treatise (*Enn.* 3.8 [30] 1.22), after having emphatically stated that “all things aspire to contemplation,” Plotinus asks: “how does nature which they say is devoid of imagination and reason (ἤν ἀφάνταστον φασὶ καὶ ἄλογον εἶναι) have contemplation in itself and make what it makes by contemplation?” To be sure, if nature were really ἀφάνταστος καὶ ἄλογος, it would be unable to contemplate; yet Plotinus says it contemplates in terms of its “total contemplation.” But who are the philosophers who made that false statement? Most interpreters, such as Henry and Schwyzer, A.H. Armstrong, J.-Fr. Pradeau, even Bréhier (in a less precise way) point to a fragment of Chrysippus.<sup>40</sup> But, in fact, Chrysippus himself was arguing against some philosophers who had denied to nature imagination and reason altogether; what he actually said was that “the Universe cannot move by necessity and because of vortices, as the followers of Democritus said it does, nor can it because of some nature devoid of representation (φύσις ἀφάνταστος), since the intellectual nature (νοερά φύσις) is better than this one.”<sup>41</sup>

It seems obvious that Chrysippus directed his criticism to both earlier *and* later Atomists: Democritus was to blame for his “vortices” of atoms as much as Epicurus (unnamed) was for having stripped nature of representation and, *a fortiori*, of reason, and for having ignored the existence of a cosmic “intellectual nature” that makes the Heaven orbit the Earth in an orderly way. Now, supposing that, faithful to his “new alliance” between Platonists and Stoics, as introduced in classification B, Plotinus really adopted Chrysippus’ criticism, he must have intended to refute the Atomists and particularly the Epicureans rather than the Stoics or the Aristotelians, as Armstrong held. Later in the same treatise, Plotinus will argue not only that nature is “intellectual” to a certain extent but that “it is reason,” which enables

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<sup>40</sup> Henry and Schwyzer 1951–1973, 1:396, refer to SVF 2.1016 (= Sextus Empiricus, *Math.* 9.11), and so does Armstrong 1966–1988, 3:362n1, who adds: “The Stoics used the terms φύσις ἀφάνταστος and νοηρά φύσις to distinguish between ‘nature’ in the sense of the Aristotelian growth-principle and in their own sense of all-pervading divine reason.” But the passage I am quoting below cannot refer to Aristotle but to the Atomists. In fact, the φύσις ἀφάνταστος has nothing to do with the Aristotelian growth-principle that makes plants grow, because Chrysippus *clearly says that it moves the whole Universe*, according to his opponents; now, in Aristotle this is the task of the Unmoved Mover, which is actually νοηρά φύσις.

<sup>41</sup> SVF 2.1016.11–15.

it to contemplate.<sup>42</sup> On the contrary, from Hellenistic times onwards, the Epicureans, unlike Platonists, Aristotelians, and Stoics, were the only major school to hold that nature works irrationally: the formula “*sine aliqua mente*,” as Cicero put it, perfectly matches the term ἄλογος of Plotinus.<sup>43</sup>

(c) A few lines later (3.8 [30] 2.4–7), Plotinus continues: “[W]e must also exclude levering from the operation of nature. For what kind of thrusting or levering can produce this rich variety of colours and shapes of every kind?” (trans. Armstrong). This term, *μολγεία*, meaning “lever,” occurs twice in the whole *corpus Plotinianum*, the first time in the early treatise 5 (*Enn.* 5.9.6.23), where Plotinus shows criticism of the literal reading of *Timaeus* for the first time in the corpus. Now, as Armstrong rightly noticed, Plotinus’ remark mirrors (almost literally) a widespread Epicurean criticism of Plato’s divine demiurge who, working like a human craftsman, was supposed to have created the Universe out of a pre-existent matter.<sup>44</sup> For instance, in Cicero’s *De natura deorum*, the Epicurean Velleius asks rhetorically: “What thrusting, what tools, what *levering*, what instruments could account for so immense a work?”<sup>45</sup> The obvious answer is that no instruments could.

So Plotinus agrees with Epicurus that there can be no craftsmanship in nature. Yet he parts with him, because he considers nature to produce spontaneously by contemplation of a higher intellectual principle and according to *logos* rather than by way of random atomic collisions and swerves. In essence, what Plotinus seems to tell his reader is that a good Platonist need not worry about the Epicurean criticism of Plato, provided he is ready to address natural production in terms of “total contemplation” and to interpret Plato non-literally. If in (a) above Plotinus credited contemplation with being a better candidate than pleasure for the ultimate end, now he suggests that, while excluding any cosmogonical craftsmanship as completely as Epicurus’ atoms do, total contemplation accounts for cosmogony much better than atoms can.

<sup>42</sup> *Enn.* 3.8 [30] 2.28. Plotinus holds that nature is only *logos*, that is, form, and no compound of form and matter.

<sup>43</sup> Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.20.53 (*frg.* 352, p. 236 Usener). See also Aëtius, *De placitis reliquiae* 2.3.1 (*frg.* 382 Usener).

<sup>44</sup> Armstrong 1966–1988, 3:363n2: “crude Epicurean criticism of Plato.” The word “crude” shows how much the unfavorable bias towards Epicurus has endured throughout millennia.

<sup>45</sup> Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.8.19 (*frg.* 367 Usener). It is noteworthy that Velleius was critical of both Platonists and Stoics.

(d) Treatises 30 (3.8.9.21) and 28 (4.4.1.20) (written a little earlier), contain the *sole Plotinian occurrences* of ἐπιβολὴ ἀθρόα, which can be translated as “a concentrated apprehension (of mind).” Now this little formula was very likely contrived by Epicurus himself who opposed it to ἐπιβολὴ κατὰ μέρος, i.e., “piecemeal apprehension.”<sup>46</sup> Odd though it may look, ἐπιβολὴ ἀθρόα was used, as far as we can ascertain, *just once* between Epicurus and Plotinus, and then by an Epicurean, Polystratus, the second scholarch of the Garden. So Plotinus seems to have taken up a little technical Epicurean formula and used it twice just in the middle of his career, in two successive treatises.<sup>47</sup> In both cases he means a synthetical intellectual apprehension, exactly as Epicurus did—which in Plotinus’ case refers (positively) to intellect in treatise 28, and (negatively) to the One in treatise 30.

We may try to make sense of this puzzling occurrence (a real Epicurean “signature,” as it were) by analogy: As mentioned above, Plotinus was often critical of Stoicism. He, nevertheless, took Stoicism seriously and even drew some ideas and terms from it, such as the συμπάθεια of the Universe with itself (*Enn.* 4.4–4.5 [28–29]). Now, supposing that, while confronting some Epicurean arguments, Plotinus needs to take them seriously, nonetheless, he had to revisit some Epicurean text-books or commentaries: no wonder, then, if he borrowed a useful formula from them as a mark of his new preoccupation with this philosophy.

7. What I intend to suggest here is that all the five aforementioned references to Epicurus, extant in the so-called *Großschrift*, point to the same curious event: *in the middle of his career and quite unexpectedly* Plotinus starts paying some attention to Epicureanism. He does not ridicule it any more by likening it to some stupid fowl, denying its aptitude for philosophy outright, nor does he reject it out of hand solely by means of some traditional school arguments, as he did in his early works. He implicitly accepts Epicurus’ idea that universality is highly indicative of the supreme end and principle but he thinks contemplation (understood as “total”) is more universal than pleasure; he agrees with Epicurus (and disagrees on this issue with Plato, at least

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<sup>46</sup> *Ep. Her.* 35. Lavaud (2008, 37) observes in *Enn.* 2.4 [12] 10.1–3 and 6.2 [43] 4.23 the presence of a related expression of Epicurean origin, τῆς διανοίας ἢ ἐπιβολῆς, which he translates as “saisie intuitive de la pensée.” He adds that “l’emploi de cette expression dans le contexte de la philosophie plotinienne est à coup sûr surprenant.” However, before Plotinus, occurrences of τῆς διανοίας ἢ ἐπιβολῆς appear in Philo of Alexandria, Galen, Sextus Empiricus, and Alexander of Aphrodisias, which suggests that the formula may have lost its Epicurean stamp, while this cannot be the case with ἐπιβολὴ ἀθρόα.

<sup>47</sup> Treatises 27, 28, and 29 form one single writing on issues pertaining to the soul.

construed literally) that the Universe cannot have been *intentionally* made by a divine Craftsman, but he nevertheless dismisses the Epicurean idea of some irrational and arbitrary nature, where chance and necessity replace order and a benevolent Providence. His new or renewed familiarity with Epicureanism enables him even to use a little technical Epicurean formula that, possibly, no other non-Epicurean philosopher had made use of prior to him.

Of course, Epicureanism remains very dangerous to Plotinus because he believes Epicureanism is not only a serious enemy of Platonism alone, as it used to be in the past, but also of the whole traditional, philosophical “Hellenism” that now can include Stoicism and Aristotelianism besides Platonism. Therefore, a new classification of philosophies imposes itself, which, if only in a negative way, vindicates the philosophical importance of Epicureanism. On the other hand, we also see that Plotinus’ polemic against the Gnostics reaches a climax precisely at this very moment. This can be no simple coincidence! Therefore, I think classification B, as well as the rest of the references to Epicurus, is *part of the anti-Gnostic policy* Plotinus was committed to during those years.

Now the moment has come to insist on what could have been the real philosophical link between Epicureanism and Gnosis. Actually, I do not think that the association between the two in Plotinus’ classification B was just a matter of rhetoric or of political expediency, devoid of any deeper philosophical implication. As I have already suggested, this connection is likely to be *anticosmism*, i.e., the denial or the censure of Providence as well as of any *cosmic, all-pervading intelligence*. This shared *anticosmism* of both many Gnostic trends<sup>48</sup> and Epicureanism is so undeniable a reality that it could provide Plotinus with good reasons for classifying the two “schools” together. Besides, *anticosmism* could also entail *hedonism* at times, an outcome, as we have seen, that was much feared by Plotinus. In fact, while Epicurus had abolished the idea of Providence altogether,<sup>49</sup> the Gnostics reproved it, holding Providence to be of poor quality, incapable of governing

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<sup>48</sup> At least those Gnostics Plotinus reproved shared a radical anticosmism. How else could we account for the following remark: “It is not by despising the world, the gods dwelling inside it, and the remaining beauties that you become good” (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 16.1–2)?

<sup>49</sup> Epicurus, *Ep. Her.* 81; *Ep. Pyth.* 97. The “divine nature” is, according to Epicurus, “free of any task” (ἀλειτούργητος). See also Cicero, *Nat. d.* 1.18. Velleius reproves both *opificem aedificatoremque mundi Platonis de Timaeo deum*, and *anum fatidicam Stoicorum Pronoeam*. The Epicureans may have even coined a word, ἀπρονοησία, in order to signify the absence of providence. See Alexander of Aphrodisias, *Fat.* 203.11: τὴν λεγομένην ὑπὸ τῶν περὶ Ἐπίκουρον ἀπρονοησίαν.

the world well, because they considered the demiurge (the “Lord of Providence”) to be an evil or at least a failed deity, inferior to the supreme, perfect God.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, because they thought the *cosmos* to be evil, some Gnostics argued that they did not need to abide by its moral laws, since they belonged to the “spiritual” cast (the *pneumatics*).<sup>51</sup>

What is more, the Epicureans and the Gnostics shared the opinion that man was ontologically and morally superior to the surrounding cosmos, even if he had to submit physically to its powers. There is, indeed, neither divinity nor soul nor intelligence nor design in heaven and stars but only in people, according to Epicurus, while the Gnostics (to Plotinus’ dismay) denied divinity and eternity to the sun and the heavenly bodies and prided themselves on being nobler than those bodies.<sup>52</sup> On the other hand, both the real, supreme God of the Gnostics, and the only existing gods of the Epicureans are supposed to live outside this world and be inactive, yet kindred with people or similar to them. And while the Gnostic claims he alone is “God’s son” (unlike the stars and all the cosmos so much worshipped by the “Greeks”),<sup>53</sup> the Epicurean sage, after having denied life and divinity to stars, is convinced that his blessed and eternal gods look very much like himself, just because nothing can surpass the human shape in beauty.<sup>54</sup>

We need not imagine the personal presence of some Epicureans in the proximity of Plotinus and his students, however. Most likely those Gnostics Plotinus was fighting against at that particular juncture simply made use of some well-known Epicurean arguments. So, when we say that *Plotinus took Epicureanism seriously*, we claim that he tried to fight off *some Epicurean arguments* that were beginning to be influential in some Gnostic circles, because of their ability to challenge the *cosmic intelligence* and the *anthropic principle* (i.e., the idea that man and the cosmos fit together).

<sup>50</sup> That inferior deity was called Yaldabaoth by the Sethians. See Turner 2000a, 137.

<sup>51</sup> Dufour in Brisson et al. 2006, 413. According to Culiario (1992), the Gnostics rejected the “ecosystemic intelligence” (the world is made and governed by an intelligent, divine providence) and the “anthropic principle” (man and the world are fitted together) which, by contrast, were accepted by Platonism, Stoicism, and Christianity. It has not been noticed that both the ecosystemic intelligence and the anthropic principle were also rejected by Epicureanism, which, in this respect, stood alone among Greek philosophies. See Lucretius Carus, *Nat.* 5.198–199 (Bailey): *nequaquam nobis divinitus esse paratam/naturam rerum: tanta stat praedita culpa.*

<sup>52</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 5.

<sup>53</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.

<sup>54</sup> *Frg.* 352, p. 233 Usener.

The claim that there were genuine *similarities* in how the Epicureans and the Gnostics understood human existence in terms of its relation to the Universe should not be hastily dismissed on the grounds that so-called Epicurean “materialism” and the Gnostic “religious philosophy” are incompatible. Indeed, these terms reflect modern categories that tell more about us and our ideological struggles than about Plotinus and his struggles. At least, one cannot deny that, despite their important metaphysical differences, which I have little intention of denying, both Gnosticism and Epicureanism rejected or despised what Hans Jonas once called the typically Greek “grandioser Ausdruck der Weltheimlichkeit” (“the majestic expression of cosmic familiarity”).<sup>55</sup> So, *to some extent*, the Epicureans anticipated some features of second- and third-century Gnosis.<sup>56</sup> And Plotinus probably understood that long before the “real” Gnostics, the Epicureans were the only philosophers who, in contrast with the “Greeks,” had a “gnosis” that taught man’s existential *estrangement* and *Geworfenheit* (“thrownness”) with regard to his cosmic environment, yet again so fundamental a peculiarity of the historic Gnosis, according to Hans Jonas’ (Heideggerian) language.

In conclusion, let me quote these tragic, beautiful verses of Lucretius that bear witness, I think, to the Epicurean *Geworfenheit* and also shed light on why Plotinus, who did not lack insight, was not only “politically” but also, to a certain extent, philosophically right in his decision to classify Gnostics and Epicureans together:

Then, again, the babe,  
Like to the castaway of the raging surf,  
Lies naked on the ground, speechless, in want  
Of every help for life, when Nature first  
Hath poured him forth upon the shores of light  
With birth-pangs from within the mother’s womb,  
And with a plaintive wail he fills the place,—  
As well befitting one for whom remains  
In life a journey through so many ills.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Jonas 1934–1954, 1:140.

<sup>56</sup> Zostrianos reproves not only “the divine ruler of the perceptible world” but also “the dead creation within me” and the “infinity of matter.” Like him but unlike Platonists and Stoics, the Epicureans considered the world to be created out of dead, infinite matter—the atoms. Turner 2000b, 485–486 comments that to consider the world to be dead “for all the Platonic features of *Zostrianos*, is a remarkably non-Platonic sentiment.”

<sup>57</sup> *tum porro puer, ut saevis proiectus ab undis  
navita, nudus humi iacet, infans, indigus omni*

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*vitali auxilio, cum primum in luminis oras  
nixibus ex abvo matris natura profudit,  
vagituque locum lugubri complet, ut aequumst  
cui tantum in vita restet transire malorum.*

Lucretius Carus, *Nat.* 5.222–226 (Bailey), trans. Leonard.



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## PLOTINUS AND THE VEHICLE OF THE SOUL\*

John Dillon

One of the many aspects of Plato's teaching in which Plotinus discerns problems that need to be addressed is that of the relations of soul and body. I have in the recent past<sup>1</sup> had occasion to address the question as to why Plato seems actually not to have regarded relations between soul and body as constituting a problem, but, if he himself did not, his successors, even from the period of the Old Academy—and of course including Aristotle—would appear to have done so.

Aristotle, after all, is trying to address this problem in the notable passage *Gen. an.* 2.3 736B27 ff., where he produces the idea of a *symphyton pneuma*, composed of the same substance as the stars—that is to say, *aithēr*, the *pempton sōma*—residing particularly in the blood around the heart, and serving as the conduit for impulses from the active intellect, *via* the passive intellect, to the body as a whole, and to its various organs. But even within the Academy, the admittedly somewhat maverick Heraclides of Pontus seems to have advanced the view that the soul is itself composed of *aithēr*, the same substance as the stars (*frgs.* 98–99 Wehrli). This is, we must grant, not the same thing as proposing a mediating entity between soul and body which would be composed of this substance, but it is evidence of speculation on the topic of soul-body relations, offering a solution which would obviate the need for any such mediating entity. It also, incidentally, shows the adoption of Aristotle's theory of *aithēr* as a fifth essence within the Academy itself, something which is also attested for Xenocrates (*frg.* 53 Heinze/264–266 Isnardi Parente)—though there is no evidence that Xenocrates proposed this as the substance of the soul.

At any rate, this is an issue that surfaces pretty early in the Platonic tradition, even if it did not bother Plato himself. To take something of a leap—but this is a regrettable function of the fragmentary state of our evidence—we find the concept of a “pneumatic vehicle” as a conduit between soul and

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\* I am happy to offer this essay, albeit not strictly Gnostic in subject-matter, to an old friend, in token of his great contributions to our understanding of the Gnostic tradition, and thus to our appreciation of the milieu out of which Plotinus arises.

<sup>1</sup> Dillon 2009.

body well established in the Platonism of the second century CE.<sup>2</sup> Galen, for a start, seems to take it for granted in a passage of his *PHP* 7.7 (p. 643f. Müller), where he is criticising a theory of Posidonius which postulated a light-like (*phōtoeides*) *pneuma* as constituting the proper medium for the exercise of vision. Galen makes this the basis for a general comment about the nature of the soul, to the effect that we must accept either the Stoic and Aristotelian view of soul as a “luminous and aetherial body” (*augoeides kai aetheriōdes sōma*), or we may take the soul itself to be an incorporeal essence (*asōmatos ousia*), and postulate that the above-mentioned body is its “primary vehicle” (*prōton ochēma*), “through which as a medium it establishes communication with the rest of bodies.”

It is not quite clear whether Galen is adopting this theory himself, but it does not on the other hand sound as if he has invented it off the top of his head. There is further evidence, from (probably) the same period, in the pseudo-Plutarchan treatise *De vita et poesi Homeri*, the author of which is acquainted with philosophical trends, though without, it would seem, being a philosopher himself.<sup>3</sup> In ch. 128 of the work, he reports it as the view of Plato and Aristotle that the soul at death takes with it *to pneumatikon*, “the pneumatic element,” which then serves as its “vehicle” (*ochēma*), implying that it already possessed this while it was in the body.<sup>4</sup>

There is other evidence that the theory was known to Galen’s contemporary, the Pythagoreanizing Platonist Numenius (*frg.* 34 des Places, from Macrobius), and to the author(s) of the *Chaldaean Oracles*, which refer to the rarefied vehicle of the soul (*psychēs leptōn ochēma*, *frg.* 120 des Places). On the whole, it seems most plausible that the theory of the *ochēma* was developed in Platonist circles of the early Roman Imperial period, in the generation or so after Antiochus of Ascalon (who was probably himself too much influenced by Stoicism to regard the soul as incorporeal), adapting Stoic theory of the soul as “intelligent fire” (*pyr noeron*) or *pneuma*,<sup>5</sup> and com-

<sup>2</sup> I am ultimately indebted here to the succinct but most useful survey undertaken by Dodds in an appendix to his edition of Proclus’ *Elements of Theology* (1963, 313–321), himself indebted to Kissling 1922.

<sup>3</sup> He is certainly sympathetic to Plato and Platonism, as well as to Pythagoras and Aristotle, but his stance is rather that of a well-educated member of the Second Sophistic than of a professional philosopher. Cf. the whole passage §§ 122–130, on Homer’s view of the soul.

<sup>4</sup> In ch. 122, after commending the Pythagorean-Platonic doctrine of the immortality of the soul, he is prepared to state that “(Homer) knows well (as exemplified in the *Nekyia* of *Od.* 11) that blood is the food and nourishment of the *pneuma*, and *pneuma* is the soul, or the vehicle (*ochēma*) of the soul.”

<sup>5</sup> SVF 2.774 = Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 7.156; SVF 2.885 = Galen, *PHP* 3.1 (p. 251 Müller).

binning that with Aristotelian speculations about the *symphyton pneuma*, to produce the concept of this substance as an indispensable medium for interaction with the body, after the doctrine of an immaterial, immortal soul had been reasserted within the Platonist tradition.

At any rate, there can be little doubt that Plotinus, in the mid-third century CE, was perfectly well acquainted with this theory—and even if he were not, his pupil Porphyry, who certainly was, would have brought it to his attention. It is the purpose of this essay to enquire as to why, given that Plotinus was acquainted with the theory, he is not inclined to make any use of it.

After all, Plotinus is as concerned as any of his predecessors, if not more so, with the problem of soul-body relations. He presents us with many acute analyses of the processes by which an impulse from the body, or the external physical world, reaches the soul, or vice versa, some of which we shall examine below, and he does appear in general happy to work with the traditional Platonist model of soul. In his most mature thought, however, he came to adopt a rather extreme version of the traditional Platonist distinction between rational and irrational soul, according to which the soul *in itself* is regarded as *apathēs*, not subject, despite appearances, to passions or affections from without, while the receptacle or arena of passions is, not the irrational soul as such, but rather an emanation, or irradiation (*ellampsis*), or “trace” (*ichnos*) of soul, which is what immediately animates the body, and which constitutes the animate body, which he likes to term the “combination” (*synamphoteron*) or the “commonality” (*koinon*).<sup>6</sup> This remarkable position is backed up by a series of acute analyses of how sense-perceptions and passions work within this complex.

One particularly significant treatment of these questions is the first part of *Enn.* 3.6 [26] (chs. 1–5), a “middle period” treatise, which comes, in Porphyry’s chronological listing, just before the major treatise “Problems of the Soul” [27–29]. Here Plotinus begins by making a firm distinction, where notoriously<sup>7</sup> the Greek term *aisthēsis* allows of no such firm distinction, between sensation and perception:

We say that sense-perceptions are not affections (*pathē*), but activities and judgements (*energeiai kai kriseis*) concerned with affections; affections belong to something else, say, for instance, to the body so-qualified (*to sōma to*

<sup>6</sup> For a selection of uses of this term, cf. *Enn.* 4.4 [28] 18.20–21, where they are juxtaposed; but also *Enn.* 1.1 [53] 5.10; 1.1 [53] 7.5; 4.3 [27] 26.1–12.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Blumenthal’s discussion in *idem* 1971, ch. 6, pp. 67–79.

*toionde*), but the judgement belongs to the soul, and the judgement is not an affection. (Enn. 3.6 [26] 1.1–5, trans. Armstrong, slightly modified)

The question then arises, in what sort of entity do the actual sense-data, as *pathē*, occur? Plotinus' purpose, in this treatise, is to exempt the soul proper from any liability to affections, so he is required to propound some very subtle distinctions. Let us focus on ch. 4, where he turns to consider the “so-called affective part of the soul”:

But we must now investigate that part of the soul which is said to be subject to affections (*to legomenon pathētikon tēs psychēs*). We have, of course, already discussed this, in a way, in what we have said about all the affections that occur in the spirited and desiring parts, and how each of them arises:<sup>8</sup> but all the same there is something still to say about it, and we must first grasp whatever sort of thing it is that the part of the soul subject to affections is said to be. It is said in any case to be that about which affections appear to gather; the affections, that is, on which pleasure and pain follow.

(Enn. 3.6 [26] 4.1–8, trans. Armstrong)

It is precisely this issue as to the proper seat of pleasure and pain that we need to pursue further. Plotinus here indulges in some fairly advanced psychology. He recognises that a sensation of fear, for example, may arise directly from sense-data, such as a charging bull or a falling tree, which prompt a sudden burst of adrenalin and urgent evasive action on the bodily level, while conveying an impulse to the soul, which becomes an opinion (*doxa*); but it may also come about as a result of an opinion arising in the soul—a fear of losing one's job, or one's life's savings, or of contracting a deadly disease—which communicates itself to the living body, and produces a sinking feeling in the pit of the stomach. In either case, we have the problem of analysing just what it is that suffers the bodily sensation.

Some of the affections (*pathē*) arise as a result of opinions, as when someone, being of the opinion that he will die, feels fear, or, thinking that some good is going to come to him, is pleased; the opinion is in one part, and the affection is stirred up in another; but some of them are of a sort to take the lead and, without any act of choice (*aprohairetōs*), to produce the opinion in the part of the soul whose natural function it is to have opinions.

Now it has been already said that the opinion leaves the opining part unmoved; but the fear which originates from the opinion, coming down from above, in its turn, from the opinion, in a way gives a kind of understanding (*synesin tina*) to that aspect of the soul which is said to fear. What does this fear

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<sup>8</sup> This at the end of ch. 2, lines 49 ff., where he is concerned to maintain that the “lower” parts of the soul do not suffer *alteration* (*alloiōsis*) when being “affected”; it is more a case of activating or de-activating potencies, which leave their essence unchanged.

produce? “Disturbance and shock (*tarachē kai ekplēxis*),” they say,<sup>9</sup> “in face of an anticipated evil.” It should then be obvious to anyone that the mental picture (*phantasia*) in the soul, both the primary one, which we call “opinion,” and that deriving from it, which is no longer opinion, but an obscure quasi-opinion and a mental picture unaccompanied by judgement (*amydra hoion doxa kai anepikritos phantasia*), like the activity inherent in what is called nature (*tēi legomenēi physei*) in so far as it produces individual things, as they say, without a mental image (*aphantastōs*).

(*Enn.* 3.6 [26] 4.8–23, trans. Armstrong, slightly modified)

We have now arrived at the problem area: *hē legomenē physis*, “what is called nature.” Plotinus does not make himself particularly clear here: he does not even care to make clear who is calling this entity, or level of ensoulment, “nature.” Arguably the Stoics, who are still in his sights. But in fact he himself does recognise such a level of being, as has been mentioned above, and it is his answer to the doctrine of the pneumatic vehicle. He seems to want to maintain that, before the individual soul takes up its place in the human body, the world soul, in its lower aspect, which is what he would term “nature,” provides a sort of anticipatory ensoulment—a *prohypographē*, an “advance sketch”—, following in the traces (*ichnē*) of which the individual soul establishes its own articulated character. This is well set out in the later treatise *Enn.* 6.7 [38], “On the Forms and the Good,” at 7.13 ff., in the course of a discussion as to why some souls have to take on humbler roles in the universe:

For what is there to prevent the power of the Soul of the Universe from drawing a preliminary outline (*prohypographein*), since it is the universal forming principle (*hate logon panta ousan*), even before the soul-powers come from it, and this preliminary outline (*prohypographē*) being like illuminations running on before into matter (*hoion prodromous ellampseis eis tēn hylēn*), and the soul which carries out the work following traces of this kind (*tois toioutois ichnesin*) and making by articulating the traces part by part, and each individual soul becoming this to which it came by assuming to itself a shape (*schēmatiasa heautēn*), as the dancer does to the dramatic part given to him.

(*Enn.* 6.7 [38] 7.13–17, trans., Armstrong, slightly altered)

Here we have two of Plotinus’ favourite terms for the lower projection of the soul, *ellampsis* and *ichnos*, employed to characterize what is in fact a sort of preliminary ensouling of the living body provided by the world

<sup>9</sup> Sc. the Stoics (cf. SVF 3.385–386). The Stoics, of course, did not have a “mind-body problem” to the same extent, or in the same way, being materialists. They still have a problem, though, in deciding just what is afflicted with the *tarachē kai ekplēxis*—not, presumably, the “intelligent fire” or *pneuma* itself.

soul, into which the individual soul can insert itself, a process for which Plotinus utilizes an image which he finds attractive in other contexts also,<sup>10</sup> that of the actor, or artistic performer, fitting himself into a preordained role.

So here the entity or substance which is responsible for such basic activities as growth or digestion, as well as passions and affections deriving from sense-perceptions, is neither a pneumatic vehicle nor yet a “projection” of the individual soul proper, but rather a *prohypographē* inserted by the world soul into the bits of matter forming the substrate of individual bodies so as to make them *living* bodies. This is indeed an interesting proposal, but it is not, at least overtly, Plotinus’ usual position. We find a different perspective presented in the course of the great treatise on “Problems of the Soul” (*Enn.* 4.3–4 [27–28]), at 4.4 [28] 18–19. Here what constitutes the intermediary between soul and body is that “illumination” from, or “shadow” of, soul, which may also be termed “nature,” *physis*. There is no indication that it derives from the world soul.<sup>11</sup>

Now for the question whether the body possesses anything on its own account, and brings some distinctive quality of its own to the life bestowed on it by the presence of soul, or whether what it has is simply nature (*physis*), and this is what it is that associates with the body—*nature*.

The answer is that the body itself, in which there is soul and nature, must not be the same kind of thing as what is soulless, or that air is when it has been lit, but rather like air that has been warmed: the body of an animal, or indeed of a plant, has something like a shadow (*skia*) of soul, and pain and taking pleasure in the pleasures of the body is the business of the body so-qualified (*to toionde sōma*); but the pain of this body and this sort of pleasure come to the notice of our self (*hēmeis*) for dispassionate cognition (*eis gnōsin apathē erchetai*). By “our self” I mean the rest of the soul, in so far as even the body so-qualified is not another’s, but belongs to us; wherefore it is of concern to us, as belonging to us. For we are not this, nor yet have we been purged of it, but it depends on us and is suspended from us, whereas we exist in respect of our chief part (*kata to kyrion*), but nevertheless that other entity is ours, though in a different way. Therefore it is of concern to us (*melei*) when it is experiencing pleasure and pain, and the more so the weaker we are, and to the extent that we do not separate ourselves from it, but hold this part of us to be the most valuable, and take it as the true man, and, as it were, submerge ourselves into it.

(*Enn.* 4.4 [28] 18.1–19, my trans.)

<sup>10</sup> Notably, that of the soul’s subjection to the laws of Fate, cf. *Enn.* 3.2 [47] 15–16.

<sup>11</sup> There is a most useful discussion of this whole passage in Blumenthal 1971, 58–62, though his account is in general more descriptive than critical.

Here Plotinus is concerned to make a firm distinction between what is “us,” and what is merely “ours,” the former being the soul proper,<sup>12</sup> and the latter being the ensouled body, or the “body so-qualified,” just below, and elsewhere (e.g., in *Enn.* 1.1 [53] 5–7), termed “the commonality” (*to koinon*) or “the composite” (*to synamphoteron*). The soul proper, the “we” (*hēmeis*), has “concern” for the composite, but this concern it has is a “dispassionate cognition” (*gnōsis apathēs*). *Pathē* belong to the composite, and that is administered by this lower “trace” of soul which may be termed *physis*. Let us continue:

For we must say that affections of this kind are not those of the soul in general, but belong to the body so-qualified and some common and composite thing (*ti koinon kai synamphoteron*). When something is a single thing, then it is, as it were, sufficient to itself. For example, what affection would a body on its own undergo if it had no soul? For if it were divided, it would not be itself that is being divided, but the unity in it. And the soul on its own would not be affected even in this way, and when it is so disposed escapes every such experience. (Enn. 4.4 [28] 18.19–26, my trans.)

So neither body by itself nor soul by itself can be said to suffer *pathē*. This is the province of that entity which arises from their combination.

But when two things want to be one, since they have this unity as something extraneous, it would be reasonable to say that the origin of pain for them consists in not being allowed to be one. I mean here not two as if there were two bodies, for in that case there is only one nature involved; but when one nature wants to share something with another, and a thing of another kind, and the worse takes something from the better, and that cannot take the better itself, but only some trace of it (*ti ichnos*), and in this way too it comes to be both two things and one, stuck between what it was originally and what it could not have, it generates a problem for itself, since it has acquired a transitory association which is not secure, but always borne in opposite directions. And as it fluctuates upwards and downwards, on its being borne down it proclaims its pain, and as it moves up its desire for the association. (Enn. 4.4 [28] 18.26–37, my trans.)

This becomes odder and odder. We are now presented with a sort of “vertical” interpretation of the basic passions of pain and pleasure, as responses, respectively, to the combination’s being “borne down” (*katō pheromenon*) into excessive association with the corporeal, and conversely being “raised

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<sup>12</sup> That is true in this context, but we must also recognise that Plotinus postulates a level of soul “above” what he regards as the self, to which we can relate sporadically (though he himself did more or less permanently!). A good passage in this connexion is *Enn.* 1.1 [53] 3–7.



up” to some sort of ideal balance, perhaps, between the lower and higher elements—expressed here, however, as “desire for the association” (*epheſis tēs koinōnias*). Some further light—though not a great deal—is thrown on this process in the next chapter:

This, then, is what is called pleasure and pain. We say that pain is cognition of the body’s withdrawal as it is being deprived of the image of soul (*indalmatos psychēs steriskomenon*) and pleasure the living being’s cognition that the image of soul is once again taking its place in the body. The affection (*pathos*) is at that level, but the cognition (*gnōsis*) belongs to the sensitive soul (*aisthētikē psychē*) which perceives in its position adjacent to that level, and makes a report to the part which is the ultimate recipient of sense-perceptions. It is that other, though, (sc. the body) that feels the pain. By “feels the pain” I mean “that has undergone the affection”; as in the case of a cut, when the body is cut the division is in respect of its mass (*kata ton onkon*), but the discomfort is in the mass because it is not just a mass, but a mass duly qualified (*toiosde onkos*). The burning is there, but it is the soul that perceives it, taking it to itself because it is, as it were, located next to it. And the whole soul perceives the affection there without itself being affected; for, receiving the perception itself as a whole, it declares that the affection is there where the wound and the pain are. (Enn. 4.4 [28] 19.1–15, my trans.)

Once again, it seems to me, there are for us conceptual and terminological problems, even if everything is quite clear in Plotinus’ mind. At the lowest level, we have the body on its own, which can be cut, but cannot as such feel pain. Then there is the body “so-qualified,” or the *koinon/synamphoton*, or *physis*, which does feel the pain, but in an inarticulate way. And then there is the *aisthētikē psychē*, which *cognizes* the pain, and passes on the message to “that part which is the ultimate recipient of sense-perceptions” (*eis ho lēgousin hai aisthēseis*)—presumably the rational soul, though Plotinus is less than specific. By this time, at any rate, the passion is no longer something felt, but merely something noted. But what exactly is it, we may ask, that says, “Ow! That hurt!” or “Damn! I’ve cut my finger!”?

It seems to me that the best candidate for this is probably the *aisthētikē psychē* just mentioned; but here Plotinus has to make an interesting distinction, which reminds us that, as noted above (cf. n. 7), he is having to work with a single term, *aisthēsis*, which has to do duty both for the basic sensation and for the conscious or articulated perception arising from that sensation. At 19.15–19, he makes the point that since the soul is “everywhere,” as being strictly non-extended, it would not be able to pin a given pain down to a particular part of the body, e.g., the finger. It could only note that there is a pain *somewhere*. It needs this lower entity, *physis* or whatever, to identify the source of the pain as the finger:

But as it is the finger hurts and the man hurts, and the man hurts because the finger is the man's finger, but we say that that the man hurts in his finger, as we say that the man is "grey" because of the greyness of his eyes. So it is that part that is affected that hurts, unless one takes "hurts" as including what is immediately consequent upon the perception (*meta to ephexēs aisthēseōs*). If one does take it together, though, one clearly means this, that "pain" is to be taken along with the pain's not failing to come to the attention of sense-perception. In fact, though, we must call the sensation itself not pain, but rather a cognition (*gnōsis*) of pain, and say that since it is a cognition it is free from affection, so that it can cognize and give a sound report. For a messenger who has undergone an affection and has his concentration fixed on that affection either fails to report altogether, or is an unsound messenger.

(*Enn.* 4.4 [28] 19.19–29, my trans.)

So, for a clear account of the pain, it seems, the "messenger" must not itself be affected by the pain. This must then be the *aisthētikē psychē*, which experiences *aisthēsis* in the "higher" sense. Since the body itself cannot feel pain, but only be cut, all that is left to feel the pain is the *physis*, as we have seen earlier.

One could develop this theme at much greater length, adducing further passages, but the point, I hope, has been adequately made. Plotinus is indeed much concerned, as Plato himself plainly was not, about the precise procedures and mechanisms involved in the interaction between soul and body, but he is not attracted by the device, favoured both by Platonists of the previous century, and by his own successors, of postulating any sort of intermediate and mediating entity, neither quite material nor quite immaterial, to act as a "cushion" for the soul on its entry into the body.

There is just one passage, at the end of *Enn.* 3.6 [26] 5, where, in the context of speculating as to what can be meant by talk of "separating" or "purifying" the soul from passions when it is not subject to passions in the first place, he makes a passing reference to a *pneuma* on which the soul may "ride" (*ocheisthai*), which may be polluted or otherwise:

But the "purification" (*katharsis*) of the part subject to affections (*to pathētikon*) is the waking up from inappropriate images and not seeing them, and its separation is effected by not inclining much downwards and not having a mental picture (*phantasia*) of the things below. But separating it could also mean taking away the things from which it is separated when it is not standing over a breath (*pneuma*) turbid from gluttony and sated with impure meats, but that in which it resides is so fine that it can ride on it in peace.

(*Enn.* 3.6 [26] 5.22–29, trans. Armstrong)

Now if this *pneuma* can be "turbid" (*tholeron*) or "fine" (*ischnon*), it is a material entity of some sort, and this is just the sort of entity the postulation

of which Plotinus is generally concerned to avoid. *Enn.* 3.6 [26] is not an “early” tractate (in fact, in Porphyry’s chronological listing, it immediately precedes the great treatise “Problems of the Soul,” on which we have just been focusing), so one cannot dismiss or downplay this reference on those grounds. I can only conclude that Plotinus is here rather carelessly slipping into this sort of language, which will make perfectly good sense to his audience (whoever they were!), while serving his immediate purpose of asserting the soul’s freedom from such experiences.<sup>13</sup>

In general, however, Plotinus has no use for a pneumatic vehicle, despite what might seem to be its advantages, especially when, as he did, one wished to free soul proper entirely from affection by *pathē*. One might ask why this should be. It seems to me that Plotinus viewed the *pneuma*, despite its superficial attractions, as being, after all, a rather weasling and incoherent concept. It seems to provide a satisfactory solution to the soul-body problem, but in reality, since it itself must be accounted a type of body, of however refined a nature, it simply “kicks the can down the road” in respect of providing a solution to the mode of interaction between soul and body. Better on the whole, he must have concluded, to work with the concept of a lower form of soul, which can be viewed both as a “prefiguration,” *prohypographē*, laid down by the world soul in each living being in the form of *physis* and as a kind of “irradiation,” or “shadow,” or “trace” put forth by the soul proper on its entry into an earthy body. These are, admittedly, two distinct things, but they could be deemed to coalesce into one essentially spiritual entity, or perhaps better, *potency*, which would be capable of taking on the role of intermediary, conveying both external sense-data and internal bodily sensations to the soul proper, in the form of units of information, and impulses downward from soul to body, which it can employ to stimulate the body in various ways. The main thing, however, is that it is a kind of spiritual entity, while the pneumatic vehicle, when all is said and done, is a kind of body.

To provide a kind of coda to this enquiry, however, we may take note of two passages from “Problems of the Soul” (*Enn.* 4.3 [27]), adverted to above

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<sup>13</sup> He virtually never does this elsewhere. Of the two passages adduced by Armstrong in his note ad loc., the first, 2.2 [14], a relatively “early” treatise, speaks at 2.21–23 of “the breath that is about the soul” (*to pneuma to peri tēn psychēn*)—presumably in the sense of enveloping it while it is in the body—following the soul in its circular motion. This does indeed sound like a pneumatic vehicle, but in the other passage that he adduces, from an earlier chapter of “Problems of the Soul” (*Enn.* 4.3 [27] 15.1–4), the reference is actually to an astral body that souls take on before entering into earthy bodies—at which stage, the astral body is dispensed with. This passage, and another to the same effect, will be discussed below.

(n. 13), from the *quaestio* as to the mode of the soul's entry into body (*Enn.* 4.3 [27] 9–19), in which Plotinus, following on Plato's lead in *Tim.* 41E,<sup>14</sup> accepts the existence of astral bodies; but these bodies, though necessary for the soul's accommodation to life in the physical cosmos, are to be discarded upon entry into the soul's earthy body. The relevant passages are as follows:

But we must investigate also how soul comes to be in body. What is the manner of its presence? For this is no less worthy of wonder and investigation. Now since the ways in which the soul enters a body are two—for one happens to a soul which is in a body, either a soul that is changing bodies or one that is coming to an earthy body from an airy or fiery one, which they do not call changing bodies because the starting point of the entrance is not clear; while the other is when the soul comes to any body whatsoever from a disembodied state, which would constitute the soul's first participation in body—it would be right for us to investigate this latter case, asking whatever it is that happens when the soul, having been entirely uncontaminated with body, takes upon itself a bodily nature. (*Enn.* 4.3 [27] 9.1–13, my trans.)

Plotinus' primary concern here, as he makes clear, is to enquire into the initial entry of soul into any body whatsoever, but in the process he mentions, merely to set it aside, the secondary way in which a soul can be said to enter a body, that is from an astral body into an earthy one. The astral body comes up again, however, somewhat later on, at the beginning of ch. 15:

The souls proceed, then, peering out (*ekkypasai*) from the intelligible realm, in the first instance to the heavens, and, taking on a body there, they then pass by means of it to more earthy bodies, to the degree to which they are extended in length. Some go from the heavens to the lower level of bodies, while others are inserted from some bodies into others, those, that is, whose power was not adequate to raise them from here because of the heaviness laid upon them, and the consequent forgetfulness, since they drag about with them a lot that was loaded onto them to weigh them down. (*Enn.* 4.3 [27] 15.1–8, my trans.)

Here he is prepared to envisage, not only astral bodies proper, but more polluted versions of them (borrowed from a notable passage of the *Phaed.* 81C–D), which form, for instance, the wraith-like bodies of ghosts. The exact composition of such “weighed-down” bodies is rather more of a problem for Plotinus than it appears to have been for Plato, but he is prepared, it seems, to recognise their existence. In neither of these passages, however, are we confronted with a “pneumatic vehicle” in the strict sense. These bodies are material vehicles serving as bodies for souls; they are not intermediate

<sup>14</sup> Where Plato has the demiurge mounting each soul upon its proper star, as upon a vehicle (*ochēma*), and expounding to them the laws of Fate.

entities between soul and body as such. Plotinus, then, has no objection to postulating astral or pneumatic bodies of various sorts, to service the soul while it is between earthy bodies, but still within the physical cosmos; he just does not find them useful as a solution to the soul-body problem.

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## LIFE AND HAPPINESS IN THE “PLATONIC UNDERWORLD”

Michael A. Williams

Enormous progress has been made in recent decades in understanding relationships between evolving strands of Platonic thought in late antiquity and intellectual currents manifest within Nag Hammadi documents often classified as “Sethian.” Our honoree is of course among the scholars most deserving of both credit and thanks for his seminal leadership and path-breaking research on these issues. John Turner’s publications are among those that have been questioning past assumptions about Plotinus’ relationship to the persons whom he criticizes most pointedly in *Enn.* 2.9,<sup>1</sup> and the history of his intellectual engagement with them. Turner and others have challenged the tendency to imagine a wide gulf separating the philosophical agenda and strategies of Plotinus from those of these assumed interlocutors.

In the fresh exploration and corrective hypothesizing in this stimulating research, most of the focus has understandably been on technical arenas of philosophical conceptions, formulations, and argumentation. I wish to focus here on another dimension that invites significant correction, but to which far less attention has been paid to date. What can be said of the implications of this famous historical confrontation between Plotinus and his opponents for how the disputants actually conducted themselves in daily life? Not that the topic of behavior has been completely ignored by researchers. Indeed, Plotinus’ argument with these acquaintances has been one of the most commonly cited pieces of alleged evidence that competing worldviews led here to radically different patterns of ethical behavior. Often scholars have merely accepted Plotinus’ accusations of an absence of ethical concern or interest in virtue on the part of his opponents. There are serious problems with that viewpoint, as I will underscore. But here I am also interested in aspects beyond merely ethical norms: How was daily life in the material world likely experienced and negotiated by these people

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<sup>1</sup> It is generally acknowledged that what Porphyry rearranged as *Enn.* 3.8; 5.8; 5.5; and 2.9 originally constituted (in that order) a single large writing; see, e.g., Harder 1936; Roloff 1970. However, for present purposes the polemic most explicitly directed at opponents in *Enn.* 2.9 is most relevant.

whose views Plotinus attacks? For all the differences we might imagine during lecture hall debates over philosophical views, what about at home or in the agora? What about implications for social interactions, political involvements, economic behavior, the propensity to simple enjoyment of life, and so forth? To the extent that such questions have been raised at all, proposed answers have all too frequently consisted of skeletal Weberian-like typologies or a modern retooling and recycling of ancient polemical caricature. I suggest that much more can be said, including fundamental corrections to some conventional assumptions about life in (to borrow John Dillon's well-known phrase) the "Platonic underworld."

