

Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies 81

Cosmology and Fate in Gnosticism and Graeco-Roman Antiquity

Under Pitiless Skies

By

Nicola Denzey Lewis

BRILL

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and Graeco-Roman Antiquity

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VOLUME 81

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LEIDEN · BOSTON
2013

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Lewis, Nicola Denzey, 1966-

Cosmology and fate in gnosticism and Graeco-Roman antiquity : under pitiless skies / by Nicola Denzey Lewis.

page cm. – (Nag Hammadi and Manichaean studies, ISSN 0929-2470 ; 81)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-90-04-24548-8 (hardback : alk. paper) – ISBN 978-90-04-24576-1 (e-book) 1. Gnosticism. 2. Cosmology. 3. Fate and fatalism. I. Title.

BT1390.L49 2013

299'.932–dc23

2012048689

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.

ISSN 0929-2470

ISBN 978-90-04-24548-8 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-24576-1 (e-book)

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This book is printed on acid-free paper.

For my girls, Lola and Isobel

*Nequaquam nobis divinitus esse paratam.
Naturam rerum; tanta stat praedita culpa.*

“Had God designed the world, it would not be
A world so frail and faulty as we see.”

—Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, 5.198–199

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book began long, long ago, as my 1998 doctoral dissertation at Princeton University under the expert guidance of Elaine Pagels, John Gager, Ted Champlin and Peter Brown. The combined skills, breadth of knowledge, and sheer brilliance of these scholars made for perhaps the most intimidating dissertation committee known to humanity, and I was daily humbled by the experience. Any successes of this book I owe to them; its shortcomings, on the other hand, remain entirely my own.

The extraordinarily congenial and interdisciplinary environment of Princeton's Program in the Ancient World also brought me into the orbit of three other outstanding Princeton scholars whom I must thank here. The first is Martha Himmelfarb, whose excellent work on Jewish pseudepigraphical and ascent texts undergirds what I learned about second-century Christian apocalyptic. Over the past decade in particular, I have been so grateful for what I learned from her as I read early Christian material. Bob Lamberton deserves credit for actually setting me on the path to this book by raising the specter of 'cosmic pessimism' as a wholly constructed worldview, and by setting aside the conventional classicist's biases as limited to a more normative canon of texts and approaches. Garth Fowden's expertise in the Hermetica reminded me to look beyond Christian and Jewish materials to Graeco-Roman religious materials, providing me with a much wider palette of texts and ideas than I would have been aware of without his insights.

Within the circles of those who work primarily on Gnosticism, I have found enduring support. Papers based on this book were presented, over the years, at the Society of Biblical Literature's Nag Hammadi and Gnosticism section. Through that section, I have been fortunate to have been guided, corrected, and inspired by a coterie of outstanding scholars. Chief among those who must be singled out are John Turner, Michael Waldstein, Michael Williams, Birger Pearson, Hans-Martin Schenke, Frederik Wisse, Einar Thomassen, Louis Painchaud, and Paul-Hubert Poirier. I've turned often to April DeConick's fabulous work on ascent and mysticism in Gnosticism, and never failed to be revived by her insights. Her recent congress on the Judas Codex in Houston (2008)—masterfully executed—reignited my passion for all things cosmic in the second century. Tuomas Rasimus's work on the Ophites pushed me to clarify my own views on ancient ascent in ways I appreciate. Finally, both Karen King and Ismo Dunderberg have

repeatedly (and occasionally relentlessly) expressed their desire to see this book in print, as has, most recently, David Brakke. I thank them for having faith in its value in those darker moments of losing my own sense of direction.

Chapter eight of this book, on sidereal determinism in the *Gospel of Judas*, is largely a reprint of my essay “Fate and the Wandering Stars: The Jewish Apocalyptic Roots of Astral ‘Determinism’ in the Gospel of Judas” that appeared in April DeConick’s *Codex Judas Papers*. When I first completed the manuscript of this book, the *Gospel of Judas* had not yet reached even the scholarly community. The language of the stars and sidereal enslavement thoroughly saturates this text, and thus no book on astral fatalism can be complete without some reference to it. At the same time, the term *heimarmene* nowhere appears in the *Gospel of Judas*, and I remain convinced that this text draws upon a very different set of conceptual materials than the others which I discuss throughout this volume. I trust that this essay’s re-appearance here will clarify how it does and does not relate to the main argument of this book. I thank Brill for permission to re-publish the essay here.

Institutionally, I could not have done without the support of Harvard University’s Committee on the Study of Religion under the direction of Diana Eck, where, when I was not teaching, I was a Research Associate so as to luxuriate in the immense riches of Widener Library. At Brown University, thanks to the delightful combination of Susan Ashbrook Harvey and Ross Kraemer, I was given another marvelous luxury: a research assistant of my own; without Robyn Walsh’s help, this project would have languished for much longer.

At Brill, I would like very much to thank Einar Thomassen for his sage advice, and the keen eye and wise observations of the manuscript’s anonymous reader. I have endeavored to incorporate the suggestions and corrections which s/he pointed out; needless to say, all errors that remain are my own.

As ever, I am thankful for the support of my family—particularly my mother’s insistence that everyone needs to know about this material, however obscure—and of my wonderful husband, Tal Lewis, whose patience and intellectual curiosity provide constant inspiration.

ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviations for some frequently cited books, collected works and series are listed below. Abbreviations employed in the bibliography for specialist journals conform to those used in *L'Année Philologique*, sometimes expanded for ease of comprehension, so that they need not be repeated here.

Nag Hammadi Tractates

(Note: The line references to most Nag Hammadi works in this book are prefaced by the codex number (NHC = Nag Hammadi Codex) to allow for more precision in citing, since some treatises exist in more than one recension in the Nag Hammadi Library itself.)

<i>1stApJas</i>	<i>(First) Apocalypse of James</i>
<i>ApJn</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
<i>Disc. 8–9</i>	<i>Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth</i>
<i>Exeg.Soul</i>	<i>Exegesis on the Soul</i>
<i>GosEg</i>	<i>Gospel of the Egyptians</i>
<i>GosPhil</i>	<i>Gospel of Philip</i>
<i>Hyp.Arch.</i>	<i>Hypostasis of the Archons</i>
<i>Orig.Wld</i>	<i>On the Origin of the World</i>
<i>SJC</i>	<i>Sophia of Jesus Christ</i>
<i>Treat.Res.</i>	<i>Treatise on the Resurrection</i>
<i>Tri.Prot.</i>	<i>Trimorphic Protennoia</i>
<i>Tri.Trac.</i>	<i>Tripartite Tractate</i>
<i>Val.Exp.</i>	<i>A Valentinian Exposition</i>

Other Gnostic and Hermetic Texts

<i>Asclep.</i>	<i>Asclepius</i>
<i>BG</i>	<i>Papyrus Berolinensis</i>
<i>Exc.Theod.</i>	<i>Clement of Alexandria, Excerpta ex Theodoto</i>
<i>GosJud</i>	<i>Gospel of Judas</i>
<i>Poim.</i>	<i>Poimandres (CH 1)</i>
<i>PS</i>	<i>Pistis Sophia</i>

Jewish, Heresiological and Early Patristic Texts

<i>1st Ap.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>First Apology</i>
<i>2nd Ap.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Second Apology</i>
<i>Ad Graec.</i>	Tatian, <i>Oration to the Greeks</i>
<i>Adv.Haer.</i>	Irenaeus, <i>Against Heresies</i>
<i>Ant.</i>	Josephus, <i>Antiquities of the Jews</i>
<i>Bellum</i>	Josephus, <i>Wars of the Jews</i>
<i>Civ.Dei</i>	Augustine, <i>City of God</i>
<i>Conf.</i>	Philo, <i>On the Confusion of Languages</i>
<i>de Mig.Abr.</i>	Philo, <i>On the Migration of Abraham</i>
<i>Dial.Tryph.</i>	Justin Martyr, <i>Dialogue with Trypho</i>
<i>Ecl.Proph.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Prophetic Eclogues</i>
<i>EH</i>	Eusebius, <i>Ecclesiastical History</i>
<i>Her.</i>	Philo, <i>Who is the Heir of Divine Things?</i>
<i>Leg.</i>	Athenagoras, <i>Embassy to the Greeks</i>
<i>Pan.</i>	Epiphanius, <i>Medicine Chest</i>
<i>Prep.Ev.</i>	Eusebius, <i>Preparation for the Gospel</i>
<i>Ps-Clem. Hom.</i>	<i>Pseudo-Clementine Homilies</i>
<i>Quaes.Ex.</i>	Philo, <i>Questions and Answers on Exodus</i>
<i>Quaes.Gen.</i>	Philo, <i>Questions and Answers on Genesis</i>
<i>Ref.</i>	Hippolytus, <i>Refutation of All Heresies</i>
<i>Spec.Leg.</i>	Philo, <i>The Special Laws</i>
<i>Strom.</i>	Clement of Alexandria, <i>Miscellanies</i>
<i>Vit.Mos.</i>	Philo, <i>Life of Moses</i>

Greek and Roman Texts

<i>Comm.Omega</i>	Zosimus of Panopolis, <i>Commentary on the Letter Omega</i>
<i>de Plat.</i>	Apuleius, <i>On Plato</i>
<i>de Stoic.Repug.</i>	Plutarch, <i>de Stoicorum Repugnantiis</i>
<i>de Const.</i>	Seneca, <i>On Constancy (De Constantia Sapientiiis)</i>
<i>de Tranq.</i>	Seneca, <i>On Tranquility (De Tranquillitate Animi)</i>
<i>de Prov.</i>	Seneca, <i>On Providence</i>
<i>Enn.</i>	Plotinus, <i>Enneads</i>
<i>In Aen.</i>	Servius, <i>Commentary on the Aeneid</i>
<i>Metam.</i>	Apuleius, <i>Metamorphoses</i>
<i>Tim.</i>	Plato, <i>Timaeus</i>

Modern Scholarly Journals and Series

ANF	<i>A Select Library of the Ante-Nicene Fathers</i>
ANRW	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischer Welt</i> (Berlin and New York 1970–)

ARW	<i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft</i>
Bauer	W. Bauer, W.F. Arndt, F.W. Gingrich, F.W. Danker, <i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i> (Chicago)
BCNH	Bibliothèque Copte de Nag Hammadi (Laval, 1974–)
BZNW	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche</i>
Crum	W.E. Crum (ed.), <i>A Coptic Dictionary</i> (Oxford)
CSEL	<i>Corpus inscriptionum latinarum</i> (Berlin, 1863–)
CIL	<i>Corpus scriptorum ecclesiasticorum latinorum</i> (Vienna)
EPRO	Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l'Empire romain
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
JAAR	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
JHI	<i>Journal of the History of Ideas</i>
JTS	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
LCL	Loeb Classical Library (London and Cambridge)
LSJ	Liddell, Scott, Jones (eds.), <i>Greek-English Lexicon</i> (Oxford, 1966)
NF	A.D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière (eds.), <i>Corpus Hermeticum</i> (Paris 1946–1954)
NHMS	Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies (Leiden)
OTP	James H. Charlesworth, (ed.), <i>Old Testament Pseudepigrapha</i> . Two Volumes (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983–1985)
NovTest	<i>Novum Testamentum</i>
NTA	W. Schneemelcher (ed.), <i>New Testament Apocrypha</i>
NTS	<i>New Testament Studies</i>
PG or PL	J. Migne (ed.), <i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (Paris 1857–1866); <i>Patrologia Latina</i> (Paris, 1844–1864)
PW	Pauly-Wissowa (ed.), <i>Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaften</i>
PGM	K. Preisendanz et al. (eds.), <i>Papyri Graecae Magicae. Die griechischen Zauberpapyri</i> (Stuttgart, 1973–1974)
RAC	<i>Reallexicon für Antike und Christentum</i> (Stuttgart, 1950–)
RArch	<i>Revue archéologique</i>
REG	<i>Revue des études grecques</i>
RevedesRelig	<i>Revue des Religions</i>
RSR	<i>Revue des sciences religieuses</i>
SVF	H. von Arnim, ed., <i>Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta</i> (Stuttgart)
SBLASP	<i>Society for Biblical Literature Annual Seminar Papers</i>
TDNT	G. Kittel and G. Friedrich (eds.), <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TLZ	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
VC	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
ZNW	<i>Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

INTRODUCTION

ἢ δὲ εἰμαρμένη ἐστὶν αἰθέριον σῶμα. Σπέρμα
τῆς τῶν πάντων γενέσεως

—Heraclitus, quoted by Galen, *De
placitis Hippocratis et Platonis* 1.28

In the late second century, the ‘philosopher-emperor’ Marcus Aurelius, a committed Stoic, reflected on the nature of cosmic order in his little notebook entitled ΤΩΝ ΕΙΣ ΕΑΥΤΟΝ, *Meditations* or *Thoughts to Himself*: “Ἦτοι ἀνάγκη εἰμαρμένη καὶ ἀπαράβατος τάξις ἢ πρόνοια ἰλάσιμος ἢ φυρμός εἰκαιότητος ἀπροσπάτητος: “The universe must be governed either by a fore-ordained destiny—an order that no one may step beyond, or by a merciful providence, or by a chaos of chance devoid of a ruler” (*Meditations* 12.14). Faced with these philosophical options, Marcus considered the paths of conduct available to anyone who sought to live in harmony with the cosmos: Εἰ μὲν οὖν ἀπαράβατος ἀνάγκη, τί ἀντιτείνεις; “If,” he asks, “the theory of an insuperable fate be true, why struggle against it?” If, however, providence “watches over all” with a rule both merciful and just, then one ought to render oneself ἄξιον σαυτὸν ποίησον τῆς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ βοηθείας, “worthy of celestial aide.” “But,” Marcus concludes, “if there is nothing but leaderless chaos, rest content that in the midst of this storm-swept sea you have within yourself reason still guiding you” (εἰ δὲ φυρμός ἀνηγεμόνευτος, ἀσμένιζε, ὅτι ἐν τοιούτῳ τῷ κλύδωνι αὐτὸς ἔχεις ἐν σεαυτῷ νοῦν τινα ἡγεμονικόν. (*Meditations* 12.14).

It was Marcus’s Stoic education that had produced in him this profound sense of harmony with the cosmos, this conviction that the solution to the enduring question of how one ought to relate to the cosmic order was one of internal acquiescence or *apatheia*—literally, a freedom from the troublesome *pathe* or passions which had accrued in so many encrusted layers around the pure, divine Reason within the individual.

From the loneliness of his tent on campaign near the Danube, Marcus found comfort for the doggedness of his existential obsessions in philosophy. But he was certainly not alone. Others in the Empire had pondered the same questions: how to live in harmony with the cosmos? How to find

¹ All translations of Marcus Aurelius are my own, based on the Greek text established by Joachim Dalfen, *Marci Aurelii Antonini ad se ipsum libri XII* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1979).

comfort under such a vast, fixed, ordered system? Above all, how to find the appropriate philosophy to which one could wholly entrust oneself, a philosophy that one could count upon to provide sure knowledge that one was living in proper relation to an order so much greater than oneself? Thus perhaps a century before Marcus Aurelius composed his *Meditations*, the author of a relatively obscure religious tractate entitled *Eugnostos the Blessed* had, unknown to the Emperor, already recorded the following views on the cosmic *oikonomia*:²

For the ordering of the aeon is spoken about in three (different) opinions by them, (and) hence they do not agree with one another. [...] For some [say about the cosmos] that it was [directed by] itself. Others, that it is Providence [πρόνοια] (that directs it). Others, that it is Fate. Now, it is none of these. Again, (of) the three voices that I have just described, none is true.³