In contrast with the insufficient consideration of such issues in the case of Plotinus' opponents, with respect to this philosopher himself there has been some interesting new thinking on this topic. There have been recent studies aimed at addressing (to quote Dillon again) "whether, in face of the firmly, not to say grimly, otherworldly emphasis of Plotinus' overall ethical stance, any place can be found in his thought for care for others, or concern for things of this world."<sup>2</sup> Examples of such analyses will be mentioned below. However, the argument that I shall make is that implications in these studies might be taken further, for the tendency has been to leave Plotinus' rhetoric against his opponents more or less in place. That rhetoric had tended to be left as an unexamined foil, to be contrasted with a revised profile of Plotinus himself in which he is now seen to be more socially and/or politically involved, more engaged with "things of this world," than many scholars had always assumed. Though critics have questioned some aspects of this revised profile of Plotinus, it seems to me that at least certain fundamental elements in it are convincing, and have relevance to the present discussion. However, my argument is that the handy and still largely unquestioned contrast with Plotinus' opponents in this regard is misguided.

### 1. PLOTINUS THE SOCIAL MYSTIC

I begin with a brief look at some arguments about Plotinus himself, and the relation of his deserved reputation as a contemplative mystic to the question of day-to-day social concern and involvement. The influential study by Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité du regard*, first published in 1963,<sup>3</sup> was at

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<sup>2</sup> In his review in *Bryn Mawr Classical Review* of Song 2009, Dillon (2010) is actually critical of how far Song goes in her argument (on which, see below).

<sup>3</sup> Hadot 1993 is the translation of the 1989 third edition.

the time commended by A.H. Armstrong as "probably the best short introduction to Plotinus ... because it most effectively disposes of the prejudice against him (shared by some good scholars) as an unhealthy advocate of flight from the world, a representative of the sick religiosity of late antiquity."<sup>4</sup> Though Hadot underscored the primacy of contemplation in Plotinus' experience,<sup>5</sup> he was keen to show that contemplation transformed the concrete experience of everyday life:

How, then, should we live? For Plotinus, the great problem is to learn how to live our day-to-day life. We must learn to live, after contemplation, in such a way that we are once again prepared for contemplation ... We must detach ourselves from life down here to such an extent that contemplation can become a continuous state. Nevertheless, we still have to learn how to put up with day-to-day life; better still, we must learn to illuminate it with the clear light that comes from contemplation. For this, in turn, a lot of work is required: interior purification, simplification, and unification.<sup>6</sup>

Hadot suggested that this emphasis appears most prominently in Plotinus' later years:

The experience of divine union remains at the center of his thought. But from now on Plotinus concentrates on showing how virtue, born from this union, transforms one's entire being and becomes substantial wisdom. Any contemplation which had no effect on concrete life, and did not culminate in rendering man similar to God through virtue, would remain foreign and meaningless to us.<sup>7</sup>

Similar themes are reprised in Hadot's essays on ancient philosophy as a "way of life,"<sup>8</sup> which, he stressed, was a pursuit entailing a transformation of one's vision of the world and life itself through "spiritual exercises" rather than mere debates over abstract theories.

In the mentality of modern historians, there is no cliché more firmly anchored, and more difficult to uproot, than the idea according to which ancient philosophy was an escape mechanism, an act of falling back upon oneself. In the case of the Platonists, it was an escape into the heaven of ideas, into the refusal of politics in the case of the Epicureans, into the submission to fate in the case of the Stoics. This way of looking at things is, in fact, doubly

<sup>4</sup> Armstrong 1964, 273–274; though he did add a few reservations about details.

<sup>5</sup> E.g., Hadot 1993, 71: "In every sense of the word, then, virtue is the continuation of contemplation. Born of contemplation and returning to contemplation, Plotinian virtue is nothing but contemplation." Hadot is referring to such statements as *Enn.* 3.8 [30] 4.6 and 1.2 [19] 4.17–19.

<sup>6</sup> Hadot 1993, 65.

<sup>7</sup> Hadot 1993, 65–66.

<sup>8</sup> Hadot 1995.



false. In the first place, ancient philosophy was always a philosophy practiced in a group, whether in the case of the Pythagorean communities, Platonic love, Epicurean friendship, or Stoic spiritual direction. Ancient philosophy required a common effort, community of research, mutual assistance, and spiritual support. Above all, philosophers—even, in the last analysis, the Epicureans—never gave up having an effect on their cities, transforming society, and serving their citizens, who frequently accorded them praise, the vestiges of which are preserved for us by inscriptions. Political ideas may have differed from school to school, but the concern for having an effect on city or state, king or emperor, always remained constant. This is particularly true of Stoicism, and can easily be seen in many of the texts of Marcus Aurelius. Of the three tasks which must be kept in mind at each instant, alongside vigilance over one's thoughts and consent to the events imposed by destiny, an essential place is accorded to the duty always to act in the service of the human community; that is, to act in accordance with justice. This last requirement is, moreover, intimately linked to the two others. It is one and the same wisdom which conforms itself to cosmic wisdom and to the reason in which human beings participate. This concern for living in the service of the human community, and for acting in accordance with justice, is an essential element of every philosophical life. In other words, the philosophical life normally entails a communitary engagement.<sup>9</sup>

These latter essays contain more attention to Stoic or Epicurean examples than to Plotinus. While traits of Plotinus' sage often echo features of the ideal wise man in Stoic traditions,<sup>10</sup> for Plotinus the emphasis was placed on the noetic register.<sup>11</sup> As Hadot had put it in the earlier study:

But whereas the Stoic's attention was constantly directed towards the events of daily life, in which he tried always to recognize God's will, Plotinian attention was directed toward the Spirit. It was an ever-renewed effort to remain in a state of contemplation of the Good.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Hadot 1995, 274.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., the association of virtue with happiness or well-being, or the premium on ἀπάθεια; cf. Graeser 1972, 60–64.

<sup>11</sup> *Enn.* 1.4 [46] 16.1–4: “If anyone should not raise up and place the sage (σπουδαίος) in this Intellect, but should pull him down to (the realm of) chance events and fear that these might happen to him, one will not preserve ‘sage’ in the sense that we consider the term.” Cf. Schniewind 2003, 148; Gerson 1994, 191: “For Plotinus, the paradigm of the rational life is the life of Intellect. This is the life of our true ideal selves, and we are not conscious of it. It is a life that the Stoics are unable to endorse because they reject discarnate existence. In practice, the ideal Stoic life would perhaps not differ greatly from the ideal (incarnate) Plotinian life. Both lives disdain externals. But Plotinus, unlike the Stoics, can hold that the ideal life of an endowed self is at best still an inferior version of the true ideal life. Fidelity to that life means that ‘living according to nature’ or ‘living virtuously’ literally adds nothing to true happiness, nor is it constitutive of happiness.”

<sup>12</sup> Hadot 1993, 82.

Yet he cautioned:

One might therefore conclude that Plotinian attention turned away from reality and tried to escape it, taking refuge in abstraction, and that it consequently demanded more concentration and fatigue than the Stoic attitude.

Nothing could be further from the truth. In the wisdom of Plotinus, there is something gentle, smiling, benevolent: a sense of tact and a feel for reality that contrast sharply with the roughness and rigor of a Marcus Aurelius or an Epictetus.

In his expansion on this theme of Plotinus' "benevolence" and "gentleness" as spiritual guide, Hadot pointed to the evidence in Porphyry's *Vita Plotini* that the latter's circle of associates and acquaintances represented "a highly variegated milieu," not only of students and "genuine philosophers" but also "doctors, philologists, politicians, and usurers":

No, Plotinus did not live amidst "pale and cloistered people." The house where he lived probably resounded with bursts of laughter, games, and shouting. It was certainly quite large, since it was owned by Gemina, a woman who belonged, it would seem, to the Roman aristocracy. There, Plotinus was far from being alone.<sup>13</sup>

Hadot characterizes the relation between the sage's life in intellect and the sage's gentle spiritual guidance of others as a mutual transformation:

We are here getting close to the secret of Plotinian gentleness. By the mere presence of his spiritual life, the sage transforms both the lower part of himself and the people who come in contact with him. From one end of reality to the other, the most effective mode of action is pure presence.<sup>14</sup>

The work of Prof. Dominic O'Meara of the University of Fribourg includes sentiments comparable to those cited from Hadot. In several studies over the years<sup>15</sup> O'Meara has challenged the conventional view that Platonist philosophers in late antiquity had no political philosophy, that they took no interest in the affairs of this world, in practical life, social questions, and so forth, because their focus was on another world, the immaterial world

<sup>13</sup> Hadot 1993, 91; see Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 9.5–10.

<sup>14</sup> Hadot is referring to *Enn.* 1.2 [19] 5.25–31: "It is as if a person were living next door to a sage and derived the benefits of his vicinity: either he becomes like the sage, or else he is so ashamed as not to dare to do anything the good man would disapprove. *Thus there will no longer be a conflict*, since the lower part respects the rational soul; *when Reason is present, it is enough*, to the point that the irrational part itself is disgusted if it is stirred at all and does not keep its peace in the presence of its Master, and it reproaches itself with weakness"; trans. Hadot (1993, 95; original emphasis).

<sup>15</sup> See above all O'Meara 2003.

outside time and space—their true “homeland.”<sup>16</sup> Platonic philosophy, so the conventional view goes, was about liberating the soul, the divinization of the human, for which political or social involvement could be only a distraction. O’Meara argues that this view is inadequate and that Platonists in late antiquity could imagine far more connection between political life and the divinization of the human than has been appreciated.

In his 1993 introduction to Plotinus, O’Meara maintained that the latter’s mysticism entailed not only an “ethics of escape from the world” but also an “ethics of giving.” On the one hand, “we must turn away and escape from this material world, withdrawing ourselves from any involvement with it so as to be able to lead a transcendent life, that of intellect and that of the One.”<sup>17</sup> From this perspective, says O’Meara, one might say that Plotinus has not been true to Plato’s vision of the improvement of life also here and now, as elaborated in the *Republic* and the *Laws*. Yet to say that Plotinus’ ethic leaves no room for politics is, O’Meara contends, “only partly true.”<sup>18</sup> Plotinus admittedly devotes most attention to issues of metaphysics and psychology, and rather minimal attention compared with Plato or Aristotle to political topics. “However,” says O’Meara, “it does not follow from this that Plotinus’ attitude is purely otherworldly, having no political application.” For if one reads the *Enneads* and

successfully reaches union with the One, then another ethics becomes relevant, what we might call the ethics of giving ... The vision of the One (the Good) *may* (but need not) lead to the desire to communicate the Good and this can be done both on the political level (lawgiving in the image of the Good) and on the individual level through the example of wisdom and virtue that can be given to others.<sup>19</sup>

And O’Meara adds:

Porphyry’s *Life* suggests that Plotinus was active almost entirely on the individual level, as a model and guide for his friends and followers. We may regard his activity of teaching and of writing as aspects of this ethics of giving. If the *Enneads* propose an ethics of escape to the reader, they are themselves the product of an ethics of giving.<sup>20</sup>

In a more recent article, O’Meara observes that this “ethics of giving” is “an aspect that has been occulted in modern studies through an exclusive

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<sup>16</sup> O’Meara 2003, 3.

<sup>17</sup> O’Meara 1993, 108.

<sup>18</sup> O’Meara 1993, 109.

<sup>19</sup> O’Meara 1993. He cites *Enn.* 1.2 [19] 6.8–12.

<sup>20</sup> O’Meara 1993, 109.

emphasis on the otherworldly, religious or mystical side of Plotinus' thought (his 'ethics of escape')."<sup>21</sup> I will argue that, *mutatis mutandis*, the same "occultation" applies to the conventional understanding of Plotinus' opponents in *Enn.* 2.9.

Two of O'Meara's students, Alexandrine Schniewind and Euree Song, have published extended analyses with conclusions similar to those of their teacher.<sup>22</sup> Schniewind points out that scholars have had "a certain reticence ... to recognize a Plotinian ethic worthy of the name," since his works tend not to contain specific and practical instruction in this area. Critics have said that if there is a Plotinian ethic it is an elitist or aristocratic ethic that in the end is addressed only to sages.<sup>23</sup> She notes that the kind of criticisms that Plotinus addresses to opponents in *Enn.* 2.9, to the effect that they are not really interested in ethics or that they are arrogant and elitist, are raised against Plotinus himself by some critics.<sup>24</sup> Summarizing the positions of several previous scholars, she concludes that most consider Plotinus' ethic to be addressed to the sage, not so relevant to the ordinary person. In that view, his ethic would be both "egoistic," with the sage no longer interested in others, as well as "elitist," since it supplies little guidance for the average person.<sup>25</sup>

However, Schniewind considers this majority view to be in need of correction, and she offers extensive countervailing evidence in her analysis of Plotinus' model sage (*spoudaios*), focusing especially on *Enn.* 1.4. As one of the several elements in this parade of evidence, she eventually returns to Plotinus' criticism of opponents in *Enn.* 2.9, and his charge that they lack any interest in ethics. She argues that this confrontation is worth careful analysis because Plotinus' model sage "corresponds perfectly to the person of dignity (*semnos*) invoked by Plotinus in his criticism of the gnostics."<sup>26</sup> An indication of the virtue of the wise man is precisely the importance that the latter accords to the relationship with others. Plotinus denounces the approach of his opponents, in which the sage would boast of exclusive access to truth.<sup>27</sup> Plotinus' model sage is instead always concerned about the fate of others, and this is manifest especially in pedagogical activity as a guide to others, a

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<sup>21</sup> O'Meara 2010, 321–322.

<sup>22</sup> Schniewind 2003; see also 2005; and Song 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Schniewind 2003, 13.

<sup>24</sup> Schniewind 2003, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Schniewind 2003, 25.

<sup>26</sup> Schniewind 2003, 185.

<sup>27</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.27–28.

model of benevolence.<sup>28</sup> In a related study, Schniewind frames this benevolence as a part of the “very Platonic phenomenon” of the sage participating in the Good and imitating the generosity of the Good. “While participating in the Good, the human soul is led naturally to communicate and testify to others about the experienced good.”<sup>29</sup> But then:

this leads us to question the kind of other-concern we encounter in Plotinus. More particularly, it raises the question whether the metaphysical foundation engendered by the Good as origin of the motivation of the *spoudaios* renders his other-concern less “ethical.” To my mind, there is no contradiction. The motivation of the *spoudaios* does not interfere with the fact that we can find a genuine other-concern in his way of interacting with other people.<sup>30</sup>

As I will discuss presently, one might make a similar assertion regarding writers and users of documents such as *Zostrianos* or *Allogenes*—including the very people whom Plotinus criticizes in *Enn.* 2.9.

In her recent study on the ascent and descent of the soul in Plotinus’ teaching, Prof. Euree Song of Seoul University, another student of O’Meara, has similarly argued that Plotinus’ “ethic of concern” (*Sorge*) had not only an otherworldly dimension (*Jenseitigkeit*) but also a this-worldly dimension (*Diesseitigkeit*).<sup>31</sup>

In spite of the demand for solitary flight from the world, Plotinus’ ethic appears not completely unworldly or solitary once one takes into consideration that the so-called “political,” i.e., civil virtues are integrated into the overall process of deification as the first step for the guide in virtue (*Tugendleiter*).

She cites a passage from Plotinus that O’Meara, Schniewind and others also have highlighted to illustrate the “ethic of giving” on the part of the mystic sage who has already ascended to vision of the One:

The soul must let go of all outward things and turn altogether to what is within, and not be inclined to any outward thing, but ignoring all things ... and even ignoring itself, come to be in the contemplation of that One, and having been in its company and had, so to put it, sufficient converse with it,

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<sup>28</sup> Schniewind 2003, 186–189. Among other passages, she cites *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 14.38–43: “the kind of philosophy which we pursue, besides all its other excellences, displays simplicity and straightforwardness of character along with clear thinking, and aims at dignity (τὸ σεμνόν), not rash arrogance (τὸ ἀϋθαδέες), and combines its confident boldness with reason and much safeguarding and caution and a great deal of circumspection” (trans. Armstrong). Schniewind says that Plotinus’ model *spoudaios* as profiled from other evidence in her study matches this description.

<sup>29</sup> Schniewind 2005, 58.

<sup>30</sup> Schniewind 2005, 59.

<sup>31</sup> Song 2009.

[it must] come and announce, if it could, to another that transcendent union. Perhaps also it was because Minos attained this kind of union that he was said in the story to be "the familiar friend of Zeus," and it was remembering this that he laid down laws in its image, being filled full of lawgiving by the divine touch. Or, also, [the soul] may think civic matters (*ta politika*) unworthy of it and want to remain always above; this is liable to happen to one who has seen much.<sup>32</sup>

Thus, says Song, "The Plotinian flight of the alone to the Alone ends not in 'absolute solipsism' and silence." Rather, "Plotinus asks that one who has attained communion with the Good return to the world in order to share, if possible, this experience."<sup>33</sup> Thus, Plotinus advocates not only an "ethic of ascent" but also an "ethic of descent" motivated by concern (*Sorge*) for others.<sup>34</sup> Song refers to Plotinus' conception of a "providential concern for others" by which the sage is essentially imitating and mediating the universal Providence (*pronoia*) of the Good.<sup>35</sup> On the one hand, the Plotinian sage should not be directly equated to the philosopher-king in Plato's *Republic*, since Plotinus' man of virtue is not a politician but rather follows a life of contemplation. However, since this sage is also

no world-denying hermit but a cosmopolitan, his political responsibilities in this world are not dismissed. The insight into the order of reality as a whole and the realization of his own nature provide reasons and motivations for the conscious return to this world.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, I mention pertinent arguments by the well-known scholar of Neoplatonism, Prof. Andrew Smith of University College Dublin. In an important article on "practical ethics" in Plotinus, Smith has remarked that

even if it could be argued that Plotinus promoted a sheltered life well removed from active involvement in the political life around him, it would still be perverse to claim that he avoided or was unconcerned with the difficulties and problems of the ordinary lives of those with whom he came in contact. It would have been perfectly possible for him to do so, but he chose not to. For a

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<sup>32</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 6.9 [9] 7.17–28 (trans. Armstrong, slightly modified).

<sup>33</sup> Song 2009, 30; cf. Schniewind 2003, 190–191; O'Meara 2003, 74–75; 1993, 108–109.

<sup>34</sup> Song 2009, 30.

<sup>35</sup> Song 2009, 31–32.

<sup>36</sup> Song 2009, 32–33; cf. Schniewind 2005, 56: "This shows that the sage himself is ready to use discursive reason so as to communicate with other men. He is ready to display something in a discursive way about a non-discursive experience. So this makes clear that he has not totally finished with discursive reasoning; just that for himself there is no need to make use of it. This reminds us of the Platonic philosopher who, once he gets out of the cave and has finally contemplated the sun, has to go back to the other people who are still in the cave and give testimony about the object of his vision."

start, if we look at the sort of people who frequented his school it will be seen that he attracted professional men who must have been engaged in the world around them.

Smith also notes, as have others in this connection, Porphyry's reference to Plotinus' concern for the social welfare of orphans who were entrusted to him by many aging parents "of highest rank" who:

on approach of death, brought him their children, both boys and girls, and entrusted them to him along with all their property, considering that he would be a holy and god-like guardian ... Yet, though he shielded so many from the worries and cares of ordinary life, he never, while awake, relaxed his intent concentration upon the intellect.<sup>37</sup>

Smith says that in Plotinus' view:

the good man will act at and from a higher level, but that this level will still impinge on his lower virtuous activities; ... the exercise of the civic virtues does have a continuing role to play in the life of the good man, even though that role is subordinate to the higher life he now leads; ... contemplation does not preclude our awareness of the external world; ... (Plotinus') theory provides the necessary metaphysical support for an ethics of transcendence, where we can be fully alive at both the empirical and intellectual levels simultaneously, just the point that Porphyry made about Plotinus in the *Life*; ... although the good man lives the transcendent life, he is at the same time fully aware of and, because of his transcendent life, more effectively equipped to deal with everyday life. This is a coherent theory of practical ethics and one which Plotinus exemplified in his own life.<sup>38</sup>

Smith acknowledges that other Neoplatonists perhaps involved themselves somewhat more than Plotinus in actual political activities, and that most of the involvements and relationships of Plotinus remained "within the private domain." However, "retreat from active involvement in politics should not be confused with a rejection of society."<sup>39</sup>

Not all modern scholars of Neoplatonism accept every aspect of arguments such as the ones I have discussed from works by Hadot, O'Meara, Schniewind, Song and Smith.<sup>40</sup> Plotinus' focus on transcendence is obvious

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<sup>37</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 9,6–19; see Smith 1999, 229; on Plotinus' care for orphans as an example of compassion, see also Clark 1996, 289–290.

<sup>38</sup> Smith 1999, 231, 232, 235, 236.

<sup>39</sup> Smith 1999, 230.

<sup>40</sup> E.g., John M. Dillon 1996, stresses Plotinus' focus on transcendence. He cites passages such as *Enn.* 1.2 [19] 7.24–28, where Plotinus says that after reaching the higher principles, the sage will act according to these while leaving behind ordinary civic virtues: "He will live,

from his writings, and no one disputes this. But O'Meara seems justified in suggesting that a significant part of the man is "occulted" if he is known only in terms of his famous mystical theory. There was a more ground-level Plotinus. That his daily life did include significant forms of social engagement and activity seems evident from what sources we have. And my core argument here is that essentially the same observation is also valid for the opponents whom Plotinus criticizes in *Enn.* 2.9. I am not contending that these opponents had no important differences with Plotinus, because they most certainly did. But too often the implications of those differences at the level of everyday life have been, and continue to be, misunderstood and misrepresented.

## 2. HIS ANTI-SOCIAL, MYTHMAKING FRIENDS?

A primary expression of this misunderstanding is the way in which Plotinus' opponents in *Enn.* 2.9 so commonly continue in place as foils, precisely when the point is to contrast their alleged radical, anti-social deviance in "withdrawing from the world" with Plotinus' more sensible and socially conscious behavior. Thus, in a quotation from Hadot cited above he rightly observes that for Plotinus, "Any contemplation which had no effect on concrete life, and did not culminate in rendering man similar to God through virtue, would remain foreign and meaningless to us"—but immediately following this Hadot sets up "Gnosticism" as proof:

This, as Plotinus was well aware, is the danger of Gnosticism. Those who know themselves to be saved by nature tend to believe moral effort will make no substantial difference. Besides, the Gnostic is not of this world, not really "from here." What good is it, then, to practice virtues, since all one has to do to insure salvation is to wait for the end of the world? It is useless and impossible

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not the life of the good man which civic virtue requires, but leaving that behind, he will choose another, the life of the gods; for it is to them, not to good men, that we are to liken ourselves" (Dillon's translation). Dillon comments that this passage "is a pretty uncompromising statement with which to end the treatise. Plotinus is not suggesting, of course, toleration of any form of antinomianism, or disregard for the norms of decent society, such as commended itself to certain contemporary Gnostic sects. Any such suggestion would have appalled him. He would, of course, observe the vulgar decencies; it is just that they would be subsumed into something higher." In a footnote here he cites *Enn.* 1.3 [20] 6.19–23 as illustration of that point, and then continues with a vivid hypothetical: "One feels of Plotinus that he would have gladly helped an old lady across the road—but he might very well fail to notice her at all. And if she were squashed by a passing wagon, he would remain quite unmoved" (324).



to try to live, down here below, according to our spiritual nature. Here Plotinus recognizes one of the gravest dangers of the spiritual life.<sup>41</sup>

While O'Meara is keen to stress that Plotinus' "ethics of giving" has been "occulted" by one-sided focus only on his "ethics of escape," he is content to leave "gnostics" with only the latter type of ethics. He refers to a "literal reading" of Plato's *Timaeus* that "took a sinister turn in the version of it found in a religious movement of Plotinus' time, Gnosticism, which saw this world as the botched product of an evil and ignorant god, a world from which we, as humans, must escape to return to another higher world and a god of goodness."<sup>42</sup> He remarks that Plotinus "often stresses the great beauty of the world, in opposition, for example, to Gnostic hate for the world."<sup>43</sup> Alexandrine Schniewind, as mentioned above, wants to challenge the impression that Plotinus is guilty of the same kind of egoistic and elitist ethic of which he accuses his "gnostic" opponents. Plotinus denounces the claim to exclusive access to truth, she states, and by contrast with these opponents he manifests his concern for others through his pedagogical efforts.<sup>44</sup>

Euree Song argues that even though Plotinus may have a somewhat more limited world-affirmation, it is doubtful that underneath this is "a gnostic world-rejection." Rather, his somewhat ambivalent attitude toward the world is the result of "a systematic tension in Platonist philosophy."<sup>45</sup> Admittedly, according to Plotinus our "true home" is that intellectual (*geistige*) world, and here we are strangers (*xenoi*). Yet she asserts that in Plotinus' eyes this world is nevertheless still not "the sort of unwelcoming stranger (*ungastliche Fremde*) as the gnostics think."<sup>46</sup> Song notes that Plotinus does claim that it is from Plato that his opponents derive their teachings, such as the immortality of the soul, the world known through intellect, the first God, that the soul must flee association with the body, its separation from it, and the flight from becoming to being.<sup>47</sup> Yet, she cautions, Plato in no way is talking about "a world-rejection so complete as the gnostic one ... Therefore, Plotinus' ethic of flight is not to be confused with the gnostic ethic of world-

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<sup>41</sup> Hadot 1993, 66; he then quotes *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 15.28–40, where Plotinus accuses his opponents of having no interest in virtue. But see my discussion below.

<sup>42</sup> O'Meara 2010, 314.

<sup>43</sup> O'Meara 1993, 92.

<sup>44</sup> Schniewind 2003, e.g., 186.

<sup>45</sup> Song 2009, 22–23.

<sup>46</sup> Song 2009, 23; she cites *Enn.* 6.3 [44] 1.26–28.

<sup>47</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6.38–42.

rejection."<sup>48</sup> Song insists that Plotinus' "ethic of concern" for others is especially profiled in his opposition against "the gnostics," whom she leaves to bear the label of "egoistic."<sup>49</sup> "Equipped with a normative concept of the 'law of providence,' Plotinus defends—against the gnostic antinomianism—the juridical, institutionalized practice of sanctions within human society, in so far as that practice agrees with the general legal order."<sup>50</sup> Plotinus wanted a worldview that "guaranteed a meaning to life in this world"; this motivated his criticism of these opponents, for in his judgment "the gnostic repudiation of the world robbed life in this world of all significance, and led to an antinomian and immoral lifestyle."<sup>51</sup>

These kinds of references to Plotinus' opponents are rather conventional. They are by no means limited to scholars who are aiming to balance Plotinus' more famous "otherworldly" teachings on mystical contemplation with explorations of his quite "this-worldly" activities and concerns in daily life. It is very common in modern discussions of Plotinus' confrontation with these "friends" of his that characterizations of the latter are limited to repeating, or even effectively intensifying, phrases from Plotinus' own polemical rhetoric. So we hear of "the totally negative attitude of the Gnostics to this world and earthly existence";<sup>52</sup> we are told that Plotinus' polemic in *Enn.* 2.9 is the clearest confirmation that "Gnostic dualism, with its anti-cosmic stance and uncompromising rejection of the beauty and positive aspects of the cosmos,

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<sup>48</sup> Song 2009, 25.

<sup>49</sup> Song 2009, 29; cf. p. 160, where she refers to Plotinus' criticism of "the egoism of the gnostics," in contrast to his notion of "that which is common" (*koinon*) that binds humankind together.

<sup>50</sup> Song 2009, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Song 2009, 162. In the articles mentioned, Andrew Smith makes far less of the opponents in *Enn.* 2.9 in his argument for the importance of social involvement for Plotinus, though what brief mention is made is limited to the conventional theme of "escape" from an "evil material universe": "This possibility that the individual soul should and can act like the World Soul is one that receives its clearest expression in II.9 [33]. It is important to remember the purpose of the treatise; Plotinus is concerned to defend the integrity of the World Soul and the goodness of what it produces, i.e., the physical universe, primarily against a certain group of Gnostics who disparaged the demiurge and the World Soul as fallen divinities who in turn produce a flawed and evil physical universe ... The achievement of perfection for the individual (in Plotinus) does not necessarily involve escape from the body either literally or psychologically. In fact Plotinus' whole point against the Gnostics is that they are wrong to think that contemplation demands disembodiment and that, therefore, the stars and the World Soul can never reach the same level of contemplation as men can, because men escape from their bodies at the moment of physical death. The Gnostics in fact according to Plotinus misunderstand the meaning of 'being outside.'" (Smith 2005, 66–67, emphasis added.)

<sup>52</sup> Bos 1984, 23; Igal 1981, 145; the gnostics opposed by Plotinus hold "an uncompromisingly negative attitude toward the cosmos."

is to be placed at the opposite end of the spectrum of ancient thought";<sup>53</sup> for a Platonist like Plotinus, "as opposed to the Gnostics, a general rejection of this cosmos is inconceivable";<sup>54</sup> Numenius' worldview, merely somewhat "more pessimistic" than Plotinus', is said still not to reach the radical "Gnostic result of rejection or ethical irrelevance of human action in the world."<sup>55</sup>

The eminent Plotinian scholar Luc Brisson, in a recent article on "Plotinus and the Gnostics," illustrates the general tendency to be content with Plotinus' basic characterizations of these opponents or with conventional variations on these, leaving at least the impression that the picture rings true. Thus, these "gnostics" consider themselves strangers to the world, not a part of our universe, but rather have been thrown here as a result of a mistake (*faute*) committed by a higher reality, sparks of light plunged into a sensate quagmire (*bourbier*).<sup>56</sup> They gather themselves in a sect and despise the rest of humanity. Since they do not belong to our world, and distinguish themselves from the majority of humans on the grounds that they are elect, they believe themselves to be superior to everyone and they isolate themselves in community. They are ignorant of the virtues. Given the little value that they accord to their fellow citizens and the world, the "gnostics" do not have to worry about the actions that they take in this world below. They leave doing good to others, to those who actually believe that conduct will ultimately lead to something better. The gnostic knows that he is saved by nature and that his actions will change nothing with regard to his destiny.<sup>57</sup> The Sethian gnostics appeal only to mystery, mythology, magic, the superiority of the elect, the sectarian spirit, and the depreciation of the perceptible world.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Filoramo 1990, 55.

<sup>54</sup> Alt 1990, 7.

<sup>55</sup> Elsas 1975, 117.

<sup>56</sup> Brisson 2010, 39.

<sup>57</sup> Brisson 2010, 40.

<sup>58</sup> Brisson 2010, 41–42. Similar in its reliance on the conventional is the portrait presented by Evangeliiou: He comments that Plotinus "did not recognize an all-important aspect of the Gnostic mentality, that is, the abyss which separates mundane things and celestial Archon alike from the God whom they call their Father. For the true God, like the true Gnostic, is not kin but alien to this Cosmos in which he finds himself imprisoned. Their revolutionary spirit is absolutely uncompromising towards everything within this Cosmos. In this sense, the Gnostic spiritual revolt is truly of Cosmic dimensions and has its parallel in certain extreme movements in the twentieth century, such as existentialism and nihilism, as has been observed," and he cites Hans Jonas' (1963) famous arguments to that effect thereby moving beyond Plotinus' actual script (Evangeliiou 1992, 121). Acknowledging that "true Platonists, no less than the Gnostics, are convinced that their real abode is elsewhere," Evangeliiou remarks that the "basic difference between the two is their attitude toward this life. While the

In summary, though some scholars have challenged in various ways the notion that Plotinus was a mystic whose focus was exclusively on transcendent vision and therefore on "escape" from any significant interest in life here or in relationships with others, the same cannot be said for the impression conventionally conveyed of his opponents in *Enn.* 2.9. Instead, these opponents are routinely dragged on stage as the star specimens of that which, it is argued, Plotinus was *not*: extreme "world-rejecters" producing "escapist" myths and having no interest in day-to-day reality.<sup>59</sup>

### 3. PAST ASSUMPTIONS VS. THE EVIDENCE

However, a careful reading of the evidence suggests a different picture. There is first of all the question of how these friends whom Plotinus criticizes actually assessed the "livability" of the material cosmos. A conventional approach has been to read their thoughts straight off the surface of certain

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Gnostic constantly complains, blames everything, hates everybody, blasphemes and, nevertheless, goes on living unwisely believing that at the end he will be saved by means of secret revelations and magical spells, the Platonic philosopher tries to live in peace with other people and in harmony with the world, to keep his soul as pure as possible, and to calmly prepare for the great journey when the time comes" (121). This is to take at face value Plotinus' polemic in passages such as *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 18.

<sup>59</sup> The influence of this general caricature is widespread, well beyond specialists in Neoplatonism such as I have quoted above. As only one example from broader intellectual circles, I can cite Rossbach 2007; so, for example, Plotinus and "gnosticism" are "two important narratives that weave the exilic condition into their accounts of human existence," but Rossbach wants to stress a "fundamental distinction": Plotinus' "narrative of emanation preserves the unity and oneness of reality by highlighting the absolute transcendence—the absolute heterogeneity—of its unifying principle, of the One." It may be that "reality appears as a disordered flux in which the soul finds no anchor for meaningful existence," but if so "it is the soul that has to change, not reality. The One is always there, sustaining reality, but the concrete historical, social and political conditions may make it especially difficult for the soul to understand that it must 'turn around' (*epistrophē, ekstasis*) and reorient its existence towards the ground of being." On the other hand: "In Gnosticism, the soul finds itself in a very different situation as the 'taut line' between the poles of reality has snapped. The key moment in the soul's narrative history is not a 'turning around' but the acquisition of knowledge (*gnosis*)—a moment of insight, in which *the soul finds in itself the divine spark that confirms its utter exceptionality in an alien and hostile environment. The inevitable conclusion drawn from this insight is that participation in the surrounding reality is contrary to the very essence of human nature.* The absolute heterogeneity that separates the innermost part of the soul from the cosmos cannot be overcome or bridged, and thus the soul's true inner principle *must turn away from reality*" (41, emphasis added). But Rossbach never explains what this "turning away from reality" would actually have entailed. How would one have gone about discontinuing the "participation in the surrounding reality" that was allegedly "contrary to the very essence of human nature"?

of Plotinus' accusations, and to contrast his appreciation for the beauty of the cosmos with "Gnostic hate for the world."<sup>60</sup> It is true that Plotinus says they claim "another cosmos better than this one"; that they "do not honor" this material earth but speak of a "new earth" for them, an archetype (παράδειγμα) of the visible cosmos they "hate" (μισεῖν); that they "despise (καταφρονεῖν) the beauty that is here," and so on.<sup>61</sup> However, Plotinus does not claim his acquaintances are *blind* to beauty in the material cosmos, only that they do not grant it the significance upon which he insists. He says that they do in fact see the "excellence in form and arrangement" (εὖσχημον καὶ εὐτάκτον) in the heavens, but complain about "disorder" (ἀταξία) here around the earth; when they say that they despise "beauty" here, he says, they are expressing disdain for something that they have first of all identified as beautiful.<sup>62</sup> It is clear from several places in Plotinus' own polemic that the fundamental argument is not about whether, for example, the stars are beautiful, but whether the latter are divine and capable of contemplating what transcends the visible universe.<sup>63</sup> Plotinus' acquaintances claimed for themselves this capacity and the ability to go outside the visible cosmos at death, while the heavenly bodies cannot do so but must "forever decorate heaven."<sup>64</sup>

The issue is also not whether the care of providence is experienced in life here and now. Rather, Plotinus considers his acquaintances' experience of providence to be narrow, arrogant and illogical. He says that they deny general providential care for the cosmos, while claiming that God's providence *does* indeed care for *them*.<sup>65</sup> They were likely articulating a message about divine providence similar to that held by many Christian writers of the day.<sup>66</sup> In any event, Plotinus' own polemic reveals that these people did not view their lives as meaningless and empty of divine care and guidance. Instead, their lives were rich with it. And one might even question the assertion that

<sup>60</sup> O'Meara 1993, 92.

<sup>61</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 8.26–28; 5.24–28; 17.28.

<sup>62</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 5.10–14; 17.28–32.

<sup>63</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 18.46–49; cf. 2.9 [33] 16.1–5: the issue is respect for the gods, not whether there is beauty in the cosmos.

<sup>64</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 18.35–39.

<sup>65</sup> Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.64–66; 16.15–18.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Burns 2011, 299; I am most grateful to the author for sharing a copy of his excellent dissertation with me before revision and eventual publication. Referring to texts like *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*, Burns notes that like many Christian writers they affirm divine providence's "reach to individuals, particularly in the realm of salvation, a saving revelation imparted to earth that individuals are free to accept or reject." I agree, though I would simply underscore the wider relevance for everyday life, not merely for eventual salvation.

providence by their accounting did not extend more universally. For example, some kind of more general providential activity seems conveyed by the statement in *Allogenes* 51.25–32 that the divine Autogenes “continually corrects the defects arising from nature.”<sup>67</sup>

I have noted that in recent scholarship aimed at rehabilitating Plotinus’ profile in the area of social concern, the acquaintances’ notion of providence has been characterized as “egoistic” and contrasted with Plotinus’ conception of a “providential concern for others” by which the sage is essentially imitating and mediating the universal Providence (πρόνοια) of the Good.<sup>68</sup> However, there is every reason to question that contrast. As I mentioned earlier, scholars like O’Meara see an “ethics of giving” in Plotinus’ acts of teaching and writing. Having experienced communion with the One, the soul must “come and announce, if possible, to another that transcendent union.”<sup>69</sup> Yet if we look at texts that Plotinus’ friends were allegedly reading, we find a model for action that can be understood in the same way. The text of *Zostrianos* portrays a seer granted transformative knowledge during his visionary ascent, and who returns to earth preaching the truth with evangelical fervor.<sup>70</sup> *Allogenes*, also, brings the news of his visions to be shared (eventually) with those who would be receptive (the “worthy”).<sup>71</sup> In

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<sup>67</sup> See Turner 2001, 576, who remarks on the “positive attitude toward the preservation or improvement of the sensible cosmos in the Platonizing Sethian treatises.” *Marsanes* 1.22–25 speaks of the “Great Father” who “looks upon the All and takes care of them all.” There has been too little recognition of the important role that providential oversight and guidance of life in the material realm played in many demiurgical texts, and not just in “Platonizing” Sethian treatises. The protective care of Pronoia overseeing the entire process, from beginning to end, is certainly an assurance brought by a text like the *Apocryphon of John* (e.g., II 7.22; 14.19–22; 23.24–25; 24.13–15; 27.34–28.5; 28.1–3; 30.11–31.31). But the insistence that everything happens in accordance with the divine will appears in many other texts (e.g., *Hyp. Arch.* 96.11–14; *Orig. World* 117.18–28; *Holy Book* III 57.25–58.22; III 59.9–12; III 68.9–22). Rudolph 1983, 66, remarks that the material realm “is not a natural process pre-determined by ‘providence,’ as Plotinus, for example, understood it, it is something effected through a crisis which has its negative consequences for the world and for man.” However, this conventional perspective needs serious reexamination. It is true that Sethian myths include some dramatic stories of the sort that Plotinus must have in mind when he chides his opponents for speaking of the “tragedy of the terrors in the spheres of the cosmos” (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 13.7–8). But characterizing life here as being only the outcome of “crisis” and “negative consequences” ignores the theme of ultimate divine control over the entire process that is so clearly articulated in many of these texts.

<sup>68</sup> E.g., Song 2009, 29, 160.

<sup>69</sup> *Enn.* 6.9 [9] 7.22–23; see discussions in, e.g., Ferwerda 1984, 71–72; Schniewind 2003, 189–191; Song 2009, 29–30.

<sup>70</sup> *Zost.* 129.16–132.5.

<sup>71</sup> *Allogenes* 65.15–25.

criticizing the teachings of his friends, Plotinus alludes to their active proselytizing.<sup>72</sup> His acquaintances, devotees using texts like *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, were not disengaged from society but rather were engaged in its enlightenment.

This is confirmed by other information in *Enn.* 2.9 that is usually overlooked. For example, since Plotinus famously says that some of his friends for whom he holds regard (αἰδώς) had embraced the teachings he is criticizing *before* they became his friends,<sup>73</sup> it seems likely that they moved in rather more respectable social circles than that “lowest” sort of folk of whom Plotinus speaks with such disdain.<sup>74</sup> Otherwise, one wonders why he would ever have bothered to befriend them in the first place, or why he *continued* to regard them with some respect despite their intellectual disagreements! Furthermore, he accuses them of “hunting reputation” (τὴν εὐδοκίμησιν θηρωμένους) by their criticism of the ancients.<sup>75</sup> This does not sound like people wishing to *withdraw* from the social scene, but rather persons with aspirations for enhanced social profile.

Several of Plotinus’ remarks indicate that the opponents were concerned about issues of justice and injustice in society, and found fault with the inequality between the wealthy and those living in poverty, the winners and losers in the sporting arena of life.<sup>76</sup> Modern studies frequently give the

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<sup>72</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.53–60; in 2.9 [33] 6.55–56, Plotinus refers to the teaching of his acquaintances as “the deception that is pouring forth upon people.”

<sup>73</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10.3–6. Igal 1981, 140, challenges the notion that “friends” (φίλοι) here should be taken as implying these opponents had been actual members of Plotinus’ own Platonist circle. He argues that Plotinus’ language here is “nothing but a *commonplace* apology deriving from and even echoing verbally Plato’s famous apology preceding his fierce attack on Poetry in the *Republic*” (original emphasis; see *Resp.* 10.595B9–10). He could be correct on that point, but even Igal seems to acknowledge that this refers to an actual friendship, though, he argues, “it was based on personal acquaintance rather than agreement in doctrine and reverence for Plato” (Igal 1981, 147n17). If Igal’s argument is accepted it would seem to shift the basis and motivations for Plotinus’ social engagement with them (*after* they were already involved with the teachings he criticizes) even more to factors such as their *social* respectability and acceptability, and make even less likely any significant social withdrawal or deviance on their part.

<sup>74</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 5.8–10; 18.17–18. Their sense of religious community does seem to have extended to the *inclusion* of more than one social class within their “brotherhood” (see below). Yet if that “lowest” class defined the “friends” themselves and everyone else who belonged to their circle, it is hard to imagine why Plotinus would have once warmed to them in the first place.

<sup>75</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6.52. Cf. 2.9 [33] 13.13–14, where he says that his opponents point to their own souls as the basis on which “they deem themselves to be held in honor/honored/worthy” (τίμιοι).

<sup>76</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.1–3; 14–15.

impression that these complaints about injustice merely reflect a motivation for and indication of "world-rejection."<sup>77</sup> However, complaints about imperfection and moral disorder in the world do not prove that these people were content merely to toss cynical jeers from the social sidelines, or saw in economic inequality no implications regarding their own social responsibilities.<sup>78</sup>

Of course, that is exactly how Plotinus wants us to imagine them, as do-nothing grouchers. He compares them to a person living in a nice house who criticizes the structure of the house but nevertheless continues to live in it.<sup>79</sup> If the cosmos does not please you, scoffs Plotinus, you are free to leave at any time!<sup>80</sup> This challenge by Plotinus is clearly rhetorical, with tongue prominently in cheek. But it is revealing for our purposes precisely because he *knows* that these opponents would have no interest at all in taking him up on the suggestion! He uses this as a debating point, but we can infer that he knows very well he is not addressing people burdened by such anomie that they actually cannot stand this world and are constantly preoccupied solely with escaping the body. A longing to ascend, to leave the body, was certainly a theme with them—but at their eventual death, as in other salvation movements, as well as in Plotinus' own worldview. There is no evidence that they were suicidal.<sup>81</sup> Plotinus knows very well that his

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<sup>77</sup> E.g., Roloff 1970, 182, who refers to this issue of economic inequality in 2.9 [33] 9.1–3 simply as a "commonplace among possible objections to the world," without further consideration of its implications for serious social concern among the opponents; Alt 1990, 26, dismisses the significance of the remark even more facetly: "At the beginning [of 2.9.9] is the question of the unjust distribution of possessions, which for the gnostics was hardly a relevant issue" ("Am Beginn steht die Frage der ungerechten Verteilung der Güter, die für die Gnostiker kaum ein relevantes Problem war"). This is simply to beg the question, and to assume that because of their "world-rejection" these people of course could have had no interest in issues involving material goods.

<sup>78</sup> Ousager 2004, 12, contrasts Plotinus' more "conservative and libertarian values" with the "abstract egalitarianism of the Gnostics"; cf. p. 244: "Plotinus mentions the egalitarian Gnostics who naïvely think that everyone has already become exactly alike and equal to the gods whenever their preachers tell them they are (II.9.9.52–60). If anyone is appalled like the Gnostics that there is no full equality of power or wealth and that there is poverty in this world, then they are not yet conscious that this is not decisive" (cf. p. 226). In fairness, Ousager is exploring Plotinus' thinking, not trying to imagine things from the standpoint of the opponents. But precisely my point is that the result in such studies has been to leave standing a completely uncritical portrait of the opponents.

<sup>79</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 18.4–7.

<sup>80</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 8.42–43.