The author of *Eugnostos* acknowledges the same essential terms of philosophical debate familiar to us from Marcus's observation: the cosmos could be ruled by fate, or by providence, or it could rule itself. But he lacked Marcus's resolute faith in innate Reason as a means of reconciling oneself with the cosmic order, whatever it might be. Humans were not to him essentially divine beings complicated and compromised by layers of encrusted matter and passions; they were nothing but these layers: $\chi\epsilon\rho\omega\mu\epsilon\ \nu\upsilon\mu\ \bar{\nu}\tau\alpha\chi\pi\omicron\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \chi\bar{\nu}\bar{\eta}\tau\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\upsilon\omicron\lambda\eta\ \bar{\eta}\pi\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \omega\alpha\tau\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\gamma\ \sigma\epsilon\omicron\bar{\nu}\omega\gamma\iota\varsigma$, "all those born from the foundation of the cosmos up to this time are dust" (*Eugnostos*, NHC III 70, 3–6).⁴

² This tractate from the Nag Hammadi collection lacks any overt reference to Christianity, and thus may be a non-Christian philosophical treatise in epistolary format. A date of the late first century or very early second century has been suggested by Douglas Parrott, *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 3–4 and V, 1 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502,3 and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1081: Eugnostos and the Sophia of Jesus Christ*, NHMS 27 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 5–6, and D.M. Parrott, "Gnosticism and Egyptian Religion," *NovTest* 29/1 (1987): 78–79. Parrott's dating is a century earlier than that proposed (but not substantiated) by Martin Krause, "The Letter of Eugnostos," in Werner Foerster, ed., *Gnosis: A Selection of Gnostic Texts 2: Coptic and Mandaean Sources*, trans. R. McL. Wilson from a 1971 edition (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974), 26.

³ *Eugnostos* remains extant in two versions in the Nag Hammadi library; my translation from the Coptic text here, based on the more complete version in Codex III, has been taken from the critical edition of Douglas Parrott, *Nag Hammadi Codices III, 3–4 and V, 1 with Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 3 and Oxyrhynchus Papyrus 1081: Eugnostos and The Sophia of Jesus Christ* (Leiden: Brill, 1991). See, too, the excellent French critical edition, Anne Pasquier, *Eugnoste (NH III, 3 et V, 1): lettre sur le Dieu transcendant*, 2 vols., (Québec: les presses de l'université Laval; Louvain/Paris: Peeters, 2000). Codex V's version of *Eugnostos* actually preserves the Greek term $\epsilon\iota\mu\alpha\rho\mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\eta$ for "it was [subject to] Fate": $[\epsilon\tau\alpha\varphi\omega\pi\epsilon\ \epsilon\lambda\tau\bar{\eta}\ \omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\bar{\nu}\mu\alpha\rho\mu\epsilon[\nu\eta\ \dots]]$ (NHC V, 1, 22) rather than the Coptic construction of NHC III 70, 21: $\omicron\gamma\tau\epsilon\tau\eta\bar{\nu}\ \epsilon\omega\omega\pi\epsilon\ \pi\epsilon$. For a study of the theology of *Eugnostos*, see Demetrios Trakatellis, *The Transcendent God of Eugnostos* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1991).

⁴ The translation from the more fragmentary Codex V differs slightly: $\bar{\eta}\rho\omega\mu\bar{[\epsilon]}\ \tau\eta\rho\omega$

The tool of such ‘dust,’ such raw mud, was the inherently flawed medium of intellectual debate, inadequate for discerning the true essence of God: $\pi\epsilon\tau\epsilon\text{-}\nu\omicron\lambda\ \gamma\alpha\rho\ \epsilon\gamma\iota\omicron\omicron\tau\omicron\bar{\eta}\ \bar{\mu}\mu\iota\eta\ \bar{\mu}\mu\omicron\varsigma\ \omicron\gamma\upsilon\beta\iota\omicron\varsigma\ \epsilon\varphi\omega\gamma\epsilon\iota\tau\ \pi\epsilon\omega\alpha\varphi\alpha\lambda\alpha\ \tau\epsilon\pi\rho\omicron\nu\omicron\iota\alpha\ \omicron\gamma\eta\eta\tau\omicron\varsigma\ \omicron\varsigma\ \tau\epsilon\ \tau\epsilon\tau\lambda\alpha\eta\tau\ \omicron\gamma\mu\epsilon\varsigma\epsilon\varsigma\omega\lambda\epsilon\ \tau\epsilon$; “For whatever is from itself is defiled life; it only makes itself. Pronoia is without wisdom. (And) that which is imminent is insensible.” (*Eugnostos*, NHC III 71,1–5).⁵

Although they held radically divergent views, two very different thinkers—Marcus Aurelius and the unknown author of *Eugnostos the Blessed*—seemed to have shared enough background in philosophy to suggest that the question of what force permeated and directed the cosmos frequently entered into second-century debates.⁶ Some believed that fate was one of those forces; others disagreed. At the heart of the issue lay not just the question of how to achieve harmony within the cosmic system, but how to attain salvation within it, or sometimes (as we shall see), in spite of it. As Christianity gained impetus across the Empire, new complications were brought to the fore. Did Jesus Christ ultimately accommodate the individual within the cosmic economy, or did he prove that economy to be essentially flawed and contingent, the product of mere philosophical speculation?

On the whole, Christians of the second century were less inclined than pagans to embrace Greek philosophical solutions to the problems of life in the cosmos, though not to the degree that we might imagine. We see such a move strikingly in the redactional history of *Eugnostos*. At some point after its completion, an unknown redactor seems to have altered the text to ‘Christianize’ it through the addition and omission of certain passages.⁷ This redacted text, titled the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (*SJC*) presents essentially

$\bar{\eta}$ [χ πο] $\bar{\eta}$ πκ[δ]ε χ ιν $\bar{\eta}$ τκα[τ]αβολη $\bar{\eta}$ [τεπ]κοςμος ωρεοην ετηου σεω[ιη]ε $\bar{\eta}$ σαπνογτε, “all men, who are born upon the earth, from the foundation of the cosmos up to this time inquire into [the nature of] God” (NHC V, 1, 3–6).

⁵ The passage is missing from the more lacunated Codex V.

⁶ See the comments of Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 178–184, on these stock doxographic debates on the cosmos; Dunderberg’s primary focus is on a similar passage in the *Tripartite Tractate* 109, 1–5.

⁷ Scholars have suggested different dates for *SJC*. H.-C. Puech “Les nouveaux écrits gnostiques découverts en Haute-Egypte,” in *Coptic Studies in Honor of Walter Ewing Crum* (Boston: Byzantine Institute, 1950), 98 n. 2, posits a fourth-century date. In a later work (H.-C. Puech, “Gnostic Gospels and Related Documents,” in Schneemelcher, *NTA* 1.245), Puech suggests the second half of the second century or the third century; Jean Doresse, in “Trois livres gnostiques inédits,” *VC* 2 (1948): 159, too, suggests a late date, around the fourth century and thus roughly contemporary with his suggested date for the *Pistis Sophia*. Catherine Barry, *La Sagesse de Jésus-Christ* (BG, 3; NH III, 4) (Québec: les presses de l’université Laval, 1993), 36, suggests a third-century dating.

the same material as *Eugnostos*, now couched in the form of a revelatory dialogue between Jesus and his disciples.⁸ What did not need to be revised is at least as revealing as what did. The Christian redactor agreed with his pagan predecessor's views on cosmic ordering enough to reproduce *verbatim* the passage I have just quoted (*SJC*, NHC III 92, 19–93, 7).⁹

Eugnostos's dismissal of fate, providence and chance as tenable philosophical constructs also troubled the Christian redactor of the treatise. *Eugnostos* advocates "freeing oneself" from philosophical positions. To "free oneself," though, implies that an individual was the sole agent of his or her own salvation. One who acquires *gnosis* directly through revelation rather than through philosophy becomes, in the words of *Eugnostos*, οὐθάνατος πε εφθοοῖ ἐν τμητε νῆρωμε εφθυμοϋ, "an immortal [ἀθάνατος] in the midst of mortals" (*Eugnostos*, NHC III 71, 11–12). The Christian redactor replaced this potentially problematic passage with a portion of dialogue in which Jesus advises his disciples not to delve too deeply into philosophical inquiry, since revelation is given only to those who are worthy:

Now as for you, whatever is fitting for you to know, and those who are worthy of knowledge, will be given to them—whoever has been begotten not by the sowing of the unclean rubbing but by the First who was sent, for he is an immortal in the midst of mortals. (*SJC*, NHC III 93, 16–24)