<sup>81</sup> In fact, the theme of the contemplation of suicide appears in *Zostrianos* (3.25–28), as an element in the fairly common motif of doubt or tortured emotions preceding a revelatory



interlocutors would not think of taking seriously his dare to “leave,” and this fact is exactly what supplies the punch here to his rhetoric!<sup>82</sup>

The conventional assessment of Plotinus’ responses to his opponents’ criticisms of social injustice has been to look past the complaints as merely windows on cosmological assumptions: Complaints about injustice in the world equal obsessive preoccupation with the “badness” of the world and its “bad” or “evil” creator. However, if one pauses to reflect on the *complaints themselves*, one might ask whether it is the opponents or Plotinus who sounds most socially concerned. It is the opponents who seem most unwilling merely to accept injustice in life, while Plotinus appears quite content to explain life in terms of a kind of social Darwinism.<sup>83</sup> The system as a whole must not be questioned; ills are suffered for a reason. The opponents were apparently less patient with such explanations. In their view, something was fundamentally wrong—immoral—about the diversity of social outcomes. There seems no reason not to read their discourse as a promotion of the ideal of justice, and therefore a form of politics.<sup>84</sup>

Other elements in Plotinus’ polemic provide additional evidence of active social engagement on the part of his friends. For example, Plotinus criticizes them for considering as “brothers” the “lowest” (*φαυλοτάτοι*) class of persons, and saying that the souls of such people are immortal and divine.<sup>85</sup> The potential significance of this fictive kinship language for social behavior is usually overlooked in modern studies.<sup>86</sup> Yet it suggests persons who were

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vision. But what follows in the text is the visionary ascent and revelation that renders Zostrianos a distinctly upbeat and invigorated messenger.

<sup>82</sup> It has been argued that Plotinus’ own position about suicide as an option possibly evolved, from an early recommendation to avoid it if at all possible (*Enn.* 1.9 [16] 15–19) to somewhat more openness to the choice later in life, when he was suffering from a severe and eventually fatal illness (*Enn.* 1.4 [46] 7.31–33); see McGroarty 1994, 108–109, who thinks that the argument in *Enn.* 1.9 could represent a wish to be more restrictive than Stoics on the legitimacy of suicide, while that in 1.4 is essentially a return to something closer to a Stoic view. (However, there was no monolithic Stoic theory on this topic.) But Plotinus’ serious views on suicide are not relevant to his challenge to opponents in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 8.42–43, since the latter is merely a rhetorical taunt.

<sup>83</sup> E.g., in his remarks in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.7–13: the majority of common folk are here to do manual labor to provide necessities for their betters, the wise (*σπουδαίοι*).

<sup>84</sup> Cf. van den Berg 2005, 106: “In the Platonic tradition, then, doing politics exists especially in the promotion of justice. The means by which this is done, by private discussions as Socrates did, or politics as the Platonic philosopher-king would do, were considered to be of secondary importance.”

<sup>85</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 5.8–10; 9.52–60; 18.17–18.

<sup>86</sup> E.g., van den Berg 2005; Edwards 1990, who seems to simply follow Plotinus in referring to the opponents as persons who “unite in an arrogant brotherhood which includes the

quite self-conscious of membership in a *community*, and from this we can plausibly infer a sense of communal responsibility.

Moreover, we need not merely rely on inference, because other criticisms by Plotinus provide actual evidence. He famously attacks them for their claims to cure themselves from diseases by performing exorcisms, and the context in which he raises this may indicate that this involved what he calls magical spells and various kinds of cries and hissing sounds.<sup>87</sup> Scholars have long suggested that these last charges may have some connection with cultic utterances attested in some Nag Hammadi texts, including *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*, and certain other "Sethian" writings.<sup>88</sup> Whether or not these cultic utterances are specifically connected to the exorcisms Plotinus mentions, he is explicit that his acquaintances practiced exorcisms to heal diseases in their community. Modern scholarship often treats this just as Plotinus did, as a matter of irrational rituals, hardly noticing that they exemplify a focused effort to provide bodily well-being in the here-and-now.<sup>89</sup>

It is a testimony to the success of Plotinus' rhetoric in *Enn.* 2.9 that the persons censured there do not come to mind as ancient paradigms of virtue. Now to be sure, many scholars have recognized that Plotinus' charge of complete moral indifference and devotion to Epicurean pleasure on the part of his friends was sheer polemic.<sup>90</sup> But if they were not libertine

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vilest of men (ii.9.13.10) but not Plotinus, and gathers together the scattered particles of fallen wisdom" (30–31). They "disdain belief in providence and upbraid both the inequalities of birth and the iniquity of man's heart. Yet do these complaints incline them to a more ardent pursuit of virtue, a withdrawal from vain and illusory enjoyments, or even an active benevolence towards men who have felt the weight of these cosmic wrongs? On the contrary (ii.9.15.19f.), they pursue their own concerns without any thought for the necessities of others" (31).

<sup>87</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 14.4–18.

<sup>88</sup> *Allogenes* 53.36–37; *Zost.* 52.16–17; 127.1–7; compare remarks by John Turner in Funk, Poirier, and Turner 2000, 78–81; and in Turner 2001, 614–633.

<sup>89</sup> The application of rituals of power like exorcism for healing was common enough in this period that we need not speculate too much about *specific* contexts in which Plotinus' opponents would have engaged in the practice. But it may be worth recalling that multiple waves of plague hit various parts of the empire, including the city of Rome from the early 250's through the 270's. Porphyry mentions at least one of these outbreaks in Rome that killed Plotinus' masseurs (*Vit. Plot.* 2.4–20). Cf. Grnek 1992, 337; Ousager 2004, 205–206. Cornelius of Rome famously mentions "52 exorcists, readers and doorkeepers" (so possibly a significant number of the 52 were exorcists) in the Roman church ca. 250 CE (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 6.43).

<sup>90</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 15.5–27; see already Schmidt 1901, 47: "the friends of Plotinus could in no way have actually drawn the (libertine) consequences of the gnostic ethic, since otherwise Plotinus would have avoided any interaction with them." But then Schmidt felt this left for them only the other option in "gnostic" ethics: encratism (47). That notion, that "gnostic" ethics was a simple two-option affair (libertinism or encratism), is still encountered in the

pleasure-seekers, were they nevertheless at least without serious interest in virtues? Yes, says Plotinus, since they have produced no treatise devoted to the topic of virtue.<sup>91</sup> However, though this last rhetorical thrust might have been technically correct, it hardly proves no interest in the virtuous life, and evidence that virtues were indeed important to them is found elsewhere in Plotinus' own polemic as well as in Sethian writings such as *Zostrianos*, *Allogenes* and closely related tractates. At one point in his argument, Plotinus complains that one ought to strive to be as excellent (ἄριστος) as possible, but not think that *only oneself* can be most excellent or virtuous.<sup>92</sup> Plotinus did not like what he heard as overtones of exclusivity in the teachings of his friends,<sup>93</sup> but this remark seems clearly to indicate that they did indeed value lives of excellence. In attacking the contrast his friends draw between perfection in the transcendent realm and imperfection here, Plotinus says that "they must not demand that *everyone* be good (ἀγαθός), nor be quick to find fault (μέμφεσθαι) thinking that things here should not differ in any way from things 'there,' because this is not possible."<sup>94</sup> Normally it is only the element of complaint about the cosmos here that receives attention in modern analysis, and yet the remark confirms the value the opponents placed on "goodness."

"Goodness" (Coptic: ⲙⲏⲧⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ) is a prominent characteristic of the divine realm in *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*,<sup>95</sup> and participation in that goodness

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literature with disheartening frequency. But it is in fact completely inadequate for a proper historical understanding of the movements in question, including Plotinus' acquaintances; see, e.g., Williams 1996, 139–188.

<sup>91</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 15.27–29.

<sup>92</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 9.27–29.

<sup>93</sup> However, Plotinus' projection of radical exclusivity on his opponents is misleading. As John Turner (2000, 554) has correctly observed, "most Sethian texts seem to entertain the prospect of universal salvation except for those who entirely reject the doctrine (but even their case is far from clear; cf. *Apocryphon of John II* 25.16–27.30)."

<sup>94</sup> *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 13.25–28.

<sup>95</sup> E.g., *Zost.* 75.19–20: Goodness (ⲙⲏⲧⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ) is among the attributes of the Spirit; *Zost.* 117.15–17: the Kalyptos aeon is the Good (ⲙⲓⲗⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ) from whom comes the good (ⲙⲓⲗⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ) and that which is good (ⲙⲓⲗⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ); *Zost.* 124.10: Protophanes receives goodness (ⲙⲏⲧⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ) through the various levels, originating in the Invisible Spirit. Similarly in *Allogenes* 52.30–32: the Triple-Power exists in blessedness (ⲙⲏⲧⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ) and goodness (ⲙⲏⲧⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ); cf. 49.5–6; 54.22–24: praise is given to Aphredon, "the one who is good" (ⲙⲏ ⲉⲧⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲥ); 58.7–16: as Allogenes approaches the time of his vision, he experiences "a blessedness of the eternal hope full of kindness/goodness (ⲙⲏⲧⲙⲁⲕⲁⲣⲓⲟⲥ), and he sees the good (ⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ) divine Auto-genes and the Savior, who is the perfect Triple-Male Child, and his goodness (ⲙⲏⲧⲁⲗⲁⲟⲥ); 64.4–10: "It (the Unknowable One) is much superior in beauty (ⲙⲏⲧⲥⲁⲓⲉ) than all things that are good (ⲉⲧⲛⲁⲛⲟⲩⲥ)," but this Unknowable One is *in* beautiful and good things: "It is unknowable to all of them in every respect, and (yet) through all of them he is within all

is an aspiration of the visionaries Zostrianos, Allogenes, and, by extension, the readers of these tractates. This aspiration is expressed in *Allogenes* when the visionary states, “I beheld the light surrounding me and the good (μα-ραθον) within me, and I became divine.”<sup>96</sup> The emphasis placed on revealers and revelation in *Allogenes* is one of the well-known differences between the portrait of visionary experience in that text (or that in *Zostrianos*) and Plotinus’ descriptions of the peak experience of the wise man. However, there are important similarities pertinent to the present discussion. For example, in his discussion of εὐδαιμονία<sup>97</sup> Plotinus equates this with having “true intelligence.” The person who has this in actuality, not merely potentially, not only has the good (ἀγαθόν) but *is* the good that he possesses. “The (Good that is) transcendent is the cause of (the good) within him, and Its being good is different from Its being present to him.”<sup>98</sup> As Rein Ferwerda remarks, “in Plotinus’ view he who has seen the Good is constrained to be good himself.”<sup>99</sup>

If we are asking specifically about relationships between the aspiration for the transcendental Good and the consequences for life in the world, the fundamental model is much the same in texts like *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*. In the case of these writings, scholars have tended to focus only on the transcendental moment and new knowledge about supernal realities. But there is every reason to assume that the reference to “the good” that Allogenes now sees *within himself* implied for author and readers the aspiration of a life of goodness lived out in this life. Everything about the visionary experiences of Allogenes or Zostrianos anticipates a resulting transformation, and not merely in the form of ultimate salvation after departure from the body, but also in new motivation for the virtuous life. As O’Meara has put it in his characterization of the connection for Plotinus between transcendental Good and the life of goodness:

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of them.” And also in *Steles Seth* 119.15–19: “Great is the self-begotten Good (οὐρανοσ) who stood at rest, the God who was first to stand (or stood primordially?). You have come in goodness (εἰς οὐρανοσ) you have revealed goodness (οὐρανοσ)”; 122.19–26: “by Vitality you have empowered Divinity; by goodness (μῆταροσ) you have empowered Mentality; by blessedness (μῆτηκακρῖος) you have empowered the projected images that flow from the One”; and in 124.32–33, the Pre-existent One is praised as, among other things, “giver of good (-αροσ), giver of blessedness.”

<sup>96</sup> *Allogenes* 52.12–19; the expression probably recurs in 56.17–18 “When you [seek] with perfect seeking [then] you will know the [good that is] in you.”

<sup>97</sup> Often translated “happiness” or “well-being”; but see McGroarty 1994, 103, who argues that actually neither adequately capture the nuances in the term εὐδαιμονία.

<sup>98</sup> See *Enn.* 1.4 [46] 4.6–20.

<sup>99</sup> Ferwerda 1984, 72; cf. Schniewind 2003, 117.

The predicament of souls misdirected and in perdition must concern the good soul in a position to act. More generally, applying the principle of double activity, we might say that a soul which is good will realize good actions. This aspect of Plotinus' ethics might be called an 'ethics of giving'. It is an aspect that has been occulted in modern studies through an exclusive emphasis on the otherworldly, religious or mystical side of Plotinus' thought (his 'ethics of escape'). The most concrete example of this ethics of giving is Plotinus' own writing, a work surely intended as a contribution for the benefit of souls.<sup>100</sup>

My point is that these sentiments are no less apt in the case of writings such as *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Some recent scholarship on the relation of Plotinus' transcendental mysticism to his sense of responsibility in daily life, social interaction, even politics, has made a plausible case that an "ethics of giving," directed to life in the here and now, held an important place in this thought. Its importance has been "occulted" by the predominant emphasis on his "ethics of escape." I have argued here that the same thing can be said of the "friends" whose views Plotinus vigorously attacks in *Enn.* 2.9, and for related Sethian texts such as *Allogenes* and *Zostrianos*—though, ironically, their position has been deployed as an "egoistic," world-rejecting contrast in order to highlight Plotinus and his "ethic of giving." There were significant differences between the convictions of Plotinus and the beliefs of these friends. But the debate was a theological one about the ascribing of divinity to astral bodies, and between "a preference either for myth and dramatic personification, or for conceptual analysis and distinction as a vehicle for rendering account of basically the same human problematic."<sup>101</sup> It was not really about whether

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<sup>100</sup> O'Meara 2010, 321–322.

<sup>101</sup> Moore and Turner 2010, 196. As I discussed above, Hadot, 1995, argued forcefully that ancient philosophy was not merely about abstract theories but "the art of living." The philosophical act is a "conversion" that "turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it. It raises the individual from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life, in which he attains self-consciousness, an exact vision of the world, inner peace, and freedom" (83). He gave particular attention to Stoic and Epicurean examples, but considered this fundamentally applicable to ancient philosophy in general: "Each school had its own therapeutic method, but all of them linked their therapeutics to a profound transformation of the individual's mode of seeing and being. The object of spiritual exercises is precisely to bring about

life here and now has any meaning and purpose, is worth living, is somehow under the direction of providence; or whether one has any responsibility to others or society in general; or whether a mystical union with transcendental Goodness might be a reason to be good. Perhaps it was because Plotinus and these "friends" were actually *not* so at odds on the here-and-now questions of life that he still considered them friends.

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this transformation" (83). My argument in this study is that we ought to recognize essentially the same dynamic in the case of Plotinus' "friends," and in texts such as *Zostrianos* and *Allogenes*. There was a transformation in the way of seeing the world, and living in it.

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## TRIAL BY FIRE: AN ONTOLOGICAL READING OF *KATHARSIS*\*

Svetla Slaveva-Griffin

The association of fire with punishment for man's ethical depravity has captured our imagination long before Christianity made the idea of "burning in Hell" its trademark. Poets and philosophers alike time and again have revisited the link between mortality and immortality. In its inception, however, this link is not so linearly punitive as in its later ideological incarnation. In the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (*Hymnus in Cererem*), for example, the burning of one's body is not envisioned as an irreversible punishment of men's propensity for immortality but as a gift bestowing immortality. Regrettably, human folly, incapable of recognizing the transformative essence of Demeter's immersion of Demophoön in fire, aborts the event and retains its mortality (*h. Cer.* 231–274).

It makes more sense to men, blinded by their perceptions, to conceive of fire as a deleterious and punitive expression of mortality—and to that effect immortality—rather than an ontologically beneficial agent of immortality. This conception is best reinforced in Plato's treatment of the third river in the underworld, the Pyriphlegethon (Πυριφλεγέθων). As suggested by its name, this is "the fire-blazing" stream that carries the souls of those who have committed heinous, yet curable crimes (ἰάσιμα μὲν μεγάλα δὲ δόξωσιν ἡμαρτηκέναι ἀμαρτήματα, *Phaed.* 113E6–7). These souls are left to the mercy of the victims of their wrongdoing to determine whether they are forgiven and thus saved from circling in the fiery river (*Phaed.* 114A6–B2). The flaming scenes in the *Hymn to Demeter* and the *Phaedo* then convey conflicting messages about the role of fire in the process of *katharsis*. This conflict is further enhanced by the concept of ontogenic fire in the hypostatic architecture of the universe, found in the *Chaldaean Oracles*.

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\* I would like to thank John Turner for his warm friendship throughout the years and for inspiring me to pursue this topic. I am also in debt to the students who took my seminars on the *Phaedo* and *Platonic Myth* for enriching, with their curiosity, my understanding of the texts, and my colleague David Levenson for providing a friendly ear to this and many other unconventional ideas.

This study examines “the other side” of *katharsis*, that is, the ontological root of the concept of purity and its relation to fire, as found in Plato’s *Phaedo* and further illustrated in the *Chaldaean Oracles*. Although reflecting different conceptual settings, the two texts first and foremost treat the concept of *katharos* and fire as essential characteristics of intelligible existence. This treatment renders the moral interpretation of *katharsis* alone and the punitive role of fire, associated with it, deficient. Is the goal of purification to cure one’s mortality, as in the case of Demophoön, or to penalize one’s immorality as in the case of the parricidal souls in the *Phaedo*? In other words, if fire is an agent of immortality, why does not “burning in Hell” or immersion in the Pyriphlegethon make the soul immortal?

### 1. THE HOMERIC *HYMN TO DEMETER*: A POINT OF DEPARTURE

The Homeric and Hesiodic overtones of Plato’s account of the afterlife at the end of his not so satisfying attempt at explaining the immortality of soul in the *Phaedo* have long been established.<sup>1</sup> Plato even introduces the subject of the underworld with a quotation from Homer—one of the few occasions on which he charitably enlists the poets’ support.<sup>2</sup>

In this light, the episode of Demophoön, in its Homeric background, offers an informative starting point for our investigation because it elucidates the ritualistic view of fire as the agent, inducing the qualitative change from mortality to immortality, in the Homeric context Plato evokes in the *Phaedo*.<sup>3</sup> The process of this qualitative change is commonly defined as a moral cleansing, purification, or *katharsis* in which the role of fire is interpreted as punitive. Such a moral interpretation of fire, however, overlooks its role as a transformative ontogenic agent and, in Burkert’s words, as mediating access to “a more highly valued realm.”<sup>4</sup> In this role, fire not only stands at the boundary between the sacred and the profane, but itself is the boundary

<sup>1</sup> Rowe 1993, 152–153, 289; 2007, 97–98. Similar overtones are detected earlier by Mackenzie 1981, 225–229.

<sup>2</sup> *Phaed.* 112A2: τῆλε μάλ’, ἤχι βάθιστον ὑπὸ χθονός ἐστι βέρεθρον (cf. *Il.* 8.14). The verse describes signs of the remoteness and darkness of Tartarus.

<sup>3</sup> Rowe (2007, 103) notes the peculiar lack of strong moralization in the eschatological myth in the *Phaedo* and interprets it as “a *mélange*, an elaboration of elements from Eleusinian religion and from Pythagoreanism,” heavily subjected to “Plato’s own imagination.”

<sup>4</sup> Burkert 1985, 76.

between the sacred and the profane; or, philosophically put, (fire constitutes) the boundary between the physical and the metaphysical.<sup>5</sup>

In the *Hymn*, Demeter, bereft of her daughter, channels her maternal instincts into raising Demophoön as her own divine offspring (*h. Cer.* 233–234).<sup>6</sup> The crucial phase in this multi-staged process takes place at night, when Demeter, in the words of the unknown rhapsode, “hides him like a brand in the fire’s might, unknown to his own parents” (κρύπτεσκε πυρός μένει, *h. Cer.* 239–240).<sup>7</sup> Upon witnessing the horrifying event, the child’s mother, Metaneira, addresses her son: “My child, the stranger hides you / deep in the fire, causing me woe and bitter cares” (πυρι ἔνι πολλῶ / κρύπτει, *h. Cer.* 248–250). In her defense, Demeter explains to her that she “would have made her child immortal and ageless forever” (ἀθάνατόν κέν τοι καὶ ἀγήραον ἤματα πάντα / παῖδα φίλον ποίησα, *h. Cer.* 260–261). Demeter does not say anything about cleansing Demophoön of his immorality, nor does Metaneira say anything about how this process affects her son. Instead, Demeter directly links fire with immortality, and Metaneira emphasizes her own emotional pain at the sight of her son engulfed in flames. The mortal mother perceives what she sees not with her mind but with her senses. Her misunderstanding of the significance of Demeter’s action is, pun intended, moribund for her son. Metaneira’s error reveals two things: first, that the correct understanding of the role of fire in the process of immortalization is not accessible to everyone, but is instead hidden;<sup>8</sup> and second, that Metaneira herself is not equipped to have a proper understanding of the role of fire. The knowledge of Demeter’s gift of immortality, delivered through fire, is not transmitted overtly through the perception afforded by the senses but conceals its ontological essence.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For Fire as a symbolical and physical representative of true being “within the world of mortal opinion and perception,” see Kahn 2009, 216–217.

<sup>6</sup> Hereafter text and translation, with adaptations, come from Foley 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Other phases of Demeter’s divinization of Demophoön include anointment with ambrosia and the inbreathing of divine *pneuma*. For the history of interpretation of the episode, see Richardson 1974, 231–234; and Foley 1994, 48–52.

<sup>8</sup> This is underlined by the repetitive use of κρύπτω and its Ionian cognate: κρύπτεσκε πυρός μένει (*h. Cer.* 239) and πυρι ἔνι πολλῶ / κρύπτει (*h. Cer.* 248–249). This also renders the meaning of the verb as “to hide” and not “to bury” *pace* Foley’s (1994) translation (“she would bury him like a brand in the fire’s might” [*h. Cer.* 239] and “the stranger buries you deep in the fire” [*h. Cer.* 249]) and in agreement with Rice and Stambaugh 1987 (“hide him like a fire-brand within the might of the flame” and “hiding you in the blazing fire”).

<sup>9</sup> Cf. how the dying Herakles becomes immortal on a pyre, and the Seven against Thebes are burnt on pyres at Eleusis; see Richardson 1974, 233.

The human inability to conceive of fire as an agent of immortality and a manifestation of higher ontological entities leads to the idea of its punitive role. Demophoön's trial by fire is aborted by the control of the senses and a lack of true understanding. If we do not want to be the Metaneiras of the world but wish to learn the genuine meaning of the process, we should not rely on our senses but look for the right means. Where else could we find instruction for them but in Plato?

## 2. *KATHARSIS* AND FIRE IN THE *PHAEDO*

The structure of the *Phaedo* conveys the same hieratic message about the privileged knowledge of immortality.<sup>10</sup> The dialogue begins in *medias res* with Echecrates' insistence on hearing the facts of Socrates' final hours from Phaedo. Phaedo, in turn, surprised by the Phleisians' disinformation, readily begins to recount the course of events. The ensuing story then displaces the initial conversation and provides the main plane of discourse in the dialogue.<sup>11</sup> Phaedo's account envelops Socrates' speech about the immortality of soul. This speech itself marks the conceptual crux of the dialogue and follows the presentations of Simmias and Cebes on the same subject. Each account thus enfoldes the principal meaning of the text with a layer of its own. Like the hidden knowledge of immortality in the *Hymn*, the nested presentation of the speeches in the *Phaedo* both obscures and unveils the essence of Socrates' account. It obscures it from those who cannot understand it and unveils it for those who can "philosophize correctly" under the guidance of Socrates as their hierophant.

At the core of this centripetal composition is Socrates' attempt to explain the soul's immortality by discussing the heterogeneity of what is composite and what is non-composite (*Phaed.* 78B–79D). This ontological point is carried further by the question of soul's separation from the body and results in Plato's definition of *katharsis* as "a release and parting of the soul from the body" (λύσις καὶ χωρισμὸς ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος, *Phaed.* 67D1–2).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> White (1989, 41–43) supports a similar interpretation of the relationship between philosophy and mystery in which "the 'true' mystics are really the true philosophers."

<sup>11</sup> On the structure of the dialogue, see Guthrie 1975, 326–338; Bostock 1986, 15.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. *Phaed.* 67C5–D1: Κάθαρσις δὲ εἶναι ἄρα οὐ τοῦτο συμβαίνει ... τὸ χωρίζειν ὅτι μάλιστα ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος τὴν ψυχὴν καὶ ἐθίσει αὐτὴν καθ' αὐτὴν πανταχόθεν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος συναγείρεσθαι τε καὶ ἀθροίζεσθαι, καὶ οἰκεῖν κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν καὶ ... μόνην καθ' αὐτὴν, ἐκλυομένην ὡσπερ [ἐκ] δεσμῶν ἐκ τοῦ σώματος; and 114C3–4: οἱ φιλοσοφία ἱκανῶς καθηράμενοι ἄνευ τε σωμάτων ζῶσι τὸ παράπαν εἰς τὸν ἔπειτα χρόνον. Also 67D4–5; 67D9–10. Hereafter, the Greek text of the *Phaedo* is from Burnet 1911 and the translation, with adaptations, is from Gallop 1993.

The definition explains the actual mechanics of the process, so to speak, as a separation of two different natures, without the implication that they have transmitted something to each other. There is no hint of an ethical implication. But as soon as the definition is introduced, Plato hastens to qualify (repeatedly throughout the rest of the dialogue) that only “those who philosophize correctly” (μόνοι οἱ φιλοσοφούντες ὀρθῶς, *Phaed.* 67D8; 67E4; 82C2–3) can achieve *katharsis*.<sup>13</sup>

Since the soul and the body have different natures, only the knowledge of the difference between the two natures, obtained by philosophizing “correctly” (ὀρθῶς), can first grasp the true essence of this separation and then facilitate it. In pursuit of this knowledge, Plato says, the philosopher is eager and ready to go to the underworld, of his own accord, just as those who, “in quest of human loves, of wives and sons who have died” go to Tartarus with the hope to see, and to be united with, their beloved ones (*Phaed.* 68A3–7).<sup>14</sup> The comparison of the philosopher’s quest to the longing of lost familial relations resonates with Metaneira’s unbearable fear of losing her son.

The implications of the philosopher’s quest in the underworld themselves are rather intriguing.<sup>15</sup> They suggest, first, that the philosopher should enter the underworld in order to acquire something he does not possess in his earthly life and, second, that what he does not possess in his earthly life is dearer to him than earthly life itself. The precious object of the philosopher’s search is revealed a little later in the text, in Plato’s insistence that “nowhere else but there will (the philosopher) attain wisdom purely” (μηδαμοῦ ἄλλοθι καθαρῶς ἐντεύξεσθαι φρονήσει ἀλλ’ ἢ ἐκεῖ, *Phaed.* 68B4). This wisdom, we can safely infer, contains the knowledge of soul’s immortality.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> In the dialogues, this expression occurs only in the *Phaedo*. By *orthōs*, Plato clearly means those who follow the path of Platonic thinking. Burnet interprets the locution to mean “those who have ‘a right to the name,’” see Burnet 1911, 67. But this use deserves a further investigation in light of the moral overtones of the concept of “uprightness” in early Indo-European texts, the Greek tragedians and historians. I am grateful to Amy Dill for this point. On the role of philosophy in acquiring wisdom about the afterlife, see Bolotin 1987, 39–56.

<sup>14</sup> The fine distinction between death and dying should be noted. While dying is a process which (according to Socrates) takes the entire span of a philosopher’s life, death is its result. The philosopher’s quest in the underworld, although posthumous, executes the final stage of the process. White 1989, 44.

<sup>15</sup> I do not see “two kinds of Hades” (one for ordinary souls and one for philosophers) in Plato’s discussion here, as Rowe (2007, 106–108) argues.

<sup>16</sup> The philosopher’s quest for knowledge in the underworld remotely echoes the journey of Parmenides’ young man to the realm of the Anonymous Goddess. Some have interpreted it precisely as a *katabasis*; see Morrison 1955, 60–68.

But why should Plato relate the idea of soul's immortality to the underworld? How can the philosopher's journey in Tartarus bring him immortality?

The answers to these questions lie in Plato's use of the adverb "purely" (καθαρώς) in the aforementioned passage. In what sense, then, can knowledge, coveted by the philosopher, be acquired in the underworld "purely"? Does "purely" mean that, there, the philosopher obtains this knowledge in complete separation from the body or that the knowledge he strives to obtain has pure content? The context permits both interpretations and hinges upon the idea of separation. But this separation echoes the technical, non-moralistic understanding of *katharsis* as "a release and parting of the soul from the body" as the individualization of two different natures (λύσις καὶ χωρισμός ψυχῆς ἀπὸ σώματος, *Phaed.* 67D1–2).<sup>17</sup> If the philosopher is going to obtain knowledge about soul's immortality "purely" in the underworld, this implies that there his soul will be completely separated from the senses of the body. If it is only in the underworld that the knowledge of the soul's true nature can be found "purely" (καθαρώς) from the perceptions of the body, the designation "purely," then, must also relate to soul's ontological foundation, and *katharsis* must denote an ontological restoration of soul's divine origin. The underworld is the first stop on the path of this transformative process.

In the discussion of the philosopher's quest for wisdom (*Phaed.* 65A–E), Socrates denies any value to the power of the senses and insists on the most pure application (καθαρώτατα) of thought (διάνοια) to the pursuit of ontological truth (*Phaed.* 65E–70A).<sup>18</sup> His understanding of *katharsis* "as a separation of the soul from the body" relates *katharos* to *dianoia* and *dianoia* to absolute existence. Thus, only "those who pursue philosophy correctly," and not those like Metaneira, have a chance to purify their souls.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> As indicated above, p. 528.

<sup>18</sup> A person pursuing intellection and withdrawal from the material world, Plato insists, "would be separated as far as possible from his eyes and ears, and virtually from his whole body, on the ground that it confuses the soul, and doesn't allow it to gain truth and wisdom when in partnership with it" (*Phaed.* 66A4–7). And "if we're ever going to know anything purely (καθαρώς)," he reasons, "we must be rid of it (the body), and must view the objects themselves with the soul by itself" (*Phaed.* 66E1–3). On the relationship between the ontological meaning of "pure" and the concept of "pure soul," see Slaveva-Griffin, forthcoming.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *Phaed.* 114B6–C6, especially 114C3: οἱ φιλοσοφία ἱκανῶς καθηράμενοι ἄνευ τε σωμάτων ζῶσι. On the "rightness" of the hidden meaning of philosophy, mystery, and rationality, see White 1989, 42–43.

If, for Plato, “philosophizing correctly” is the principal means of achieving separation from the body and restoring soul’s immortality, the simple removal of the corporeal appetites does not suffice for achieving this. Put differently, Plato’s hieratic message in the *Theaetetus* to pursue “likeness to god” (ὁμοίωσις θεῶ, *Theaet.* 176A–B) presupposes a common ontological element in the subject and the object of the pursuit. This common element, I suggest, is the concept of “purity” not as a moral criterion but as an innate characteristic of “being.” Proof of this hypothesis is found again in Socrates’ discussion of what is composite and what is non-composite (*Phaed.* 78B–79D):<sup>20</sup>

Whenever (soul) studies alone by itself, it departs yonder towards that which is pure (οἴχεται εἰς τὸ καθαρὸν) and always existent (ἀεὶ ὄν) and immortal (ἀθάνατον) and unvarying (ὠσαύτως ἔχον), and by virtue of its kinship with it (συγγενῆς οὐσα), enters always into its company, whenever it has come to be alone by itself, and whenever it may do so; then it has ceased from its wandering and, when it is about those objects, it is always constant and unvarying, because of its contact with things of a similar kind; and this condition is called “wisdom” (φρόνησις), is it not? (*Phaed.* 79D1–7)

The passage is part of the well-known affinity argument seeking to explain the kinship of soul with what is non-composite. The key point for us here is that “purity,” in its neuter adjectival substantivized form *to katharon*, heads the list of the innate characteristics of “being,” preceding such principal characteristics as “always existent” (ἀεὶ ὄν), “immortal” (ἀθάνατον), and “unchanging” (ὠσαύτως ἔχον, *Phaed.* 79D1–2). Later, when the affinity of the invisible part of soul (τὸ ἀίδές) is compared to the place where it arrives after its departure from the body, this place is also described first as “pure” and only afterwards as “invisible” (καθαρὸν καὶ ἀίδη, *Phaed.* 80D5–6).<sup>21</sup> On the same note, even later in the text, soul’s reincarnation is described as having no part in “communion with the divine and pure and uniform” (ἄμοιρος εἶναι τῆς τοῦ θείου τε καὶ καθαρῶ καὶ μονοειδοῦς συνουσίας, *Phaed.* 83E2–3). In all these instances, *to katharon* does not denote, as expected, the

<sup>20</sup> Here again, he enlists “the reasoning of intellect” (τῷ τῆς διανοίας λογισμῷ, *Phaed.* 79A3) as the driving force for soul’s separation from the body and for grasping the nature of that which is non-composite.

<sup>21</sup> To be faithful to the text, it should be noted that the place is described, in this order, as “noble, pure, and invisible” (γενναῖον καὶ καθαρὸν καὶ ἀίδη, *Phaed.* 80D5–6). The appearance of “noble” first among the attributes should not be interpreted as an early sign of any moralization of the post-corporeal experience of the soul but should be given its original meaning “of high birth” (Cf. Liddell and Scott 1999). The latter once again discloses the ontological rather than ethical importance of the text.



final result of soul's corporeal withdrawal, but—respectively in the above order—absolute being beyond sense perception, the “place,” figuratively speaking, to which the soul travels after its separation from the body and, most importantly, the starting point of soul's descent into the body. *To katharon*, in other words, does not mean post-corporeal purified existence separate from the body but absolute existence without and regardless of the body. If we relate this understanding to our original point of departure—Plato's view of *katharsis* as the separation of two heterogeneous natures—it becomes apparent that *to katharon* (*Phaed.* 79D1–7; 80D6; 82B11) does not solely mark the final result of soul's corporeal withdrawal, but also the original starting point of soul's corporeal descent. This observation shows that, in the *Phaedo*, the ontological meaning of the concept of “pure” is primary and its soteriological meaning only secondary to it.<sup>22</sup>

The primary meaning of *katharsis* in regard to the soul is ontological, and its moral connotations follow only in regard to the body.<sup>23</sup> These ontological and ethical registers are solidified in the juxtaposition of “the lover of wisdom” (φιλόσοφος) and “the lover of the body” (φιλοσώματος):

Then if you see a man resentful that he is going to die, isn't that proof enough for you that he's no lover of wisdom (φιλόσοφος) after all, but what we may call a lover of the body (φιλοσώματος)? And this same man turns out, in some sense, to be a lover of riches (φιλοχρήματος) and of prestige (φιλότιμος), either one of those or both. (*Phaed.* 68B8–C3)

The φιλόσοφος pursues knowledge of the true nature of things “purely,” away from the senses of the body, whereas the φιλοσώματος, as “a lover of riches” (φιλοχρήματος) and “a lover of prestige” (φιλότιμος), pursues everything in relation to the body and its senses (*Phaed.* 68C2). The *philosophos* relates to the ontological register of *katharsis*, while the *philosōmatos* relates to the ethical one. We find, however, the demarcating lines between the two registers blurred in the following passage:

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<sup>22</sup> Among the Platonic dialogues, only in the *Phaedo* does Plato place *katharon* first among the characteristics of being. It is omitted in the *Phaedrus* (245C5–246A2; 247C6–7). In the *Timaeus*, the adjective appears in its common medical context to explain the spleen's detoxification of the liver (*Tim.* 72C). The emphatic position of *katharon* in the *Phaedo* perhaps pulls more ontological weight in the dialogue because of the ethical reverberations of the topic of *katharsis*. The most prominent forms discussed in the work belong to the domain of ethics (goodness, justice, holiness, *Phaed.* 75C–D). But even then, they still appear in their ontological guise.

<sup>23</sup> The preference of ontological to ethical connotation is even clearer in the description of the “true earth” where even the stones are pure (*Phaed.* 110E3). See note 27 below.

Truth to tell, temperance, justice, and bravery may in fact be a kind of purification of all such things (τὸ δ' ἀληθές τῷ ὄντι ἢ καθαρσις τις), and wisdom itself a kind of purifying act (ἢ φρόνησις μὴ καθαρμός τις ἦ). So it really looks as if those who established our initiations are no mean people, but have in fact long been saying in riddles that whoever arrives in Hades unadmitted to the rites, and uninitiated, shall lie in the slough, while one who arrives there purified (ὁ δὲ κεκαρθαμένος) and initiated shall dwell with the gods.

(*Phaed.* 69B8–C7)

It can no doubt be argued that the above passage presents the virtues as the means of purification, knowledge as the act of purification, and the philosopher as the only one who both possesses the means and attains the successful end of purification.<sup>24</sup> If the philosopher is the only one who is equipped with the means (διάνοια and φρόνησις) to understand the hidden knowledge of purification, “the lover of the body” does not even stand a chance. Like Metaneira, he can only abort the process of ontological restoration of the soul on the grounds of his strong attachment to the body and the misconceptions formed through his senses.<sup>25</sup>

Now it is time to go back to the original question of what the role of fire is in the underworld as the first stop on the road of transformative change. In his treatment of the underworld in the *Phaedo*, Plato mentions fire first in the geographical description of the “true earth.” Everything on the counter-earth is purer in comparison to the murky dwelling on this earth; the stones are purer, the air is purer, even the people there have faculties purer than ours.<sup>26</sup> Being *katharos* is the main distinctive characteristic of both the geography and the psychography of this extraordinary earth. The notion of “pure” is even detected in Plato’s description of the nature of the underworld as consisting of “great rivers of fire and many of liquid mud, some purer and some more miry” (πολύ δὲ πῦρ και πυρός μεγάλους ποταμούς, πολλούς δὲ ὑγροῦ πηλοῦ και καθαρωτέρου και βορβορωδεστέρου, *Phaed.* 111D7–9). This place, we learn, is not the abode of souls, which have succeeded in having permanently detached themselves from the body; it is only a temporary abode of

<sup>24</sup> The parallel with the initiation of the mysteries reinforces the exclusivity of the true knowledge of the process.

<sup>25</sup> Even after its departure from the body, in Plato’s words, the soul of the *philosōmatos* “flutters around the body” and “around the visible place” before its guide manages to lead it, with difficulty, to its proper place in the underworld (*Phaed.* 108A8–B1).

<sup>26</sup> Respectively πολύ ἔτι ἐκ λαμπροτέρων και καθαρωτέρων ἢ τούτων (*Phaed.* 110C2), οἱ λίθοι εἰσι καθαροί (*Phaed.* 110E3), and ὄψει και ἀκοῇ και φρονήσει και πᾶσι τοῖς τοιοῦτοις ἡμῶν ἀφεστά- ναι τῇ αὐτῇ ἀποστάσει ἢ ἵπερ ἀήρ τε ὕδατος ἀφέστηκεν και αἰθῆρ ἀέρος πρὸς καθαρότητα (*Phaed.* 111B3–6).

souls on their way to another incarnate life.<sup>27</sup> This “true earth” must possess some symbolic metaphysical quality, and I have to agree with Hackforth that this symbolism is underplayed since it is ultimately not the destination of “those who are fully purified through philosophy.” It should be considered as a kind of dispatching middle ground, which guards the entrance to the underworld and provides a temporary place for the souls in transition from one stage of existence to another.

The geography of the underworld that Plato offers in the *Phaedo* mainly consists of a description of the great rivers which transverse it.<sup>28</sup> The third of these, as mentioned in the beginning, is of particular interest to us:<sup>29</sup>

The third river issues between these two (Oceanus and Acheron), and near the point of issue it pours into a huge region all ablaze with fire (πυρὶ πολλῷ καόμενον), and forms a lake larger than our own sea, boiling with water and mud (ζέουσσαν ὕδατος καὶ πηλοῦ); from there it proceeds in a circle, turbid and muddy, and coiling about within the earth it reaches the borders of the Acherusian Lake, amongst other places, but does not mingle with its water; then after repeated coiling underground, it discharges lower down in Tartarus; this is the river they name Pyriphlegethon (ἐπονομάζουσιν Πυριφλεγέθοντα).  
(*Phaed.* 113A5–B5)

What is the role of the river of “blazing fire” in the underworld? Why is fire the most pronounced element on the “true earth”?

All souls undergo a transformation in the underworld, but obviously with different degrees of success. These different degrees depend on how strongly the soul is attached to the body and its senses. The only tool for measuring soul’s attachment to the body is morality. The more attached the soul is to the body the more immorally it lives; the less attached the soul is to the body the more morally it lives.<sup>30</sup> But, instead of arranging the souls in some sort of morality scale, Plato, in the *Phaedo*, distinguishes them spatially by apportioning them, commensurate with their morality, to different regions of the underworld. Those who have “lived indifferently journey to Acheron” (*Phaed.* 113D5); those who have committed “wrongful

<sup>27</sup> Hackforth 1955, 175.

<sup>28</sup> On the cosmogonical and cosmological qualities of the rivers, see White 1989, 252–260; and Gertz 2011, 184–187.

<sup>29</sup> The name of the river is first mentioned in Circe’s instructions to Odysseus before his *katabasis* in *Od.* 10.513. Aside from the *Homerica*, the form πυριφλεγέθων appears as a masculine nominative singular participle in an Orphic text describing the healing power of agate as “chilled fire” (*Lithica* 633).

<sup>30</sup> For example, Plato is emphatic in explaining the relation between morality and immortality from an ethical viewpoint in *Phaedr.* 248A–249D.

and illegal acts of killing” are thrown into Tartarus, with the further proviso that those who have killed or wronged strangers go to the Cocytus river and those who have trespassed against their parents go to the Pyriphlegethon (τοὺς μὲν ἀνδροφόνους κατὰ τὸν Κωκυτὸν, τοὺς δὲ πατραλοίας καὶ μητραλοίας κατὰ τὸν Πυριφλεγέθοντα, *Phaed.* 114A5–7).<sup>31</sup> There the latter are left to beg their victims for forgiveness until some of them are eventually expiated and wait for their next embodiment (*Phaed.* 114A7–B5).<sup>32</sup>

If we examine Plato’s portrayal of the Pyriphlegethon more closely, we find that fire does not play any punitive role therein.<sup>33</sup> The punishment of the souls in the blazing river is that they must face their victims and beg them for forgiveness.<sup>34</sup> The presence of fire in the underworld indicates that the souls are undergoing transformative change. The souls more strongly connected with the body require a stronger catalyst to facilitate their separation from the body.

Fire, as the essential agent of immortality, initiates the process of corporeal dissolution to whatever extent a particular soul can bear. That this process has to take place in the underworld or in the ground is demanded by the past ties of soul with corporeality.<sup>35</sup> In response to Metaneira’s reaction,

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<sup>31</sup> White (1989, 263) interprets the segregation of the souls according to their morality in different rivers as visualization “in a material setting.”

<sup>32</sup> The description of fluvial circulation in Tartarus teems with physiological details (*Phaed.* 112B–E). It is reminiscent of Plato’s attention to hematic circulation in the *Timaeus* (80E–81B) as well as to the birthing pains of the soul’s regrowing wings in the *Phaedrus* (251A–252A). Aristotle, in *Mete.* 2.2 355B32–356A30, dismisses Plato’s empirically erroneous explanation of the rivers, while Damascius interprets it theologically (*In Phaedonem* 2 §145, p. 362 Westerink) and Olympiodorus discerns between its physical and ethical significance. See Gertz 2011, 184–187.

<sup>33</sup> A similar notion can be detected in White’s (1989, 259) observation that “the third river constitutes a lake that apparently does nothing more than combine fire, earth, and water.” In his *In Meteora* 146.10–11, Olympiodorus emphasizes the purificatory rather than the penal nature of the process; see Gertz 2011, 185. Fire is not mentioned in Plato’s discussion of the severity of the crime and the legal punishment for parricides and matricides in *Leges* 9.869A–C, although the tone of the discussion there is completely punitive.

<sup>34</sup> Mackenzie (1981, 225–229) discusses the laxity of Socrates’ description of the wrongful souls’ fate in the underworld. Rowe (2007, 103–104) also notes the odd ethical implications of the scene, which he sees as influenced by the Athenian judicial system at the time and not by the more obvious Platonic encouragement toward philosophy. Plato does not deny the possibility of absolution to those souls who undergo this process for a longer time. His only qualification is that they “do not cease from experiencing this till they persuade those they have wronged” (*Phaed.* 114B4–5). In the victims’ forgiveness, White (1989, 263) recognizes an affirmation of the prevalent power of “the good that binds together all things.” On forgiveness as the correct response to wrongdoing, see Holmgren 2012.

<sup>35</sup> At the end, most souls still reincarnate and reincarnation is simply a function of mortality.

Demeter snatches Demophoön from the fire and places him on the ground (ἀπό ἔο θῆκε πέδον δὲ / ἔξανελούσα πυρός, *h. Cer.* 253–254). Her earth-bound motion symbolically decrees Demophoön's mortality, while Metaneira's reaction establishes the common misunderstanding of the ontologically transformative role of fire in the process of *katharsis*.<sup>36</sup> In the *Phaedo*, Plato works with a similar context by emphasizing the earth-bound qualities of the underworld and the souls' difficulties in overcoming their moral, and thus mortal, connections in it. To the philosophically informed mind, however, fire in the underworld expresses the hidden and coveted knowledge of intelligible essence the philosopher seeks through the separation of the soul from the body, as introduced in Socrates' initial discussion (*Phaed.* 68A–B). This impression becomes a fully formed conviction in Plato's conception of the fate of the souls who

have lived exceptionally holy lives ... are freed and delivered from those regions within the earth, as from prisons, and who attain to the pure dwelling above (ἄνω δὲ εἰς τὴν καθαρὰν οἴκησιν ἀφικνούμενοι) ... And among their number, those who have been adequately purified by philosophy (οἱ φιλοσοφία ἱκανῶς καθηράμενοι) live bodiless (ἄνευ τε σωματῶν ζῶσι) for the whole of time to come. (*Phaed.* 114B6–C4)

This is Plato's happy-ending version of the story of Demophoön. These souls have transcended the region of "the true earth" and dwell in the τόπος νοητός. The passage visualizes, in material terms for lack of better means, the restoration of soul to its intelligible existence.<sup>37</sup> For the philosopher's soul as for all other souls, the road towards the intelligible is inevitably through the underworld since "nowhere else but there will (the philosopher) attain wisdom purely" (μηδαμοῦ ἄλλοθι καθαρῶς ἐντεύξεσθαι φρονήσει ἄλλ' ἢ ἐκεῖ, *Phaed.* 68B4).<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> On the variety of ritualistic interpretations of the scene, see Foley 1994, 50–51.

<sup>37</sup> There is a direct correlation of language and meaning in Plato's description of the soul's urge to depart "towards that which is pure (οἴχεται εἰς τὸ καθαρὸν) and always existent and immortal and unvarying" (*Phaed.* 79D1–2) and of the souls of those who have lived holy lives, purified by philosophy, and who have arrived "to the pure dwelling above" (ἄνω δὲ εἰς τὴν καθαρὰν οἴκησιν ἀφικνούμενοι, *Phaed.* 114C1–2). The phrases οἴχεται εἰς τὸ καθαρὸν and εἰς τὴν καθαρὰν οἴκησιν ἀφικνούμενοι respectively mark the starting and ending point of Plato's exposition on the immortality of the soul and the individual soul's fate in the afterlife. This exposition literally takes off from the former and ends with the latter. The emphatic use of the various compounds of *katharos* in them also allude to the primacy of its ontological meaning.

<sup>38</sup> See above, p. 530; as well as White 1989, 264–266.

3. THE *CHALDAEAN ORACLES*: A POINT OF CLOSURE

On the subject of our investigation, as on many others, the *Chaldaean Oracles* provide a glimpse at the hidden knowledge of ontological conceptions veiled in soteriological terms.<sup>39</sup> They spell out what Socrates' explication of the philosophically correct understanding of *katharsis* and the role of fire in the underworld implicitly conveys in the *Phaedo*.<sup>40</sup> As captured by the title, the collection contains revelatory knowledge about the true essence of reality<sup>41</sup> and its connection with Platonic ideas has long been a subject of scholarly interest.<sup>42</sup>

Contrary to the concealed metaphysical overtones in the presence of fire in the *Phaedo*, the theme of the ontological role of fire and of the soul's relation to it permeates the *Oracles*. According to the *Oracles*, fire is not only the cosmological driving force of intelligible existence but also the main ingredient of its understanding. They describe the knowledge of this existence as "understanding heated by Fire" (τὴν περιθαλπῆ ἔννοιαν, *frg.* 139).<sup>43</sup> The phrase captures the hermeneutic qualities of fire as an expression of intelligible reality. Just as the knowledge of this reality is fire, so is reality built upon fire as is evident in the statement that "all things have been generated from One Fire" (εἰσὶν πάντα ἐνὸς πυρὸς ἐκγεγῶτα, *frg.* 10). Fire is the agent of intelligible existence:

For the First Transcendent Fire (πῦρ ἐπέχειν) does not enclose its own Power in matter by means of works, but by Intellect. For Intellect derived from Intellect is the Craftsman of the fiery cosmos (ὁ κόσμου τεχνίτης πυρίου).<sup>44</sup> (*frg.* 5, trans. Majercik)

As Turner cogently points out, the fragment conveys the notion of "a triad comprised of the Father himself, his power, and his intellect."<sup>45</sup> The two foundational elements in this triad are fire: the Father—the supreme organizing principle of existence—is hypostatic fire that remains "beyond" the intelligible; the Father's intellect is "the Craftsman of the fiery cosmos." The intermediate, and third, element in the triad is the Father's power, conceived as

<sup>39</sup> Athanassiadi 1999, 149, 159–163.

<sup>40</sup> The same is valid for some Gnostic texts; see Turner 2010, 228.

<sup>41</sup> See Lewy 2011, 6–8.

<sup>42</sup> Lewy 2011, 74–75, 311–398; Brisson 2003, 111–132.

<sup>43</sup> Translation, with adaptations, is from Brisson 2003, 129.

<sup>44</sup> Hereafter (unless otherwise indicated) the translation is from Majercik 1989, with modifications.

<sup>45</sup> Turner 2010, 214–215.

Hecate—“the intellectual diaphragm or membrane that separates the first and second fires” (ὑπεζωκῶς τις ὑμῆν νοερός πῦρ πρῶτον καὶ πῦρ ἕτερον, *frg.* 6).<sup>46</sup> Hecate’s role is to unfold and delimit the multiplicity of intelligible existence:<sup>47</sup>

For Im placable Thunders leap from him and the lightning-  
receiving womb of the shining ray of Hecate, who is  
generated from the Father. From him leap the girdling flower  
of fire (πυρὸς ἄνθος) and the powerful breath (situated) beyond the fiery  
poles (πόλων πυρίων). (*frg.* 35, trans. Majercik)

As the power of intelligible existence, Hecate also participates in the generation of the sensible world. Since the paternal intellect and the demiurgic intellect are manifested by fire, Soul as the third underlying principle of existence and individual souls must also relate to fire and to Hecate’s realm of influence:

(The souls) rest in god, drawing in the flowering flames (πυρσοῦς ...  
ἀκμαίους)  
Which come down from the Father. From these flames, as they descend,  
The soul plucks the soul-nourished flower of fiery fruits (ἐμπυρίων ...  
καρπῶν). (*frg.* 130, trans. Brisson)

Hecate is the “bond” not only between the Father and the intellect but also between intellect and soul.<sup>48</sup> In the latter role, the *Oracles* describe her as “the font of fonts, a womb containing all things” (*frg.* 30) and “life-producing” (*frg.* 32). She unifies and separates the three underlying principles of existence just as she denotes both the upward and downward transformation from one ontological aspect to another.<sup>49</sup> Fire is the agent of this transformation.

Hecate’s unification and identification of the three ontological layers, as conceptualized in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, is visually attested elsewhere in her common statuary representation as three conjoined bodies with three heads and six hands.<sup>50</sup> In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, she is also granted a

<sup>46</sup> Turner 2010, 218.

<sup>47</sup> Perceptively described by Brisson as “the spouse-daughter of the first Father, and the mother-sister of the demiurge, in accordance with a scheme we find elsewhere, particularly in Orphism” (Brisson 2003, 120–123). Cf. Turner 2010, 218.

<sup>48</sup> On Hecate’s role, see Majercik 1989, 7; Dillon 1996, 394–395; Turner 2010, 218–221; and Lewy 2011, 353–356.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. *frgs.* 1; 128; and *frgs.* 34; 35; 37, respectively.

<sup>50</sup> A conspicuous example is *Hecate Triformis*, first-century CE, Rijksmuseum van Oudheden, Leiden.

triple domain over the sky, the earth, and the sea.<sup>51</sup> The *Hymn to Demeter* shows how fluidly she moves between above-ground and under-ground. First, we meet her as Persephone's playmate before her abduction, next, as a companion to grieving Demeter in search for her daughter, and, at the end, as a constant attendant to Persephone after the divine settlement (*h. Cer.* 51–61; 439–440).<sup>52</sup> Her epithet *χθονία* identifies the underworld as the main stage of her ontologically transformative power which is executed and symbolized by fire, her attribute.<sup>53</sup>

In this tripartite ontological architecture, the underworld becomes the only possible initial point for soul's ascent, Hecate its enabler, and fire its means. To return to the *Phaedo*, in the beginning of his eschatological account, Socrates insists that the road the discarnate soul travels in the underworld is not single or simple but has “many partings and tri-forcations” (*σχίσεις τε καὶ τριόδους πολλὰς ἔχειν, Phaed.* 108A4). The manuscript tradition, however, records the reading *periodous* in the place of the now accepted reading of *triodous*. In fact, the former is attested in all three primary families of manuscripts.<sup>54</sup> The preference of the latter in many manuscripts and in the editions of Burnet and Rowe sheds informative light on our investigation. The later commentators of the text, Proclus and Olympiodorus, first suggested the emendation of *periodous* for *triodous*. In support of his reading, Olympiodorus explicitly connects the use of *hosia* in the following line with the sacrifices (*θυσία*) in honor of Hecate *Chthonia*.<sup>55</sup>

In light of Plato's discussion of *katharsis* in the *Phaedo*, Hecate's triplicity—documented in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, the *Hymn to Demeter*, Hesiod's *Theogony*, and her visual representations—affords a more literal interpretation of the meaning of *triodous* in the description of the souls' posthumous journey as referring to the three possible ways of transformation awaiting the soul there. These three ways correspond to the ontological and ethical registers of Plato's treatment of *katharsis* in the dialogue. One road leads the souls which have been completely purified by philosophy. This is the

<sup>51</sup> Cf. *Theog.* 413–455. In a lengthy aretology, Hesiod introduces Hecate last among the early gods. He most frequently refers to her privilege, granted by Zeus, of retaining all three realms of influence, after the defeat of the Titans.

<sup>52</sup> Richardson 1974, 291, 294–295. Burkert 1985, 222.

<sup>53</sup> In depictions of the Eleusinian mysteries, Hecate is commonly represented with a torch in her hand. The fire denotes the transformative nature of the process over which she presides.

<sup>54</sup> Rowe 1993, 92.

<sup>55</sup> Burnet 1911, 107. Cf. Hesiod, *Theog.* 418–420.



road of ascent to intelligible existence and immortality. The second road leads the souls which, still seeking a complete purification, become incarnate again. This is the road which measures soul's morality. The third road is for the souls which have committed such grievous crimes that their purification depends on their victims' forgiveness. This is the road which measures the soul's immortality.<sup>56</sup> The upward direction of the first road activates the ontological register of *katharsis*, while the downward direction of the third road indicates its ethical register. The middle road comprising the soon-to-be-incarnate souls conflates the two registers. The philosophically inclined souls understand Demeter's proclamation of fire as an ontological agent for immortality, the sensually inclined souls follow Metaneira's physical aversion to fire as a punitive agent of immortality.<sup>57</sup> Immortality, morality, and immortality are simply three separate steps in the process of purification.

Through Hecate's three-fold nature, the First Transcendent Fire in the *Chaldaean Oracles* is reflected in the flames of Demophoön's immortalization just as in the blazing stream of Plato's Pyriphlegethon.<sup>58</sup> The primary ontological understanding of fire and *katharsis* applies only to those who, with Socrates and Plato, "do philosophy correctly." As the *Seventh Letter* puts it, "acquaintance with it (the true understanding of the universe) must come rather after a long period of attendance on instruction in the subject itself and of close companionship, when, suddenly, like a blaze kindled by a leaping spark, it is generated in the soul and at once becomes self-sustaining" (341C5–D2).<sup>59</sup> We can conclude, then, with Iamblichus, that the goal of *katharsis* is "the perfect fulfillment of the soul through fire."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Cf. Plato's understanding of the tripartite soul in the *Republic* and especially his allegory of the charioteer and the two horses in the *Phaedrus*.

<sup>57</sup> If it is difficult to discern the hidden presence of fire in the soul, it is certainly easier to detect it in the body. All we have to remember is that the younger gods in the *Timaeus* (42E8–9) make man's body by mixing and molding fire, earth, water, and air. Fire is also involved in the greatest cataclysmic events on Earth, according to the old Egyptian priest (22C1). Fire and water are the two primary elements in the composition of the human body and in the cause of disease (Nutton 2004, 79, 81).

<sup>58</sup> An extreme view of the ontogenic role of fire is found in Pselus: the intelligible realm resembles a volcano and its lava surfaces in the physical world through a network of channels (*Hypotypōsis* 27–28 [201 des Places]). Brisson 2003, 126.

<sup>59</sup> I am grateful to Vishwa Adluri for directing my attention to the *Seventh Letter*.

<sup>60</sup> *De mysteriis* 5.26.22: τελείαν ἀποπλήρωσιν ἀπὸ τοῦ πυρός.

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“HARMONIZING” ARISTOTLE’S  
CATEGORIES AND PLATO’S PARMENIDES  
BEFORE THE BACKGROUND OF NATURAL PHILOSOPHY\*

Gerald Bechtle

Much scholarly work has been done on the late ancient “harmonization” of the philosophies of Aristotle and Plato. But most of the literature on this phenomenon takes a fairly abstract and non-sympathetic stance on this concept and is typically steeped in modern prejudice resulting from the firm belief that we are dealing with two fundamentally irreconcilable thinkers.

This essay is about the relation between—or harmonization of—two crucial texts, one by Aristotle and one by Plato, respectively the *Categories* and the *Parmenides*, neither of which is normally associated with natural philosophy. Instead, each of these two texts has a strong connection with logic.<sup>1</sup> Natural philosophy, the science of natural things, i.e., φυσική, i.e., physic(s) in a more traditional sense, is treated in texts such as Aristotle’s *Physics*, *Heavens*, *Generation and Corruption*, *Meteorology*, *Soul*,<sup>2</sup> or Plato’s *Sophist*, *Politicus*, or *Timaeus*.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, physical science is also relevant

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\* I wish to thank the participants of the 2006 meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature’s seminar on “Rethinking Plato’s *Parmenides*” in Washington D.C. for an inspiring discussion on a short version of this essay. Robert Berchman’s remarks on the relevance of Origen for the relation *Parmenides-Categories* are particularly useful and have provided ideas for future research. I also wish to express my gratitude to all the participants of the conference on “Philosophy of Nature in Neo-Platonism,” organized by Christoph Horn and James Wilberding at the University of Bonn in 2007, where in particular Lloyd Gerson, Stephen Menn, Carlos Steel, and Steve Strange have provided great feedback on another version of this essay, and particularly on Proclus and Simplicius. Last but not least, I wish to thank Arnd Kerkhecker, Martin Korenjak, and Nora Kreft for their remarks on Simplicius, and Martin Korenjak in particular for his critical reading of yet another version of this essay.

<sup>1</sup> It should not be forgotten that the *Parmenides* is a logical dialogue according to the Thrasyllan division (Diogenes Laërtius, *Vit. phil.* 3.58 Marcovich: Παρμενίδης ἢ περὶ ἰδεῶν, λογικός), a fact remaining influential ever after.

<sup>2</sup> For the physical character of these five treatises see Hadot, Hoffmann, et al. 1990, 65 (with the explanation and relevant passages on pp. 85–90).

<sup>3</sup> For the physical character of the first two of these three dialogues, cf. Westerink’s (1990) reconstructed text on p. lxxii (instead of 26.40–41): εἶτα ἐρχόμεθα μετὰ τούτους εἰς τὸν (Σοφιστήν καὶ τὸν Πολιτικὸν ὡς θεωρητικὸς καὶ) περὶ φυσικῶν διδάσκοντα(ς). For the physical character of

with regard to the *Categories* and the *Parmenides*. For physics plays a pivotal role between the logical and the metaphysical sciences—and both the *Parmenides* and the *Categories* can be considered as logical texts. Hence, it is not astonishing that the *Categories* and the *Parmenides* can be read with reference to each other and therefore also be related to each other. For both of them are logical and, as such, require a reference back to physical science. Furthermore, as generally referring back to real (physical) objects, both texts are at some point developed in a meta-physical direction.

The latter point needs some further development. In later ancient times, the *Categories* was *primarily* associated with logic, and the *Parmenides*, notwithstanding its logical character, *primarily* with theology. By connecting them in their exegesis, the Platonists not only make a text by Aristotle and another by Plato bear one upon the other, but also—mostly by means of the concept of (physical) things, πράγματα—bridge the gap between the realm of logic and the metaphysical world. The Platonists can establish this connection all the more easily by virtue of the fact that the *Parmenides* can also be considered as logical, and that the *Categories* has a strong potential to be metaphysicized—a potential to be explored in a different context by medieval Christian thinkers.

The reference to real (physical) objects is a fundamental prerequisite for the *Categories*, and, in general, for logic in the ancient (and sometimes even medieval) understanding. For the categories presuppose (natural) πράγματα, i.e., sensible things and/or physical reality—a fact that is probably true both for Aristotle himself and (by and large) for his later interpreters. We know that in the context of the later interpretation of the *Categories* a transfer from these physical πράγματα to πράγματα (things) on the meta-physical level (intelligible or transcendent beings) is mostly close at hand—indeed so close that Simplicius repeatedly distances himself from or importantly qualifies such a metaphysicization of Aristotle's *Categories*;<sup>4</sup> thus Simplicius prefers to hold that the *Categories* is really about sensible beings as signified by words/verbal expressions.<sup>5</sup> There are two reasons for this extension

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the *Timaeus*, see Anonymus, *Prol. Plat.* 26.20 (Westerink 1990): ὦν τὸν μὲν Τίμαιον ἐπὶ πᾶσι τοῖς φυσικοῖς. For the physical character of the *Timaeus* as opposed to the theological character of the *Parmenides*, see below n. 18.

<sup>4</sup> What Simplicius seems to deny is that noetic categories could really be categories *properly speaking*; and holding that noetic categories are not categories *properly speaking* is of course not the same as saying that noetic categories cannot exist at all.

<sup>5</sup> Simplicius, *In Categ.* 73.29–74.17: λέγομεν δὲ ὅτι οὐ περὶ τῶν ὄντων ἢ ὄντα ποιούμενος τὸν λόγον, ἀλλ' εἴπερ ἄρα, ἢ ὑπὸ τοιῶνδε σημαίνεται φωνῶν, προηγουμένως μὲν περὶ τῶν τῆδε διαλέγεται etc. Cf. also 76.18–19: ὅτι περὶ τῆς αἰσθητῆς καὶ φυσικῆς οὐσίας ὁ λόγος καὶ τῆς ἐν ταύτῃ

of the traditional domain of the *Categories*: firstly, πράγματα/real things are just that, i.e., real things/reality, even though this reality takes the two forms of sensible/natural and intelligible;<sup>6</sup> secondly, Iamblichus operates a largely underrated metaphysization of the *Categories* that remained a subject of discussion after him even though Simplicius and others do not follow him on this point. This metaphysization is in a way an extreme response to the objections raised by Plotinus against the Aristotelian categories—their unfitness for the νοητά make them rather useless—and it is in contradiction with the Porphyrian compromise—the categories are useful despite their exclusively sensible/physical scope.

The *Parmenides*, on the other hand, establishes in the understanding of its later exegetes a logically grounded metaphysical science, or theology—it therefore concerns metaphysical πράγματα in some logical fashion. Analyzing the intersection between the logical but, on its “pragmatic”

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διανοητής and 22–23: οὐκ ἦν οὖν τοῦ παρόντος λόγου περὶ τῆς κοινῆς οὐσίας τῶν τε νοητῶν καὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ἀπορεῖν. 90.19–20: ἡ γὰρ αἰσθητὴ οὐσία ἡ μάλιστα ἐστὶν οὐσία. 205.22–35, in particular 22–24: ἰστέον δὲ ὅτι πολλὰ τῶν γενῶν ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς ἐστὶν κυρίως, οὐκέτι δὲ ἐν τοῖς νοητοῖς, εἰ μὴ τις κατ’ ἄλλον τρόπον αὐτὰ μεταφέρειν ἐπ’ ἐκείνων βιάζοιτο, ὡσπερ τὸ κείσθαι καὶ τὸ πάσχειν. 277.5–11, in particular 7: οὐδὲ γὰρ αἱ κατηγορίαι περὶ τῶν νοητῶν εἰσιν, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῶν λεγομένων ... (which is not to say that there cannot exist such things as νοητὰ ποιότητες—but they are not actual qualities, i.e., genuine categories). 290.9–10: ἀλλ’ ὅλως οὐ περὶ τῶν νοητῶν ἐστὶν ὁ προκειμένος λόγος (after quoting Iamblichus on Porphyry on νοητὰ ποιότητες). 300.25–28: τῇ γὰρ αἰσθητῇ καὶ φυσικῇ οὐσίᾳ τὰ μὲν συνεισῆλθεν ὡς ποιότης καὶ πρὸς τι, τὰ δὲ ἐπεισῆλθεν ὡς τὸ ποιεῖν καὶ πάσχειν, κινηθείσης ἤδη πρὸς ἃ ἠδύνατο, τούτοις δὲ ἐπηκολούθησαν τὸ ἐν χρόνῳ καὶ ἐν τόπῳ καὶ τὸ κείσθαι καὶ τὸ ἔχειν. 340.12–13: τοσαῦτα καὶ περὶ τοῦ κείσθαι εἰρήσθω, ἐνοοούντων ἡμῶν ὡς ἐπὶ σωματῶν εἴρηται κυρίως τὸ κείσθαι (this succinct Simplician commentary on an immediately preceding literal quotation from Iamblichus is directly comparable to 290.9–10). Simplicius is habitually considered to follow Iamblichus’ νοερά θεωρία; on the basis of the evidence cited, I think he himself is actually much closer to Porphyry, at least as far as the restriction of the categories proper to the sensible realm is concerned. In this context it should of course not be forgotten that Simplicius (78.4–5) attributes this view already to Boethus of Sidon (ca. second half of the first century BCE): ὁ μέντοι Βόηθος ... μὴ γὰρ εἶναι περὶ τῆς νοητῆς οὐσίας τὸν λόγον. Cf. also Ps.-Archytas (perhaps also to be dated to the first century BCE, or else a bit a later) at Simplicius 76.20–22: πάσα ὧν ὡςτὰ φυσικὰ τε καὶ αἰσθητὰ ἦτοι ἐν τούτοις ἢ διὰ τούτων ἢ οὐκ ἄνευ τούτων πέφυκεν τῆ διανοίᾳ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὑποπίπτειν.

<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, and strangely, Eusebius describes *physics*, the physical part of philosophy, as bipartite, and thus as dealing with *both intelligibles* (meta-physicals though they are) *and sensibles*—cf. *Praep. ev.* (ed. des Places *post Mras*) 11.7.1.1–4: καὶ τὸ τρίτον δὲ μέρος τῆς καθ’ Ἐβραίου φιλοσοφίας (τούτο δ’ ἦν τὸ φυσικόν, διαιρούμενον καὶ παρ’ αὐτοῖς εἰς τε τὴν τῶν νοητῶν καὶ ἀσωμάτων ἐποπτεῖαν καὶ εἰς τὴν τῶν αἰσθητῶν φυσιολογίαν). 10.1–11.1: ταῦτα μὲν δὴ καὶ περὶ τῆς τοῦ παντός φυσιολογίας. διχῆ δὲ καὶ τὸν περὶ τούτων διαστειλάμενοι λόγον, τὸν μὲν περὶ τῶν αἰσθητῶν ... περὶ δὲ τῶν νοητῶν ... Such a notion of a φυσιολογία of intelligibles (ἡ τῶν νοητῶν φυσιολογία—cf. 11.8) is a strange one indeed, but Eusebius must have conceived of this “physical science” as of a science of reality as a whole (he does use the term ἡ τοῦ παντός φυσιολογία)—cf. also παρ’ ἑαυτοῦ (sc. Plato) τῇ τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπιβαλῶν φύσει (11.8.1.8–9).

basis, metaphysicized *Categories* and the logically metaphysical *Parmenides* means (re)discovering the logical side of the *Parmenides* and the (meta)physical side of the *Categories* in their *interrelatedness*.

In view of all this, it is not really surprising that in the texts analyzed in this essay—by Clement of Alexandria (probably influenced by contemporaneous Platonic discussions), Alcinous, Atticus, and Proclus—the common pivot is, broadly speaking, the relevance of the categories/categorial language with respect to God, the Good, or the One (the highest principle). The connections established between the *Categories* and the *Parmenides* can thus be shown to play a philosophically very fruitful role in terms of the development of the Platonists' doctrines; and they also suggest that the key to a full understanding of the roots of the Christian theological tradition's quest to describe God in terms of categorial logic may well lie with the ancient Platonists. But the latter thesis will have to be explored in another context.

After a *status quaestionis* on the general ideological issues involved (1), and after outlining the specific conditions for—and background of—the late ancient “harmonization” of the *Categories* and the *Parmenides* (2), this essay tries to break some new ground by showing exemplarily how texts as “Aristotelian” as the *Categories* and as “Platonic” as the *Parmenides*—the two are placed at opposite ends of the later Platonist curriculum—can be and were indeed read in conjunction; this reading exploits and/or yields intersections of the *Categories* and the *Parmenides* that are important to the history of these dialogues' Platonist reception (3). And if one understands why and how it is possible to read the *Categories* into the *Parmenides*—or the *Parmenides* into the *Categories*—one will get a concrete idea of the workings and particular genius of Platonist philosophy.

#### 1. ARISTOTLE VS. PLATO? THEIR PHILOSOPHIES BETWEEN “UNITARIAN” HARMONIZING AND “ANALYTICAL” SEPARATION

It has been a scholarly tradition for some time to study not only the *Corpus Aristotelicum* and Plato's dialogues, but even the late antique reception of these corpora (in, e.g., Late Platonist<sup>7</sup> commentaries), quite independently from one another. To be sure, the interpretative separation of Aristotle and

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<sup>7</sup> “Late Platonist” because it would not be helpful to introduce into this time span a caesura still commonly made between so-called Middle and Neoplatonist periods; for our purpose, it is better to consider the Platonist tradition as a whole.

Plato seems natural enough to most modern readers—and the question of whether it is justified is mostly beyond the scope of this essay.<sup>8</sup> But it is hardly doubtful, and most scholars would, in theory, readily agree that there is no basis for the separation of Aristotle and Plato insofar as the history of their reception is concerned. Yet even this separation has been a matter of fact.

Reading Plato without taking into account Aristotle, and Aristotle without taking into account Plato, can be viewed as an alternative model or a reaction to the late ancient attempts at harmonizing their philosophies. These harmonizing or “unitarian” tendencies, dominant in the commentary tradition, naturally preclude one from separating the late antique reception of Plato and Aristotle. Positively speaking, the intertwinement of the Aristotelian and Platonic strings of tradition, being a philosophically productive principle, is even a fundamental prerequisite for the occurrence of most late ancient philosophy.

In imperial times, philosophers were in general not at all doubtful of Aristotle’s essential Platonism.<sup>9</sup> In fact, it has only rarely been challenged

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<sup>8</sup> By reading Plato without taking into account Aristotle, and Aristotle without taking into account Plato, their often obvious common doctrinal ground gets out of sight (see also below, last paragraph of section 1.). This essay is for the most part concerned with the interrelationship between Aristotle’s *Categories* and Plato’s *Parmenides* in the later ancient reception. To muster some sympathy for the Platonists who were concerned with the harmonization of these two texts, one may recall these words by Frede (1983, 28): “Die Species und Genera der Kategorienschrift, deren Existenz Aristoteles dann in der Metaphysik bestreitet, unterscheiden sich nicht wesentlich von den Genera und Species, die in Platons Spätialogen einen so bedeutenden Platz einnehmen, zunächst im *Phaedrus*, dann vor allem im *Sophistes*, im *Politicus*, und im *Philebus* ... Mir scheint, daß Platon in den Spätialogen, beginnend mit dem zweiten Teil des *Parmenides*, die Lehre von den Ideen durch eine Lehre von den Genera und eine Lehre von den Prinzipien, welche diese Genera konstituieren, zu ersetzen sucht.” Of course, Frede does not forget to state that Plato, as opposed to Aristotle, maintains the ontological priority of the genera over their species and individuals. But this difference in itself presupposes the essential similarity of the doctrines. If, then, the *Categories* and the *Parmenides* reflect basically the same doctrine of genera and species, why should it be so unheard of to try to find the Aristotelian categories (i.e., the genera of the genera) in the second part of the *Parmenides*?

<sup>9</sup> Porphyry’s lost work *Περὶ διαστάσεως Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους* is certainly no exception to that rule; on the contrary, it most likely bears witness to Porphyry’s compatibilist attitude, and it has even been suggested that this work was identical with Porphyry’s *Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι τὴν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους ἀΐρεσιν* ζ’. Be that as it may, these titles attest in any case to an awareness of the issue of harmonization: combining Aristotelian and Platonic doctrine was something one would *think about* critically, and not just *do* unreflectingly. For the Porphyrian work titles cf. Elias, *In Isag.* 39.6–8 (Busse): οὐ γὰρ μόνον ἢ παροῦσα πραγματεία (sc. the *Isagoge*) αὐτῷ γέγραπται πρὸς Χρυσάριον, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλαι, ὅσον τὸ *Περὶ διαστάσεως Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους* and Suda, *Lexicon* 4.178.21–22 (Adler): *Περὶ τοῦ μίαν εἶναι τὴν Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους ἀΐρεσιν* ζ’. Given that students may wonder why they should start the



and has effectively been an important hermeneutic and interpretative factor ever since his works were subjected to scholarly scrutiny, i.e., at least since Hellenistic times.

The fact that even the reception of the two thinkers is nevertheless studied *de facto* independently has of course obvious reasons—reasons that are mostly related to the modern dogma of the irreconcilability and antagonism between Aristotle and Plato on any given topic, a conception reinforced by the prevalence of the opposite doctrine in late antiquity. The practical consequences of this somewhat paradoxical situation are, for instance: modern scholars' specialization in, or preference for, either Aristotelianism or Platonism (and thus also for one or the other set of relevant commentaries); interpreters' interests in either the logical and physical, or the more theological themes; and, at least partly related to these dichotomies, falsely clear-cut and anachronistic distinctions between the perceived centres of interest of differently located (Alexandria, Athens, etc.) late antique philosophical schools, and of groups of philosophers belonging to these schools.

To be sure, modern interpreters may invoke the late Platonists' own tendency to separate *de facto* the reading of Aristotle and Plato—the course of philosophical study proceeding, as is well known, from Aristotle, for beginners in philosophy, to Plato, for the advanced students.<sup>10</sup> This proposed order

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philosophical curriculum (culminating in Plato) with Aristotle's *Categories*, it would be quite natural for the harmonization issue to have cropped up especially often and explicitly in the context of the *Isagoge* (and the *Categories*). That this is indeed the case is suggested by the fact that both the *Isagoge* and *Περὶ διαστάσεως Πλάτωνος καὶ Ἀριστοτέλους* are dedicated to Chrysaorius and that issues relating to the *συμφωνία* (or harmonizing reading) of Plato and Aristotle become especially explicit in commentaries on the *Isagoge*; the (neglected) Arethas of Caesarea testifies exemplarily well to this fact: cf. *Schol. in Eisag.*, scholion 148.1–6 (Share) (on Porphyry, *Isagoge* 11.4–5 Busse): τοῦτο ὡς μὴ πάνυ ἀρεσκόμενος τῇ τοιαύτῃ δόξῃ τέθηκεν. Πλατωνικὸς γὰρ ὁ Πορφύριος, αὕτη δὲ Ἀριστοτελικὴ ἢ δόξα. βούλονται δὲ εἰς συμφωνίαν ἄγειν τινὲς Πλάτωνα καὶ Ἀριστοτέλη ὑπὲρ οὗ ἢ ἀμφισβήτησις αὐτοῖς γέγονεν οὕτως. φασὶ γὰρ ὡς ἀμφοτέροι ταυτὸν λέγουσι, Πλάτων φημί καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης, κἂν τοῖς ὀνόμασι διαφέρωνται ... Cf. also scholion 83.1–3: τοῦτο ὡς Πλατωνικὸς λέγει Πορφύριος, τὸ κείσθω φημί· οὐ γὰρ πάνυ ἀρέσκειται τοῖς Ἀριστοτελικοῖς δόγμασι, καὶ εἰ μὴ νῦν τὰ Ἀριστοτέλους προεχειρίζετο, οὐκ ἂν ποτε ταῦτα εἰρήκει, and scholion 84.12–14: τὰ ἀφ' ἑνός, καθ' ἃ τῶν κατηγοριῶν διαίρεσιν γίνεσθαι ἢ δοκοῦσα διαφωνία τῶν κορυφαίων φιλοσόφων Ἀριστοτέλους καὶ Πλάτωνος συναλεύει, and scholion 90.1–2: δευτέρων τοῦτο παραγγέλμα Πλατωνικόν. Πλατωνικά δὲ παραγγέλματα τοῖς Ἀριστοτελικοῖς συνάπτει Πορφύριος.

<sup>10</sup> For an excellent synopsis of the Platonist course of study cf. the overview in Hadot, Hoffmann, et al. 1990, 44–47. An indicator of the progress yet to be made after the initial reading of the *Categories* is Simplicius' final prayer at *In Categ.* 438.33–36 (Kalbfleisch): ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ μέχρι τοῦδε καὶ ὁ θεὸς προήλθεν Ἰάμβλιχος, καὶ ἐγὼ καταπαύω τὸν λόγον, εὐχόμενος τοῖς τῶν λόγων ἐφόροις τούτων τε ἀκριβεστέραν ἐνδοῦναι κατανόησιν καὶ ταύτην ἐφόδιόν μοι πρὸς τὰς ὑψηλοτέρας θεωρίας χαρίσασθαι καὶ σχολὴν παρασχέιν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ περιελκόντων.

entails, or, depending on the perspective, starts from, a rather sweeping appreciation of perceived very general characteristics of Aristotelian and Platonic works leading to a certain view of what is typically Aristotelian, or typically Platonic. It would, for instance, be typical of Aristotelian texts to be instrumental (quite literally) as introductions to philosophy, whereas the study of Plato requires a much higher level of philosophical education. This is borne out by the details of the late Platonist curriculum (cf. also section 2): the study of the *Categories* provides an opportunity not only for a biography of Aristotle but also for a specific introduction to the entire Aristotelian philosophy; this is preceded by a general introduction to the whole of philosophy in the context of the study of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. In contrast, the canon of Platonic dialogues is meant to cater to those students proficient enough to be involved in the “Great Mysteries”<sup>11</sup> and ready

<sup>11</sup> Plato’s *Phaedrus* can be considered as exploring and setting a precedent for the philosophical use of mysteries-related language. Hermias’ commentary on the *Phaedrus* proves that relevant passages of this dialogue were of course not lost on the later Platonists: cf. Hermias, *Schol. in Phaedr.* 178.8–31 (Couvreur) (on *Phaedr.* 250B8 and C1). Even when not specifically commenting on the *Phaedrus*, the later Platonists were often influenced by it when using language and terminology relating to mysteries and religious experience: cf. Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* 4.24 (73.1–6 Saffrey-Westerink) (Proclus here makes use of the same passage, *Phaedrus* 250B8–C1), and the entire ch. 1.1. But the parallel between philosophical initiation and mysteries does not only go back to the *Phaedrus*. Other Platonic dialogues should also be mentioned in this context: *Meno*, *Symposium*, *Gorgias*, *Euthydemus*, *Republic*, *Phaedo* (for detailed references cf. Canto-Sperber 1993, 238n70); and cf. also *Tüb. Theos.* § 63 (Erbse), where the *Second Letter* (312D7–E1) is literally quoted immediately after the following: ὅτι ὁ Πλάτων τὰ περὶ θεολογίας μυστήρια μὴ καταπιστεύων ἀκαθάρτοις ἀκοαῖς ἐν τῇ πρὸς Διονύσιον ἐπιστολῇ φησιν οὕτως. The following passages attest to the Platonists’ habit of referring to Great and/or Small mysteries: Iamblichus, *Protrepticus* 2 (43.8–10 des Places = 10.4–6 Pistelli): ὡς πρὸ τῶν μεγάλων μυστηρίων τὰ μικρὰ παραδοτέον, καὶ πρὸ φιλοσοφίας παιδείαν. Marinus, *Procl.* 13.1–10 (Saffrey-Segonds-Luna): ἐν ἔτεσι γούν οὔτε δύο ὅλοις πάσας αὐτῷ τὰς Ἀριστοτέλους συνανέγνω πραγματείας, λογικάς, ἠθικάς, πολιτικάς, φυσικάς, καὶ τὴν ὑπὲρ ταύτας θεολογικὴν ἐπιστήμην. ἀχθέντα δὲ διὰ τούτων βικανῶς, ὡσπερ διὰ τινῶν προτελείων καὶ μικρῶν μυστηρίων, εἰς τὴν Πλάτωνος ἠγε μυσταγωγίαν ἐν τάξει καὶ οὐχ ὑπερβάθμιον πόδα, κατὰ τὸ λόγιον, τείνοντα· καὶ τὰς παρ’ ἐκεῖνῳ θείας ὄντως τελετάς ἐποπτεύειν ἐποίει τοῖς τῆς ψυχῆς ἀνεπιθολώτοις ὄμμασι καὶ τῇ τοῦ νοῦ ἀχράντῳ περιωπῇ. Cf. also Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 1.28.176.2: καὶ τέταρτον ἐπὶ πάσι τὸ θεολογικὸν εἶδος, ἢ ἐποπτεία, ἣν φησιν ὁ Πλάτων τῶν μεγάλων ὄντως εἶναι μυστηρίων, Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ τὸ εἶδος τοῦτο μετὰ τὰ φυσικά καλεῖ—this passage additionally confirms that already in the second half of the second century CE it was possible, and probably even standard practice, to equate Platonic theology and Aristotelian metaphysics, a fundamental doctrinal prerequisite for the later Platonists’ theology; elsewhere I showed that the similar identification of Aristotelian theology and Platonic dialectic can be traced to Alcinous (cf. ch. 4, “Die wissenschaftlichen Methoden und ihre Grundlegung in Iamblichus’ *De communi mathematica scientia*,” of Bechtle 2006, 61–90, here esp. p. 68 and context).

for the deeper theological truths.<sup>12</sup> This simplistic distinction of an introductory and instrumental Aristotle and a full-fledged philosophical Plato has a parallel in, and is partly influenced by, the division of philosophy already current in the so-called “Middle Platonist” period when (instrumental) logic (also called dialectic) was considered as a *necessary* propedeutic to the various branches of practical and theoretical philosophy (the whole of philosophy—and even the ten categories—then being considered as Platonic).<sup>13</sup> There can be no reasonable doubt that the Aristotle/Plato curriculum reflects—through its choice of works to be read and the order in which they should be read—above all the scholastic priorities of the late Platonists. Thus, the later Platonists’ school curriculum may be taken as an indication of the *de facto* separation of the Aristotelian and Platonic traditions, notwithstanding the professed necessity to go beyond such a distinction and harmonize the two philosophies. Possibly, then, and somewhat paradoxically, the modern reaction to these late antique “unitarian” tendencies—i.e., separation of (the reception of) Aristotelian and Platonic writings—has been influenced almost naturally, though not obviously, by the late ancient school curriculum itself<sup>14</sup>—which took on a life of its own over the centuries. In any case, its probably far-reaching consequences can be difficult to gauge in detail and can hardly be overestimated.

However, the late Platonists’ curriculum with its seemingly unambiguous distinction between Aristotelian and Platonic reading lists actually reveals them to be finely-tuned to one another and shows them to form a neat and

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, less introductory texts by Aristotle such as the theoretical writings are also aimed at more advanced students. The culminating point of the Aristotelian theoretical writings is the only theological text, the *Metaphysics*. It fittingly features at the very end of the Aristotelian cycle, just before the start of the Plato curriculum (that also culminates in theology). The position of Aristotelian and Platonic theologies at the end of the respective curricula is indicative of their (supposed) parallel character—it is an expression of the fact that the later Platonists had effectively merged the Aristotelian “first philosophy” of the *Metaphysics* with Plato’s dialectic/theology because they considered them to be complementary.

<sup>13</sup> Cf., e.g., Alcinous, *Epit.* 3.153.25–38 (Whittaker-Hermann): ἡ δὲ τοῦ φιλοσόφου σπουδὴ κατὰ τὸν Πλάτωνα ἐν τρισὶν ἔοικεν εἶναι. ἔν τε τῇ θεᾷ τῇ τῶν ὄντων, καὶ ἐν τῇ πράξει τῶν καλῶν, καὶ ἐν αὐτῇ τῇ τοῦ λόγου θεωρίᾳ. καλεῖται δὲ ἡ μὲν τῶν ὄντων γνῶσις θεωρητικὴ, ἡ δὲ περὶ τὰ πρακτέα πρακτικὴ, ἡ δὲ περὶ τὸν λόγον διαλεκτικὴ ... ὅπερ (probably the whole of logic/dialectic) προηγούμενον μὲν οὐκ ἂν εἴη τῷ φιλοσόφῳ, ἀναγκαῖον δέ. That Alcinous’ dialectic, meant to be Platonic, is really very much influenced by Peripatetic thought is particularly—and paradoxically—manifest in passages such as this (5.156.24–26): τῆς διαλεκτικῆς δὲ στοιχειωδέστατον ἡγείται (sc. Plato) πρῶτον μὲν τὸ τὴν οὐσίαν ἐπιβλέπειν παντὸς ὄτουοῦ, ἔπειτα περὶ τῶν συμβεβηκότων.

<sup>14</sup> The Neoplatonic canon does of course extend beyond Aristotle and Plato—there are works to be read before Aristotle and after Plato—but for our argument it is sufficient to consider only the evidence related to these two main authorities.

consistent doctrinal whole. One should not forget that we are in a school context. As has just been emphasized, choices have to be made and the material, once selected, has to be presented in some way, and the guiding principle is mainly a pedagogical one. Therefore, the recommended course of study with its (utilitarian, didactic) separation between Aristotle and Plato naturally cannot be compared to an all-pervasive “unitarian” principle guiding Platonist exegesis and commentary of Aristotelian and Platonic works.

Within this context, it is easy to understand that the late ancient tendency to harmonize is nowadays acknowledged and studied in a rather theoretical way, i.e., in a manner one studies some curious and not sensibly understandable bizarre phenomenon. Hence, for most people it does not follow that this “unitarian” approach could possibly be taken seriously, not even when they study the commentary tradition for which this harmonization of Aristotle and Plato admittedly was a guiding imperative. It is typical that there are only very few studies that make a consistent and explicit attempt at analyzing the importance of Platonic tenets in the Aristotle commentaries, and of Aristotelian doctrinal elements in Plato commentaries. Few would study, for instance, the reception of the *Physics* jointly with that of the *Timaeus*, or that of the *Metaphysics* together with that of the *Parmenides* (not to speak of the possibility to study any Aristotelian treatise jointly with any Platonic dialogue, for example the *Categories* together with the *Sophist*). In other words, structural analyses of Platonist texts that take into account the authors’ own priorities and guidelines are still scarce. But they are essential to providing us with an idea of how “Neoplatonic” philosophy actually comes about, a glimpse of the ways according to which it is developed and formed, and thereby of its inner workings.

Ultimately, of course, one has to face the question of how to view Aristotle and Plato themselves, so as to appreciate the interpretative efforts of their commentators. A reasonable stance may be formulated, very succinctly, along the following lines, although the topic as such, as stated above, is beyond the scope of this essay. Aristotle is by no means a faithful follower of Plato, and Plato has not anticipated Aristotle’s teaching, even though this used to be common understanding in antiquity. However, the assumption that their relation can be seen in terms of an autocratically philosophizing Plato and/or a relentlessly criticizing Aristotle is equally unlikely. A more probable picture is that of a real dialogue between the two great philosophers, one that includes criticisms, and also reactions to these criticisms, and therefore a sensible exchange of ideas and arguments. This implies that there is a certain degree of continuity as regards the problems tackled by

both great men, even though their answers to the philosophical questions raised by these problems may differ considerably. Hence, joint interpretations of Aristotle's and Plato's accounts of certain common issues can indeed be very useful, to bring out the differences, but above all to understand the common ground on which they move. Also, more specifically, if the relation between Plato and Aristotle is as described, one may identify reflections and criticisms (or the lack thereof) of Platonic doctrines in Aristotle's work and then use them circumspectly as hermeneutic tools—i.e., by paying close attention to Aristotle one may find out more about Plato's own intentions in formulating his doctrine.<sup>15</sup> In this sense, then, Aristotle may indeed be one of the first Platonists (and hence later Platonists' attempts at bringing out this essential Platonism were not completely unjustified).<sup>16</sup>

## 2. THE JOINT READING OF THE ARISTOTELIAN *CATEGORIES* AND THE PLATONIC *PARMENIDES*

From what has been said, it is clear that in what follows I wish to make the argument for reading together, wherever reasonable and fruitful, the Aristotelian and Platonic corpora as far as the history of their reception is concerned. The example I take is, if accepted, quite strong and hence more likely to make the case for all the other, more standard, instances of reading a text by one author (Aristotle or Plato) *through* a text by the other (e.g., *Organon* texts/*Cratylus* or *Theaetetus*; *Ethics* texts/*Gorgias* or *Phaedo*; *Physics*/*Timaeus*; *Metaphysics*/*Parmenides*, and other pairings that

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<sup>15</sup> An interesting recent example of this way of reading Aristotle is Strobel 2005. He uses the Aristotelian distinction between τὸδε τι ("This") and τοιόνδε/ποιόν τι ("Such") to better understand Plato's forms, and especially the notoriously thorny issue of self-predications—one of the great topics of learned debate in the twentieth century. He calls attention to the fact that Aristotle does not criticize Platonic self-predications, although he does critique the Third Man Argument. Strobel argues that this is due to the fact that Aristotle, unlike the modern scholarly debate about self-predications, does not identify Plato's forms with *Eigenschaften* (properties, attributes, characteristics) or *Begriffe* (concepts), but rather (pretty much correctly, according to Strobel) conceives them as *Gegenstände* (things/objects/entities) about which true statements are made by means of self-predications. But these things/objects/entities can be either Aristotelian "Suches"—Aristotle takes it that Plato's forms are Suches, or "Thises," and, from Aristotle's viewpoint, Plato's problem with his forms is that he often confuses these two types of things/objects/entities.