The author of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* emphasized Jesus's role as the only legitimate medium of revelation. In the *SJC*, Jesus speaks to his disciples as the sole bearer of the divine truth: "But I, who came from the boundless Light, I am here. For I am he who knows it (the Light), so that I might speak to you concerning the precise nature of the truth" (*SJC*, NHC III 93, 9–11).¹⁰ In

⁸ The *Sophia of Jesus Christ* exists in two closely related versions, one from Nag Hammadi, NHC III (90, 14–119, 18) written in a purer form of Sahidic with a greater reliance on Greek loan words, and one from the Papyrus Berolinensis 8502, 3 (BG) 77, 8–127, 12. Scholars have questioned the literary and compositional relationship between *Eugnostos* and *SJC*. That *Eugnostos* came first was argued most persuasively by Martin Krause, "Das literarische Verhältnis des Eugnostosbriefes zur Sophia Jesu Christi," in A. Stubier and A. Hermann, ed., *Mullus. Festschrift Theodor Klauser: Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum*, Ergänzungsband 1 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1964), 215–223; Anne Pasquier, *Eugnoste*, 31–32, notes *Eugnostos*'s dependence on Genesis exegesis and Jewish apocalyptic sources in the same manner as other arguably Christian Nag Hammadi treatises. For Barry, *Sagesse*, 21, the *SJC* develops the Jewish and Christian elements *already* present in *Eugnostos*.

⁹ See D.M. Parrott, "The Significance of the Letter of *Eugnostos* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* for the Understanding of the Relation between Gnosticism and Christianity," in *SBLASP* (2 vols., Missoula, MT: SBL, 1971), 2.407.

¹⁰ Jesus's dialogue here has obvious resonances with the Gospel of John, particularly in the use of distinctively Johannine themes such as Jesus's source in the Light, and Jesus as bearer of the Truth.

the eyes of the Christian who adapted *Eugnostos*, Jesus alone warranted such an exalted status as “immortal in the midst of mortals.” But the redactor’s careful rewording also reveals that he wished to deflect the focus from *Eugnostos*’s pursuit of immortality through philosophy. Rather, theorizing about cosmic order reflected a lower level of misguided preoccupation. Philosophical knowledge on the nature of the cosmos was painfully insufficient compared to divine knowledge or *gnosis* that neatly circumvented human reason.¹¹

Yet another second-century Christian text reproduces a very similar critique of current philosophical debate, though one in which the role of Jesus Christ as the source of cosmic truth is made less explicit than within the pages of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. The author of the *Tripartite Tractate* may have been a participant in Valentinus’s learned and sophisticated Christian study circle active in second-century Rome.¹² Following its discussion of the transgression of the first human being (a deliberate work of providence!) and the loss of knowledge concerning the true source of being, the *Tri.Trac.* summarizes prevailing views on the source of existents:

Therefore other types (of explanation) have been introduced: that it is according to *Pronoia* [[οὐ]προνοία] that existents have their being. These are the people who observe the stability and the conformity of the movement of creation. Others say that it is something alien [οὐγαλλοτριον]. These are people who observe the diversity and the lawlessness and the evil of the powers. Others say that the things that exist are what is destined to happen. These are the people who were preoccupied with this concern. Others say that it is something in accordance with Nature. Others say that it is a self-existent. The majority, however, all who have gone as far as the visible *stoicheia* [μικροστοιχί[ον]], do not know anything more than them.

(*Tri.Trac.* III, 12,109, 5–20)

As he addresses the problem of where to locate the source of being, the author of the *Tri.Trac.* offers his own critique of current views on the interrelation of fate and providence. All these views on cosmic *oikonomia*, he asserts, are self-limiting, because they fail to represent the true dynamics of the cosmos; philosophical inquiry begins at the inferior level of the visible elements or *stoicheia* and does not seek to push beyond this. The author’s use of the term *stoicheia* in this passage, combined with his assertion that

¹¹ See the similar assessment of Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism* 181–185, using *Tripartite Tractate* 109:1–5 as a core text.

¹² I have used here the critical edition and extensive notes prepared by Harold Attridge and Elaine H. Pagels, “Tripartite Tractate,” in Harold Attridge, ed., *Nag Hammadi Codex I (the Jung Codex)* (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

philosophy is at best an inadequate tool to perceive the truth, suggests that he may have held in mind Colossians 2:8: “beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy [διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας] ... according to the *stoicheia* of the cosmos [κατὰ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου], and not according to Christ”—a clever choice of proof-text for the deep suspicion toward philosophy which could lurk within Christian sentiment.

The brief references I have just recounted serve to illustrate the focal point of the present study. From the beginning of the second century—the point at which Christianity had gained enough converts to make itself a significant force against paganism—Christianity struggled to establish its new position against deeply rooted pagan patterns of thought and action regarding the nature of the cosmos. In the second century of the Common Era—the focal point of this study—there existed a cultural interplay and overlap that naturally obscures any modern attempt to draw dividing lines between ‘popular’ and ‘high’ paganism. The cosmology developed and expanded in the orbit of high philosophical discourse, for instance, undergirded the way in which most individuals in the Roman Empire conceived the world around them. The examples of Marcus Aurelius, *Eugnostos the Blessed*, the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, and the *Tripartite Tractate* illustrate the problems, solutions and ultimate limitations of essentially pagan philosophical cosmologies as they underwent a process of re-examination and gradual revision under the force of emergent Christian theologies.

This book is about the manner in which a variety second-century Christian writers—those often yet imprecisely labeled ‘Gnostics’—thought about the cosmos. More precisely, it is about the manner in which these same intellectuals *wrote* about the cosmos, which (as I shall show) is rather different from the way that they thought about it. The nature and shape of the universe was constantly drawn and redrawn as the boundaries of this discourse shifted according to external and internal pressures; the force of Roman appeals to tradition and to Greek philosophy weighing against an urge to innovate or to assimilate non-Roman or non-Greek ideas; the potency of cosmology for locating not just one’s own social group in the broader scope of universal workings but for actually dislocating others; the recognition that articulating publicly or privately one’s place in the cosmos could become a discourse of alterity—or a discourse of power.¹³

¹³ The term ‘alterity’ for a constructed otherness derives from the cultural anthropology and post-colonial studies. For the development and articulation of alterity, see Michael

People are complicated; consequently, history is complicated. I have, therefore, attempted in this book to simultaneously simplify and make complex the Graeco-Roman cosmologies with which our authors worked. I have simplified them by not setting out to produce a comprehensive survey of every pronouncement ever made on the topic of the cosmos in antiquity; instead, I have selected those sources I personally find most compelling, and also those which I feel comfortable treating as an historian of the Roman Empire and a specialist in ancient Gnosticism. I have also chosen to simplify by focusing on one specific aspect of cosmology: discussions of fate, particularly as ‘enslaving’ or ‘inexorable.’ Philosophers looking to find an analysis of ancient Greek systematic refutations of fate and determinism (as in the case of Carneades’ famous formulations) will fail to find such here. These refutations sought to exercise and discipline the mind, but they do not—at least to me—represent general and genuine contestations with the idea or conviction that we are all held in thrall to the stars. To put this differently, while some Christian thinkers developed a system of arguments against the idea of something like astral fatalism, others adopted the idea of astral fatalism into a discourse of alterity whereby some were enslaved by fate but others were free; still others adopted the idea that while they themselves had once been enslaved by fate, they were now free. I hesitate to call these ‘religious’ uses of a philosophical concept, but certainly and inarguably they are markedly different from memorizing a system of standard academic positions and counter-positions on the ostensible influence of the stars.

I have also sought to simplify by selecting a chronological limit to my investigation. The heart of my analysis lies in the second century of the Common Era. I am drawn to this period because it coincides with a number of events: to name only two, the apogee of the intellectual Renaissance that was the Second Sophistic, and the rise of Christianity. Indeed, I find it the most intellectually experimental phase of early Christianity—unconstrained by a fixed canon, official creeds, a New Testament, a papacy or dominant Church, and much that shaped Christianity only two centuries later—Christians of the second century strove to make intelligible and compelling to outsiders a new life in Christ. What precisely that looked like was hotly contested.

Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), and Pauline Turner Strong, *Captive Selves, Captivating Others: The Politics and Poetics of Colonial American Captivity Narratives* (Westview Press/Perseus Books, 1999).

A word now on making things complicated. My aim here is not to reduce the irreducible positions and worldviews floating around in the second century into something easily digested. Neither is this a summary of views—that book would have been mercifully easier to write, I suspect, but immensely less rewarding and satisfying. Rather, I am here picking out what I find to be interesting moments in a process: during the slow process of Christianization, as the degree of dissonance between Christians and the Roman order receded into eventual consonance, the nature of Christian debates on the topic of fate and the cosmos shifted radically in scope. In the second century, one could still find Christians who accepted, for example, the concept of astral fatalism, but who considered it a thoroughly corrupt system administered by demons. Within a number of Christian writings, therefore, we find the assertion that the Christian individual is no longer subject to the laws of astral fatalism, though they still bound his or her pagan contemporaries. The author of the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, for example, held in mind two laws of fate administered by two distinct lawgivers: the stars or planets ruled the behavior and destiny of the ‘pagan,’ while Jesus Christ had abrogated destiny for all those to whom he had granted a new genesis. ‘Fate’ (or more specifically, ‘enslavement by fate’) becomes part of a discourse of alterity, distinguishing one group, community, or individual from another. But when the Empire effectively Christianized—that is to say, after the late fourth century—the distinctive language of fate and enslavement to a hostile cosmos lost its rhetorical and polemical potency. Thus the fourth century and beyond saw the production of elaborate though tedious *de Fato* treatises. The authors of these philosophical treatises—among them Methodius, Origen and Clement of Alexandria—adopted, ironically, Graeco-Roman refutations of astral fatalism in order to attack polytheist belief and *praxis*.¹⁴ The issue becomes sort of a dead letter, and the production of *de Fato* treatises merely a scholastic exercise in empty antiquarianism. From the second to

¹⁴ It should be noted that the earliest Christian treatise on the nature of Fate is Bardaisan of Edessa’s second-century *Book of the Laws of the Countries*. Bardaisan’s approach to the problem of astral fatalism remains essentially unique within the second-century context, though its implications for later Christian debates on the subject remains profound. I have chosen in this study to exclude any detailed discussion of Bardaisan, largely because Bardaisan’s philosophical treatise presents an essentially ethical refutation of fatalism, not a discussion of cosmology within the context of a soteriological debate. For more on Bardaisan including his understanding of fate, see Nicola Denzey, “Bardaisan of Edessa,” in Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, eds., *A Companion to Second-Century Christian “Heretics”* (Leiden: Brill, 2005) 159–184; Ute Possekkel, “Bardaisan and Origen on Fate and the Power of the Stars,” *JCS* 20/4 (2012): 515–541.

the fourth century, however, we find in various sources a dense web of arguments, counter-arguments, invective and polemic, all centering on the issue of fate's validity within an increasingly Christian cosmos. In this study, I examine some of these sources closely.

My aim in this book is threefold: (1) to investigate the nature of debates on the subject of astrological fate (Gk: *heimarmene*) specifically and astral fatalism more generally during the first and second century; (2) to explore the manner in which certain 'Gnostic' authors within early Christianity refuted fatalism yet promised the convert an 'escape' from 'the evil bonds of fate'; and (3) to destabilize the perceived and wholly constructed difference between 'Gnostic' and 'proto-orthodox' Christians, or between Christians and non-Christians, by focusing on a metaphysical concept, *heimarmene*, and the manner in which various educated citizens of the second century parsed it through their own understandings of the cosmic economy.

Since Gnosticism has long been classified as a movement that introduced and perpetuated notions of a malevolent cosmos in antiquity, in the first chapter of this study I confront the notion of whether or not the formulation of 'Gnostic cosmic pessimism' retains any analytic integrity or usefulness at all. I hope that placing the debate within its own historiographical context will settle the question once and for all; I end the opening chapter, then, with some suggestions for new approaches to ancient 'Gnostic' cosmology.

In the second chapter, I draw on two Nag Hammadi cosmogonic treatises, the *Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World*, to investigate their understandings of the concept of divine providence or *pronoia*. Hans Jonas had charged Gnostics with taking the benevolent *pronoia* of the Stoics and deliberately inverting it to make of it a malevolent power; a close reading of these texts and a comparison with contemporary Middle Platonist teachings on a divided *pronoia* or multiple providence schemes reveals that, contra Jonas, the authors of these two Nag Hammadi treatises confronted the same philosophical issues as had their Middle Platonist contemporaries, and they posed similar solutions to the origins and place of evil. In neither case can Jonas's characterization of a malevolent providence be sustained.

In chapter three, I backtrack to the Pauline corpus, which I present as a significant source for Christian 'cosmic pessimism,' if one can indeed be found. Specifically, I contend that Gnostics borrowed the concept of *heimarmene* from contemporary debates in Middle Platonism, but they read these debates through the interpretive lens of Pauline exegesis. Paul himself did not use the term *heimarmene*, but in his undisputed letters he does indeed refer to 'enslavement to the cosmos'—a metaphysical state of bondage that, Paul believed, Christ Jesus came to rectify. This potent image

of humankind existentially enslaved to sin (conceived cosmically, or on a cosmic scale) is, in second-century Christian worldviews, grafted on to Middle Platonist cosmic schemes which made way for *heimarmene* itself to be presented as enslaving. However, those second-century Christians who read the Pauline corpus also drew from it notions—and workable models for—release from cosmic enslavement.

In chapter four, I consider the appearance of the Greek philosophical term *heimarmene* in the Nag Hammadi library, returning to the *Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World* as case-studies, since these two cosmogonic texts make the most extensive use of the term, carefully assigning *heimarmene* a mythic origin and, hence, aetioloical purpose in the cosmos. Far from being unmitigatedly and universally negative, *heimarmene* is invoked, I suggest, as an explanatory principle to account for human disinterest in spiritual engagement. This lack of engagement, however, is seen pragmatically rather than universally or existentially; it can be overcome by those who exercise the power of free choice. This use of *heimarmene* is no different from what we find in contemporary Middle Platonist teachings, except that it offers a variety of methods of annulling or qualifying *heimarmene's* power.

The fifth chapter begins with the appearance of the term *heimarmene* in one of the Nag Hammadi library's three Hermetic writings, the *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*. The nature of the concept of astral fatalism in the Hermetica has been just as badly presented and misunderstood as astral fatalism in Christian Gnosticism, thus this chapter presents a more nuanced presentation of the 'enslavement to fate' trope in Hermetism. I demonstrate that the Hermetica and Christian literature grappled with an identical set of issues: the precise relationship between *heimarmene* and *pronoia*, and the degree to which humans are at the mercy of either.

Chapters six and seven, working as a pair, present a series of 'solutions' to the contingent problem of 'enslavement to the cosmos' in a variety of second-century sources. Beginning with Reitzenstein's claim that the Gnostics had already claimed freedom from *heimarmene*, I consider some of the ways that communities or individuals (both Christian and non-Christian) employed to attain that state of spiritual and existential freedom. Different texts propose, directly or indirectly, a variety of ways to escape malevolent celestial influence; models I discuss here include the apocalyptic ascent of a savior or redeemer through the cosmos, subverting or 're-tuning' its structure; and the control of the passions through ascetic techniques of self-mastery. Chapter seven focuses on the discourse of 'release from fate' that we find in allusions to the Christian sacrament of baptism. Here, I highlight

that the traditional division of Christians into 'Gnostic' and 'proto-orthodox' camps fails us; we find in the rhetoric of Justin Martyr, for example, an identical set of tropes to what we find in the excerpts of the Valentinian teacher Theodotus: that Christians were 'enslaved to fate' only until baptism, at which point they were granted a new birth or 'genesis,' a word that also can be translated as 'horoscope.'