<sup>16</sup> It is remarkable that this opinion is gaining new momentum in the scholarly world: Lloyd Gerson (2004) analyzes Aristotle's position on the role of θεωρία (in *Eth. nic.* 10.6–8 1175A–1179A) and asserts his basic Platonism in the area of ethics—an elaboration of one part of Gerson's argument in his recent book *Aristotle and Other Platonists* (2005).

are roughly on the same plane). I wish to consider, in conjunction with one another, the reception of two texts that, after the constitution of the above-mentioned curriculum, were placed at its opposite ends, i.e., Aristotle’s *Categories* and Plato’s *Parmenides*. Hence, one needs to examine the later Platonist material—not all of it necessarily or equally strongly teaching- or curriculum-related—situated at the intersection of these two texts, and therefore in some way or other concerned with both of them at the same time. Some of this material will be examined in section 3 below. The present section, however, will dwell on certain details of the Platonist school curriculum, on the *σκοπός* of the *Categories*, and on possible *points de rapprochement* between the actual texts of the *Categories* and the *Parmenides*. Thereby, I aim to provide the necessary background for a full understanding of the relations between the *Categories* and the *Parmenides*, and also, exemplarily, between logic and metaphysics, and therefore of the interpretative possibilities inherent in reading these texts together. Thus one may, at least exemplarily, get a better grasp of both the late ancient exegetes’ unitarian stance and the (resulting?) metaphysization.

### 2.1. *The Categories and the Parmenides in the Curriculum*

The *Categories* and the *Parmenides* play, as evidenced by the scholastic course of study current in Later Platonism, the roles of a logical and of a metaphysical/theological text, respectively. Actually, being placed at opposite ends of the Platonists’ combined Aristotle/Plato curriculum they have become *the logical*<sup>17</sup> and *the metaphysical*<sup>18</sup> texts *par excellence*. This

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Simplicius, *In Categ.* 1.4–6 (Kalbfleisch): οὐ μόνον ὅτι προοίμιόν ἐστι (sc. the *Categories*) τῆς ὅλης φιλοσοφίας (εἶπερ αὐτὸ [sc. the *Categories*] μὲν τῆς λογικῆς ἐστὶν ἀρχὴ πραγματείας, ἡ δὲ λογικὴ τῆς ὅλης προλαμβάνεται δικαίως φιλοσοφίας). More specifically, the *Categories* is placed at the beginning of the *Organon*, preceding *Interpretation* and *Prior Analytics*—cf. 4.28–5.1 (and cf. also 5.5–15): τῶν δὲ ὀργανικῶν τὰ μὲν περὶ αὐτῆς ἐστὶν τῆς ἀποδεικτικῆς μεθόδου (i.e., the *Posterior Analytics*), τὰ δὲ περὶ τῶν πρὸ αὐτῆς, ὡς τὰ Πρότερα ἀναλυτικὰ καὶ τὸ Περὶ ἑρμηνείας καὶ αἱ Κατηγορίαι, τὰ δὲ περὶ τῶν τὴν ἀπόδειξιν ὑποδομένων, ὡς οἱ Τόποι καὶ οἱ Σοφιστικοὶ Ἐλεγχοὶ καὶ αἱ Ῥητορικαὶ τέχναι. See also Hadot, Hoffmann, et al. 1990, 26, 65 (bottom right position of the *Categories*).

<sup>18</sup> Proclus, *In Parm.* 617.23–618.3 (Cousin), uses particularly strong language for the *Parmenides*: πάντα δὴ ἀπλῶς τὰ θεῖα γένη παρασκευὴν ἐνθεῖναι μοι τελείαν εἰς τὴν μετουσίαν τῆς ἐποπτικωτάτης τοῦ Πλάτωνος καὶ μυστικωτάτης θεωρίας, ἣν ἐκφαίνει μὲν ἡμῖν αὐτὸς ἐν τῷ Παρμενίδῃ μετὰ τῆς προσηκούσης τοῖς πράγμασι βαθύτητος ... This also underscores the point made above about the Plato curriculum’s association with “Great Mysteries” and “deeper theological truths.” The following passages are quite different in tone (apart from Olympiodorus); they refer to the theological character of the *Parmenides* by distinguishing it from other dialogues, mostly from the *Timaeus* (for the *Timaeus* and the *Parmenides* summarize, as it were,

becomes especially clear if one considers the Aristotelian and Platonic canons individually. On the one hand, the later Platonist division or classification of Aristotle's writings—only the *αὐτοπρόσωπα* (i.e., the writings in which the author speaks in his own name) are relevant here—ends (having started from “above”) where the students must start, i.e., with the *Organon*.<sup>19</sup> And the *Categories*, placed at the beginning (from the student's point of view) of the *Organon*, is the diametrical opposite of the *Metaphysics*,<sup>20</sup> the only extant example of a theological treatise and the culminating point of the study of Aristotle's philosophy. On the other hand, the Platonic canon's equivalent of the *Metaphysics*, at the very end of the course of study, is the quintessentially theological *Parmenides*.<sup>21</sup> (The other theological dialogues of the twelve-dialogue canon are the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium*.)<sup>22</sup> The *Parmenides*' traditional counterpart at the beginning of the Platonic cycle is the *Alcibiades*.<sup>23</sup> One can speculate that this dialogue, given its theme of self-knowledge, is a more appropriate beginning than, say, one of the logical Platonic dialogues such as the *Cratylus* or the *Theaetetus*,<sup>24</sup> since logic, as being introductory, was considered more specifically Peripatetic—just as theology, as the ultimate science, was thought to be more specifically Platonic (and self-knowledge, one may argue, is a prerequisite for doing theology). Thus the *Alcibiades* (being subsequent to the Aristotelian *Metaphysics*) mirrors the *Categories* as an introduction, just as the *Parmenides* mirrors the *Metaphysics* as a theological culmination. And since the Platonic canon tops the Aristotelian canon, the *Categories* and the *Parmenides*

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the whole of Platonic philosophy): Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.13.14–19 (Diehl); Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* 1.8 (32.15–18 Saffrey-Westerink); Proclus, *In Parm.* 641.15–643.5 (Cousin); Calcidius, *In Tim.* 172 (277.5–8 Waszink); Anonymus, *Prol. Plat.* 26.20–21: ὦν τὸν μὲν Τίμαιον ἐπὶ πᾶσι τοῖς φυσικοῖς, τὸν δὲ Παρμενίδην τοῖς θεολογικοῖς; Olympiodorus, *In Alc.* 11.4–6 (Westerink).

<sup>19</sup> Simplicius, *In Categ.* 4.22–23 (Kalbfleisch): καὶ τῶν αὐτοπροσώπων τὰ μὲν ἐστὶν θεωρητικά, τὰ δὲ πρακτικά, τὰ δὲ ὀργανικά ...

<sup>20</sup> Simplicius, *In Categ.* 4.23–24 (Kalbfleisch): καὶ τῶν θεωρητικῶν τὰ μὲν θεολογικά, ὡς ἡ Μετὰ τὰ φυσικά ...

<sup>21</sup> Anonymus, *Prol. Plat.* 26.20–21 and 43–44 (Westerink): ὦν τὸν μὲν Τίμαιον ἐπὶ πᾶσι τοῖς φυσικοῖς, τὸν δὲ Παρμενίδην τοῖς θεολογικοῖς and καὶ οὕτως ἐπὶ τοὺς τελείους δεῖ ἐλθεῖν, τὸν Τίμαιον φημι καὶ τὸν Παρμενίδην.

<sup>22</sup> Anonymus, *Prol. Plat.* 26.41–43 (Westerink): καὶ εἶθ' οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸν Φαῖδρον καὶ τὸ Συμπόσιον ὡς θεωρητικούς καὶ περὶ θεολογικῶν διαλεγόμενους.

<sup>23</sup> Anonymus, *Prol. Plat.* 26.23–26 (Westerink): πρῶτον τοῖνον δεῖ τὸν Ἀλκιβιάδην πράττειν, διότι ἐν αὐτῷ γινώσκωμεν ἑαυτοὺς, ἄξιον δ' ἐστὶν πρὶν ἢ τὰ ἕξω γνῶναι ἑαυτοὺς γνῶναι. πῶς γὰρ ἔχωμεν ἐκεῖνα γνῶναι ἑαυτοὺς ἀγνωσούντες;

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Westerink's (1990) reconstructed text on p. lxxii (instead of 26.37–39): οὐκοῦν μετὰ τοὺς εἰρημένους διαλόγους δεῖ ἀναγνῶναι τέταρτον τὸν Κρατύλον ὡς περὶ ὀνομάτων διδάσκοντα, εἶτα τὸν Θεαίτητον ὡς περὶ νοημάτων.

constitute the very beginning and the very end of the combined Aristotelian and Platonic curriculum that starts with logic and ends with theology—their extreme position confirming these two texts as being the leading exemplars of logic and theology, respectively.

## 2.2. *The σκοπός of the Categories*

But of greatest importance seems to be a fact that Iamblichus expresses in formulating the σκοπός of the *Categories* and that probably summarizes earlier interpretative currents regarding the *Categories*. For Iamblichus, the *Categories* is περί φωνῶν σημαίνουσῶν πράγματα διὰ μέσων νοημάτων, i.e., about (simple) words (according to the first imposition) that signify things by the intermediary of thoughts.<sup>25</sup> This seemingly small clarification is actually connected to the whole of Iamblichus’ theory of the Platonic canon. For if we look at that canon as reconstructed by Westerink,<sup>26</sup> we realize that, in ascending order, the logical dialogues *Cratylus* and *Theaetetus* are about words (ὀνόματα) and thoughts (νοήματα), respectively, whereas the *Sophist* and the *Politicus* are about physical πράγματα and the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* about theological πράγματα. The context of all this is the acquisition of knowledge of beings (ἡ γνώσις τῶν ὄντων) through theoretical virtue (θεωρητικῆ ἀρετή). Above the dialogues just mentioned, the *Timaeus*, building on the *Sophist* and the *Politicus*, summarizes the physical science of Plato’s philosophical system, and the *Parmenides*, elaborating on the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium* (and the *Philebus* as well) presents its theology. Now, serving ἡ γνώσις τῶν ὄντων, all of this, logic, physics, and metaphysics, words/thoughts and things, both physical and metaphysical,

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Philoponus, *In Categ.* 9.12–15 (Busse): οἱ δὲ ἀκριβέστερον λέγοντες, ὧν εἷς ἐστὶν ὁ Ἰάμβλιχος, φαίνῃ ὡς οὔτε περί νοημάτων μόνων ἐστὶν αὐτῶ ὁ λόγος οὔτε περί φωνῶν μόνων οὔτε περί πραγμάτων μόνων, ἀλλ’ ἐστὶν ὁ σκοπὸς τῶν Κατηγοριῶν περί φωνῶν σημαίνουσῶν πράγματα διὰ μέσων νοημάτων. Cf. also the references given by Lloyd 1990, 50n13. Cf. also Hoffmann 1987. With respect to this definition of the *Categories*’ σκοπός, one could also cite, as a *point de rapprochement* between the two texts, *Parm.* 132B3–4. There it is suggested, in an entirely different context, that each of the εἶδη—i.e., a metaphysical πράγμα, on Iamblichus’ reading—might be a νόημα (located in soul).

<sup>26</sup> Westerink 1990, lxxiii. Cf. his reconstructed text on p. lxxii (instead of 26.34–43): εἶτα ἐρχόμεθα ἐπὶ τὴν γνώσιν τῶν ὄντων, ἥτις διὰ τῆς θεωρητικῆς ἀρετῆς προσγίνεται· ταῦτα δὲ τὰ ὄντα (ἢ ἐν ὀνόμασιν) ἢ ἐν νοήμασι θεωροῦνται ἢ ἐν πράγμασιν. οὐκοῦν μετὰ τοὺς εἰρημένους διαλόγους δεῖ ἀναγνῶναι τέταρτον τὸν Κρατύλον ὡς περί ὀνομάτων διδάσκοντα, εἶτα τὸν Θεαίτητον ὡς περί νοημάτων. εἶτα ἐρχόμεθα μετὰ τούτους εἰς τὸν (Σοφιστὴν καὶ τὸν Πολιτικὸν ὡς θεωρητικούς καὶ) περί φυσικῶν διδάσκοντα(ς)· καὶ εἶθ’ οὕτως ἐπὶ τὸν Φαῖδρον καὶ τὸ Συμπόσιον ὡς θεωρητικούς καὶ περί θεολογικῶν διαλεγόμενους.



is contained in Iamblichus' definition of the σκοπός of the *Categories*. And that Iamblichus means both physical and metaphysical πράγματα when using this term is quite obvious from passages such as Ammonius, *In de int.* 24.22–32 (Busse)<sup>27</sup> (above the physical substances, non-discursive πράγματα coming from the divine are signified by soul-produced words through the mediation of intellect-derived concepts; thus these πράγματα become accessible to discursive reason), and also from Simplicius' discussion of Iamblichus.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, we have already seen that the *Categories* does show up not only in connection with the *Parmenides*, but also in the vicinity of the *Timaeus* and even the *Theaetetus*, a fact more readily understandable after what has just been said. All of this means that the *Categories* is the perfect introductory treatise to the whole of the Platonists' philosophy, inclusive of its highest, theological, part.<sup>29</sup> Therefore we need not be astonished that our authors linked the Aristotelian *Categories* and the Platonic *Parmenides*, and viewed them as the Alpha and the Omega of the later Platonic school tradition. Nor need we be astonished that in addition to their natural connection in the domain of logic, they were both, as based on πράγματα, concurrently metaphysicized in this context as well.

The philosophically all-embracing character of the *Categories* according to Iamblichus' definition—its being about words, thoughts, and things, its being the perfect introduction, and even its metaphysicization—is quite naturally reflected in Porphyry's *Isagoge*, especially in (the reception of) one of its famous passages. This is not surprising given that that passage is in itself (like the whole *Isagoge*) a reaction to problems surrounding the *Categories*, many of them due to an evident lack of (Aristotelian) context. As has already been stated, the study of the *Categories* provides an opportunity not only for a biography of Aristotle, but also for a specific introduction to the entire Aristotelian philosophy; this is preceded by a general introduction

<sup>27</sup> ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴ ταῦτα διήθρωται, προσθετέον ἐξῆς τοῖς βουλομένοις ἀνάγειν ἑαυτοὺς ἐπὶ τὴν τῶν ὄντων θεωρίαν καὶ τὰς ἐξηρημένους τούτων περὶ ὧν ὁ λόγος αἰτίας σκοπεῖν, ὅτι τριῶν ὄντων ὑπὲρ τὰς φυσικὰς οὐσίας τῶν ἀρχικῶν διακόσμων, τοῦ τε θείου καὶ τοῦ νοεροῦ καὶ πρὸς τοῦτοις ἔτι τοῦ ψυχικοῦ, τὰ μὲν πράγματα θεόθεν παράγεσθαι φαμεν, ἀπὸ δὲ τῶν νόων ὑφίστασθαι τὰ νοήματα, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν ψυχῶν τῶν κατὰ τὸ λογικὸν χαρακτηριζομένων καὶ παντὸς σώματος χωριστὴν οὐσίαν ἔχουσῶν ἀποτελεῖσθαι τὰς φωνὰς· νῦν γὰρ ὁ λόγος ἡμῖν οὐ περὶ τῆς τυχούσης φωνῆς, ἀλλὰ περὶ τῆς σημαίνουσας τὰ πράγματα διὰ μέσων τῶν νοημάτων κατὰ τινὰ συνθήκην καὶ ὁμολογίαν αὐτῆς τε σημαίνεσθαι διὰ γραμμάτων δυναμένης ...

<sup>28</sup> Cf. my article cited below in footnote 35.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. in particular Simplicius, *In Categ.* 1.3–7 (Kalbfleisch): πολλοὶ πολλὰς κατεβάλλοντο φροντίδας εἰς τὸ τῶν Κατηγοριῶν τοῦ Ἀριστοτέλους βιβλίον, οὐ μόνον ὅτι προοιμίον ἔστι τῆς ὅλης φιλοσοφίας ..., ἀλλὰ καὶ ὅτι τρόπον τινὰ περὶ ἀρχῶν ἔστι (sc. the *Categories*) τῶν πρώτων ...

to the whole of philosophy in the context of the study of Porphyry’s *Isagoge*. Porphyry’s *Isagoge* (whose second title is *περὶ τῶν πέντε φωνῶν*), taking as a whole its cue from an important and strongly *Categories*-related passage in Aristotle’s *Topics*,<sup>30</sup> leaves famously unanswered what had yet to become one of the most important questions of Western philosophy (Porphyry, *Isagoge* 1.9–14 Busse):

αὐτίκα περὶ τῶν γενῶν τε καὶ εἰδῶν τὸ μὲν εἶτε ὑφέστηκεν εἶτε καὶ ἐν μόναις ψιλαῖς ἐπινοίαις κείται εἶτε καὶ ὑφεστηκότα σώματά ἐστιν ἢ ἀσώματα καὶ πότερον χωριστὰ ἢ ἐν τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς καὶ περὶ ταῦτα ὑφεστῶτα, παραιτήσομαι λέγειν βαθυτάτης οὔσης τῆς τοιαύτης πραγματείας καὶ ἄλλης μείζονος δεομένης ἐξετάσεως.

For example, about genera and species—whether they subsist, whether they actually depend on bare thoughts alone, whether if they actually subsist they are bodies or incorporeal and whether they are separable or are in perceptible items and subsist about them—these matters I shall decline to discuss, such a subject being very deep and demanding another and a larger investigation.

(trans. Barnes)

This question—with possible answers already supplied—of the status of the universals was later answered by nominalism, conceptualism, and both moderate and strong realism. Of course, all three medieval responses are already prefigured in Iamblichus’ contextualization of words, thoughts, and things within his definition of the *σκοπός* of the *Categories*. There is some logic behind this: if the *Categories* is concerned with these three classes, and if therefore the categories can be considered on a nominal, conceptual, and, generally speaking, real level, it is clear that the antecedent question of the status of the predicables must also pivot around these three basic levels. I do not wish to suggest a direct influence of Iamblichus’ definition of the *σκοπός* of the *Categories* on any of the medieval philosophers taking a stance in the debate on the problem of universals. Iamblichus’ definition probably just became a common scholastic heritage that constituted the axiomatic background for any kind of thinking related to the logical foundations and thus to their major pillars in late antiquity and the Middle Ages, i.e., the *Isagoge* and the *Categories*.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *Top.* 1.4 101B17–25 and its distinction of the “predicables”: *πάσα δὲ πρότασις καὶ πᾶν πρόβλημα ἢ ἴδιον ἢ γένος ἢ συμβεβηκός δηλοῖ· καὶ γὰρ τὴν διαφορὰν ὡς οὖσαν γενικὴν ὁμοῦ τῷ γένει τακτέον. ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦ ἴδιου τὸ μὲν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι σημαίνει, τὸ δ’ οὐ σημαίνει, διηρήσθω τὸ ἴδιον εἰς ἄμφω τὰ προειρημένα μέρη, καὶ καλεῖσθω τὸ μὲν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι σημαίνον ὄρος, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν κατὰ τὴν κοινὴν περὶ αὐτῶν ἀποδοθεῖσαν ὀνομασίαν προσαγορευέσθω ἴδιον. δῆλον οὖν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὅτι κατὰ τὴν νῦν διαίρεσιν τέτταρα τὰ πάντα συμβαίνει γίνεσθαι, ἢ ὄρον ἢ ἴδιον ἢ γένος ἢ συμβεβηκός.*

### 2.3. *Textual Echos from the Categories in the Parmenides*

At some point one necessarily wonders whether there is any basis at all for the *rapprochement* of the *Categories* and the *Parmenides* in (the) texts by Aristotle and/or Plato. In a general way—and so as to take up the point about Aristotle’s Platonism made in the last paragraph of section 1—the later Platonists’ interpretative stance in this regard can at least partly be defended if we can trace foreshadowings of Aristotle’s categories in the *Parmenides*. Where, then, are the categories in the *Parmenides* (in its second part)? *Substance/being* (οὐσία) can be found at *Parm.* 141E7–142A1, 142B5–143A2, 143A4–144E7, 155E4–156B5, 161E3–162B7, 163B7–164A1; *quantity* (ποσόν) at *Parm.* 140B6–D7, 149D8–151E2, 156B7–8, 157A8–B3, 161C3–E2, 164A1–2, 164C8–D4, 164E3–165A5; *quality* (ποιόν) at *Parm.* 142B3–5;<sup>31</sup> *relative* (πρός τι) at *Parm.* 154D7–E2<sup>32</sup> (and context); *(any)-where* (ποῦ or ποῦ) at *Parm.* 138A2–B6, 139A3–8, 145B6–E5; *anytime/moment* (ποτέ) at *Parm.* 140E1–141D5, 151E3–155C7; *position* (κεῖσθαι) at *Parm.* 148E4–149A6; *having-on* (ἔχειν) seems, somewhat paradoxically, quite close to the *Parmenides*’ ubiquitous μετέχειν and πεπονθέναι (πάθος γὰρ καλεῖ τὴν μέθεξιν ἄλλου τινός);<sup>33</sup> *doing* (ποιεῖν) forms a pair with *being-affected* (πάσχειν) which can for example be found at *Parm.* 139E7–140B5 (for the standard sense “to have the character (of) x or y” Plato prefers the perfect forms of the verb),<sup>34</sup> 156C4–5 (πάσχειν), 157B6 (πάσχειν). It should be noted that the five greatest genera of the *Sophist*, sometimes called the “Platonic categories,” are even more readily apparent in the *Parmenides*, and one can hold that the basic “categories” of Absolute (καθ’ ἑαυτό) and Relative (πρός τι) account for the whole structure of the *Parmenides*.

To analyze the intertwined histories of the interpretation of the *Categories* and the *Parmenides* in late antiquity may help us understand in depth the Platonist metaphysization of these texts, a fact that seems counterintuitive—to say the least—to some modern scholars, and remains mysterious to most. To the best of my knowledge, there is virtually no basic research on this

<sup>31</sup> οὐκοῦν ἔν ἐι ἔστιν, φαμέν, τὰ συμβαίνοντα περὶ αὐτοῦ, ποῖά ποτε τυγχάνει ὄντα, διομολογητέα αὐτά· οὐχ οὕτω;

<sup>32</sup> οὐκοῦν τό γε ἔλαττον διαφέρειν ἡλικία πρὸς τι ἢ πρότερον νεώτερον γίγνοιτ’ ἂν ἢ ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν πρὸς ἐκεῖνα πρὸς ἃ ἦν πρεσβύτερον πρότερον;

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Proclus, *In Parm.* 1196.24–29 (Cousin): ὅρα δὲ πῶς ἀσφαλῶς οὐκ εἶπε τὸ ἐν πεπονθέναι τὸ ἐν, ἀλλὰ μηδὲν ἄλλο πεπονθέναι, πληρὸν τὸ εἶναι· τοῦτο (sc. τὸ ἐν) γὰρ ἐστὶ (sc. τὸ ἐν) καὶ οὐ πέπονθε· πᾶν γὰρ τὸ ὅτιον πεπονθὸς πολλὰ ἐστὶ· πάθος γὰρ καλεῖ τὴν μέθεξιν ἄλλου τινός.

<sup>34</sup> πεπονθέναι, πεπονθός etc. are so frequent in the second part of the *Parmenides* that they need not be listed exhaustively. Cf. also the preceding footnote.

topic, and it is not really established as a topic yet. The following section will discuss relevant texts by Clement of Alexandria, Alcinous, Atticus, and Proclus. Obviously, much more would have to be done for a complete overview of the topic. However, it may be possible, even from such a limited survey, to draw some general conclusions about the interesting parallel treatment in late antiquity of two entirely different, but virtually equally authoritative texts, and thereby to gain a better perspective on the late antique reception of Aristotelian and Platonic texts.

3. TESTIMONIES TO THE ANCIENT JOINT  
READING OF THE *CATEGORIES* AND THE *PARMENIDES*  
(READING THE *CATEGORIES* INTO THE *PARMENIDES*)<sup>35</sup>

3.1. *Clement of Alexandria*

Clement of Alexandria makes no explicit reference to the *Parmenides*. But his testimony is nevertheless relevant in this context. In a recently published essay, D. Runia shows that the *Parmenides* influences Clement’s thought, a fact obvious at *Strom.* 4.25.156.1–2<sup>36</sup> and 5.12.81.4–6.<sup>37</sup> In the latter passage, as Runia says:

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<sup>35</sup> Sections 3.1–4 correspond to Bechtle 2010. For a joint reading of the *Categories* and the *Parmenides* that turns things around so that the *Parmenides* is subsidiary to the reading and interpretation of the *Categories* (i.e., reading the *Parmenides* into the *Categories*), cf. Bechtle 2008. Simplicius’ sophisticated use of the *Parmenides* as part of the exegesis of the *Categories* is of course a far cry from a simple “joint reading” motivated by the wish/necessity to find the ten Aristotelian categories in the second part of Plato’s *Parmenides*. Instead, it reflects in a typical way the very creative further development of Platonist philosophy out of exegetical issues (in combination with the ideological framework surrounding them) that grow ever more complex and diverse as the discussion of them continues and as the emphasis of the interpreter changes.

<sup>36</sup> ὁ μὲν οὖν θεὸς ἀναπόδεικτος ὧν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπισημονικός, ὁ δὲ υἱὸς σοφία τέ ἐστι καὶ ἐπιστήμη καὶ ἀλήθεια καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα τούτῳ συγγενή, καὶ δὴ καὶ ἀπόδειξιν ἔχει καὶ διέξοδον. πάσαι δὲ αἱ δυνάμεις τοῦ πνεύματος συλλήβδην μὲν ἐν τι πράγμα γενόμεναι συντελοῦσιν εἰς τὸ αὐτό, τὸν υἱόν, ἀπαρέμφατος δὲ ἐστὶ τῆς περὶ ἐκάστης αὐτοῦ τῶν δυνάμεων ἐννοίας. καὶ δὴ οὐ γίνεται ἀτεχνῶς ἐν ἑν ἑν, οὐδὲ πολλὰ ὡς μέρη ὁ υἱός, ἀλλ’ ὡς πάντα ἑν. ἔθθεν καὶ πάντα· κύκλος γάρ ὁ αὐτὸς πασῶν τῶν δυνάμεων εἰς ἑν εἰλουμένων καὶ ἐνουμένων.

<sup>37</sup> καὶ μὴν ὁ δυσμεταχειριστότατος περὶ θεοῦ λόγος οὗτός ἐστιν. ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἀρχὴ παντός πράγματος δυσεύτερος, πάντως που ἢ πρώτη καὶ πρεσβυτάτη ἀρχὴ δύσδεικτος, ἥτις καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν αἰτία τοῦ γενέσθαι καὶ γενομένους εἶναι. πῶς γὰρ ἂν εἴη ῥητὸν ὁ μῆτε γένος ἐστὶ μῆτε διαφορὰ μῆτε εἶδος μῆτε ἄτομον μῆτε ἀριθμός, ἀλλὰ μῆδὲ συμβεβηκός τι μῆδὲ ᾧ συμβεβηκέν τι. οὐκ ἂν δὲ ὅλον εἴποι τις αὐτὸν ὀρθῶς· ἐπὶ μεγέθει γὰρ τάττεται τὸ ὅλον καὶ ἔστι τῶν ὅλων πατήρ. οὐδὲ μὴν μέρη τινὰ αὐτοῦ λεκτέον· ἀδιαίρετον γὰρ τὸ ἑν, διὰ τοῦτο δὲ καὶ ἄπειρον, οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἀδιεξίτητον νοούμενον, ἀλλὰ κατὰ τὸ ἀδιάστατον καὶ μὴ ἔχον πέρας, καὶ τοῖνον ἀσηχημάτιστον καὶ ἀνωνόμαστον.

Clement uses the dialectical argumentation of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* to develop a negative theology of absolute transcendence. There is nothing in what Clement writes that Philo would have disagreed with. But contrary to what we found in Philo's case, we may be certain that by the second half of the second century the *Parmenides* was being used for purposes of negative theology. There is nothing surprising in this, for, as was pointed out by Lilla ...<sup>38</sup> there is an excellent parallel for the Clementine passage in the Middle Platonist handbook of Alcinous (cf. Didask. §10, 165.5–7, 12–16 Whittaker-Louis). This work, however, cannot be dated with any accuracy, which makes Clement's evidence all the more valuable for the historian.<sup>39</sup>

When discussing Proclus' opinion in section 3.4, we will understand in more detail in which way the Aristotelian categories contribute to the context of a negative theology of absolute transcendence that is derived from the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides*. For the moment, it may suffice to give special emphasis to the very fact that Aristotelian categories or rather categorial language<sup>40</sup> are present in a Clementine passage whose negative approach to God is strongly reminiscent of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* (cf. also the ease of the transition from God/Father to One in *καὶ ἔστι τῶν ὄλων πατήρ. οὐδὲ μὴν μέρη τινὰ αὐτοῦ λεκτέον· ἀδιαίρετον γὰρ τὸ ἓν ...*). For, as Runia has already noted, Clement, at *Strom.* 5.12.81.5 in particular, makes the point that *various Aristotelian categories cannot be applied to him* (i.e., God). More precisely, Clement states that God's not being (Aristotelian categorial) *γένος, διαφορά, εἶδος* etc. is related to his (*Parmenides*-influenced) apophatic character. Thus, Clement can be counted as an early witness to the existence of a contemporary or probably earlier independent Platonist tradition, by which he is influenced, and which combines exegetically Aristotelian categorial language and the Platonic *Parmenides*.

<sup>38</sup> See Lilla 1971, 214–215.

<sup>39</sup> Runia 2010, 185.

<sup>40</sup> One may argue that terms like *γένος, διαφορά, εἶδος, συμβεβηκός* can be linked to the *Categories* treatise and hence count as “categorial” only by taking into account Porphyry's use of this terminology in the *Isagoge* (the *Isagoge* being conceived as an introduction to the *Categories*). But this terminology is above all the terminology of the Aristotelian *Topics*. And not only is the *Topics* traditionally closely associated with and parallel to the *Categories* treatise, but the latter even presupposes the former (just as it presupposed the *Isagoge* once Porphyry had written it). Cf. Aristotle, *Top.* 101B17–25 and the distinction of the predicables: *πάσα δὲ πρότασις καὶ πᾶν πρόβλημα ἢ ἴδιον ἢ γένος ἢ συμβεβηκός δηλοῖ· καὶ γὰρ τὴν διαφορὰν ὡς οὐσαν γενικὴν ὁμοῦ τῶν γένει τακτέον. ἐπεὶ δὲ τοῦ ἴδιου τὸ μὲν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι σημαίνει, τὸ δ' οὐ σημαίνει, δηρήσθω τὸ ἴδιον εἰς ἄμφω τὰ προειρημένα μέρη, καὶ καλείσθω τὸ μὲν τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι σημαίνον ὄρος, τὸ δὲ λοιπὸν κατὰ τὴν κοινὴν περὶ αὐτῶν ἀποδοθεῖσαν ὀνομασίαν προσαγορευέσθω ἴδιον. δῆλον οὖν ἐκ τῶν εἰρημένων ὅτι κατὰ τὴν νῦν διαίρεσιν τέτταρα τὰ πάντα συμβαίνει γίνεσθαι, ἢ ὄρον ἢ ἴδιον ἢ γένος ἢ συμβεβηκός.*

### 3.2. *Alcinous*

Alcinous writes in the second century CE (*Epit.* 6.159.43–44 Whittaker): *καὶ μὴν τὰς δέκα κατηγορίας ἔν τε τῷ Παρμενίδῃ καὶ ἐν ἄλλοις ὑπέδειξεν* (i.e., Plato) ... (“Furthermore, Plato indicates the ten categories both in the *Parmenides* and in other dialogues ...”) This short note rather bafflingly puts Plato’s *Parmenides* and Aristotle’s *Categories* in the most direct relation to one another and proves that there was a discussion about the anticipation of the ten Aristotelian categories in some of Plato’s dialogues, and especially in the *Parmenides*. These ten Aristotelian—and, for Alcinous, Platonic—categories are subordinated to the Old Academic basic double category of Absolute and Relative, but Alcinous does not use the *Sophist* to find any more (purely) Platonic “categories.” This probably means that to him the ten (Aristotelian) categories are by themselves sufficient (and sufficiently Platonic). Thus, Alcinous does not merely read Aristotelian treatises (like the *Categories*) “back into” Platonic dialogues (like the *Timaeus*, the *Theaetetus*, and the *Parmenides*)—but he actually assumes that Plato already had at his disposal a full-blown Aristotelian theory of categories. This amounts to nothing less than the claim that the Aristotelian theory of categories is really Platonic. But the assumption that in one of his dialogues, Plato anticipates Aristotle’s conception of categories—which makes of Aristotle a faithful and even orthodox Platonist who only further elucidates and confirms the master’s doctrines—is, although acceptable to many Platonists, still strong enough to be a subject of dispute already in Antiquity.

### 3.3. *Atticus*

Alcinous’ somewhat younger contemporary Atticus writes (*frg.* 2.136–138 des Places): *κἄν τὰς δέκα δὲ κατηγορίας παρὰ σοῦ μάθῃ τις δεκαχῆ διανέμειν τὰγαθόν, τί ταῦτα πρὸς τὴν Πλάτωνος γνώμην τὰ διδάγματα;* (“And if someone learns from you that the ten categories display the Good tenfold, what will these teachings contribute to Plato’s tenets?”) It is very likely that this does imply a criticism of Platonists like Alcinous, and perhaps even of Alcinous himself, who adduce Aristotle in their interpretation of Plato; in any case, it is another sign of the author’s radical anti-Peripateticism. This criticism is more likely than not the exception, and Alcinous’ stance seems to be more standard. If this is the case, and if we can therefore also put aside Eudorus (around the turn of our era) and Nicostratus (ca. second half of the second century CE), whose Platonism is militant insofar as it mostly seems to preclude a positive appreciation of Aristotle, then

Porphyrus's positive attitude in his Aristotle commentaries<sup>41</sup>—reflecting his well-known harmonization of the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle—is by no means unprecedented. This is confirmed by other pre-Porphyrusian and pre-Plotinian philosophical writers. They trace back Aristotle's *Categories* not only to the *Parmenides*, but also to the *Timaeus*<sup>42</sup> or the *Theaetetus*.<sup>43</sup> It probably helped the reception of Aristotle's treatise that the number of categories was ten, a traditionally perfect and therefore attractive number, recognized by the Pythagoreans and by Plato.

### 3.4. Proclus

Not really astonishingly, Proclus, however, sides with Atticus' criticism of philosophers like Alcinoüs in his discussion of whether the *Parmenides* already contains the *Categories*. The relevant passage, in which he does not agree with those who find the ten categories in the *Parmenides* is *In Parm.* 1083.28–1084.10.

καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἄλλοις παραλείπει πάντα,

ὅσοι τὰ δύο εἶδη τοῦ ποσοῦ, τὸ τε διωρισμένον καὶ τὸ συνεχές, ἀποφάσκεισθαι τοῦ ἑνὸς εἰρήκασιν· οὔτε γὰρ δύο μόνα εἶδη τοῦ ποσοῦ κατὰ τε τοὺς Πυθαγορείους καὶ Πλάτωνα, πανταχοῦ καὶ αὐτὸν βοῶντα τρεῖς εἶναι τὰς περὶ τὸ ποσὸν ἐπιστήμας, ἀριθμητικὴν, μετρητικὴν, στατικὴν, οὔτε πάντα ὅσα παρείληπται τῆς τοῦ ποσοῦ φύσεώς ἐστίν, οἷον τὸ σχῆμα, τὸ κινεῖσθαι, τὸ ἐστάναι·

ἢ ὅσοι τὰς δέκα κατηγορίας ἐν τούτοις ἀνελίττουσιν· οὐ γὰρ ταῦτα μόνον ὑπὸ τὰς δέκα κατηγορίας, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἄλλα πολλὰ ἂν εἶποι τις ὧν οὐδεμίαν ὁ Παρμενίδης πεποιήται μνήμην·

<sup>41</sup> To be sure, insofar as I think that Eudorus' and Nicostratus' sometimes ground-breaking work on the *Categories* has contributed to shape later Aristotle commentary and can despite its negative and at times even destructive character be addressed as "commentary," Porphyry's *Categories* commentaries are (as commentaries) indebted to Eudorus and Nicostratus.

<sup>42</sup> Plutarch, *An. procr.* 1023E–F finds the *Categories* in the *Timaeus* (37A–B): ἐν τούτοις ἅμα καὶ τῶν δέκα κατηγοριῶν ποιούμενος ὑπογραφήν ἔτι μᾶλλον τοῖς ἐφεξῆς διασαφεῖ. 'λόγος' γὰρ φησὶν 'ἀληθῆς, ὅταν μὲν περὶ τὸ αἰσθητὸν γίνηται καὶ ὁ τοῦ θατέρου κύκλος ὀρθὸς ἴων εἰς πάσαν αὐτοῦ τὴν ψυχὴν διαγγεῖλη, δόξαι καὶ πίστει γίνονται βέβαιοι καὶ ἀληθεῖς· ὅταν δ' αὖ περὶ τὸ λογιστικὸν ἦ καὶ ὁ τοῦ ταύτου κύκλος εὐτροχος ὧν αὐτὰ μὴνύση, ἐπιστήμη ἐξ ἀνάγκης ἀποτελεῖται· τούτω δ' ἐν ᾧ τῶν ὄντων ἐγγίγνεσθον, ἐάν ποτέ τις αὐτὸ ἄλλο πλὴν ψυχὴν προσεῖπῃ, πᾶν μᾶλλον ἢ τὸ ἀληθές ἐρεῖ.' The article by Hoffmann (1980) proves that reading the categories into the *Timaeus* was a fruitful strategy in Iamblichus' time, too. Karfik (2004, 48–51) hints at the relevance of the *Phaedo* in the *Timaeus* context of time.

<sup>43</sup> The anonymous *Commentarius in Platonis Theaetetum* (68.7–22 Sedley-Bastianini) finds the categories in the *Theaetetus*: οὕτως καὶ τὰλλα πάντα ἐπιδέχεται τὰς ἐναντίας κατηγορίας διὰ τὸ μὴδὲν εἶναι ἓν, τοῦτ' ἔστιν μὴ ἔχειν ὠρισμένην ποσότητα.

ἢ εἴ τινες τὰ πέντε γένη θρυλλοῦσι τοῦ ὄντος· καὶ ταῦτα μὲν ἀπέφησε τοῦ ἐνός, τὴν οὐσίαν, τὸ ταῦτόν, τὸ ἕτερον, τὴν κίνησιν, τὴν στάσιν, οὐ μέντοι ταῦτα μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ σχῆμα καὶ τὸ ὅλον καὶ τὸν χρόνον καὶ τὸν ἀριθμὸν καὶ τὸ ὅμοιον καὶ τὸ ἀνόμοιον, ἃ μὴ ἔστι γένη τοῦ ὄντος.

I do not bother to refute those,

first, who have said that what is being denied of the One are the two classes of quantity, the discrete and the continuous; for one thing, according to the Pythagoreans and Plato there are not just two classes of quantity, since he makes it quite clear in various places (*Philebus* 55C) that the classes of knowledge concerning quantity are three—arithmetic, mensuration, and statics; nor are all the things quoted of the nature of quantity, as for instance, shape, motion, or rest.

Nor do I have much regard for those who seek to ferret out the ten categories in this passage; for not only the propositions here can be brought under the ten categories, but there are many other things also that one could mention of which Parmenides has made no use.

Or again, if some people want to allege that it is the five genera of being which are being made use of here; certainly he had denied these of the One, namely Being, Sameness, Otherness, Motion and Rest, but he is not denying these alone, but also shape and wholeness and time and number and likeness and unlikeness, which are not genera of Being.

(trans. Dillon and Morrow 1987, 433–434)

Three distinct opinions are reported in this text (with reference to Proclus’ treatment of the first hypothesis). The holders of the first opinion, taken by John Dillon in the footnotes to his translation to be “unidentifiable, but presumably Middle Platonic,”<sup>44</sup> answer the question of whether all that exists is denied of the One, or not all, by stating that what is being denied of the One are the two species of the quantum (ποσόν), the discrete and the continuous. Kevin Corrigan says that “Proclus’ refutation of the view (in relation to his treatment of hypothesis 1) that what is denied of the One are the two classes of quantity, the discrete and the continuous, hitherto imputed to unknown Middle Platonic sources, might also reflect at least part of the view of Plotinus (and Porphyry).”<sup>45</sup> In the seventh chapter of his *De communi mathematica scientia*, Iamblichus gives us a very detailed account of the discrete and the continuous. The larger context is the determination of the scientific object appropriate to each mathematical science (note how Proclus

<sup>44</sup> Dillon and Morrow 1987, 433n57.

<sup>45</sup> Corrigan 2010, 46.



mentions arithmetic, mensuration, and statics!). It becomes clear that the discrete (juxtaposed) is πλῆθος, and the continuous (unified), μέγεθος. And limited μέγεθος, i.e., line, surface, solid, is measurable, whereas limited πλῆθος, i.e., number, is countable. It becomes very clear in Iamblichus that these “species of the quantum” (in Proclus’ words) are two (the third, statics, is left aside) different modes of conceiving the whole cosmos, the order, structure and harmony of the all. And if one can conceive the whole cosmos according to these species of the quantum, we can much better understand the reason why someone should claim that what is being denied of the One are the two species of the quantum (ποσόν), the discrete and the continuous. But who is this someone? Certainly not Iamblichus himself. We know enough of his *Parmenides* interpretation to assert that what he quotes here is not relevant to it. Then it must be his source. It must suffice here to say that working on Iamblichus’ *De communi mathematica scientia* I have determined that this source is Nicomachus of Gerasa, who elaborates on none other than Aristotle himself. If I am right, this would mean that Proclus alludes to “Nicomachean” *Parmenides* interpreters. This hypothesis is backed by the fact that the next *Parmenides* exegetes Proclus takes on are people like Alcinoüs.

This leads us to the holders of the second opinion, who do not refer to only one category, i.e., the ποσόν, but to all of them indistinctly. John Dillon says: “That it is the categories that are being denied of the One in the First Hypothesis (and asserted in the Second) is presented by Proclus (*In Parmenidem* 1083.37 ff.) as being the view of some earlier (probably Middle-Platonic) commentators, a view which he rejects himself.”<sup>46</sup> In the footnotes to his translation he identifies these commentators as follows: “Albinus could be included here, on the basis of *Did.*, ch. 6, p. 159, 34f. Hermann.”<sup>47</sup> Kevin Corrigan agrees, and I agree, too. I do not wish to discuss the holders of the third opinion who “allege that it is the five genera of being which are being made use of here,” because this would take us away from the intersections of the Aristotelian *Categories* and the Platonic *Parmenides* we are seeking and towards the intersection of the “Platonic categories” and the *Parmenides*.

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<sup>46</sup> Dillon 1993, 85.

<sup>47</sup> Dillon and Morrow 1987, 433n58 (the passage is 159.43f., not 159.34f.).

#### 4. SUMMARY

If we summarize what we have up to now, we see an early Church Father, Clement of Alexandria, who makes use of the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* and of Aristotelian categorial language in the context of an apophatic theology. Then we have a second century philosopher, Alcinous, who in his *Didaskalikos* finds the categories in the Platonic *Parmenides*. And his slightly younger contemporary Atticus criticizes him for that on the grounds of Platonic orthodoxy. Roughly three centuries after Alcinous we have Proclus who cites and refutes in his *Parmenides* commentary various views relating to what exactly should be denied of the One in the first hypothesis. The second view is one that might have been held by people like Alcinous, which would give us a context in which to place his rather baffling remark in the *Didaskalikos*. According to this view, Alcinous, or the people whose opinion he represents, would have drawn on the Aristotelian *Categories* when discussing, in the context of the first hypothesis, the question of whether all that exists is denied of the One, or whether what is denied of the One is not all, but the ten categories. Proclus’ refutation of this view is interesting insofar as the ten categories seem to him to be inclusive of *more* than what is mentioned by Parmenides. In other words, this interpretation is to Proclus’ mind not a close enough reading of the text. That Proclus is not opposed *in principle* to reading the categories in the *Parmenides* is also confirmed by his refutation of the first opinion. For, according to Proclus, stating that what is being denied of the One are the two species of the one “category” *ποσόν* means ignoring, firstly, that the discrete and the continuous do not make up the entire *ποσόν*, and, secondly, that Parmenides’ list contains things incompatible with the nature of quantity. Again, Proclus has no fundamental objections to applying categories and concepts such as quantity to the Platonic text, but the suggestions of his predecessors just do not do justice to a close reading of the text.