Chapter eight discusses the case of the recently discovered *Gospel of Judas*, a remarkable (and anomalous) text which invokes the language of astral fatalism frequently. What sets *GosJud* apart, I argue, is that its discourse of astral enslavement nowhere draws upon contemporaneous Graeco-Roman cosmology or philosophical discussions of physics or metaphysics. Instead, its author appears to draw on older Jewish apocalyptic traditions which equate the stars with priests who administrate the Jerusalem Temple. I see no general philosophy of astral enslavement within this troubling text, which unlike others which I discuss in this volume, offers no system of salvation or 'way out' for the Christian faithful. Nevertheless, the *GosJud's* rhetorical deployment of the language of sidereal enslavement seems to me identical with other second- and third-century texts; its author clearly positions himself outside or apart from those whom he perceives as enslaved to a demonic cosmos.

In the final chapter, I note the manner in which the orthodoxy of the fourth century deemphasized the cosmological undertones of salvation; what had been reflections on physics or cosmology become, in a Christian empire, reflections on ethics. At that point, the questions of what force (other than God) directed the cosmos, and whether or not that force opposed or sustained humans eventually faded into the background of Christian ethical debates on fate and free will.

CHAPTER ONE

WERE THE GNOSTICS COSMIC PESSIMISTS?

1. *Hans Jonas and the Construction of Gnosticism's Character*

Since the time of Hans Jonas's influential study *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*—the first volume of which appeared in 1954—the diverse Christian philosophers of antiquity still frequently termed 'Gnostics' have been almost universally defined as a group who considered the cosmos to be enslaved by demonic powers.¹ Like other modern scholars who sought to find a political or economic explanation for a perceived socio-pathological malaise, Jonas asserted that the essentially pessimistic worldview that he felt characterized Gnosticism arose as a psychological reflex to "material hardship."² In Jonas's abridged translation of *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* entitled *The Gnostic Religion* (1958) he describes the worldview of 'Gnostic' individuals in florid prose:

The starry sky—which from Plato to the Stoics was the purest embodiment of reason in the cosmic hierarchy, the paradigm of intelligibility and therefore of the divine aspect of the sensible realm—now stared man in the face with the fixed glare of alien power and necessity. Its rule is tyranny, not providence

¹ For a summary of issues and deconstructions of the terms 'Gnosticism' and 'Gnostic,' see, inter alia, Morton Smith, "The History of the Term Gnostikos," in B. Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism*, 2.786–807; Ugo Bianchi, "Le Gnosticisme: Concept, Terminologie, Origines, Délimitation," in B. Aland, ed., *Gnosis: Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 33–64. An extended terminological overview of the term 'Gnosis' is found in Christoph Marksches, *Die Gnosis* (München: Beck, 2001), and J. Holzhausen, "Gnostizismus, Gnosis, Gnostiker: Ein Beitrag zur antiken Terminologie," *JAC* 44 (2001): 58–74. For full discussions, see Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: Arguments for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), Karen L. King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005), and the essays in Antti Marjanen, ed., *Was There a Gnostic Religion?* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005). I share the call for abandoning a casual or kneejerk use of the terms 'Gnostic' or 'Gnosticism,' although it is virtually impossible to avoid the term as it is used so frequently in scholarship. I have resorted, in this study, to often putting the term into what we in the United States call 'scare quotes.' It is an imperfect solution to a thorny problem in the field.

² Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1988), 2.64ff. The *floruit* of what Jonas wished to call 'gnosticism' (with a lower-case 'G') was the second century—a time of economic wealth and stability for many Roman citizens, including the *intelligentsia* he considered responsible for the development of this movement.

... the stellar firmament becomes now the symbol of all that is terrifying to man in the towering factness of the universe. Under this pitiless sky, which no longer inspires worshipful confidence, man becomes conscious of his utter forlornness, of his being not so much a part of, but unaccountably placed in, and exposed to, the enveloping system.³

The beauty of such evocative prose here often distracts us from a strikingly frustrating point: Jonas does not cite any primary sources to support his analysis, though nearly ten pages later he invokes Plotinus's highly polemical diatribe against the Gnostics in his circle at Rome (*Enn.* 2. 9. 13) for proof that the interlopers to Plotinus's circle had created a "terror in the heavens."⁴

An avid student of Heidegger in his youth, during which time he cultivated a profound fascination for the French existentialists and German nihilists of the nineteenth century, Jonas was struck by what he perceived as profound points of contact between Gnosticism, existentialism, and nihilism. He addresses these parallels in his epilogue to *The Gnostic Religion*:

When, many years ago, I turned to the study of gnosticism I found that the viewpoints ... which I had acquired in the school of Heidegger, enabled me to see aspects of gnostic thought that had been missed before.⁵

To set the stage for his summary of what he perceived as the Gnostic *Zeitgeist*, he quotes Pascal's *Pensées*: "cast into the infinite immensity of spaces of which I am ignorant, and which know me not, I am frightened";⁶ he later paraphrases Pascal:

man is only a reed, liable to be crushed at any moment by the forces of an immense and blind universe in which his existence is but a particular blind accident, no less blind than would be the accident of his destruction.⁷

Jonas continues that the cultural situation in antiquity "showed broad parallels" with our modern situation, but then fails to explain either why or how this is so.⁸ Nevertheless, he claims, it is for this reason that we recognize ourselves "in so many facets of later post-classical antiquity."⁹

³ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1958 [1963]), 254–255. Jonas repeats himself *verbatim* on p. 329: "We have heard how the Gnostics felt about [the laws of the cosmos]. Of providence it has nothing, and to man's freedom it is inimical. Under this pitiless sky ..." The passage on the 'starry sky,' meanwhile, he repeats on p. 328.

⁴ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 262.

⁵ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 320.

⁶ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 322.

⁷ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 320.

⁸ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 320.

⁹ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 326.

An epilogue is, of course, a place for a grand summation of views, not for detailed analysis. Thus it is not surprising that here Jonas paints Gnosticism with broad strokes. Significant for our purposes, however, is that he saw fit to include, tucked in to musings on the ostensible parallels between Gnosticism and existentialism, a substantial section on the development of cosmic pessimism. He limits his citation of ancient sources in this section to Tertullian's castigation of Marcion's own "devaluation of the cosmos," in which Marcion describes the universe as "this little cell of the creator [*haec cellula creatoris*]" (*Ad.Marc.* 1.14). This tiny shred of a text—not even the words of Marcion himself but those drawn from Tertullian's polemical attack on him—was sufficient for Jonas to conclude: "the cosmic *logos* of the Stoics, which was identified with providence, is replaced by *heimarmene*, oppressive cosmic fate."¹⁰ Coming as it does, at the very end of a significant and elegant study, the theory of 'cosmic pessimism' had the last word, so to speak. It is the final impression or idea that so many readers carried away with them as they closed the book.

Just how influential Jonas's idea of cosmic pessimism as essential to Gnosticism was would soon become clear. In 1966, the landmark Messina conference on Gnosticism issued a formal definition of Gnosticism. According to the first part of the definition, Gnosticism was

a coherent series of characteristics that can be summarized in the idea of a divine spark in man, deriving from the divine realm, fallen into this world, of fate, birth, and death, and needing to be awakened by the divine counterpart of the self in order to be finally re-integrated.¹¹

This definition posits Gnosticism as centrally concerned with the myth of the soul's enslavement to fate and its awakening from the state of existential sleep and enslavement. The Messina definition was very much a product of its time, but at this point we need to re-evaluate its usefulness and accuracy.

2. *Cosmic Pessimism: The Genesis of an Idea*

The idea that one could characterize a single distinct and definitive Roman *Zeitgeist*—and that it was marred by a prevailing cosmic pessimism, particularly characterizing a hazily-defined movement called Gnosticism—was endemic to certain academic circles during the first four decades of the

¹⁰ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 320.