One can perhaps conclude that the application of Aristotle’s categories to the *Parmenides* was a common procedure in Platonism, and apparently still influential enough to be refuted by Proclus in the fifth century. As I tried to show in another essay,<sup>48</sup> the intriguing link between the Aristotelian *Categories* and the Platonic *Parmenides* has survived even the fifth century and is once again made fruitful by Simplicius in the sixth. Since Simplicius does not comment on the *Parmenides*, but on the *Categories*, we do not have

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. my article cited above in footnote 35.

there another instance of reading the *Categories* into the *Parmenides*, but instead the *Parmenides* is subsidiary to the reading and interpretation of the *Categories*.

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CHRISTIANS AGAINST MATTER:  
A BOUQUET FOR BISHOP BERKELEY

Mark Edwards

In a volume dedicated to John Turner, an examination of late antique conjectures on the origin of the world requires no apology, even if it contributes to a narrative in which most of the protagonists are Christians, orthodox in later eyes as in their own. The genesis of the doctrine of creation out of nothing has been canvassed with learning and acumen in a number of recent studies;<sup>1</sup> the quest for antecedents to Bishop Berkeley's expulsion of matter from the philosophic lexicon remains, to my knowledge, sadly incomplete. In this essay, my aim is not only to supplement the work done by previous scholars on both subjects, but to combine them, since it seems to me that the second is a logical appendix to the first. Constraints of space forbid me to make more than parenthetical reference to Gnostic thinkers, though the relevance of the discussion to Gnostic studies should be obvious enough. The same constraints entail that even my handling of such topics as I have been able to address will never be more than promissory.

1. THINGS WHICH ARE NOT

It is widely agreed that neither the Old Testament nor the New contains a text which unequivocally asserts the creation of the world from nothing. The opening verses of Genesis imply that before the heaven and the earth as we know them were framed there was neither nothing nor something, but a *mêlée* akin to the chaos which precedes the emergence of the first divine beings in the *Theogony* of Hesiod:

Gen 1:1–2: In the beginning, God made the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form and void (*tohu-bohu*), and darkness was upon the face of the deep.<sup>2</sup>

Does this imply that the *tohu-bohu* was the first creation, to be succeeded by God's shaping of the elements? Or should we assume that the opening

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<sup>1</sup> Ehrhardt 1964; Young 1991; May 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of ancient texts are my own.

verse is merely the superscription, and that the narrative commences in verse 2 with the anarchic state that preceded the imposition of order by divine command? To the author and his first readers this was more than a cosmogony, since it celebrates the omnipotence of the same God who has sworn to defend his people from the violence of their lawless and turbulent neighbours. When Jeremiah foresees the destruction of Israel under the image of a return to *tohu-bohu* (4:23), this is a cataclysm that she has brought upon herself by her disobedience. Conversely, the obedience of the faithful is sustained by the recollection of God's power to bring forth more than was foreshadowed in the beginning:

My child, I pray thee, behold the heaven and the earth and all that is in them, and understand that God made them from things that are not, and the generation of man. (2 Macc 7:28)

This is the exhortation of a mother to her children who are suffering fatal tortures on account of their fidelity to the Law. If there is any presage of resurrection here, it is heavily veiled; by contrast, in the Christian epistle to the Hebrews, faith in the resurrection (11:19, 35) is underwritten by the assurance that it is the Father of Jesus Christ who causes things that are seen to come into being from things that do not yet appear (1:3). For Paul, the twin portents of the resurrection are the begetting of Isaac from the dead loins of Abraham (Rom 4:17–19) and the evocation of the first light from darkness:

For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, has shone forth in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God by the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Cor 4:6)

This dictum presupposes the existence of the darkness before the light, as does the author of the Fourth Gospel when he writes, “The light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not apprehended it” (John 1:5). If there is a strict doctrine of creation out of nothing among the Jews of New Testament times, it is found in Philo (ca. 40 BCE–ca. 40 CE), but parenthetically and by implication. His frequent references to God's creation *ek mē ontōn* are as ambiguous as the statement in 2 Maccabees which they echo; on the other hand, attempts to show that he posits the existence of some matter before creation have been rebutted by J.C. O'Neill, who demonstrates that the *ousia* to which he alludes is that of the intelligible, not the physical, universe.<sup>3</sup> When, on the other hand he intimates in his treatise *On God (De Deo)*,<sup>4</sup> that if matter were not divinely preserved it would fall back “to nothing,”

<sup>3</sup> O'Neill 2002, 459–460.

<sup>4</sup> O'Neill 2002, 460, citing the Armenian treatise *On God* 7–8.

the logical implication is that matter comes originally from nothing. Since Philo accepts the Greek commonplace that nothing comes spontaneously from nothing, it would seem, as O'Neill contends, that he holds a doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* by the will of God.

Philo effects a more consistent fusion of Greek and biblical thought than the Christian apologists, who profess to be exposing the insolency of the Greek schools and their unavowed dependence on the scriptures. Justin Martyr (*floruit* 150) echoes the *Timaeus* when he writes that God, being good, has fashioned all things from formless matter, but the Psalmist has ousted Plato when we hear in the following sentence that the object of creation was to enable meritorious humans to reign with him in heaven (*1Apol.* 59). Justin declares no opinion as to the provenance of this formless matter; his pupil Tatian, boasts, however, that those who have embraced the Word will not believe in a second, unoriginated principle:

I have undertaken, by sending forth my voice, to order the inchoate matter in you. Just as the Word, begotten in the beginning, begot for himself in turn this creation of ours, having fashioned the matter, so I too, having been reborn in the likeness of the Word and having achieved the apprehension of truth, am giving new form to matter of the same kind in its confused state. For matter is not unoriginated, like God, nor is it of equal power to God by virtue of being unoriginated, but is generated; nor is it generated by any other, but solely by the fashioner of all things who sent it forth. (*Orat.* 5.3, ed. Whittaker)

Athenagoras (ca. 170) concurs: "God is ingenerate and eternal, matter generated and perishable" (*Legatio* 4.2). Both Tatian and Athenagoras could be said to hold a doctrine of creation out of nothing, insofar as they assign no substrate to matter and deny it to be eternal. If, however, we make the use of the pronoun *ouden* (nothing) a test of their adherence to this doctrine, neither will satisfy this canon. If we can trust Hippolytus (ca. 220), the first Christian to teach expressly that all creation proceeds from nothing wrote a generation earlier than any of the apologists, though he found a more limited following in the Church:

When, he says, there was nothing, no matter, no existence, no non-existence, no simple, no compound, no intelligible, no perceptible, no human, no angel, no God ... the non-existent God—whom Aristotle calls the thought of thought, but these the non-existent—without intelligence or perception, without will or design, impassibly and without desire, elected to make a world ... Thus then, the non-existent God made a non-existent world from those things that were not.

(Basilides *apud* Hippolytus, *Ref.* 7.21.1 and 4, ed. Marcovich)

Quotations from Basilides in Hippolytus come with a caveat, since Irenaeus (ca. 180) gives quite a different account of him, and there is reason to fear



that a parody of the prologue to the Fourth Gospel has been foisted upon him by an ingenious controversialist.<sup>5</sup> If we set him aside, the first proponent of creation out of nothing is Theophilus, bishop of Antioch (ca. 175), who purports to be explaining the faith of all Christians to a sympathetic pagan:

And they (the prophets) have taught us that he made all things out of those that are not. For nothing was coeval with God; rather, being his own place and in need of nothing and existing before the ages he wished to make humans so that he might be known to them. After all, it is that which is generated that is in need, whereas the ingenerate is in need of nothing ... (quoting Gen 1:1–2). This is what the divine scripture teaches at the outset, that matter is in some way generated, having been generated by God, and that from it God has made and fashioned the cosmos. (Autol. 2.10, ed. Grant)

But if he was the first to espouse the doctrine, does it follow that he was also the first to give expression to it? In the following section, I shall propose that it had already been broached, though only to be rejected, by an author whom Theophilus is known to have handled roughly in a lost work.

## 2. MATTER AND EVIL

Greek Christians were innovating on the scriptures if they affirmed that the world had been created *ex oudenos*, “from nothing,” rather than *ex ouk ontōn*, “from things that are not.” This choice was denied to speakers of Latin in antiquity by the poverty of their language, which contained no present participle of the verb “to be.” The cardinal text, 2 Macc 7:28, was inevitably translated as a testimony to creation out of nothing:

*Peto nate, aspicias in caelum et terram et ad omnia quae in eis sunt, et intelligas quia ex nihilo Deus fecit illa et hominum genus.*

When Tertullian (ca. 210) undertook to refute Hermogenes’ doctrine that the Creator had worked upon pre-existent matter, his Latin cannot tell us whether his adversary had contrasted matter with “things that are not” or with “nothing” when he set out an exhaustive triad of possibilities:

This primordial and lightless darkness the worst of painters has coloured by laying it down as a premiss that the Lord made all things (a) from himself, or (b) from nothing or (c) from something else. His aim was, having shown that he could not have made them from himself or from nothing, he should thus

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<sup>5</sup> See especially the last words of John 1:3: *oude hen*, translated in Latin as *nihil*. Cf. Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.8.5 on the Naassenes.

establish the truth of the remaining alternative, viz. that he made them from something and that this something was therefore matter.

(*Herm.* 2.1, ed. Gerlo)

It is more probable that Hermogenes wrote “from nothing,” since “matter” and “that which is not” were synonymous rather than antithetical locutions for many of his fellow-Greeks. If this was the case, moreover, we have a ready explanation for the usage of Theophilus, the author of a lost work against Hermogenes, who, as we have seen, departs from scriptural precedent when he asseverates that the world was made from nothing. We have seen that in his extant work *Ad Autolyicum*, Theophilus appeals to the commonplace that God is in need of nothing, and infers by rhetorical sleight of hand that nothing was all that he needed for the creation of the world. When, therefore, we encounter a similar argument in Tertullian’s treatise against Hermogenes, it is not unreasonable to surmise that he had found it in his Greek precursor’s debellation of the same adversary:

For when he denies that matter was either generated or made, I find that in consequence the name “Lord” does not belong to God in respect of matter, inasmuch as, having no origin it had no author and hence was necessarily free (*Herm.* 3.7) ... And thus it was not that matter itself had any need of God, but that it offered itself to God in his need, rich, copious and generous to one who, as I suppose, was its inferior, lacking strength or aptitude to create from nothing. (8.1)

The first alternative broached by Hermogenes, only to be rejected, is that God created all things from himself. This error is not expressly contradicted by Theophilus in his surviving manifesto for Christianity; if Gerhard May (1994) is correct, however, the doctrine of creation out of nothing is a Christian prophylactic against the teaching of certain Gnostics who, by making matter an efflux from the divine *pleroma*, implied that God himself was subject to folly and vicissitude. If Hermogenes entertained the same fears, he resolved them by embracing the view of the Marcionites and the Sethians, who made matter coeval with the Godhead,<sup>6</sup> against both Basilides and the Valentinian school which derives the substrate of the world from the tears of Wisdom (Irenaeus, *Haer.* 1.1–2). Tertullian, like every catholic Christian of this epoch, would have shrunk from any system that appeared to seek the origin of evil in God himself. To make common cause with Hermogenes,

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<sup>6</sup> The *interpretatio graeca* (Plotinus, *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 10) of such texts as *Hyp. Arch.* (NHC II,4 87.12–15), though *Zost.* (NHC VIII,1 9.16) may imply that matter was an emanation from Sophia.

however, would be to admit that, as the world has been fashioned from a mischievous substrate, it was evil from the beginning:

Suppose now that we believe matter to be superlatively evil, by nature of course, just as we believe God to be superlatively good, again by nature. It will necessarily follow that the nature is fixed and immutable ... since if nature in matter is to be converted from evil to good, it was possible for nature in God to be converted from good to evil. (Herm. 12.1)

Plotinus (204/5–270) was of much the same opinion. Whether he held that matter was the offspring of soul, its coeternal substrate or an effluence of the intellectual matter which precedes the forms as the genus precedes the species,<sup>7</sup> he never renounced his doctrine that the voluntary commerce of soul with matter is the source of evil. By contrast, Alexander of Aphrodisias (*floruit* 180 CE) had maintained that it is the presence in a free agent of *to mē on*, of the unconverted substrate which is not something and hence might be more things than one, that enables him to shape the open future (*Fat.* 172.10 ff.). As a Peripatetic he was bound to grant ontological primacy to the concrete entity, conceding only a nominal objectivity to the substrate and the *eidōs* that informs it. Augustine likewise holds that God creates body and matter coevally from nothing, matter being the logical precondition of embodiment, as making a sound is the logical precondition to singing a note:

Who is of such keen intelligence as to be able to perceive without great pains in what sense the sound is prior to the singing? Singing, after all, is sound with form, and while nothing can exist without form, it is impossible that anything can be formed which does not yet exist. In the same way, matter is prior to that which comes into being from it, not in the sense that it is itself the cause, being rather that which comes into being, and not at any previous point in time. (Augustine, *Conf.* 12.29, ed. O'Donnell)

Christians cannot maintain, with the Platonists, that evil is a necessary concomitant of material existence. Whatever God creates out of nothing by fiat is assumed to be perfectly tractable to his omnipotence; when omnipotence is married to benevolence, it cannot be maintained that evils are necessary or indelible. At the same time, our being made from nothing opens up, as it were, a space into which we can fall again, without forcing us to entertain the unpalatable corollary that God is finite because there is something outside him. This point is urged by Augustine against the Manichaeans, who, according to him, proclaimed that the stuff of the world is a darkness solid enough to take possession of light and hold it captive. He retorts that, insofar

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<sup>7</sup> See Corrigan 1986; O'Brien 1993; Narbonne 2011, 11–54.

as a thing exists, it is from God; if it fails, that is not because it is of perishable substance, but because existence and non-existence are mingled in its creation:

Why do you hesitate to say, in every perishable nature, what in it is from God and what from nothing, when the form in it is according to nature and its perishing contrary to nature? (Augustine, *Fund.* 40.46, ed. Zycha)

Adam fell not because there was any evil power that was capable of mastering him, but because, with the pride to which a perfect creature is peculiarly vulnerable, he tried to lean on himself alone and found that alone he was nothing. Before Augustine, Athanasius (298–373) had taken it as a premiss of his treatise *De incarnatione* (2.3 etc.) that if we were not sustained by God we would fall back into the void from which his own Word summoned us. The doctrine of creation out of nothing thus entails that we are not constrained to sin by any force that limits the sovereignty of God, while on the other hand, God himself is not complicit in our transgressions, as he would be if (to return to the three alternatives of Hermogenes) we had come to be, not “from nothing,” but from him.

### 3. WHY MATTER?

Were a Platonist to ask, “What was in the beginning before creation?” every Christian after Tertullian gave the answer that the beginning *in* which all was created is eternal Wisdom:

For if all things have been made through the wisdom of God [Ps 104:24], then God, when he made both heaven and earth in the beginning, that is first place, made them in his own wisdom. Moreover, if “beginning” signified matter, scripture would not have told us that God made *in the beginning* (Gen 1:1), but “from a beginning” (Herm. 20.1)

It was not uncommon, since Logos means “reason” as well as “speech,” for Christians to equate the second person of the Trinity with the Platonic realm of forms. Plotinus regarded the forms themselves as determinations of intellectual matter, which, “being all at once and containing all,” stands to them in the relation of a genus to a species (*Enn.* 2.4 [12] 3). Prior to this, and to everything, is the cornucopian emptiness of the One, of which nothing may be truly affirmed, not even that it exists, as it is the fountainhead of everything in existence. Although the One is God and more than God, we can say without impiety—as we say of matter but not of the forms or being—that it is *apeiron*, “infinite” or “undetermined” (*Enn.* 2.4 [12] 14–15). The Christian theologian who comes closest to identifying the One with God

the father is Marius Victorinus, for whom the Father is the potentiality that is actualized in Spirit and made active in creation through the Son. He is able to speak of the Father in terms that others applied to matter:

What then is that *to mē on* which is above *to on*? That which is not understood as *on* or as *mē on*, but is understandable only in unknowing, since it is *on* and not *on*, inasmuch as by its own power it has brought *to on* to light and given it birth.  
(*Ad Cand.* 1.14, ed. Locher)

Such language had not been heard since Basilides was accused of preaching a non-existent deity. In contrast to Basilides, Victorinus is at pains to differentiate the origin of the Son and the Spirit from that of the world which depends for its existence upon the Godhead. Yet it might be asked why, once Christians had dispensed with the notion of ingenerate matter, they were so reluctant to infer that God himself is the substrate of creation. When Origen asserted that the Father's will is the matter of the Son, he meant that the Father brought him into existence without a substrate and under no necessity. But since the same could be said of the entire contingent order, would it be any more audacious to argue that the Father's will—or, with reverence to the other persons, the will of the Three in unison—is the sole matter of creation?

When George Berkeley urged in 1710 that the reality of the sensible world could be guaranteed only if it were eternally observed by God, he felt obliged to begin by demonstrating the incoherence of the rival theory, which represents matter as the immutable substrate. Eight centuries before, his fellow-Irishman, John Scotus Eriugena, had reasoned from the premiss that there is nothing outside God to the conclusion that he himself is the proper substance of his creatures. This was dangerous logic, but his rejection of matter ought to have commended itself to any Christian who denied the necessity of two principles. In 1962, Arthur Hilary Armstrong claimed to have discovered a precursor to Eriugena in Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335–395); his arguments became better known to historians of philosophy when they were taken up in Richard Sorabji's rejoinder to a celebrated article by Myles Burnyeat, which maintained that Berkeley's idealism had never been, and could not have been, pre-empted in the history of Greek thought.<sup>8</sup> The text to which Armstrong and Sorabji appeal, in the latter's translation, runs as follows:

By his wise and powerful will, being capable of everything, he established for the creation of things all the things through which matter is constituted: light,

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<sup>8</sup> Armstrong 1962; Burnyeat 1982; Sorabji 1983.

heavy, dense, rare, soft, resistant, fluid, dry, cold, hot, colour, shape, outline, extension. All of these are in themselves *ennoiai* and bare *noēmata*; none is matter on its own. But when they combine they turn into matter.

(In *Hexaemeron*, PG 44:69B)

Similar reasoning can be illustrated from the writings of Gregory's elder brother, Basil of Caesarea (ca. 330–379):

In the same way we shall counsel ourselves with regard to (the *ousia* of) earth. We will not meddle about its *ousia* proper, nor waste our thoughts searching for the substrate itself nor try to find some nature devoid of qualities, existing in such a way on its own account. (In *Hexaemeron* 1.8, trans. Zachhuber)

As the translator of the second passage has noted, however,<sup>9</sup> Basil does not deny that a “nature devoid of qualities” exists, in the tenuous sense in which existence was granted to matter by the Neoplatonists. The first passage argues, not that there is no such thing as matter, but that matter is constituted by the properties which inhere in it—a strange position certainly, but not the position of Berkeley. If the question is one of chronological priority, neither Gregory nor Basil can take the laurel from the author who supplies the twenty-fourth excerpt in the *Philocalia*, a florilegium of choice texts from Origen, which Basil is traditionally supposed to have edited with another Cappadocian, Gregory Nazianzen. This excerpt, a prolix dialogue on the freedom of the will, is also attributed to Methodius, who was born two generations after Origen, and again to a certain Maximus, who appears to have flourished in the second century. Whoever he is, there is no ambiguity in his conclusion: to posit a thing without qualities, which is nonetheless the eternal theatre of conflicting qualities, is logically incoherent and irreconcilable with the benign omnipotence of God.

For this author it is an axiom that God cannot be the source of any evil. If, however, evils are qualities and qualities do not originate in matter, in whom can evil originate but in God? The case is not mended if we suppose that matter acquires its qualities by turning to God—or, as a Platonist might say, that it assumes a determinate character by participation in the realm of being. Either we must suppose that it is conversion to God that vitiates these properties (which is plainly absurd and impious), or that the qualities were evil from the outset, which cannot be true if, *ex hypothesi*, matter did not possess these qualities before turning to God. According to his opponents, matter is not the natural seat of any quality but plays host to all without

<sup>9</sup> Zachhuber 2006.

discrimination. In that case, the author protests, it will be at odds with itself, as no thing that deserves one name can be:

If parts (of the same thing) are not destructive of one another, but these (contraries like heat and cold) are destructive of one another, they are not parts of one another. And if they are not parts of one another, they will not be of one matter. Nor indeed can they be themselves matter, since none of the things that exist is destructive of itself. If therefore matter were one thing, it would not be at odds with itself; and therefore, since the contraries do obtain, it is proved. (Origen, *Philoc.* 24.8, ed. Robinson)

The consequence to be drawn is that evil originates neither in matter nor in God, but in the abuse of rational freedom. If the author is Maximus, Origen (as we have noted) may have been his junior. If that is so, it is possible that Maximus was one of the “deep inquirers” whose speculations are repeated without endorsement or rebuttal in the *De principiis* of the Alexandrian scholar:

This, however, should be noted, that a substance never exists without quality, and that it is by the intellect alone that this substance which underlies bodies and is capable of receiving quality is discerned to be matter. On this account some who were desirous of inquiring more deeply into these questions have ventured to assert that bodily nature consists of nothing else but qualities. For if hardness and softness, heat and cold, wetness and dryness, are qualities, and when these and all the others like them are taken away nothing is conceived to lie beneath, then the qualities will appear to be everything. (*Princ.* 4.4.7, ed. Koetschau)

Thus, we may be confident that there were Christians at the end of the second century who did not regard matter, or even the creation of matter, as a desideratum for the existence of discrete particulars. This departure from the Greek tradition was a corollary of the doctrine of creation out of nothing, and a clear anticipation of a thesis that we commonly associate with Berkeley. Berkeley’s second and more important thesis—that the non-existence of matter entails the existence of God—is not represented, so far as has been ascertained in Greek or Latin writings of the early Christian era. We should not presume, however, that these were the only languages of philosophy. Syriac-speaking Christians were generally more proficient as translators than as philosophers, but Job of Edessa was not content to act as amanuensis to a Platonic or Aristotelian notion of matter. In his *Book of Treasures*, he presses an argument which is not perfectly anticipated in any of the passages quoted above:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> *Treas.* 1.2, trans. Mingana 1935, 8–9.

Aristotle taught that there are three principles in the universe: matter and two antagonistic forces, matter receiving the two antagonistic forces, which are heat-cold and dry-humidity ... and as we infer the simple elements from the complex ones, so it is necessary that matter should be inferred from the simple ones. But how can we infer matter from the simple elements? ... Indeed it possesses nothing that resembles them, so how is it? From nothing? Absolutely impossible, because nothing has neither likeness, quantity, shape, quality, nor any other common genera from among the ten categories. This applies also to matter. How then do we know it? From the fact that, as we say, it receives the antagonistic forces which are in it? We see in the universe that like is affinitive to like and unlike is antipathetic to unlike; how therefore can matter receive things that are dissimilar to itself? ... As therefore I cannot assent that a non-existent thing exists, I can apply the same with regard to matter.

Job goes on to deduce the existence of God. The elements, which play host to warring properties, would not coalesce spontaneously; they were therefore brought together by the coercive agency of another being. This being, whom we call God, is not constituted by the elements and is therefore incorporeal; since the elements cannot circumscribe him, he must also be infinite, and therefore one (p. 16 Mingana). As the elements themselves are not eternal, but have come into being, the cause of their being must lie in God—though not in his infinite nature (since the infinite has no logical relation to the finite), but in a special determination of his will. This is leprous reasoning, and not quite that of Berkeley, who argues only from the existence of perceptibles, not from the forced conjunction of properties. Greater philosophers, nonetheless, have committed greater fallacies; Job's false ingenuity proves at least that the translation of Greek thought into foreign tongues did not always rob it of its fecundity or its power of organic growth, and that is a fact that few have demonstrated so often or so well as the honorand of the present volume.

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PROCLUS AGAINST THE GNOSTICS?  
SOME REMARKS ON A SUBTLE ALLUSION IN THE  
*TIMAEUS*-COMMENTARY CONCERNING CAVES AND CAGES

Benjamin Gleede

However one conceives of the relationship between Gnosticism and Neoplatonism, it is indisputable that the former was a very important stimulus for Plotinus, not only on the grounds of the testimony of his biographer,<sup>1</sup> but also from his works themselves, especially the treatises attributed by modern researches to the so-called *Großschrift*.<sup>2</sup> In this text, the Gnostics are criticized harshly for their abuse of the traditional authorities, both poets and philosophers, and above all Plato, from whom they—according to *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6.10–12—have taken every *particula veri* of their teachings.

Considering the fact that Proclus is even more of a traditionalist than Plotinus and that his exuberant system of intelligible triads might be said to resemble the Gnostic speculations more closely than the comparatively simple metaphysics of his predecessor, it is astonishing to see that allusions to or discussions of Gnostic tenets are virtually absent from Proclus' extensive works. Even if the Gnostics were virtually absent in Proclus' time, an author of such intense antiquarian interests as Proclus, presumably even with a great deal of earlier Platonic literature on the subject at his disposal, might well be expected to discuss ideas as reminiscent of or alien to Platonism as were the Gnostic ones.

Nevertheless, his oeuvre contains, as far as I can see, only two very vague allusions to the Gnostics, both in the commentary on *Tim.* 29A–B. In commenting upon Plato's labelling of the cosmos as "the most beautiful of all generated things" and the demiurge as "the best of all causes" he wants to corroborate the former statement by pointing to the fact that even those "who insult the demiurge" admit that the cosmos is beautiful enough to

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<sup>1</sup> Porphyry, *Vit. Plot.* 16.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Elsas 1975. More recent Plotinus-scholars, however, question the *Großschrift*-theory, without, of course, denying the crucial relevance of the Gnostic challenge for Plotinus' philosophical works (cf., e.g., Narbonne 2011, 1–9).

“ensnare” souls,<sup>3</sup> and argues for the latter statement by attacking interpreters who “put the blame on this universe and make allegations by using the words of the ancients who call the cosmos a ‘cave,’ a ‘prison’ and a ‘grotto.’”<sup>4</sup>

Already E. Diehl, the critical editor of the *Timaeus*-commentary, had identified the first group, who “insults the demiurge,” with Plotinus’ Gnostics, an assumption which was also accepted by A.J. Festugière,<sup>5</sup> the first translator of the text, and the recent English translation of David Runia and Michael Share.<sup>6</sup> As to the second group, those who “put the blame on the universe,” Festugière finds it “vain de chercher des personnalités précises pour ces ἔνιοι de 333.26. C’est tout le courant dualiste et pessimiste, qu’il s’agisse de Platoniciens comme Numénius ..., de Gnostiques, ou de disciples du Trismégiste.”<sup>7</sup>

In this essay, I will try to question this remark and propose an alternative solution which, in my opinion, fits better with both the immediate context in Proclus and his general custom as an author and polemicist.

## 1.

To have shown the immense debt some of the texts of the Nag Hammadi library owe to the Platonic tradition is probably the most important of John Turner’s achievements. The four treatises he labelled as “Platonizing Sethian” not only display distinctive characteristics of Platonic metaphysics, but are—in their description of a contemplative ascent—in principle modelled after what is probably the most well-known and influential text in Plato’s dialogues, the cave-parable in the seventh book of the *Republic*.<sup>8</sup> If one takes, however, a closer look at those Sethian texts (i.e., *Zostrianos*, *Three Steles of Seth*, *Allogenes*, *Marsanes*), one is astonished to see to what extent they conceal their dependence on this famous paradigm. Whereas Plato’s concern is to describe the circumstances within the cave, where the

<sup>3</sup> Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.333.7–9 Diehl (cf. Runia and Share 2008, 189). Unless otherwise indicated, all translations of ancient texts are my own.

<sup>4</sup> Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.333.26–334.1 Diehl. Proclus’ own comparatively short essay on the line and the cave in the *Republic* accordingly stresses that the latter parable does not deal with ἡμετέρα φύσις (7.514A) in the full sense, but exclusively παιδείας τε πέρι και ἀπαιδευσίας, i.e., with respect to its educational potentials and their activation (Proclus, *In Remp.* 1.292.24–293.5 Kroll).

<sup>5</sup> Festugière 1967, 192.

<sup>6</sup> Runia and Share 2008, 189n779.

<sup>7</sup> Festugière 1967, 192n4.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Turner 2001, 84.

necessary duty of the Philosopher king is located, with the intellectual “revelations” or insights to be expected outside being barely hinted at, the Gnostic emphasis lies exclusively on those revelations needed outside the cave. On the terminus a quo of this ascent they are, however, relatively silent, if this terminus is described at all: Zostrianos’ farewell to his “inner corporeal darkness, psychical chaos, and dark, lustful femininity” only occupies a few opening lines in the treatise, and also the revelation of Authronios about the physical cosmos does not tell us much more than that it is a blurred and corrupt image of an image.<sup>9</sup> Neither here nor in the other treatises mentioned above do we find pessimistic depictions of the world as a cave or cage<sup>10</sup> from which we would be encouraged to free ourselves. The only Gnostic reference I could find in which the world might actually be called a cave comes from the Naassene Psalm quoted by Hippolytus (*Ref.* 5.10.2), where the soul “toiling as a captive, being a game ... for Death” is said to sometimes “live in a royal palace and look at the light” and sometimes “being thrown in a den ... there she weeps.”<sup>11</sup> That this “den” or “cave” (σπήλαιον) actually refers to the visible world was not only assumed by Marcovich, whose conjecture first of all brought it into the text,<sup>12</sup> but could be corroborated by the fact that—according to the same Hippolytus—those Naassenes actually intensively allegorized Homer, for example his description of Hermes leading the souls of the killed wooers to the meadows of Asphodelos (*Od.* 24.1–14). For the Naassenes, Homer talks about the Logos here who leads the souls “like bats in the edge of a marvellous cave” (v. 6) past “the people of dreams” (v. 12) to salvation, i.e., out of the fallen world past the masses of unenlightened people.<sup>13</sup>

This passage has made scholars like Mark Edwards<sup>14</sup> believe that it was not only Plotinus who blamed the Gnostics for a one-sided abuse of the cave-imagery,<sup>15</sup> but also Porphyry in his treatise *De antro nympharum*. That it is

<sup>9</sup> Trans. John D. Turner, in Meyer 2007, 545–583.

<sup>10</sup> It is only on the occasion of Zostrianos’ descent—which, in comparison to that of Plato’s philosopher-king, is astonishingly unproblematic—that he preaches against the “bonds and chastisers” which surround people in this life. Such a descent into the “darkness” or “prison” of the world also occurs, as the editors of this volume have indicated, in the Pronoia monologue contained in the long recension of the *Ap. John* (NHC II,1 30–31).

<sup>11</sup> For text and translation, see Marcovich 1981, 770–771.

<sup>12</sup> Marcovich 1981, 773.

<sup>13</sup> Hippolytus, *Ref.* 5.7:30–41 (PTS 25:151–154 Marcovich).

<sup>14</sup> Edwards 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. apart from *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6.6–10 Henry-Schwyzler (ὡς γὰρ τῆς ἀρχαίας Ἑλληνικῆς οὐχ ἀπτόμενοι ταῦτα σκευωροῦνται εἰδότες καὶ σαφῶς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀτύφως λεγόντων ἀναβάσεις ἐκ τοῦ σπηλαίου καὶ κατὰ βραχὺ εἰς θεῶν ἀληθεστέραν μάλλον καὶ μάλλον προιοῦσας) especially the

actually those Platonic texts that Proclus is primarily drawing upon in writing the aforesaid remark is, of course, indisputable. In my opinion, however, this does not preclude the possibility or even probability that, in resuming those texts of his Platonic predecessors, he has in mind a present opponent, one who not only deprived the cosmos of its divine and eternal status, but also—in contrast to extant Gnostic literature—clearly and unambiguously blamed the cosmos, on occasion, for being both a gloomy cave and an enslaving prison. This present opponent is a form of contemporary Christianity, whose literature was not so much of dogmatic, but of ascetic and exegetical provenance.

## 2.

That the Gnostics abused Plato by calling the world a cave or a prison is an accusation leveled not only by Platonists against the notorious sects, but of course also by Christian theologians. Clement of Alexandria (*Strom.* 3.3.12–21), arguing against the Gnostic rejection of marriage and procreation, blames Marcion in particular for having misunderstood not only Plato in the *Phaedo*, where the latter had admittedly called this life a φρουρά (62B) and a δεσμωτήριοιον (114C),<sup>16</sup> but also Empedocles' description of the world as an “unfamiliar place,” the “meadow of Ate” or a “roofed-over cave.”<sup>17</sup> As Clement wants to prove with appeal to *Pol.* 273B–C, this by no means entails that this world or life is bad by nature, but only that it becomes a place of correction and punishment (κολαστήριοιον) for souls who overlook the truth (*Strom.* 3.3.13.1–2). Nevertheless, Tertullian, his contemporary and fellow polemicist against Marcion, openly addresses some imprisoned Christian brothers in the following way:

There and thenceforth you were severed from the world; how much more from the ordinary course of worldly life and all its affairs! Nor let this separation from the world alarm you; for if we reflect that the world is more really

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famous passage 4.8 [6] 1.27–36, where Plotinus summarizes the pessimistic Plato-statements misunderstood by some people in the following way: Οὐ ταῦτόν λέγων πανταχῆ φανέεται, ἵνα ἂν τις ἐκ ῥαδίας τοῦ τοῦ ἀνδρός βούλημα εἶδεν, ἀλλὰ τὸ αἰσθητὸν πᾶν πανταχοῦ ἀτιμάσας καὶ τὴν πρὸς τὸ σῶμα κοινωνίαν τῆς ψυχῆς μεμψάμενος ἐν δεσμῶ τε εἶναι καὶ τεθάφθαι ἐν αὐτῷ τὴν ψυχὴν λέγει, καὶ τὸν ἐν ἀπορρήτοις λεγόμενον λόγον μέγαν εἶναι, ὃς ἐν φρουρᾷ τὴν ψυχὴν φησιν εἶναι· καὶ τὸ σπῆλαιον αὐτῷ, ὡσπερ Ἐμπεδοκλεῖ τὸ ἄντρον, τότε τὸ πᾶν—δοκῶ μοι—λέγειν, ὅπου γε λύσιν τῶν δεσμῶν καὶ ἄνοδον ἐκ τοῦ σπηλαίου τῆ ψυχῆ φησιν εἶναι τὴν πρὸς τὸ νοητὸν πορείαν.

<sup>16</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.3.19 (GCS 15:204 Stählin).

<sup>17</sup> Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 3.3.14 (GCS 15:201 Stählin); cf. Empedocles, *frgs.* 120–121 (Diels-Kranz).

the prison, we shall see that you have gone out of a prison rather than into one. The world has the greater darkness, blinding men's hearts. The world imposes the more grievous fetters, binding men's very souls. The world breathes out the worst impurities: human lusts. The world contains the larger number of criminals, even the whole human race. Then, last of all, it awaits the judgment, not of the proconsul, but of God. Wherefore, O blessed, you may regard yourselves as having been translated from a prison to, we may say, a place of safety. It is full of darkness, but you yourselves are light; it has bonds, but God has made you free. Unpleasant exhalations are there, but ye are an odour of sweetness.<sup>18</sup>

This is of course highly exaggerated rhetoric<sup>19</sup> due to a rather extreme situation. Nonetheless, it points to the fact that some kind of pessimism with regard to, and even contempt for, the world is essential to the Christian religion from its beginning, a sentiment which was just a little overemphasized in Gnostic circles. Not only did the Johannine school teach that the κόσμος was nothing but “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye and the pride of life,” and doomed to perish (1John 2:16–17), but even Jesus told his disciples to leave everything in the world behind and follow him for sake of a greater, otherworldly good.<sup>20</sup> This sort of *contemptus mundi* or καταφρόνησις κόσμου—one of Plotinus' central charges against the Gnostics (*Enn.* 2.9 [33] 15–18)—was elevated to one of the most important ethical ideals in the Christian church and was institutionalized not only in the cult around the martyrs, but also in the monastic movement, where the true hermit could count as something like a “*martyr vivus*.”<sup>21</sup>

Because the basic textbook for the Christians was neither Plato nor Homer, but the Bible, we will, in what follows, first of all take a look at the exegetical tradition, i.e., take a tour through the biblical caves and cages, in order to see to what extent they were allegorically combined with the

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<sup>18</sup> Tertullian, *Ad mart.* 2.1–4 (CCSL 1:4 Dekkers et al.): *Si enim recogitemus ipsum magis mundum carcerem esse, exisse uos e carcere, quam in carcerem introisse, intellegemus. Maiores tenebras habet mundus, quae hominum praecordia excaecant. Grauiores catenas induit mundus, quae ipsas animas hominum constringunt. Peiores immunditias expirat mundus, libidines hominum. Plures postremo mundus reos continet, scilicet uniuersum hominum genus. Iudicia denique non proconsulis, sed dei sustinet. Quo uos, benedicti, de carcere in custodiarium, si forte, translato existimetis. Habet tenebras, sed lumen estis ipsi; habet uincula, sed uos soluti deo estis. Triste illic expirat, sed uos odor estis suauitatis.* The translation is taken from ANF 3:693.

<sup>19</sup> Comparable pagan examples can be found in Dio Chrysostoms' speech on the death of Charidemus (*Or.* 30.11–19, ed. von Arnim 1962, 297–299) or Maximus of Tyre's assessment of the cynical attitude towards civilisation in *Dialexeis* 36.4 (ed. Koniaris 1995, 425–426).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Sasse 1957.

<sup>21</sup> Paulinus of Nola, *Epistula* 18.9 (CSEL 29:136 von Hartel).

Platonic cave- and prison-imagery, and how such a combination was interpreted. Afterwards, we will take a more systematic look at the monastic *contemptus mundi*, in order to see to what extent it actually could have been the target of Proclus' reproach.

## 3.

Although there are some fairly prominent prisons in the biblical literature, e.g., the one of Joseph in Gen 39–40, the prisons of the Apostles Peter and Paul in Jerusalem (Acts 12), Philippi (Acts 16) and Rome (Acts 28) and, maybe most picturesque, the miserable pit of Jeremiah (Jer 38) and Daniel's den of lions (Dan 6), apparently none of these—as far as we can judge from the extant exegetical literature—lent itself to intensive allegorization, at least as an image for the fallen world and the wretched human condition. The only passage on the occasion of which the topic of life as a cage or prison regularly comes up is the famous “*Nunc dimittis*” of the old Simeon in Luke 2:29. From Origen onwards, this ἀπολύειν the old man praises in the sight of the young Jesus seems to have been understood as relief from the prison of life. Origen's fifteenth Homily on the Gospel of Luke describes Simeon as a unique example of how the final liberation from the bondage of the body is possible: only the one who is led by the Holy Spirit to the temple of God (Luke 2:26) and who uses the chance to leave everything else behind and embraces nothing but the child is finally relieved from prison and bondage and leaves this life in peace in order to reign in God's kingdom.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, the Greek Ephrem presents Simeon as a model of patience effective against the spirit of sloth, which wants us to believe that we will never be able to escape this pitiful prison of life,<sup>23</sup> and Pseudo-Chrysostom praises him as a model of perfection, since—guided by the spirit—he finally

<sup>22</sup> Origen, *Hom. Luc.* 15 (GCS 45:92–96 Rauer). Cyril of Alexandria, *In Lucam* (PG 72:504C) resumes parts of this passage. A sigh of relief similar to that of Simeon is described in Gregory of Nazianzen's funerary oration for his brother Cesar (*Or.* 7.21.2–12; SC 405:232–233 Calvet-Sebasti): Πείθομαι σοφῶν λόγους, ὅτι ψυχὴ πάσα καλὴ τε καὶ θεοφιλὴς, ἐπειδὴν τοῦ συνδεδεμένου λυθεῖσα σώματος ἐνθὲνδε ἀπαλλαγῆ, εὐθύς μὲν ἐν συναισθήσει καὶ θεωρίᾳ τοῦ μένοντος αὐτὴν καλοῦ γενομένη, ἅτε τοῦ ἐπισκοτούντος ἀνακαθαρθέντος, ἢ ἀποτεθέντος, ἢ οὐκ οἶδ' ὅ τι καὶ λέγειν χρὴ, θαυμασίαν τινὰ ἡδονὴν ἤδεται καὶ ἀγάλλεται καὶ ἴλεως χωρεῖ πρὸς τὸν ἑαυτῆς δεσπότην, ὥσπερ τι δεσμοτήριον χαλεπὸν τὸν ἐνταῦθα βίον ἀποφυγοῦσα, καὶ τὰς περικειμένους ἀποσεισαμένη πέδας ὑψ' ὦν τὸ τῆς διανοίας πτερὸν καθέλκετο, καὶ οἷον ἤδη τῇ φαντασίᾳ καρπούται τὴν ἀποκειμένην μακαριότητα.

<sup>23</sup> Ephrem of Syria, *Capita centum quomodo quis humilitatem sibi comparet* (ed. Phrantzoles 1989, 70).

learned to welcome the retreat from this miserable prison of life.<sup>24</sup> One of the most vivid descriptions of life as prison, we find, however, in Chrysostom's fourteenth homily on Matthew: During its lifetime every soul is in prison, awaiting the last judgement. Reverting into itself it becomes aware of the various chains it is bound with, of all its sins, lust and greed which torture it and chain it to various mundane affairs, and which will not let it get out of this prison called life.<sup>25</sup>

If we now look for biblical caves which might offer themselves as symbols for human life and its miserable circumstances, the most promising ones will definitely be those in the inscriptions of Psalms 56 and 141 LXX, which David is supposed to have sung in the cave to which he fled before Saul (1Sam 24). Whereas the first of these is all in all optimistic in tone, yet not without describing vividly the horrible circumstances the singer was saved from, the second one is a proper lamentation, extremely pessimistic, and even contains the verse: "Save my soul from prison!" (Ps 141:8). Small wonder we find Jerome in his short interpretation understanding David as Christ, who enters the gloomy, lightless cave of this world persecuted by Saul, the devil.<sup>26</sup> Augustine, however, is much more careful: He knows about the interpretation of some people, "that the cave and prison is this world. That is what the church prays for, that it is going to be freed out of this prison, i.e., from this world, from under the sun, where everything is vanity."<sup>27</sup> Yet, as it is the soul who is supposed to be freed from this prison, he is reluctant to accept this interpretation, as he obviously sees it in close proximity to the interpretation fiercely rejected in the following paragraph which refers the prison to our bodies.<sup>28</sup>

That this was actually the interpretation promoted by Origenist circles can be inferred from a catena-fragment on the verse ascribed to Origen where it says: "To say: 'Free my soul from the prison' does not befit anybody, but only those who are able to engage in the contemplation of the events in purity, without this body."<sup>29</sup> That those circles accordingly also described the incarnation of their preexisting souls as an engagement or "encavement" can be inferred from polemical descriptions like that of Cyril of Alexandria, according to which God's wrath sends the sinful souls "into the world, binds them to bodies from the earth in forcing them to carry this burden, locks

<sup>24</sup> Pseudo-Chrysostom, *De occursu domini, de deipara et Symeone* (PG 50:809C–D).

<sup>25</sup> John Chrysostom, *Hom. Matt.* 14 (PG 57:222B–D).

<sup>26</sup> Jerome, *Tractatus de Psalmo CXLI* (CCSL 78:309 Morin).

<sup>27</sup> Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 141.17 (CSEL 95.5:45 Gori).

<sup>28</sup> Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 141.18 (CSEL 95.5:46–47 Gori).

<sup>29</sup> *Psalms CXLI* (PG 12:1668B).



them in something like the cave of their strange desires and decides to educate them by that experience.”<sup>30</sup> We can therefore be almost certain that there were Origenist expositions of this Psalm identifying the cave-prison as the body which consequently conveyed such a pessimistic picture of the world we live in that also Augustine felt the need to distance himself from it.<sup>31</sup>

A pessimistic evaluation of the cave-metaphor for the world was thus present in catholic Christian literature. This evaluation, however, was not very prominent, probably because the most important biblical cave is not found in the Old Testament, but is the cave of Christ’s nativity in Bethlehem. That Christ’s birth actually happened in a cave was almost undisputed from the middle of the second century onwards when the *Infancy Gospel of James* gave its impressive description of how “the great light appeared in the cave so that the eyes were not able to bear it. And step by step this light receded until an infant became visible, and it came and it took the breast from his mother Mary.”<sup>32</sup> This contrast between the celestial light and the darkness of the subterranean cave is of course a very appropriate motif for expounding the miracle of incarnation, as both were inextricably linked by classical biblical references like Isa 9:1 or John 1:5. “By the cave in which the Lord was born,” preaches Gregory of Nyssa, “one is to understand the dull and subterranean life of human beings, in which appears the one who reveals himself to those sitting in darkness and the shadow of death.”<sup>33</sup> And in his

<sup>30</sup> Cyril of Alexandria, *In D. Joannis evangelium* (ed. Pusey 1872, 1:115): ἀγανακτήσας εἰκότως ὁ Δημιουργὸς ἀποστέλλει μὲν αὐτὰς εἰς τὸν κόσμον, τοῖς δὲ ἀπὸ γῆς ἐνέπλεξε σώμασιν ἀχθοφορεῖν ἀναγκάσας, καὶ μονονουχί σπηλαίῳ τινὶ τῶν ἐκτόπων ἐγκατακλείσας ἡδονῶν, παιδεύειν αὐτὰς ἐξ αὐτῆς ἐδοκίμασε τῆς πείρας αὐτῶν. In his *Comm. Jo.* 28.7 §§ 56–57 (GCS 10:397–398 Preuschen) Origen interprets the call to Lazarus to come out his tomb-cave as the call for discipleship, i.e., the call to leave the tomb-cave of this world behind and follow him.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. the clarifications concerning “*mundus*” in Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.* 141.15 (CSEL 95.5:43–44 Gori) and concerning the “*corpus*,” 141.18–19 (46–49 Gori).