¹¹ Ugo Bianchi, *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo* (Leiden: Brill, 1967), xxvi.

last century. We find throughout British, French and German scholarship a series of linked pronouncements concerning how individuals in the Roman Empire *felt*. In a series of lectures delivered at Columbia University in 1912, the British classicist Gilbert Murray detected in the first four centuries of the Roman Empire what he famously described as “an intensifying of certain spiritual emotions; an increase of sensitiveness, a failure of nerve.”¹² He had not invented the striking phrase ‘failure of nerve’; it had first emerged from a conversation between Murray and his colleague J.B. Bury at Oxford on the ‘rise’ of asceticism and mysticism in the third century. Bury, who was busy preparing a seven-volume edition of Edward Gibbon’s *Decline and Fall*, scorned Murray’s and Gibbon’s formulation of Empire. “It is not a rise,” he said, “it is a fall or failure of something, a sort of failure of nerve.”¹³ Bury’s insight greatly impressed Murray; it also underscored the work of others whom Murray admired, including Albrecht Dieterich, Richard Reitzenstein, Wilhelm Bousset, Franz Cumont, and later, Murray’s former pupil E.R. Dodds.

Murray’s famous formulation of “*the Roman Zeitgeist*” (I put the whole expression in quotation marks, since the assertion was made that there was a *sole Roman Zeitgeist*) as a profound ‘failure of nerve’ set the stage for a new tendency to understand the third century as deeply marred by spiritual and existential privation. For this reason, the first chapter of *La Révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste*, André-Jean Festugière’s four-volume study on the development of pagan religion in the third and fourth centuries dedicated to his teacher Franz Cumont, bears the title, “Le déclin du rationalisme.”¹⁴

Murray’s famous formulation of ‘the Roman *Zeitgeist*’ as a profound ‘failure of nerve’ reflected a new interest in pathologizing Roman and Late Roman religious experience, based on the conviction that the Roman Empire induced in its citizens a marked tendency toward superstition and irrationalism. In 1933, four years after his arrival at Harvard, Arthur Darby Nock penned his classic study on conversion in the ancient world, examining religions of the period through quasi-psychological ‘case study’ analyses.¹⁵ Perhaps inspired by the pioneering work of his fellow Harvard scholar

¹² Gilbert Murray, *Five Stages of Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1925), 119.

¹³ Murray, *Five Stages*, 9.

¹⁴ A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d’Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1944–1954), 1.1–18.

¹⁵ Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion. The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933). Nock would later collaborate with A.-J. Festugière to produce the learned, four-volume critical edition of the Hermetic Corpus, *Corpus Hermeticum* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1946–1954).

William James half a century earlier, Nock found evidence of mental instability not only in the third century CE, but even as far back as the second in his profiles of, among others, the Isis devotee Apuleius and Aelius Aristides.

Other admirers of William James such as Campbell Bonner and E.R. Dodds further amplified Nock's methods. Bonner assessed Aristides, for instance, as a "brainsick noodle" in an article published in the *Harvard Theological Review* in 1937, which later Dodds himself quoted.¹⁶ Dodds' defense was that although Aristides certainly was "brainsick," nevertheless his experience had to be classified as "religious."¹⁷ The distance between the centuries grew briefer for an instance, as scholars discovered the same neuroses, fears, and pathologies in the citizens of two millennia past as those that shape and color our own experiences today. It was not until the work of Roman historian Ramsay MacMullen in 1984 that Aristides' experience was reassessed without resorting to psychologizing or pathologizing.¹⁸

Dodds' assessment of Aelius Aristides formed part of a 1964 lecture series he delivered at the University of Belfast dedicated to Nock, who had been his inspiration at Dublin and Oxford and who had died a year earlier, in 1963. Subsequently published under the title *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety* (1965), this small book would have a profound impact upon modern historiography.¹⁹ In answer to his friend and colleague Michael Rostovtzeff, who deemed psychological analysis of Late Roman materials "one of the most urgent tasks in the field of ancient history," and to Martin P. Nilsson, who suggested in his *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* that an analysis "in William James' sense of the 'spiritual soil' of late antiquity" would yield interesting results, Dodds moved beyond the already fragile world of historical certainties to the type of psychological inference his mentors Murray and Nock had first brought to Late Roman sources.²⁰ In a famous statement, Dodds characterized the third century as a time "so impoverished intellectually, so insecure materially, so filled with fear and hatred of the world" that citizens of the Empire, terrified by the "burden

¹⁶ E.R. Dodds, *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 43.

¹⁷ Dodds, *Pagans and Christians*, 43.

¹⁸ Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100–400)* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984), 9.

¹⁹ The book represents a distillation of some of the ideas first introduced in E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

²⁰ Michael Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1956), 486; M.P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, 3rd ed. (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1967), 711–712.

of daily responsibility” constructed for themselves a religion—or, more properly, religions—to bolster their sense of security.²¹

Dodds believed he could find a distinctive *Weltanschauung* spawned from the collective burden of existential dread that the ‘crisis’ of the third century had imposed upon Roman minds. Citing Plato, “the world is of necessity haunted by evil” (*Theaetetus* 76A) he held that the religious ‘sentiment’ of the third century was marred by a “progressive devaluation of the cosmos.”²² He had made much the same point in his earlier study, *The Greeks and the Irrational*:

The adoration of the physical cosmos, and the sense of unity with it ... began to be replaced by a feeling that the physical world—at any rate the part of it below the moon is under the sway of evil powers, and that what the soul needs is not unity with it but escape from it.²³

According to Dodds, three prevalent themes in texts of the High and Late Roman Empire supported his hypothesis that people considered the cosmos “set in opposition to God.”²⁴ First, a variety of texts from pagan philosophical tractates to Christian ascetical works denigrated or despised matter as a substance “not created by God and resistant to his will.”²⁵ Second, it was during the first to third century that highly articulated conceptions of fate as the instrument of planetary demons first gained prominence. Finally, Dodds asserted that in this period we first find notions of a personal demonic or malevolent agent against whom hapless individuals felt powerless.²⁶

A quick consultation of Dodd’s footnotes and sources for these three assertions yields some interesting insights into his methods. As proof for his claim that individuals of the Roman Empire developed theories of a demonic astral fatalism, for instance, Dodds launches into a brief discussion of the devaluation of the cosmos in the third century, attributing this decline to ‘oriental’ (i.e., Babylonian) influences:

The [concept of fate is] apparently oriental in origin. The Keepers of the Gates would seem to derive ultimately from the Babylonian cult of planetary gods, although at some point in their long history they have suffered a transformation from the status of high gods to that of maleficent demons.²⁷

²¹ Dodds, *Age of Anxiety*, 100.

²² Dodds, *Age of Anxiety*, 37.

²³ Dodds, *Greeks*, 248.

²⁴ Dodds, *Age of Anxiety*, 13.

²⁵ Dodds, *Age of Anxiety*, 13.

²⁶ Dodds, *Age of Anxiety*, 13.

²⁷ Dodds, *Age of Anxiety*, 14.

To support his arguments, Dodds cites sources as disparate as Ephesians, the *Hermetica*, Origen, Augustine, Plotinus, and Firmicus Maternus—certainly an impressive array, on the face of it. Remarkably, of all these sources, only Origen and Plotinus date to the third century, although Dodds locates the origin of astral fatalism as early as the first century. Still, none of the passages Dodds cites directly treats the topic of fate as an enslaving entity. The Ephesians passage, for example, “for our struggle is not against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places” (Eph 6:12, NRSV) attests only to a belief in malevolent celestial beings; it has nothing to do (at least directly) with enslavement to fate. It certainly is not a third-century text, so it is curious that Dodds invokes it at all. Possibly he might have pointed to the use and understanding of this passage in later Christian literature. One treatise from Nag Hammadi, *The Hypostasis of the Archons* (NHC II, 4) begins with a quotation of Ephesians 6:12. But *Hypostasis of the Archons* remains undated and undatable; even if it could have reasonably been composed in the third century, it still never precisely equates the “cosmic powers of the darkness” with astral fate. Ultimately, Dodds himself may have realized that he stood on unstable ground; he soon concedes, “even in our period ... the best minds denied the tyranny.”²⁸ Here, his prevarication is revealing: far from being a prominent theme, the rhetoric of an inexorable, enslaving Fate is strikingly rare among extant primary source composed during the first four centuries.