<sup>32</sup> *Prot. Jas.* 19.15–16 (ed. Hock 1995, 66).

<sup>33</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *In diem natalem saluatoris* (GNO 10.2:257.13–258.3 Jaeger et al.): τὸ δὲ σπήλαιον ἰδῶν, ἐν ᾧ τίκεται ὁ δεσπότης, τὸν ἀφεγγή και ὑπόγειον τῶν ἀνθρώπων νόησον βίον, ἐν ᾧ γίνεται ὁ τοῖς ἐν σκότει και σκιᾷ θανάτου καθημένους ἐπιφαινόμενος. σπαργάνοις δὲ διασφίγγεται ὁ τὰς σείρας τῶν ἡμετέρων ἀμαρτημάτων περιβαλλόμενος. ἡ δὲ φάτιν τὸ τῶν ἀλόγων ἔστιν ἐνδιαίτημα, ἐν ᾗ γίνεται ὁ λόγος, ἵνα γινῶ βούς τὸν κτησάμενον και ὄνος τὴν φάτιν τὸν κυρίου αὐτοῦ, βούς ὁ ὑπεξευγμένος τῷ νόμῳ, ὄνος τὸ ἀχθοφόρον ζῶον, τὸ τῇ ἀμαρτίᾳ τῆς εἰδωλολατρείας πεφορτισμένον. Cf. also the reference to John 1:5 in *De beatitudinibus* (GNO 7.2:104.8–10 Jaeger et al.: Ἀκόλουθον τοῖνον ἐξετάσαι τί ποτε ἄρα ἔστιν ἐκεῖνο τὸ φῶς, ᾧ τὸ ζοφῶδες τοῦτο τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης φύσεως σπήλαιον ἐν τῷ παρόντι βίῳ οὐ καταυγάζεται) or the *Christmas sermons* of Asterius of Amasea (*Hom.* 4.3.5–7 Datema: Φῶτα πανήγυριν ἄγομεν, ἐπειδὴ τῇ τῶν ἀμαρτημάτων ἀφέσει ὅλον ἐκ σκοτεινοῦ τινος δεσποτηρίου τοῦ προτέρου βίου πρὸς τὸν φωτεινὸν και ἀνεύθυνον ἀναγόμεθα) or John of Damascus’ *Hom. Nat.* 5.9–17 (PTS 29:329–330 Kotter).

Encomion on Stephen, the first martyr, he draws a parallel between Stephen and Christ in the following way: “Christ put on man for us, he put off man for Christ. Christ came down into the cave of life for us, he escaped this cave for the sake of Christ.”<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, Gregory even assigns a clear reason why a Christian should be in fact unable to read Plato’s cave-parable in as pessimistic a way as some Origenist circles probably did: For a Christian, the ascent Plato demanded is basically unnecessary because on account of the incarnation the sun is already in the cave and shines for anybody willing to open his eyes.<sup>35</sup>

Our short and very selective examination of the exegetical tradition has thus shown that there definitely were pessimistic applications of the prison-and-cave-metaphor in Christian literature, but that these were, for the most part, dominated by an optimism regarding liberation and illumination through Christ. Thus, for example, Simeon’s captivity only comes into play on the occasion of his liberation, while the darkness of David’s cave foreshadows its illumination by the birth of Christ. It remains to be seen to what extent this optimism also affected the aforesaid ascetic tendencies and how an institutionalized *καταφρόνησις κόσμου* can be reconciled with the world’s character as creation saved by the incarnation of the Son of God himself.

## 4.

How important the monastic, or, better yet, anchoretic idea of contempt for the world became in later Christianity<sup>36</sup> is quite easy to infer from the fact that, from the middle of the fourth century onwards, the ideal of complete retreat and exemption generated its own branch of Christian literature, with titles ranging from Ambrose’s rather mild *De fuga saeculi*<sup>37</sup> to

<sup>34</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Steph.* 1 (GNO 10.1:75.7–10 Jaeger et al.): ἐκεῖνος τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐνδύμενος, οὗτος τὸν ἄνθρωπον ὑπὲρ ἐκείνου ἀποδυόμενος. ἐκεῖνος τὸ δι’ ἡμᾶς ὑπερχόμενος, οὗτος τοῦ σπηλαίου δι’ ἐκεῖνον ὑπεξερχόμενος. The phrase σπήλαιον τοῦ βίου also appears in Gregory’s commentary on the Song of Songs (GNO 6:212.4–11 Jaeger et al.): οὕτω καὶ ἡ φιλόανθρωπος αὐτῆς νύμφης τῶν θείων τοῦ νυμφίου μυστηρίων ἀξιοθεῖσα, ὅτε τὴν κλίνην εἶδε καὶ φορεῖον τοῦ βασιλέως ἐγένετο, βοᾷ πρὸς τὰς νεάνιδας (αὐταὶ δ’ ἂν εἶεν αἱ τῶν σωζομένων ψυχαί) ἕως πότε λέγουσα τῷ σπηλαίῳ τοῦ βίου ἐναποκλείεσθε; ἐξέλθετε τῶν προκαλυμμάτων τῆς φύσεως καὶ ἴδετε τὸ θαυμαστὸν θέαμα Σιῶν θυγατέρες γενόμεναι, θεάσασθε περιπρέποντα τῇ κεφαλῇ τοῦ βασιλέως τὸν στέφανον ...

<sup>35</sup> Gregory of Nyssa, *Adv. Apol.* GNO 3.117.13–17 Jaeger et al.

<sup>36</sup> A good example might be the 34<sup>th</sup> letter of Barsanuphius to John of Gaza (SC 450:368 Neyt and Angelis-Noah), where a certain Geron is asked by his brother for a visit. The brother gets the following answer: Ἐὰν δὲ καταφρονήσας τοῦ κοσμοῦ γένη μοναχός, τότε ἀδελφός μου εἶ, and afterwards falls ill because of his completely inappropriate attempt.

<sup>37</sup> CSEL 32.2:163–207 Schenkl.

Eucherius' blunt and direct *De contemptu mundi*.<sup>38</sup> Although this literature does not employ prison- and cave-metaphors very often, its pessimistic stance towards the world is pretty clear. Characteristic of passages where such imagery is actually used is the following example from the Nilo-Evagrian corpus of letters:

Regard the perishing world to be a cave in which both righteous people and some earthly angels live, and the bad ones, who lurk in the aforesaid cave like reptiles, commit many crimes and molest the blessed people. If then—because of the cohabitation with these, their patience and exhortation—the brutish ones change themselves into a human condition, it is fine. If they, however, remain incorrigible, they will pay the double price in the afterlife, because they welcomed immorality instead of virtue and because they were not willing to ameliorate themselves, neither because of the cohabitation with the righteous people nor because of their admonition.<sup>39</sup>

This picture of the world as a rotten cave of dangerous reptiles, which occurs also in hagiographical literature,<sup>40</sup> is not exactly optimistic, and would for Proclus most probably sound like a grave blasphemy against the cosmic god. Nevertheless, the underlying view is obviously the same as can be found already in Clement of Alexandria: the world is not bad in itself, but in its fallen state it is made a *κολαστήριον* for sinners by divine providence. Maybe this is also why the prison-metaphor seems to be, all in all, more prominent than the cave one. The former is taken up already by *Diognetus* (6:4–7) and this in a very revealing manner, as the relationship between Christians and the cosmos is compared to that between soul and body:

The invisible soul is imprisoned in a visible body, and Christians are obviously in the world, yet their piety remains unseen. The flesh hates the soul and fights against it without having been harmed, because it is impaired in making use of its desires, and also the world hates Christians without having been harmed, because they resist desires. The soul loves the flesh, which hates it, and also Christians love those who hate them. The soul is locked in the body, yet holds the body together, and also Christians are held captive in the world as in a prison (*φυρούρα*), yet they hold the world together.

<sup>38</sup> Pricoco 1990.

<sup>39</sup> Nilus/Evagrius, *Epistulae* 3.21 (PG 79:380C): Νόμισόν μοι σπήλαιον ὑπάρχειν τὸν φθειρόμενον κόσμον· ἐν αὐτῷ δὲ καὶ τοὺς δικαίους διαιτᾶσθαι ἀνθρώπους καθάπερ τινὰς ἐπιγείους ἀγγέλους, καὶ τοὺς πονηροὺς, δίκαν ἐρπετῶν ἐμφωλεύοντας τῷ λεχθέντι σπηλαίῳ, πλείστα ἀδικεῖν καὶ καταπονεῖν τοὺς μακαρίους ἄνδρας. Ἐὰν τοίνυν διὰ τῆς τούτων συνδιαγωγῆς, καὶ τῆς ὑπομονῆς, καὶ τῆς παραινέσεως μεταβληθῶσί ποτε οἱ θηριώδεις πρὸς ἀνθρωπίνην κατάστασιν, εὐγε· εἰ δὲ μέχρι τελευτῆς ἀδιόρθωτοι μένοιεν, διπλὴν ἀποτίσουσιν τιμωρίαν κατὰ τὸ μέλλον, ὅτι τε ἀντὶ τῆς ἀρετῆς τὸ φαῦλον ἠσπάσαντο, καὶ ὅτι οὔτε τῇ συνδιατριβῇ τῶν δικαίων, οὔτε τῇ νοουεσίᾳ βελτίους ἑαυτῶν γενέσθαι βεβούληνται.

<sup>40</sup> Cf., e.g., the *Vita sanctae Syncreticae* (ed. Abelarga 2002, 778–802).

This is of course basically the same stance as that of the Johannine school which taught God's love for the world (John 3:16) while prohibiting the love of worldly affairs, which are, in their entirety, conceived of as hostile and noxious for the Christian (1John 2:15). Thus, it soon became quite clear in Christian circles that in biblical usage two meanings of *κόσμος* have to be sharply distinguished: "The fabrication of the world is good," says Tatian, "but business (*πολίτευμα*) there is bad,"<sup>41</sup> and, according to Severian of Gabala, *κόσμος* qua *σύστασις δημιουργική* has nothing to do with *κόσμος* qua *τῶν ἀνθρώπων τὸ σύστημα τὸ πονηρόν*.<sup>42</sup>

Returning to our introductory question whether Proclus might actually have had the Christians in mind in his obscure remark, we can say that for a hostile audience, Christian monastic ideals might suggest at least a distorted relationship with, if not open contempt for, the concrete beauty of the cosmos. At any rate, Festugière—in his wholesale scepticism for any identification of the second group envisaged by Proclus—overlooked the first part of the remark which was left unquoted above: the people in question "by no means dare to blame the creator" in any respect.<sup>43</sup> This, however, leaves barely any room for those dualistic currents mentioned by Festugière to be addressed by this remark. This kind of "hypocritical" piety—that which aims at extolling the creator by downgrading his foremost works, and the very expressions of his being, to non-divine status—matches exactly the polemical image of Christianity to be found elsewhere in Proclus<sup>44</sup> and later pagan Neoplatonists like Simplicius.<sup>45</sup> Due to the Christians' prevailing power, their contempt for, and blasphemy against, the cosmic God—which was absolutely unbearable for Proclus—could only be attacked indirectly, by allusions drawn from traditional material such as we can find in Plotinus or Porphyry.

<sup>41</sup> Tatian, *Orat.* 19.3 (PTS 43:40 Marcovich).

<sup>42</sup> *Comm. Eph.* 2.2–3 (307.27–28 Staab).

<sup>43</sup> Proclus, *In Tim.* 1.333.26 Diehl.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Gleede 2009, 154–158.

<sup>45</sup> Simplicius, *In Phys.* 1326.38–1327.3 Diels (CAG 10): Ὁ δὲ Γραμματικὸς ἐκεῖνος, οὐ κατ' ἀρχὰς τῶν εἰς τοῦτο τὸ βιβλίον σχολῶν ἐμνημόνευσα, μέγα νομίζων, εἰ τῶν ἰδιωτῶν πολλοὺς ὑπάγοιτο πρὸς τοῦ οὐρανοῦ καὶ τοῦ κόσμου παντὸς καταφρόνησιν ὡς ὁμοίως αὐτοῖς ὄντων φθαρτῶν καὶ δηλονότι καὶ πρὸς τὴν αὐτοῦ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ, εἰ γενητοῦ καὶ φθαρτοῦ κόσμου ποιητῆς ἀποδειχθεῖη ... Cf. also Simplicius, *In Cael.* 84.29–30 Heiberg (CAG 7).

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IMAGINATION AND PSYCHIC BODY:  
APPARITIONS OF THE DIVINE AND GEOMETRIC  
IMAGINATION ACCORDING TO PROCLUS\*

Alain Lernoald

Proclus explains his conception of imagination in two main contexts: (i) the manifestations of the divine, and (ii) the activity of the geometer. I will argue that we have to posit, with regard to the manifestations of the divine on the one hand, and the activity of the geometer on the other hand, a clear distinction between two levels of imagination: an inferior one, that is, the geometric imagination, and a superior one, the pure pneumatic imagination, the former mirroring the latter. No doubt that the Aristotelian connexion of the *πνεῦμα* with *φαντασία* provides an important basis for the doctrine of the imagination in Late Neoplatonism.<sup>1</sup> But the exact connexion of the pneumatic vehicle of the soul with the geometric imagination requires some clarification.

1. IMAGINATION AND APPARITIONS OF THE DIVINE

How can the divine, which is incorporeal and invisible, be seen or heard by the corporeal beings that we are; in other words, how can the incorporeal divine appear to us as corporeal and visible? An answer to this question is given in the following passage from the *Commentary on Plato's Republic*:

For in the case of those themselves who do see (the visions from the gods) they are seen by the *luminous wrappings* of their souls. They are certainly often seen *when the eyes are closed*. Insofar as they (the visions) have extension and appear in air of a similar nature (i.e., extended) they subsist as akin to those who see them. Insofar as they project a divine light and are active and present an image of the powers of the gods through manifest symbols, they are derivative of the superior beings themselves who offer them. Therefore

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\* I am very grateful to Gregory MacIsaac and Dominic O'Meara who read a first draft of this essay, and to the editors of this volume for all their useful remarks.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Dodds 1933, 313 ff.



even the ineffable signs of those (beings) are given shape, some projecting one form, others another.<sup>2</sup>

(*In Remp.* 1.39.9–17 Kroll; trans. Woolf,<sup>3</sup> emphasis added)

The human soul that has descended into the world of generation and acquired a fleshly body, can be, by virtue of the “luminous envelope” or “luminous body” and theurgic purification, a suitable receptacle for the powers that the gods send forth from the intelligible heights towards the realm of generation and incarnate souls. As in the *De mysteriis* of Iamblichus (3.14),<sup>4</sup> the ἀύγοειδές ὄχημα is the recipient of divine φαντασία.

Now what gives shape to the powers of the gods is the imagination. Imagination is the proper activity of the psychic (pneumatic) vehicle, as Proclus explains in a passage of his *Commentary on the Timaeus of Plato*. In *In Tim.* 3.286.1–287.10 (Diehl), Proclus establishes a distinction between three levels of sense-perception (αἴσθησις):

- (i) The embodied sense-perception, whose objects are external, which knows *by means of sense-organs*, and which occurs when there is a strong affect. This kind of sense-perception is divided (not “common”<sup>5</sup>).
- (ii) Sense-perception in the psychic vehicle; this is an immaterial and pure sense-perception, impassible but not without form since it has its existence in a body. This kind of sense-perception has the same nature as imagination itself: both are “common” (i.e., not divided between the different sense-organs). But when it moves outside itself and insofar as it is divisible in the pneumatic body (*In Tim.* 3.286.29: μερίζεται περὶ τὸ πνεῦμα), it is called “sense-perception”; when it remains inside itself and sees the figures and the shapes by means of the *pneumatic* body (286.27: ἐν τῷ πνεύματι),<sup>6</sup> then it is called “imagination.”
- (iii) Intermediate sense-perception, which, in the irrational life, is a receptacle for objects coming from outside alone and not for *the ideal types*

<sup>2</sup> Καὶ γὰρ τοῖς ὁράσιν αὐτοῖς ὁράται τοῖς ἀύγοειδέσι τῶν ψυχῶν περιβλήμασιν· καλυπτομένων γοῦν τῶν ὁμμάτων ὁράται πολλάκις· ὡς μὲν οὖν διαστατὰ καὶ ἐν ἄλλῃ τοιοῦτῳ τῷ ἀέρι φανταζόμενα συγγενῆ τοῖς ὁράσιν ὑφίσταται· ὡς δὲ θεῖον προβεβλημένα φῶς καὶ ὡς δραστήρια καὶ ὡς ἐνεικονιζόμενα τὰς τῶν θεῶν δυνάμεις διὰ τῶν ἐναργῶν συμβόλων αὐτῶν ἐξήρηται τῶν προτεινόντων αὐτὰ κρειττόνων· διὸ καὶ τὰ ἄρρητα συνθήματα ἐκείνων ἀποτυποῦται, τὰ μὲν ἄλλην τὰ δὲ ἄλλην μορφήν προβεβλημένα.

<sup>3</sup> In Sorabji 2004, 71.

<sup>4</sup> See Finamore 1985, 145 f.

<sup>5</sup> I.e., it does not belong to the common sensorium.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Festugière 1966–1968, 5:163n2: “Il s’agit sans doute des ἄνωθεν τύποι, que la sensation de la vie irrationnelle ne peut pas recevoir (287.1–2).”

from above (*In Tim.* 3.287.1–2: τῶν μὲν ἀνωθεν τύπων ἀδεκτός ἐστί); nevertheless, this intermediate sense-perception is “common,” but not impassible.

Proclus concludes this development by a brief recapitulation (*In Tim.* 3.287.7–10):

- common and impassible sense-perception belongs to the *first* vehicle;
- common and passible (intermediate) sense-perception belongs to the irrational life;
- divided (not common) and passible sense-perception belongs to the principle that animates the body: ἡ δὲ τῆς ἐμψυχίας τοῦ σώματος.

Let us summarize the characteristics of imagination according to this text. *Imagination* is a mode of being, or more accurately, a mode of activity of *sense-perception* in the vehicle of the (individual human) soul; it is (psychic) sense-perception as having an internal activity and as being undivided. In other words, imagination is not absolutely different from (psychic) sense-perception (as fire is not absolutely different from the heat it gives off); this explains why, although *impassible* by itself (as an internal activity), imagination is not free of form or shape. Imagination knows μορφωτικῶς (as internal activity of the psychic *sense-perception*), and so partakes in a certain amount of passibility. As Proclus says here, pneumatic sense-perception and (consequently) imagination is bodily because it has its existence in a body (*In Tim.* 3.286.23–24: καὶ αὐτὴ σωματοειδής ἐστίν, ὡς ἐν σώματι λαχοῦσα τὴν ὑπόστασιν). For Proclus, the soul (except the unparticipated soul) is never completely disembodied.<sup>7</sup> The soul, even once completely purified, remains attached to a body, the imperishable astral body, which Proclus usually refers to as the first body. Here, however, when he says that the seat of the highest sensation is “the first vehicle” (*In Tim.* 3.287.9), he seems to mean by this the pneumatic and perishable body (cf. *In Tim.* 3.286.27 and 30).<sup>8</sup> One more remark: Proclus stresses here the impassibility of pneumatic sense-perception, and the

<sup>7</sup> This is a Plotinian doctrine, cf. *Enn.* 4.3 [27] 4; see also Dodds' (1933, 300) commentary on Proclus, *El. Theol.* 196.

<sup>8</sup> I do not discuss here the Proclan distinction between the imperishable “luminous body” (or first vehicle), which is the body of pure soul, and the perishable pneumatic body or vehicle, which is acquired by the soul during its descent from the intelligible to the sensible, nor do I enter into a comparison with the gnostic doctrine of the “garment of light.” For the three bodies in Proclus (luminous, pneumatic, material), see *Theol. Plat.* 3.5 (18.24–19.15 Saffrey-Westerink); *El. Theol.* 196, 207, 208, 209 Dodds (and Dodds' Appendix II, “The Astral Body in Neoplatonism,” in Dodds 1933, 313–321); see also Trouillard 1957.

impassibility of imagination in the sense that they are more impassible than passible, since they are separated from sensible matter and independent of sense-perceptible objects.

## 2. IMAGINATION IN GEOMETRY

In the first chapter of the second Prologue (or Prologue part II) of the *Commentary on Euclid*,<sup>9</sup> Proclus gives the most detailed exposition of the concept of imagination in geometry that we can find in ancient Greek literature. To understand how imagination is introduced by Proclus and what role he attributes to it, we must provide a general analysis of this first chapter of Prologue II.

Prologue II, chapter one, begins with the following question: are the objects that the geometer studies separate from (sensible) matter<sup>10</sup> or are they inseparable from perceptible things? This question leads to an aporia. It is possible to say neither that these objects are in sense-perceptible things nor that they are pure forms. If the objects of geometry are perceptible, then the geometer looks down towards the perceptible things and geometry does not emancipate our mind from the bondage of the senses, and we are contradicting what Plato says (*Resp.* 6.510D4–511A1 and 7.526E–527B). On the other hand, if the objects of geometry are (κατ' οὐσίαν) immaterial (unextended), geometry itself is not possible any more. To escape this aporia Proclus has recourse to the distinction between three types of universals: (i) the transcendent universal, which is separate from matter (χωριστὸν τῆς ὕλης) and which is “prior to the Many” (πρὸ τῶν πολλῶν); (ii) the universal “in the Many” (ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς); and (iii) the universal “posterior to the Many” (ἐπὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς), also called “later-born” (ὑστερογενές).<sup>11</sup>

Leaving aside this third kind of universal, Proclus focuses on the universal “in the Many” and introduces imagination as intelligible matter to make a distinction between two kinds of universals “in the Many”:

The universal species being three in kind to speak briefly, let us consider the differences that can display, according to the underlying matter, the partic-

<sup>9</sup> *In Eucl.* 48.1–57.8 Friedlein.

<sup>10</sup> In the “Pythagorean” scale of beings (or forms—with these three orders: intelligible forms, psychic forms, sensible forms) “separate” entities can be identified with psychic forms or with intelligible ones. Only the latter are “paradigmatic” because there are no forms, strictly speaking, above them.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. *In Eucl.* 50.16–51.9.

ipated universal,<sup>12</sup> which is in the Many and is constitutive of the being of the particulars.<sup>13</sup> If we posit that the participants in this universal<sup>14</sup> are two in kind, some being sensible, others having existence in the imagination,—for matter likewise is twofold, as Aristotle somewhere says: the matter of things tied to sensation and the matter of imagined objects (τῶν φανταστῶν)—, we shall admit that the co-ordinate (sc. immanent) universal is of two kinds, one perceptible, since it is participated in by sense objects, and the other imaginary, as existing in the plurality (of images) in the imagination.<sup>15</sup>

(*In Eucl.* 51.9–20)

Next,<sup>16</sup> we have a paragraph on imagination as a faculty of knowledge intermediate between intellection and sense-perception (here Proclus refers to the imagination as “passive intellect”; cf. Aristotle, *An.* 3.5 430A24).

In the following section we have an homology between the sense-perceptible circle and the imagined circle, on the one hand, and the dianoetic circle and the “physical” circle, on the other. Prior to and transcending the circle in sense-perceptible matter is the circle in Nature, i.e., the λόγος—the reason principle—of the circle in Nature.<sup>17</sup> And prior to and transcending the circle in imagination is the λόγος (immaterial, unextended) of the circle in διάνοια, “discursive thought” (*In Eucl.* 53.5–54.13).

The first chapter ends (54.14–57.8) with the answer to the question raised initially: the object of *ordinary* geometrical science is the *dianoetic*, i.e., “substantial” (οὐσιώδης) λόγος of the circle *as projected* by διάνοια in imagination; imagination indeed helps overcome the *weakness* of (human) discursive thought which is unable to see the substantial reasons themselves that are in it so long as these reasons remain wrapped up; that is why διάνοια

unfolds and exposes them (sc. the λόγοι οὐσιώδεις) and presents them to the imagination sitting in the vestibule; and in imagination, that is, with its aid,

<sup>12</sup> That is: the immanent universal.

<sup>13</sup> Morrow’s construction of this phrase does not make sense, cf. Morrow 1970, 41: “Of these three kinds of universal forms—briefly stated, the universal shared by its particulars, the universal in its particulars, and the universal that supplements the particulars—let us note that there are differences in the underlying matter.” I follow Barocius’ Latin translation: *Triplicibus autem (ut unico verbo absolvam) universalibus formis existentibus, ejus formae, quae multa participant, quaeque in multis est, et particularia complet, differentias juxta subjectam materiam consideramus.*

<sup>14</sup> 51.13: I read ἀὐτοῦ in *M* (ἀὐτὰ: Friedlein).

<sup>15</sup> Trans. Morrow, modified.

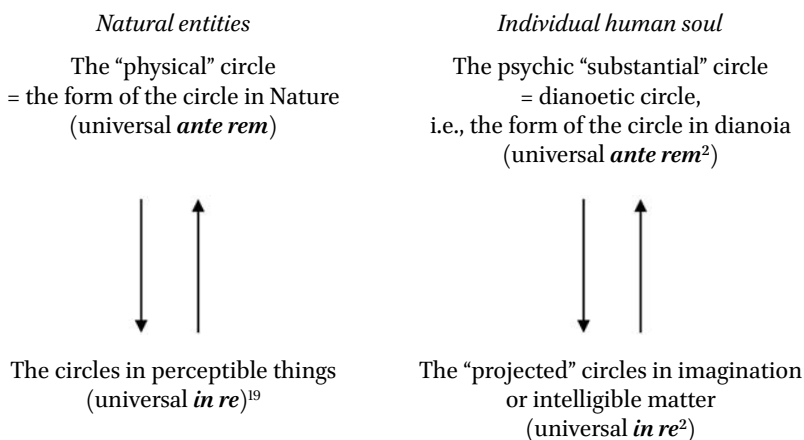
<sup>16</sup> *In Eucl.* 51.20–53.5.

<sup>17</sup> On Nature as the last and proximate cause of the corporeal and so as incorporeal substance (and at the same time inseparable from sensible bodies), see *In Tim.* 1.9.25–12.25. See also Lernould 2012.

it explicates its knowledge of them, happy in their separation from sensible things and finding in the matter of imagination a medium apt for receiving its own forms. (*In Eucl.* 55.1–6)

Now, the projection in imagination (intelligible matter) of the λόγοι οὐσιώδεις is the condition of the possibility for a return to these λόγοι. The *true* (i.e., Platonist) geometer accomplishes the reverse path that leads up from imagination to the psychic innate λόγοι (55.6–56.8).

The following diagram that we can obtain from this passage may be useful:<sup>18</sup>



*Figure 4:* The homology between the universal in sensible matter and the universal in intelligible matter, on the one hand, and the “physical” circle and the dianoetic circle, on the other

### 3. GEOMETRIC IMAGINATION AND BODY

I propose now to read the three passages in the first chapter of Prologue II of the *In Euclidem* in which the idea of the association of geometric imagination with body is expressed.

After the section devoted to the distinction between the two kinds of matter, namely, the sense-perceptible and the intelligible (the imagination);

<sup>18</sup> For a more detailed explanation of the ontological status of geometrical objects and of the role played by imagination according to Proclus, see Lernould 2011.

<sup>19</sup> On Nature as cause both of procession and reversion, see Lernould 2012, 98.

and, consequently, the distinction between two kinds of embodied universals (ἐν τοῖς πολλοῖς), namely, the sense-perceptible, and the imaginary, we have a paragraph in which the idea is expressed that the imagination is intermediate between intellection and sense-perception. We find the first and the second of our three passages in this section, which begins with the following sentence:

*First passage:* For imagination, by virtue of its shape-producing movement, and because it has existence with and in the body, bears imprints that are always individual, extended and shaped, and everything that it knows has this kind of existence. For this reason a certain person has ventured to call it “passive intellect.”<sup>20</sup>  
(*In Eucl.* 51.20–52.5, emphasis added)

καὶ γὰρ ἡ φαντασία διὰ τε τὴν μορφωτικὴν κίνησιν<sup>21</sup> καὶ τὸ μετὰ σώματος καὶ ἐν σώματι τὴν ὑπόστασιν ἔχειν μεριστῶν ἀεὶ καὶ διηρημένων ἐστὶν καὶ ἐσχηματισμένων τύπων οἰστική, καὶ πᾶν ὃ γινώσκει τοιαύτην ἔλαχεν ὑπαρξίν. ὅθεν δὴ καὶ νοῦν παθητικὸν τις αὐτὴν προσεπιτεῖν οὐκ ὠκνησεν.

Then Proclus gives the characteristic features by virtue of which intellection and sense-perception are the two modes of knowing on the extremes, leaving an intermediate space for imagination, which is neither pure intellection nor pure sense-perception, but partakes of both:

*Second passage:* By contrast, the imagination, occupying the central position in the scale of knowing, is moved by itself to put forth what it knows,<sup>22</sup> but because it is not outside the body, it draws its objects out of the undivided center of its life, it expresses them in the medium of division, extension and figure. For this reason everything that it thinks is the imprint, that is, the figure of a notion, and it thinks the circle as extended, and although this circle is free of external matter it possesses the intelligible matter which is in her.  
(*In Eucl.* 52.20–53.1, emphasis added)

ἢ δ' αὖ φαντασία τὸ μέσον κέντρον κατέχουσα τῶν γνώσεων ἀνεγείρεται μὲν ἀφ' ἑαυτῆς καὶ προβάλλει τὸ γνωστόν, ἅτε δὲ οὐκ ἔξω σώματος οὐσα<sup>23</sup> ἐκ τοῦ ἀμερούς τῆς ζωῆς εἰς μερισμὸν καὶ διάστασιν καὶ σχῆμα προάγει τὰ γνωστά αὐτῆς, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο πᾶν, ὅπερ ἂν νοῆ, τύπος ἐστὶ καὶ μορφή νοήματος, καὶ τὸν τε κύκλον διαστατῶς νοεῖ τῆς μὲν ἐκτὸς ὕλης καθαρεύοντα νοητὴν δὲ ὕλην ἔχοντα τὴν ἐν αὐτῇ.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Aristotle, *An.* 3.5 430A24.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *In Remp.* 1.235.18–19: ἢ μὲν φαντασία νόησις οὐσα μορφωτική.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. *infra*, 94.19–95.20.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. also *De decem dub.* 3.5–4 Isaac: things grasped by sense-perception and imagination are not “outside the bodies,” *non extra corpora* (cf. Isaac Sebastocrator, *Peri tōn deka pros tēn pronoian aporēmatōn* 3.9, in Isaac 1977, 156: πράγματα μόνον μερικά καὶ οὐκ ἔξω σωμάτων). Proclus puts imagination higher than sense-perception, but in one sense, if by imagination we mean the faculty in which is the universal *post rem*, the universal derived from the sensible particulars, then it is natural to associate sense-perception and imagination.

The third passage is in the penultimate section of the chapter, where a homology between the physical and the dianoetic circles is established, on the one hand, and the sense-perceptible and the imaginary circles, on the other hand. The former are prior and transcendent; the latter are in matter, but sense-perceptible circles differ from each other by virtue of their size *and* substratum, while imaginary circles differ only by virtue of their size:

*Third passage:* For if you imagine several concentric circles, they will have their existence *in a single immaterial substratum and in a life inseparable from the simple body that has moved apart from*<sup>24</sup> *indivisible being by being extended;* but they will differ from one another in that some will be larger, some smaller, some encircling, some encircled. (In *Eucl.* 53.12–18, emphasis added)

ὅταν γὰρ πολλοὺς ὁμοκέντρους φαντασθῆς, ἐν ἐνὶ μὲν πάντες ὑποκειμένῳ καὶ ἀύλῳ καὶ ἐν ζωῇ τὴν ὑπαρξίν ἔχουσιν ἀχωρίστῳ σώματος ἀπλοῦ καὶ τῷ διαστήματι πλεονάσαντος τῆς ἀμερούς οὐσίας, διαφέρουσι δὲ τῷ τε μεγέθει καὶ τῇ μικρότητι καὶ τῷ περιέχεσθαι καὶ περιέχειν.

In the first passage Proclus explains the term “passive” in the expression “passive intellect.” Passivity is marked by the fact that imagination knows imprints, which implies an affect and so an externality between the imprint and the object printed, an externality between the knowing subject and the object known (in contrast with intellection, by which the knowing subject and the object known are one); and this passivity is grounded in the inherence of imagination in the body. Proclus refers here not to the fleshly body,<sup>25</sup> but to the psychic (pneumatic) body. But he is not very clear on this point.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Morrow’s translation has: “surpasses.” The verb *πλεονάζειν* means here: “to proceed into plurality.”

<sup>25</sup> The dependence of intellection upon imagination and consequently upon the sense-perceptible human body is expressed in Aristotle, *An.* 1.1 403A5–15; 2.2 414A19–21; *Gen. an.* 2.4 738B2–6.

<sup>26</sup> Porphyry associates imagination and the solar body, cf. *Sent.* 29 (19.7f. Lamberz): *προελθούση δὲ ἐκ λόγου εἰς φαντασίας προβολὴν σύμφυτον τὸ ἡλιοειδές*, “If it (sc. soul) proceeds from reason to project imagination, it inclines naturally to a solar body” (trans. Dillon [2005], modified). In his *Commentary on Plato’s Cratylus*, Proclus speaks of a corporeal and material imagination, cf. *In Crat.* 67 (29.1–7 Pasquali): “Ὅτι ἀναλογεῖ Σωκράτης μὲν τῷ νῷ, Ἑρμογένης δὲ τῇ ἀλόγῳ δόξῃ ἐφιειμένη τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ, ὁ δὲ Καλλίας τῇ σωματοειδεῖ φαντασίᾳ καὶ ἐνύλῳ· διὸ καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν σοφιστῶν ὡς ἀνδράποδον φρονεῖται. ἡ δὲ δόξα καὶ ἡ φαντασία σχεδὸν ἀδελφαὶ εἰσιν ὡς ἀρχιθυροὶ, “Socrates is analogous to the intellect, Hermogenes to irrational opinion desiring the Good, and Callias to corporeal and *material imagination*. This is why the sophists cheat him (i.e., Callias) like a slave. But opinion and imagination are pretty much sister faculties, like next-door neighbours” (trans. Duvick, emphasis added). I think that Proclus refers here to imagination in so far as it is dependent upon sense-perceptible objects and receives imprints of sensible things.

The second passage exhibits clearly how geometric imagination partakes of intellection and of sense-perception. Like intellection, (geometric) imagination is not moved by external (sense-perceptible) objects, but is “moved by itself” (in other words: it possesses its own objects in itself). Now, unlike intellection, imagination does not know the concept, but the imprint of the concept. Insofar as it knows an *imprint*, the imagination is like *sense-perception*. But unlike sense-perception, the imprint, in the case of imagination, is not the *imprint of an external sense-perceptible object*, but the *imprint of a concept*, a concept which pre-exists in the undivided life of imagination before the very projection of it by the imagination itself.<sup>27</sup> And if imagination, unlike intellection, proceeds out of itself, it is because imagination is not outside the (psychic) body.

In the third passage, I think that the *καί in καί ἐν ζωῇ* is expegetic. Imagination is life (cf. 52.18 f.), as soul itself is life, that is: a self-moving entity. Imagination partakes of the capacity of self-moving which defines soul. And we have here an important, alas non-developed, piece of information about the body closely associated with imagination. This body is “simple.” I take it that “simple” means: “not composed (of form and matter),” i.e., immaterial (free of sensible matter). And unlike the indivisible and transcendent *λόγος* (the psychic *λόγος οὐσιώδης* or the paradigmatic intelligible form, it does not matter here), this body has extension (but only “pure” extension, extension exempt from sense-perceptible matter).<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The discursive reason projects its own indivisible *λόγοι* in imagination. But imagination is not just a passive *organon of dianoia*. It possesses its own autonomy. As the souls “first” are moved by intellect, “then” move by themselves and project the sciences from themselves (cf., e.g., *In Tim.* 1.222.27–223.2), in the same manner imagination is “first” moved by *διάνοια*, and “then” moved by itself. In a characteristic Proclan manner, we have a reproduction *inside the imagination*, and after the mode of imagination, of the pair *διάνοια/φαντασία* (the *λόγοι* wrapped up *versus* the projected *λόγοι*). In other words imagination “starts from what is partless within it” and proceeds therefrom to project the divisible (extended) geometric figures, cf. *In Eucl.* 94.25–95.20; see also Simplicius, *In de an.* 202.2–6 and 231.32–214.6 Hayduck.

<sup>28</sup> The “simple body” is not here the geometrical body (the point, the lines and the surfaces are also objects of geometry). It seems to me that there is a reference to the geometrical body in the following passage of the commentary on Plato’s *Republic*, cf. *In Remp.* 2.52.6–8: *καί γάρ ἡ φαντασία νοῦς τις ἐστὶν παθητικὸς ἔνδοον μὲν ἐνεργεῖν ἐθέλων, ἀσθενῶν δὲ διὰ τὴν εἰς τὸ στερεὸν πτώσιν*: “For the imagination is a kind of passive intellect which wants to have an internal activity, but which is without strength because of its fall into the three-dimensional.” The fall into the three-dimensional is here identified with the external activity of imagination. See also *In Eucl.* 94.26–95.2: “Imagination in its activity is not divisible only, neither is it indivisible. Rather it *moves from the undivided to the divided, from the unformed to what is formed*” (emphasis added). I think that “the divided” refers here to geometrical objects in general.



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Geometric objects and divine apparitions share common features. They are intermediate between immaterial and material entities. They are imaginary objects in the sense that imagination offers a suitable receptacle for transcendent forms which come from above by virtue of an act of projection. Imagination makes visible these realities which are *per se* invisible. Can we, on the grounds of these common features, identify geometric imagination with the pneumatic body as the receptacle of divine apparitions?<sup>29</sup> I do not think so. There is no doubt that geometric imagination is in the pneumatic body.<sup>30</sup> But the gods are located far higher in the scale of beings than the λόγοι οὐσιώδεις, which are located in the partial (individual) human soul. Indeed, by the word “gods” Proclus commonly refers to the Henads, which come just after the One. For the powers (qualities) emanating from the transcendent gods, only the “luminous wrappings” of the purified psychic body can offer a suitable organ of perception. The geometric imagination, which receives the psychic (mathematical) λόγοι projected by the weak διάνοια, cannot be identified with a “luminous wrapping.”

Indeed, the pneumatic body, as the seat of the impassible (and common) sense-perception, can be more or less purified in such a way that imagination, as impassible (and common) sense-perception turned inwards, can be located at different levels of purity.<sup>31</sup> I propose therefore the following conclusion: the pair διάνοια/φαντασία (sc. imagination in geometry) mirrors the pair gods/“luminous wrappings” (sc. imagination in the case of the

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Breton 1969, 122: “Corps psychique et imagination seraient ainsi une même puissance d’extension naturelle à l’âme *dianoétique*” (emphasis added). Trouillard 1982, 40: “Ce véhicule est identique à l’imagination,” where by “imagination” Trouillard means the geometric imagination.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. Syrianus, *In Met.* 85.4f. Kroll: τὸ μαθηματικὸν σῶμα τοῦ λόγου προβληθέντος ἐν διανοίᾳ κατὰ τὸ πνεῦμα καὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ πνεύματι φαντασίαν ὑφίσταται, “The mathematical body comes to be when the reason-principle is put forth in discursive intellection in virtue of the *pneuma* and the *imagination that is in the pneuma*” (trans. Dillon-O’Meara [2006], slightly modified, emphasis added). Cf. also 93.1–6: ῥητέον οὖν ὅτι αἱ μὲν ἀδιάστατοι ὡς λόγοι καὶ εἶδη οὐσίαι, αἱ δὲ ἐν τῇ φαντασίᾳ αἱ διασταταὶ ὡς ὕλαι τῶν εὐθειῶν ἢ τῶν περιφερειῶν. εἰ δὲ καὶ ὅλην τὴν φανταστὴν οὐσίαν ὡς ἐν ὑποκειμένῳ φαίη τις εἶναι τῇ φαντασίᾳ ἢ τῷ πνεύματι, ἐκείνων μὲν ἂν αὐτῶν ἀναγκάζοιτο δευτέραν αὐτὴν ἀποφαίνεσθαι καὶ ἀτελεστεράν, οὐ μέντοι τῆς αἰσθητῆς οὐσίας, “Our reply to this must be that there are substances that are non-extended, such as reason-principles or forms, and there are other substances, residing in the imagination, serving as matter for either straight lines or curved ones. But if one were to say that all substance at the imaged level resides as it were in a substratum, i.e., *imagination or pneuma*, one might be compelled to declare it to be secondary and less perfect than those entities (sc. the reason-principles or forms), but not than sensible substance” (trans. Dillon-O’Meara, modified, emphasis added).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Porphyry, *De regr. an.* 2.27.21–28.19 Bidez, in Sorabji 2004, 71f.

apparitions of the divine). As intelligible matter, geometric imagination is a purified matter, a purified receptacle suitable for the λόγοι projected by δianoια, just as the “luminous wrappings” are an even more purified receptacle for the powers that gods give off. The σύμβολα of the gods are given shapes and receive different forms (μορφαι), but as visible forms projecting a divine light they transcend the neat and precise outlines of the geometrical figures in the imagination of the geometer.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In his commentary on Euclid (*In Eucl.* 94.21–25), Proclus says: “For not only the reason-principles in the δianoια, but also the impressions of intelligible and divine forms, are accepted by the imagination in accordance with its peculiar nature, which furnishes shapes (μορφάς) to the shapeless and figures (σχήματα) to what is without figure” (trans. Morrow, modified). Proclus refers in these lines to imagination as receptive (μορφωτικώς) of two kinds of “objects”: the dianoetic (mathematical) reason-principles (at the level of soul) and the divine forms, i.e., (probably) the intellectual forms (in the paradigmatic intellect), focusing on the features that imagination furnishes to both of them: extension, shape, divisibility.

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## NEOPLATONIZING GNOSTICISM AND GNOSTICIZING NEOPLATONISM IN THE “AMERICAN BAROQUE”

Jay Bregman

Hilary Armstrong gave the Gnostics a fair hearing in his “Dualism: Platonic, Gnostic, and Christian.”<sup>1</sup> He basically viewed Gnosticism as having some points of contact with Platonism, but since they were not doing the same thing as philosophers, he reasoned, it would be wrong to treat them as “bad philosophers.” Although Gnostic anti-cosmism is balanced by his nuanced view of certain Gnostic pro-cosmic ideas, Gnostics are “mythicizers,” hence doing something very different from philosophers since, in the last analysis, they think that the cosmos is at best transitory—a place to flee from.

However, in the last decade or so, there has been a reconsideration of Armstrong’s view. Led especially by John Turner and others, scholars have affirmed that Gnostics, Middle Platonists, and Neoplatonists indeed have more in common philosophically than had been previously supposed; Gnostics were perhaps even writing commentaries on Plato’s dialogues in order to gain a respectable hearing in Plotinus’ seminars.<sup>2</sup>

Nineteenth-century America was the scene of an earlier engagement with Gnosticism, through which heterodox thinkers paved the way for its current serious reception. I will trace the roots and anticipations of contemporary discussions, in the Neoplatonic, late Transcendentalist journal, *The Platonist*, and other North American sources.

Metaphysical thinkers of the later American Renaissance painted their religious symbols on a Neoplatonic canvas. A secularizing world had given rise to notions of a universal syncretistic cosmic Theism, which welcomed the “esoteric” strains of all traditions. Alexander Wilder, M.D., a regular contributor to *The Platonist*, also cast a wide syncretistic net: the Neoplatonists taught Platonic philosophy in the form of a religion embracing some of the characteristic features of Jainism, the Sankhya and Pythagorean schools (*hē gnōsis tōn ontōn*). His accounts include Solar worship, Mithras, “divine men” (*theioi andres*) like Apollonius and Pythagoras, and theurgy, including

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<sup>1</sup> Armstrong 1990, 41; for his general overview, see pp. 42–51.

<sup>2</sup> A good place to start a study of this ongoing discussion is Turner and Majercik 2000.

Proclus' teaching that *symbola* or "tokens" made ascent possible through each level of reality up to the One. He was interested in Alchemy and the philosopher's stone as a kind of universal medicine, the perfection of matter.<sup>3</sup>

With such "over the top" syncretism and the increasing confusion of an incipient late nineteenth-century "spiritual crisis," perhaps the "American Baroque" is a suitable name for the era's heterodox branches of occult and religious thought. The "Classical" American Renaissance (seminal period, roughly 1830–1860) peaked in the first half of the 1850s; after 1860 or so, there was an increasing sense of social, economic and spiritual crisis. Parallel to the almost grotesque ostentation and extravagance of the Gilded Age, was the overheated spirituality, in part a reaction to the rise of scientific materialism, in which Neoplatonists, Theosophists, and other esoteric and syncretistic religious groups made common cause. Just as in Europe of the sixteenth and well into the seventeenth century, there were somewhat similar crises, together with wars and revolutions in connection with religion, the rise of Hermetic thought and Neoplatonism, changing class and economic conditions, a new philosophy and the rise of early modern science. Roughly two hundred years apart (late seventeenth and late nineteenth centuries) both eventually gave way to an initially more rationalistic and reform-minded eras.

Given the nineteenth-century rise of interest in comparative religion, it is not hard to find more than a few American "Synesii on steroids," as it were. Neoplatonism, mystical gurus such as Socrates and Ammonius Saccas, Esoteric Christianity, Alchemy, Hermetic writings, Gnostic works, Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, Ancient Mesopotamian, Phoenician, Egyptian, Kabbalah, Essenes, and Pythagoreans: all became different but compatible expressions of the One Great Truth. Alexander Wilder was the most comprehensive among these "baroque" figures, whose writings remain intelligible. He gave new meaning to Symmachus' celebrated appeal to Christian emperors for religious tolerance, *Uno itinere non potest pervenire ad tam grande secretum* ("The ultimate mystery cannot be reached by one path alone"). Such later Transcendentalist disciples of Thomas Taylor opted for a new non-denominational syncretistic "cosmic Theism." Wilder also sounded a "revivalist" note: "The reflecting men of all the older ages, down to Plato, Plotinus, Iamblichus, and the followers of the Gnosis, all paid like respect to the great arcanum of life and of Man."<sup>4</sup> He viewed Proclus as a perennialist

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<sup>3</sup> Wilder 2009, 21–23; 2010, 22.

<sup>4</sup> Wilder 2009, 188.

who took the primitive unity of religions and philosophies for his point of beginning: "Like the Rabbis and Gnostic Christians, he cherished a profound reverence for the *Abrahas*: the 'word' or 'Venerable Name.'"<sup>5</sup> In the thought of the *Philalethians* (especially followers of Ammonius Saccas), there are three elements: godhead, the human soul and theurgy. From the Divine All proceeds the Divine Wisdom or Egyptian Amun;<sup>6</sup> man becomes the "little world" containing all, the Microcosm.<sup>7</sup> The secret of the Hermetic philosophy is the key to all knowledge; another form of the riddle of the Sphinx, the philosopher's stone's triple garment, i.e., body, soul and spirit, is man.<sup>8</sup>

Although Emerson himself eschewed such an occult orientation, he nevertheless opened up a path to it for late Transcendentalists through his stated approval of Iamblichean theurgy, and his metaphorical yet transcendental reflection, in Hermetic mode, on the fall of the cosmic *Anthropos*: "Man is the dwarf of himself"; he once filled the cosmos, now he is related to it only distantly and by analogy. Along similar lines, reflecting his notion of the "lapse" of Spirit, fellow Transcendentalist Bronson Alcott sees Nature as "reason immersed ... and plunged into matter ... it doth not know but do."<sup>9</sup>

Wilder dubbed the Eclectic Theosophers, disciples of Plotinus' mysterious guru, Ammonius Saccas, *Philalethians*, lovers of truth, and *Analogetists*,<sup>10</sup> interpreters of rites and myths by analogy and correspondence, relating events in the external world to states of the soul. Pagans and Christians alike adopted these doctrines *and a general fusion of religious belief seemed imminent*. But their ideas incited Christian jealousy *and* led to the murder of Synesius' teacher, Hypatia.

"The Spectator of the Mysteries,"<sup>11</sup> writes Dr. Wilder, receives at Eleusis the revelation of a mystic *gnōthi sauton*: knowledge of the self becomes knowledge of the absolute (Socrates had it without being an initiate, as his last words prove). He defines "entheasm" as participation in the divine nature, together with prophetic illumination and inspiration, which modern physicians consider "pathological" because of their limited materialist point of view.

Plotinus and Iamblichus attest to the interior intuition through which we apprehend the "absolute fact" more perfectly than through reasoning or

<sup>5</sup> Wilder 2010, 14.

<sup>6</sup> Wilder 2010, 6–7.

<sup>7</sup> Wilder 2010, 22.

<sup>8</sup> Wilder 2010, 22–25.

<sup>9</sup> See Bregman 2000, 255.

<sup>10</sup> Wilder 2010, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Johnson 1881–1882, 3–6.



sense perception.<sup>12</sup> “we begin with instinct, the end is omniscience.” It is a direct beholding, what Schelling denominates a realization, which blends us with that identification of subject and object called Deity and, to use an expression of Emerson, “becomes recipient of the soul of the world.”

Wilder understood that Iamblichus added theurgy to the Eclectics’ theosophy. In Plotinus’ “gnosis,” the soul proceeds philosophically, first by means of sense perception, second by discursive dialectics and third by noetic intuition. Its instinct is to return to its origin, which is its higher undescended part; its center, the eternal good, through a faculty superior to reason; such ecstasy is intervallic in this life. For Iamblichus, on the other hand, she proceeds theurgically, and in contemplating the blessed spectacles acquires another life and operates according to another energy. Iamblichus’ idea of God was not a natural corollary of reason, but an *a priori* imprint on the soul. The soul controls inferior natures from above, in association with spiritual beings through theurgy—as a god. Proclus refined and systematized the theurgy of Iamblichus. Iamblichus and Proclus both extol prayer as a means of spiritual attainment. For the latter, e.g., “prayer is by no means an insignificant part of the upward path of souls.” Iamblichus sees prayer as “the general end of religious worship”; they “join the Sacred Art in an indissoluble connection with the divine beings.” Proclus also emphasized “faith” (*pistis*); not as in Plato’s *doxa, pistis* in the sense of opinion as opposed to knowledge of the sense world, but rather “super-noetic” *pistis*. In Proclus, faith comprises an internal method by which each perceives its own unity or divinity, a higher kind of “intuition” through the flower of the intellect and beyond, to the “flower of the whole soul”: “He (Proclus) even thought that there were *symbola* or tokens, that would enable a person to pass from one order of spiritual beings to another ... till he arrived at the absolute Divine. Faith, he inculcated, would make one the possessor of this talisman.”<sup>13</sup>

Gnostic elements are to be found in rather unexpected places. Arthur Versluis’ interpretation of Captain Ahab’s “Gnosis” in *Moby Dick* is a compelling example.<sup>14</sup> Levi St. Armand, dissenting from T.S. Eliot’s criticism of Poe as an

<sup>12</sup> Bregman 1990, 112–113.

<sup>13</sup> Wilder 2009, 20–21. For Proclus on the “flower of the intellect” and “the flower of the whole soul,” see Proclus, *Commentary on the Chaldaean Oracles* in Uzdevinys 2004, 244–249; on Proclus’ “faith” (*pistis*) see *Theol. plat.* 1.25: “for we should investigate the Good, not through knowledge and in an imperfect manner, but giving ourselves up to the divine light and closing the eyes to become thus established in the unknown and occult unity of beings. For such a kind of ‘faith’ (*pistis*) is more venerable than cognitive activity not in us only, but in the gods themselves.” (Trans. Thomas Taylor, slightly modified.)

<sup>14</sup> Versluis 2001, 97–100; in general, pp. 95–104, including Melville as a “descendentalist”

unfocused “Gothic” horror writer, has suggested that his *Eureka* and other works, including “The Fall of the House of Usher” are primarily Gnostic/Hermetic, analyzable into the components of an Alchemical Process, which perhaps anticipated Jung’s “Analytical Psychology.”<sup>15</sup> The American interest in Jung himself has had its own unique development, beyond simply hanging on the coattails of Freudian Psychoanalysis.<sup>16</sup>

Swedenborg and Mesmer, who, according to C. Gutierrez, postulated an influential “third way,” “between Renaissance enchantment and scientific empiricism,” provided the thought structure for much of this.<sup>17</sup> Herbert Leventhal has detailed, then, the arrival intact of Renaissance Occult cosmology to the New World, and an underground Occult eighteenth-century “counter enlightenment.”<sup>18</sup> The Transcendentalists, with their Bible of the Nations (also influenced by Swedenborg, Emerson’s Representative “Mystic”), played no small role in these developments. The context was pluralism, the democratization of education, American instinctive pragmatic experimentation, and, most importantly, secularization. The last is too often wrongly understood to lead only to Protagorean “secular humanism,” materialism, atheism, and skepticism, whereas it also led to the very serious and still active interest in, for example, non-western religious traditions.<sup>19</sup> Central to this type of thought, and central to Swedenborg as well as to Proclus, was “the idea of correspondence, in which many levels of the universe replicate one another.”<sup>20</sup>

The spiritual evolution of humankind called for a new “world church.” The contemporary candidate was H.P. Blavatsky’s *Theosophical Society*. Blavatsky herself accepted the attribution of the term “theosophy” to Plotinus’ guru Ammonius Saccas. Theosophy could provide an “exoteric esoteric” framework in order to attract students and “initiates” to an inclusive spiritual movement; all religions were esoterically identical.

Blavatsky and her colleague, Mr. Olcott, wrote introductions to Wilder’s works. (In the Neoplatonic sections of her *Isis Unveiled*, she borrows liberally from Wilder’s ideas.) The Neoplatonic “chain of being,” in which the

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(Transcendentalist in reverse), Schopenhauer as a kindred spirit and favorite of the author, and his clear rejection of the Neoplatonic *privatio boni* accepted by the Transcendentalists.

<sup>15</sup> Levi St. Armand 1972, 1–8.

<sup>16</sup> E. Taylor 1999, 222–224.

<sup>17</sup> Gutierrez 2009, 7, quoting Gabay 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Gutierrez 2009, 6, from Leventhal 1976.

<sup>19</sup> This is in part due to the “Counter-Enlightenment” program of the European Romantics, influential on the Transcendentalists, among others.

<sup>20</sup> Albanese 2007, 179.

elements of the natural world corresponded with the cosmic and noetic realms, became the *lingua franca* of American Occult movements, including Spiritualism. The “vertical perspective” was the royal road to universal salvation, mind cures involving re-attuning our *psychē-sōma* to “heavenly harmonies,” and contact with the “other side.” Mme. Blavatsky herself had been a Spiritualist but later criticized the movement by contrast with the real nature of the “spiritual world.” Spiritualism was itself based on a revived Neoplatonic/Hermetic Renaissance chain of being, with a vitalist emphasis.

Wilder, the physician, accepted a *noetic*-toned theory of evolution. We have mental faculties animals do not have. There is no evolutionary connection between the human and the animal brain. The mental faculties have the brain for their principal organ: the “sensuous” is related to the *medulla oblongata*; the “reasoning” to the parts immediately above; and the “supersensuous” (*noetic*) to the the coronal region of the brain. Furthermore, evolution cannot explain the “ensoulment” of body (and of the hylozoistic cosmos) described in Plato’s *Timaeus*.

Significantly, according to one Theosophist, “Wilder experienced a number of radical changes in his religious views ... for a time he identified with revivalist movements ... but finally grew out of them into a sphere of spiritual freedom & became an outstanding exponent of Platonism and Hermetic Philosophy.”<sup>21</sup>

The Theosophists gave their *imprimatur* to a new edition of Thomas Taylor’s Neoplatonic-toned interpretive essay, *The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, where A. Wilder, in his learned introduction, accepts Taylor’s Proclan speculations on the meaning of the Mysteries, but also points out that Taylor was unaware of their Hindu origins (*sic*).

*The Platonist* included articles on Theosophy, as well as on comparative religion and Platonism. A typical issue might include the Yoga of Patanjali, Sufism (including the Neoplatonic-inspired Illuminism of Suhrawardi), “Astral Perception,” and Taylor’s (or the editor’s) essays and/or translations of Platonic texts.

In an article on the origin of Theosophy, the author of an earlier piece on Spinoza, Rabbi Emmanuel Schreiber, attributes the movement to “the *Gnostics*, or more correctly Theosophists, hovering between Judaism, Christianity and Paganism, adopting ideas from all three ...”<sup>22</sup> His brief overview is useful (for the time): e.g., the *Pneumatics* inspired by the supreme god

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<sup>21</sup> T. Taylor 1987, inside back cover from biographical discussion of A. Wilder by Mme. Blavatsky.

<sup>22</sup> Johnson 1887, 499.

are free from the law; they are a law unto themselves and need no guidance; such are the prophets and possessors of the true Gnosis; next the *Psychics*, in the service of the law-giving demiurge; last the *Choics* (of earth), who are like brutes and incapable of being ruled by the precepts of the law. Sons of Adam became types of these: Seth of the Pneumatics, Abel of the Psychics, and Cain of the Choics. A radical Christian version of this kind of *gnosis* made Christianity the product of the “Unknown Supreme God,” Judaism that of the (bad or oppressive) demiurge, and “Paganism” that of “Primitive Matter.” Among his notable remarks are, “Carpocrates the carnal communist” and not surprisingly, “Although deriving from Judaism their origin, the Gnostics directed with fanatical fury their hostile attacks against it, in which the school of ... Marcion went farthest.”<sup>23</sup>

As we have seen, the syncretistic, Neoplatonizing later Transcendentalists hoped that Theosophy and other occult movements would provide them with an organized church of “exoteric esotericism.” Wilder’s friendship with Olcott and Blavatsky went so far as to include his major work of editing *Isis Unveiled*. Some suggested he was the real author, but defending Blavatsky—as the editor of *The Platonist* had on occasion—he said that these people were like those who attributed the authorship of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to the Preacher Lyman Beecher, rather than to his daughter, Harriet Beecher Stowe. Nevertheless, it seems clear that Mme. Blavatsky was dependent on him for all of the sections involving the Platonic tradition, but much of the introduction of “Before the Veil” is by Wilder.<sup>24</sup> It reads like a (Neoplatonic) history of Platonism from the early Academy, along with the idea of Greek thought’s indebtedness to India. He criticized Aristotle’s realist interpretation “that the ideas are substantial existences—real beings.” He follows V. Cousin’s eclectic Idealism:

Ideas are objects of pure conception for the human reason, and they are attributes of the divine reason ... world-soul was not the Deity ... the original One did not *exist*, as we understand the term. Not till he had united with the many—emanated existence (the monad and the duad) ... produced ... the ... manifested ... it is only the reflection of the Deity—the World-Soul. In this doctrine we find the spirit of esoteric Buddhism.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Johnson 1887, 501–502, read between the lines here—the Rabbi put Judaism in italics; by 1887 there were already some who held such ideas on the way to the creation of a kind of “mystical fascism”; e.g., the notion of the primacy of “Aryan” (i.e., Indian) religious ideas as the real and universal source of Semitic religion.

<sup>24</sup> Wilder in Blavatsky 1877.

<sup>25</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:xvi, xviii, original emphasis.

Following Porphyry: the philosophy of Plato was taught in the Mysteries. Xenocrates forbade the eating of animal flesh, because like Pythagoras he had the Hindu sages for his masters and models. And strangely: we have good evidence that the basically Pythagorean doctrine of the Heliocentric cosmos was taught in the Mysteries, and that Socrates died for *atheism*, that is, for divulging this sacred knowledge.<sup>26</sup> Blavatsky's scientific ideology is here couched in Platonic/Hermetic terms; the author of *Epinomis*, who peoples the cosmos with daemons and spirits between highest gods and human embodied souls,

is more rational than our modern scientists, who make between the two extremes one vast hiatus of being, the playground of blind forces ... On the brink of the dark chasm separating the spiritual from the physical world stands modern science, with eyes closed and head averted pronouncing the gulf impassable ... But across this chasm the patient student of Hermetic philosophy has constructed a bridge.<sup>27</sup>

Magic is natural, levitation the result of negative against positive electric polarities. There is an Occult side to nature. The true teachings of the Mysteries—originating ultimately in India—of all ancient nations, are the True world faith, obscured by Christian dogma and intolerance.

In Neoplatonism, Chaldaean style, the aether could be conceived of as the “vehicle” of the world soul. Nineteenth-century Spiritualists, however, considered it to be the source of a subtle fluid that permeated the cosmos and all bodies, making possible all the different forms of “action at a distance,” i.e., natural magic.

In an attempt to find modern philosophical legitimacy for her Hermeticism/Neoplatonism, Blavatsky enlisted Schopenhauer for the cause. This may seem incoherent at first blush, but the late nineteenth-century Symbolist poets and aesthetes also combined Schopenhauer with Plotinus and Poe.<sup>28</sup>

Schopenhauer's doctrine is that the universe is but a manifestation of the will. Every force in nature is its effect, representing a higher or lower degree of its objectiveness.<sup>29</sup>

But then, *per saltum*, this becomes the teaching of Plato, who says everything comes from the eternal invisible Will. “Our Heaven ... was produced

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<sup>26</sup> This is surely H.P. Blavatsky rather than Wilder—how did he miss it?

<sup>27</sup> Wilder in Blavatsky 1877, 1:xxii.

<sup>28</sup> Bregman 2002, 179–180.

<sup>29</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:55.

according to the eternal pattern of the 'Ideal World' contained ... in the dodecahedron" (*Tim.* 28C).

With Plato, the Primal Being is an emanation of the Demiurgic Mind (*Nous*), which contains from the eternity the "idea" of the "to be created world" within itself, and which idea he produces out of himself. The laws of nature are the established relations of this *idea* to the forms of its manifestations; "these forms," says Schopenhauer, "are time, space, and causality. Through time and space the idea varies in its numberless manifestations."<sup>30</sup>

This garbled fusion of Plato and Schopenhauer may at least be understood as reflecting the Transcendentalist adoption of Coleridge's Neoplatonized Kantianism. I will say more about this below.

Blavatsky continues with a "laundry list" of similar ideas (the idea that Primal Mind + Ur-Matter = cosmos or world soul predates Plato) from the *Chaldaean Oracles*, Philo, Phoenician *Theogony*—the version she accepted is reminiscent of Porphyry—the Orphic Hymns and the *Katha-Upanishad*, are in agreement with Kabbalists and Theurgists. Plutarch (in *De Iside et Osiride*) merely gives Greek form to ancient Egyptian wisdom.

This comprises a Schopenhauer-inspired analysis of the unreality of mind and matter, and the incoherence of materialism and naturalism. The idea that Will is the only explanation of manifest phenomena, as well as a justification of occult phenomena, follows.<sup>31</sup> The conclusion to this convoluted argument: "The ancient philosophy affirmed that it is in consequence of the manifestation of that Will—termed by Plato *the Divine Idea*—that everything visible and invisible sprung into existence."<sup>32</sup> Then, a Hermetic justification of "natural magic": "As that Intelligent Idea which, by directing its sole will-power toward a center of localized forces, called objective forms into being, so can man, the microcosm of the great Macrocosm, do the same in proportion with the development of his will-power."<sup>33</sup> Subsequently, a typical barb at the materialists: "The imaginary atoms—a figure of speech employed by Democritus (an alchemist), and gratefully seized on by the materialists—are like automatic workmen moved inwardly by the influx of that Universal Will directed upon them, and which, manifesting itself as force, sets them into activity."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:55–56.

<sup>31</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:55–62.

<sup>32</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:61–62.

<sup>33</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:62.

<sup>34</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:62.

R. Wicks' useful guide to Schopenhauer carefully analyzes the objectifications of the Will with regard to Platonism:

Within the first layer of the will's manifestation ... ideally timeless ... universal subjects become aware of universal objects, viz., the Platonic Ideas ... Within the second ('indirect') layer ... individual subjects ... become aware of individual material objects, stimuli and psychological motives ... Platonic Ideas issue from our projection of the PSR's (Principle of Sufficient Reason's) root, and are not mind-independent entities in the manner that Plato conceived of them.<sup>35</sup>

In Schopenhauer's two-tiered system, the "world of representation" has a "realm of universal objects or essences and a realm of individuated objects that kaleidoscopically reflects those essences."<sup>36</sup> His vision recalls Plotinus: the One "emanates as if it were a fountain or a sun, a great chain of being that begins with a level of universal essences and then coalesces into a level of concrete individual things that range from the animate to the inorganic."<sup>37</sup>

The Upanishads and Buddhism also significantly influenced Schopenhauer. Wicks points to this similarity in view of the Three-Body-Doctrine of Mahayana Buddhism, in which a universal Buddha principle, Reality itself, resides at the core of things. This principle instantiates itself as a series of Buddha-Manifestations, viz. deities such as Vairocana-Amitabha-Aksobhya, representing virtues such as wisdom, equanimity, and compassion, similar to the Platonic forms of wisdom, beauty and strength as embodied by Athena, Aphrodite, and Apollo. The Buddha principle further specifies itself into historical individuals, including Gautama; such a combination of Eastern and Western thought would appeal to nineteenth-century Neoplatonists and Theosophists.<sup>38</sup>

Schopenhauer thus is part of a great speculative tradition where "an all permeating oneness" is at "the ground of all being," "the rest of existence ... manifestations or particularizations of this foundational force or activity."<sup>39</sup> An important difference lies in the characterization or valuation of the primal oneness: some ascribe to it many wisdom- and intelligence-related qualities. Others minimally, ascribing to it relatively little, including Schopenhauer. The Sun of the Good and the idea vs. the darker *Urgrund*, which for Schopenhauer is "blind" Will (by which he does *not* mean god,

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<sup>35</sup> Wicks 2008, 60–61.

<sup>36</sup> Wicks 2008, 61.

<sup>37</sup> Wicks 2008, 61.

<sup>38</sup> See Wicks 2008, 61.

<sup>39</sup> Wicks 2008, 61.

as Mme. Blavatsky would have it); although the levels of the Will's objectification reflect continuous (upward) gradation, and consciousness too from conscious to subconscious to unconscious, Will is *toto genere* from the world of representation.

If we were beings capable of only having representations, the way to the thing-in-itself would be completely closed off for us. Only the other side of our own essence (i.e., will) can reveal the other side of the essence in-itself of things.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, given the prominence of the *Urgrund* in German mystical thought, including Neoplatonizing thought, connected with the emphasis on the Will in the *Hermetica*,<sup>41</sup> it becomes possible to see Blavatsky's somewhat garbled use of Schopenhauer as being not completely off the mark.

Mme. Blavatsky calls on Porphyry in her critique and attempts to "straighten out" Spiritualism:

Human spirits can *never* materialize themselves *in propria persona* ... The most they can do is to project their aethereal reflection on the atmosphere ... One of the most powerful attractions of our departed ones is their strong affection for those whom they have left on earth. It draws them irresistibly ... into the current of Astral Light vibrating between the person sympathetic to them and the Universal Soul.<sup>42</sup>

Actual visible representations, however, are not the persons represented, but rather their "portrait statues," constructed, animated and operated by the elementaries. Pausanias reports spirits at Marathon, some four hundred years after the battle with neighing horses and shadowy warriors: who produced the neighing of horses? Was it the immortal souls of Athenians? Phantoms of animals have been seen worldwide. What "personates" them?

[W]e have either to admit that animals have surviving spirits ... or hold with Porphyry (and Henry More), that ... as a rule psychical phenomena are produced by the nature-spirits of their own motion and ... good disembodied human spirits can, under exceptional circumstances ... manifest their presence by any of the phenomena *except personal materialization*.<sup>43</sup>

This somewhat confusing account represents Blavatsky's attempt to rationalize and fit in to her occult system these reported phenomena.

But, theurgists were wary of evoking souls:

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<sup>40</sup> See Wicks 2008, 63.

<sup>41</sup> Faivre 1995, 55.

<sup>42</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:68–69, original emphasis.

<sup>43</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:70, 320–321, original emphasis.



“Bring her (the soul) not forth, lest in departing she retain something,” says Psellus. “It becomes you not to behold them before your body is initiated/ Since by always alluring, they seduce the souls of the uninitiated” (Proclus) ... “It is extremely difficult to distinguish a good daemon from a bad one,” says Iamblichus ... If a human soul succeeds in penetrating the dense oppressive terrestrial atmosphere, still there is a danger the soul (may become contaminated) ... “departing she *retains* something” ... Therefore the true theurgist will avoid causing any more suffering to this pure denizen of the higher sphere than is absolutely required.<sup>44</sup>

The idea expressed here is apparently a word of caution to the theurgic occultists, concerning the danger of evoking purified souls, who may become polluted here below and thereby (paradoxically?) bring impurities back with her to the spiritual realm.

These diverse ideas of Mme. Blavatsky are based on Hermetic and Neoplatonic thought. She taught the Hermetic notion that matter has in time become, through sin, more gross and dense, and that “at the beginning the human body was ... half ethereal ... and that ... mankind communed freely with the now unseen universes” before matter became a formidable barrier.<sup>45</sup> To contextualize: no less a thinker than C.S. Peirce claimed he had been inoculated from the Schelling-inspired Transcendentalists, but thereby retained some of the virus, and speculated that matter was somehow basically “congealed” mind.<sup>46</sup>

For Blavatsky, the “astral soul” is conceived on the model of the Neoplatonic Spiritual Vehicles of the soul; the biography of Apollonius of Tyana is an allegory of the dogmas of Hermetic and Indian mysteriosophy. The Hermetic-Kabbalistic guardians of primitive divine revelation knew that the difference in creeds and religious practice was only external. They “had solved every problem that is within the grasp of human intellect [and] were bound together by a universal freemasonry of science and philosophy, which formed one unbroken chain around the globe.”<sup>47</sup> Now (1877) Theosophy would revive the eternally true doctrines: “Unless we mistake the signs, the day is approaching when the world will receive the proofs that only ancient religions were in harmony with nature and ancient science embraced all that can be known. Secrets long kept may be revealed; books long forgotten and arts long lost may be brought out to light again ...”<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:321, original emphasis.

<sup>45</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:1–2.

<sup>46</sup> West 1990, 249n1; Hausman 1993, 147–148.

<sup>47</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:38.

<sup>48</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:38.

The soul of the world, a Greek and Hindu Deity, pervades all things as Ether (astral light), the “living fire of the theurgists,” and is the basis for Mesmerism and other “spiritual phenomena.” Our own astral souls are not immortal, though they persist for a time and ascend through the elements; but the divine spirit in us is immortal (*nous* as opposed to *psychē*; and *ruach* to *nephesh* in the Kabbalah). The pre-existence of the highest part of the soul is affirmed in concert with Synesius and Origen. The teachings of Buddha and Pythagoras only differ in their names for things:

This doctrine of God as the universal mind diffused through all things underlies all ancient philosophies. The Buddhist tenets, which can never be better comprehended than when studying the Pythagorean philosophy—its faithful reflection—are derived from this source as well as the Brahmanical religion and early Christianity.<sup>49</sup>

Metempsychosis, the symbol of “the day of regeneration,” was violently distorted and grossly anthropomorphized. It became only a supplementary doctrine, “[n]either Gautama Buddha nor Pythagoras intended to teach this purely-metaphysical allegory *literally*.”<sup>50</sup>

After endless forays into comparative religion and long discussions of historical distortions of the truth, Mme. Blavatsky all but takes up the cause of late antique Neoplatonism:

Having traced the similarity of the views respecting the Logos as found in the Kabbalah and the codex of the Christian Nazarenes and the Gnostics,<sup>51</sup> the reader is prepared to appreciate the audacity of the patristic scheme to reduce a purely metaphysical figure in the concrete and make it appear as if the finger of prophecy had from time immemorial been pointing down the vista of the ages to Jesus as the coming Messiah. A theomythos intended to symbolize the coming day—near the close of the great cycle, when the “glad tidings” from heaven should proclaim the universal brotherhood and common faith of humanity the day of regeneration—was violently distorted into an accomplished fact.<sup>52</sup>

Blavatsky accepted Wilder’s accounts of the history of the “Alexandrian School” almost verbatim. Thus she reaches her conclusion:

And so our philosophers were swept away by the ignorant and superstitious masses. The Philalethians, the lovers of truth, and their eclectic school perished. And there, where the young Hypatia had taught the highest philosophical doctrines and where Ammonius Saccas has explained that ‘the whole

<sup>49</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:289.

<sup>50</sup> Blavatsky 1877, 1:289, original emphasis.

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Blavatsky 2009, 105n1.

<sup>52</sup> Blavatsky 2009, 182.

which Christ had in view was to reinstate and restore to its primitive integrity the wisdom of the ancients—to reduce within bounds the universally prevailing dominion of superstition ... and to exterminate the various errors that had found their way into the different popular religions' (Mosheim)—there we say, freely raved the (*sic*) hoi polloi of Christianity. No more precepts from the mouth of the “God-taught philosopher”, but others expounded by the incarnation of a most cruel, fiendish superstition.<sup>53</sup>

Another contributor to *The Platonist*, Isaac Myer, wrote a long erudite work on Solomon Ibn Gebirol, the Kabbalah, and the Zohar,<sup>54</sup> in which he accepts—in line with the Florentine *prisca theologia*—an early origin for the Kabbalah, which influenced Plato and Pythagoras, Gnostics and Neoplatonists, and was brought into early Christianity by St. Dionysius the Areopagite and “St.” Synesius. Myers’ first English translation of the latter’s “On Dreams” appeared serially in two issues of *The Platonist*.<sup>55</sup> He tries to show that in his theory of the *pneuma-ochēma*, knowing Kabbalah, Synesius implicitly equated Greek ideas of *pneuma*, *psychē*, and *nous* with Hebrew equivalents such as *ruach*, *nephesh* and *neshamah*. According to Blavatsky’s review, it is a work where

a counterpart is pointed out to every Zoharic idea, as embodied in ancient Hindu, Babylonian, Egyptian ... symbols. Every Pythagorean Number finds its place and classification ... and we find a striking identity of thought between nations ... Such an investigation of the mysteries ... would lead to ... the final unveiling of the heathen origins of Christianity. The learned author ... himself a Mason ... observed that ... both the N[ew] Testament and early Patristic literature ... “had a common origin in the esoteric teachings of the Israelites” [and] shows moreover a common origin of all religions. That is precisely what Theosophy does ... “[A] building is very near collapsing if people once begin to see its foundations bare” ... At this rate dogmatic and sectarian Christianity must indeed be very near its end. For in few other works are the said foundations made so visible and the mysteries of the exoteric religion laid so bare ...<sup>56</sup>

In fact, Esoteric Christians, who were liberal and averse to dogmatic and repressive forms of the faith, attempted to emphasize tolerance of other religions and an allegorical and mystical reading of doctrine, but they still affirmed Christian uniqueness. They are to be distinguished from Christian Esotericists, who saw Ur-Christianity as merely another garb for the

<sup>53</sup> Blavatsky 2009, 183.

<sup>54</sup> Myer 1988.

<sup>55</sup> Johnson 1888, 212–224, 225–231.

<sup>56</sup> Blavatsky 1889, 505, 507, 512.

perennial philosophy. The American Platonists and Occultists agreed with the latter.

In the late nineteenth century, with physics in flux and electricity not well understood yet, Edison was a Theosophist, and Darwin's co-evolutionist Wallace believed in the spiritual level of evolution; it was still possible to hold, along with the Spiritualist Andrew Jackson Davis, that the human body could act as a telegraph to connect minds and spirits, and to agree with Mesmer, himself a believer in the universal ether—ancient but also still part of physics—that:

all parts of the chain of being were subject to the dynamics of an ethereal fluid—from world-soul—that penetrates the universe and are thus affected in an analogous way to how gravity causes tides in the ocean ... Beginning with Plato's *Timaeus* ... through Neoplatonic texts from Plotinus to the Kabbalah, the great chain of being descended from the godhead to every creature in the universe, describing a cosmos that was enchanted and a humanity ... that was part of the grand plan.<sup>57</sup>

For a time, Mme. Blavatsky impressed the Society for Psychical Research, and even the great Cambridge ethicist H. Sidgwick, but they soon thought her a fraud. In their empirical search for immortality, William James was disappointed when F.H.W. Myers passed away; he failed to communicate with the Pragmatist. Citing the example of Socrates, Myers himself held that hearing “voices” was not simply a sign of insanity. Such “daemons” could be part of the higher consciousness of the self, reached by “recollection.” Belief in spirits was perhaps compromised thereby, but the soul might still be immortal.<sup>58</sup> Theosophy had an influence on many modern artists, most notably W.B. Yeats, who practiced automatic writing and created an occult world-system in “A Vision,” and was a theurgic Neoplatonist. But Yeats also made all of the complicated and baroque occult material “aesthetic” and therefore palatable. The Occult movement was in part inspired by Enlightenment anti-clericalism, the new comparative religion, as well as Swedenborg, and a Masonic/Hermetic revival. The philosophy of Absolute Idealism also provided “cover” for the movement, but the rise of naturalism and the science of the Brain, as opposed to the science of Mind, began to give the despised materialism significant victories. The living chain of being was itself occulted. Some have tried to revive it; there are still some Neoplatonic

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<sup>57</sup> Gutierrez 2009, 50, 141; recently some scholars have suggested that a return to the Neoplatonic vertical model of the “chain of being” could perhaps provide another “lost” dimension to our present limited “linear historical” orientation.

<sup>58</sup> Gray 2011, 11.

and Hermetic philosophers, mostly meeting in small groups. But many of these have begun to look to the sub-atomic quantum level for a source of, for example, “pan-psychic” ideas; and for the implicate order of physicist David Bohm, in which “all things are in all things,” as it were. Proclus would have liked this.<sup>59</sup> Although Spiritualism and even Theosophy helped bring about a global appreciation of religions and more religious pluralism, their putative version of a universal religion, in some ways reminiscent of a revival of the counter-Christian “church” of the emperor Julian and his followers (both contemporary and subsequent), has not been re-established.

In the twentieth century (into the present), there has been much interest in Gnostic ideas in psychology (e.g., Jungian) and literature (e.g., Hesse).<sup>60</sup> Films such as *The Matrix* suggest a “gnosticizing cultural tendency.” *Gnosis* magazine (and its successors) have presented articles on ancient Gnosticism and have attempted to outline and to realize in practice a modern Gnosis. Nag Hammadi scholars have even entered the discussion, most recently with the debate on the *Gospel of Judas* and its dissemination to an eager “spiritual” public.

The self-described contemporary New Kabbalist, Sanford L. Drob, includes a chapter on Kabbalah and Neoplatonism in his book *Kabbalistic Metaphors*. Influenced by J.N. Findlay, he discusses the Sefirot in the light of Plotinus and Proclus. The principle of “all in all” was adopted by the Kabbalists, Ben Sheshet’s view being that each letter comprises all of the others, and that of Asher ben David, that each divine trait (middah) is contained in each of the others. In the *Zohar*, Cordovero and the Kabbalists of Safed:

there emerged the view that each of the Sefirot interpenetrate and thereby contain aspects (*Behinnot*) of each of the others ... Later Kabbalists, e.g., Abravanel, held that not only the second Sefirah Chochmah (Wisdom), but also the entire sefirotic system corresponded to the realm of Platonic Ideas. They are, according to Abravanel, “the divine figurations with which the world was created.”<sup>61</sup>

Philip K. Dick created his own idiosyncratic Gnosis, readers finding in adaptations of his self-consciously Gnostic stories an uncanny talent for enabling them to view reality from new and startling metaphysical perspectives. His *Valis*, “Vast Living Active Intelligence System,” would be unthinkable with-

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<sup>59</sup> See Bregman 1997, 190–191.

<sup>60</sup> Berendt 1991, 163, credits Hermann Hesse and John Coltrane with a seminal influence in introducing the “New Consciousness” into the 1960’s Counter-Culture.

<sup>61</sup> Drob 2000, 131–132. Recent Neoplatonizing discussions of the Kabbalah include Friedman 1995; Matt 1998; and Green 2002.

out his creative readings of Neoplatonism, the Nag Hammadi Corpus, Hermetic thought, Kabbalah, Spinoza, and Greek Philosophy, as well as early Christianity, Eastern thought, the Pre-Socratics, and the Mysteries, including those of the Orphic-Pythagorean persuasion. His speculations fit in well with those of the nineteenth-century authors contributing to *The Platonist*. Dick could almost seem, at times, to be a Christian Platonist, if it were not for his Gnostic leanings. Valis is sometimes identified with the One and/or *nous*, or YHWH. He interprets the Torah Kabbalistically. At other times he presents Valis as a Gnostic savior; he sometimes sees Jesus as a negentropic hypercosmic savior, who “breaks into” the cosmos to set things right.

But the savior Valis ... restores our memory and gives us knowledge of ... Our real nature—forgotten but not lost—is ... fallen bits of the Godhead. His nature—the Savior’s—and ours is identical; we are him and he is us. The Creator of this world is irrational and wars against the Savior who camouflages himself and his presence here. He is an invader. It is a secret that he is here, nor do we recognize the irrationality of this world and its frauds: that it lies to us. It is us and the Savior vs. this irrational world.<sup>62</sup>

His *magnum opus*, *The Exegesis*,<sup>63</sup> details these speculations, which were written into and became part and parcel of his sci-fi novels. It includes diagrams of the Pleroma, and many complex and difficult-to-unpack theological peregrinations, which require another article.<sup>64</sup>

Dick’s instinctive Platonism, however, is dramatically presented in his dream of Lincoln’s assassination, as an “illusion” occurring in the Platonic Cave. As he puts it:

I made a fantastic breakthrough to ... what I construe to be the actual world ... that Plato distinguished from ... the merely evident world, or empirical world ... it is not an idea. It is actually a perception. The model would be as follows ... we are all sitting in a theater watching a live play ... we are all so naïve that we think that the play is factually true, that it is real, it’s not a play ... and we believe the actors *are* the characters that they’re performing ... are real. Let’s say it’s a play about the assassination of Abraham Lincoln ... And we really believe he’s Lincoln ... and this other guy is John Wilkes Boothe ... and we believe that it’s all real ... all of a sudden, the whole back scenery falls over flat ... we see stagehands ... and somebody studying their script.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>62</sup> See Bregman 2002, 188–189.

<sup>63</sup> Jackson and Lethem 2011.

<sup>64</sup> Bregman 2002, 192n43; Jackson and Lethem 2011; for Gnostic and related classical philosophical and Orphic-Pythagorean and mysteries speculations, see Jackson and Lethem 2011, esp. pp. 51–52, 83, 118, 454–455, 549–556, 600, 620–621, 856.

<sup>65</sup> Anton, Fuchs, and Bertrand 1996, 44.

This is certainly reminiscent of Plato's cave denizen who is pulled about by his chain forcibly (*Resp.* 7.515C). Dick continues:

Well, this is what happened to me ... for a period of about three and a half days it was as if the scenery had ... fallen over flat, revealing to me the nature of the reality behind it ... so different from the phenomenal world that I couldn't use language to describe it ... I've discovered, for instance, that Plotinus, the neo-Platonist, had this experience [he also mentions Sufis, Origen, Driesch, Bergson, Brahmanism, Emerson, Wordsworth] ... You know, it's a little like Plato. That is why I gave the image of watching a play ... similar to Plato's image of the pictures shown on the walls of the cave.<sup>66</sup>

He goes on to briefly discuss the theory of Kozyrev about time, which has an energy that is

the primary energy of the universe ... an energy poured into a material system and the material system is the universe ... I got rephased in terms of linear time in such a way that, instead of linear time flashing by me like the frames in a movie projector flash by, I got past the progressiveness of linear time and saw things out side of their temporal progressions.<sup>67</sup>

On a more irenic note, rejecting the dogmatic Baptism of his youth, Eric Reece suggests the real American gospel should be the *Gospel of Thomas*.<sup>68</sup> He appreciated Jefferson's understanding of Jesus as an ethical teacher, but takes it a step further. *Thomas'* intuitive mysticism would have made the rationalist Jefferson nervous. Emerson was equally concerned with how "historical" Christianity had muddled Jesus' message, but he also mined the Gospels in search of the

mystery of the soul ... Emerson did not, like Jefferson, deny Jesus' divinity; he simply said the same potential resides in every human heart. He was offering, without knowing it, the first American commentary on the Gospel of Thomas ... [T]he same Jesus whom Thomas Jefferson hoped to recover ... And whereas Jefferson found in Jesus' teaching an ethic ... Emerson found in it an alchemical light that transforms flesh into spirit ... Thomas combines these two visions of Jesus to give us ... a truly American gospel ... (where one) intuits the laws of God through the laws of nature.<sup>69</sup>

Many authors, artists and thinkers, comprising a wide range of sensibilities, have revived and brought to the attention of the contemporary world the

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<sup>66</sup> Anton, Fuchs, and Bertrand 1996, 44–45.

<sup>67</sup> Anton, Fuchs, and Bertrand 1996, 44–45; *Mutatis mutandis*, here, it would seem, we are not very far away from the discussion of being and becoming, with time as a "working model of eternity" in *Tim.* 37D.

<sup>68</sup> Reece 2005, 40–41.

<sup>69</sup> Reece 2005, 40–41.

essentially “gnostic mission” of the “American Baroque’s” spiritual seekers. Reece’s article is the best short, easy-to-read summary I have encountered to date suggesting a “natural” and pro-cosmic American gnosis, in which Enlightenment and Romantic thought are combined, keeping in mind that American Romantics did not reject the Enlightenment and secularism but built on it, while at the same time criticizing and going beyond its rationalism: *in nuce*, neo-Hellenistic syncretists, with an ample spiritual vision, unlike their eighteenth-century counterparts. The author takes into account world traditions syncretistically, as well as modern Biblical and Gnostic scholarship. Joseph Campbell, a latter-day Transcendentalist as it were, subscribed to the same “gnostic” tradition succinctly expressed in his pro-cosmic “Hermetic” introduction to Bullfinch’s *Age of Fable*,<sup>70</sup> which rings true as reflecting the authentic “American *Religion*.”

The importance of Gnosticism in the broadest sense for the development of any distinctive American philosophical or religious consciousness cannot be underestimated. Neoplatonizing and Gnosticizing Neoplatonism in any of the chameleon forms outlined above were decisive for the American Baroque.

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<sup>70</sup> Bullfinch 1979, 6: “Nature was not fallen ... there was nothing in the world that was not radiant of God. And man was not cut off from God, but himself—through unknowing—of the very substance of the very substance of Divine Mind, and when awakened to a true knowledge of himself, fully one with the Word.”



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## 18. KEY TO FRENCH REFERENCES

<i>Allégories d'Homère</i>	Heraclitus, <i>Allegoriae</i>
<i>Allogène</i>	<i>Allogenes</i> (NHC XI,3)
<i>Anonyme de Bruce</i>	<i>The Untitled Text in the Bruce Codex</i>
<i>Apocalypse de Pierre</i>	<i>Apocalypse of Peter</i> (NHC VII,3)
<i>Apocryphon de Jean</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i> (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG,2)
<i>Compendium</i>	Cornutus, <i>Theologiae Graecae compendium</i>
<i>Contre les Galiléens</i>	Julian the Emperor, <i>Contra Galileos</i>
<i>Contre les hérésies</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Adversus haereses</i>
<i>Contre les Valentiniens</i>	Tertullian, <i>Adversus Valentinianos</i>
<i>Deuxième Traité du Grand Seth</i>	<i>Second Treatise of the Great Seth</i> (NHC VII,2)
<i>Elenchos</i>	Hippolytus, <i>Refutatio omnium haeresium</i>
<i>Évangile de Judas</i>	<i>Gospel of Judas</i> (CT,3)
<i>Évangile de la Vérité</i>	<i>Gospel of Truth</i> (NHC I,3)
<i>Évangile des Hébreux</i>	<i>Gospel of the Hebrews</i> , apud Origen, <i>Comm. Jo.</i>
<i>Évangile Égyptien</i>	<i>Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit</i> (NHC III,2; IV,2)
<i>Évangile selon Marie</i>	<i>Gospel of Mary</i> (BG,1)
<i>Évangile selon Philippe</i>	<i>Gospel of Philip</i> (NHC II,3)
<i>Extraits de Théodote</i>	Clément of Alexandria, <i>Excerpta ex Theodoto</i>
<i>Hypostase des archontes</i>	<i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i> (NHC II,4)
<i>Jacques</i>	( <i>First</i> ) <i>Apocalypse of James</i> (NHC V,3; CT,2)
<i>Les Mystères d'Égypte</i>	Iamblichus, <i>De mysteriis Aegyptiorum</i>
<i>Lettre à Anébon</i>	Porphyre, <i>Epistula ad Anebonem</i>
<i>Livre des secrets de Jean</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i> (NHC II,1; III,1; IV,1; BG,2)
<i>Livre sacré du Grand Esprit invisible</i>	<i>Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit</i> (NHC III,2; IV,2)
<i>Lettre de Pierre à Philippe</i>	<i>Letter of Peter to Philip</i> (NHC VIII,2; CT,1)
<i>Logos véritable</i>	Celsus, <i>Aléthēs logos apud Origen</i> , <i>Contra Celsum</i>
<i>Marsanès</i>	<i>Marsanes</i> (NHC X)
<i>(Première) Apocalypse de Jacques</i>	( <i>First</i> ) <i>Apocalypse of James</i> (NHC V,3; CT,2)
<i>Première Pensée à la triple forme</i>	<i>Trimorphic Protennoia</i> (NHC XIII,1)
<i>Protennoia trimorphe</i>	<i>Trimorphic Protennoia</i> (NHC XIII,1)
<i>Sagesse de Jésus Christ</i>	<i>Sophia of Jesus Christ</i> (NHC III,4; BG,3)

<i>Silvanos</i>	<i>Teachings of Silvanus (NHC VII,4)</i>
<i>Témoignage de Vérité</i>	<i>Testimony of Truth (NHC IX,3)</i>
<i>Traité tripartite</i>	<i>Tripartite Tractate (NHC I,5)</i>
<i>Trois Stèles de Seth</i>	<i>Three Steles of Seth (NHC VII,5)</i>
<i>Zostrien</i>	<i>Zostrianos (NHC VIII,1)</i>