Why, then, did Dodds include ‘enslavement to Fate’ as one of his three manifestations of cosmic pessimism? We can find the answer, I suggest, in Dodds’s reliance upon historiographical tradition. His teachers and colleagues had similarly described fate—variously termed astral fatalism, astral determinism, or planetary determinism (all are translations of the Greek philosophical term *heimarmene*) as a direct source of existential oppression in the third-century Empire. Gilbert Murray, for instance, considered astral fatalism to be a particular symptom of the third-century’s ‘failure of nerve’:

For by some simple psychological law the stars which have inexorably pronounced our fate, and decreed, or at least registered the decree, that in spite of all striving we must needs tread their prescribed path; still more perhaps, the Stars who know in the midst of our laughter how that laughter will end, become inevitably powers of evil rather than good, beings malignant as well as pitiless, making life a vain thing.²⁹

²⁸ Dodds, *Age of Anxiety*, 15.

²⁹ Murray, *Five Stages*, 180.

Nock expressed a similar observation, albeit to characterize a period almost six hundred years earlier. On the emotional tenor of the Hellenistic period, Nock wrote:

This was no neat world in which Zeus or the providence of the gods saw to it that the just man had a reasonable measure of prosperity and the unjust man of punishment. It might be ruled by a blind Fortune, or again by an unchangeable Fate written in the stars or determined by them.³⁰

This sense of oppression to an astrally-determined ‘unchangeable Fate’ Nock had viewed as an important factor in the widespread appeal of both Eastern soteriological cults and Christianity. He explained, “Men wished to escape from mortality and from the domination of an unbending fate.”³¹ Festugière, similarly, traced the development of cosmic pessimism as an attitude in his study *L’idéal religieux des Grecs et l’évangile* (1932), locating its origins not in the third century of the Empire, but in the Hellenistic period. *Heimarmene*, he believed, acquired negative connotations as a consequence of the political instability that followed the death of Alexander the Great:

Car, précisément parce que, les cadres de la cité ayant disparu, l’homme est davantage abandonné à son incertitude, parce que l’égoïsme des maîtres, et l’ambition de ceux qui le veulent être, avivent la cruauté des guerres, multiplient les massacres, habituent à mépriser le sang des faibles, l’homme sent peser plus lourd le joug de l’εἰμαρμένη.³²

He takes up the same position in his *Personal Religion among the Greeks* (1954); in the Hellenistic period, he avers, the breakdown of political rule provoked a widespread spiritual crisis among ordinary citizens, in which it was perceived that “the gods became indifferent” to the vicissitudes of human fortune. “That is ... why,” he concluded, “the Greeks of the Hellenistic Age felt so strongly that all things in this world are ruled by a blind Fortune or by an inexorable Destiny. It is the spontaneous reaction of the man in the street.”³³ The explanation of ‘cosmic pessimism’ helped make sense of the apparent proliferation of religious movements in the Hellenistic period, but as an explanatory principle, it worked as a sort of convenient catchall for later centuries equally well.

Ultimately, neither Murray nor Nock nor Festugière was able to produce evidence to substantiate their assertions that individuals felt “overpowered

³⁰ Nock, *Conversion*, 100.

³¹ Nock, *Conversion*, 15.

³² A.-J. Festugière, *L’idéal religieux des Grecs et l’évangile* (Paris: Gabalda, 1932), 104–105.

³³ Festugière, *Personal Religion Among the Greeks* (Berkeley: University of California Press), 8. See also Festugière, *L’idéal religieux*, 101–115, “Heimarmène.”

by blind forces,” whether in the Hellenistic period or the Late Roman; they preferred instead to generalize about the psyche of ‘the common man.’ After extolling his praises of Stoic *apatheia*, Murray comments, “But the vulgar of course can turn Kismet into a stupid idol, as easily as they can Fortune.”³⁴ For Nock, the genesis of cosmic oppression occurred when the “man in the street” suddenly (and inexplicably) found his existence and well being related to “cosmic universals.”³⁵ Similarly, Festugière maintained that fear of an inexorable destiny was “the spontaneous reaction of the man in the street.”³⁶

3. *Cosmic Pessimism and the History of Religions School in Germany*

The perspective expressed by French and English scholars—that the people of Greek and Roman antiquity were terrorized by specters of their own creation—also reflects the earlier scholarship of the influential *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Two of the most successful proponents of the school, Wilhelm Bousset and Richard Reitzenstein, had earlier produced two classic studies of Gnosticism: Bousset, his *Hauptprobleme der Gnosis* in 1907, and Richard Reitzenstein, *Poimandres: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptische und frühchristlichen Literatur* in 1922.³⁷ The *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* had first developed the idea that ‘cosmic pessimism’ pervaded the worldview of Rome from Babylonian or Iranian religion by way of Gnosticism. It proved only a small conceptual leap to define one symptom of ‘cosmic pessimism’ as a prevailing sense of bondage to an enslaving fate. Bousset found at the heart of Gnosticism an originally Babylonian teaching on the nature of *heimarmene* and the way to free oneself from it.³⁸ Reitzenstein concurred; one of the principal teachings that united the many sects in antiquity was, in his words:

³⁴ Murray, *Five Stages*, 168.

³⁵ Nock, *Conversion*, 100.

³⁶ Festugière, *Personal Religion*, 108.

³⁷ Richard Reitzenstein, *Poimandres: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptische und frühchristlichen Literatur* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904). Reitzenstein makes no generalizations on the nature of fate and the need to transcend it. Compare Bousset, *Hauptprobleme*, 238, on *heimarmene*.

³⁸ Bousset, *Hauptprobleme*, 55; see also Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, concerning the work of his predecessor Maass, 77: “mit Recht hat Maaß hervorgehoben, welch furchtbaren Druck diese orientalische Schicksalsvorstellung auf die Seelen üben mußte und geübt hat. Sich diesem Zwange zu entziehen, aus dieser δουλεία in eine Art ἐλευθερία zu kommen, wird die allgemeine Sehnsucht der Zeit.”

daß sieben Archonten die Welt knechten und den Menschen nicht zur Freiheit kommen lassen, die ihm kraft seines göttlichen Adels gebührt, daß aber die γνῶσις aus dieser Tyrannei erlösen und zu Gott führen kann.³⁹

Like Cumont, Reitzenstein was certainly not averse to generalizations; yet he refrained from statements that might suggest that he believed that a significant portion of Roman citizens felt themselves to be enslaved by fate. He emphasized instead the opposite side of the equation. Various religious groups in the first four centuries, he suggested, developed conceptions of *gnosis* then offered this salvific knowledge as an antidote to the servitude of *heimarmene*.⁴⁰ His thesis was, then, rather the opposite of Nock's and Dodds' assessment that cosmic pessimism terrorized individuals. Instead, *heimarmene* served as the existential problem readily solved in antiquity by adherence to various 'Gnostic' theologies. To put it differently, cosmic enslavement was, by the third century, a problem already solved in the spiritual lives of many.

4. Astrology and Cosmic Pessimism

I have discussed, so far, ways in which scholars of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries created and maintained a purely academic invention: that a pessimistic understanding of fate as 'enslaving,' 'tyrannical' and 'inexorable' characterized *'the Roman Zeitgeist.'* As we have seen, many scholars presented 'cosmic pessimism' as a particular symptom of the spiritual malaise endemic to the Age of Anxiety, although the ancient sources themselves present a rather different picture.

So why would scholars infer an attitude not immediately evident from ancient texts? Many scholars brought their training and background in Christian theology to bear, finding in a pre-Christian empire only decline, dissolution and superstition. Thus for many scholars working in the first half of the twentieth century, the prevalence of astrology in the Empire was a sure sign of Roman descent into irrationality. Paul Wendland, for example, alludes to "the spread of astrology and its accompanying astral religion" which "lay like a nightmare upon the soul."⁴¹ According to Gilbert Murray, "Astrology fell upon the Hellenistic mind as a new disease falls upon some

³⁹ Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, 79. Note also his discussion of enslavement to fate on 80–81, 102–108.

⁴⁰ Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, 77.

⁴¹ Paul Wendland, "Hellenistic Ideas of Salvation in the Light of Anthropology," *American Journal of Theology* 17 (1913): 345.

remote island people ... every one was ready to receive the germ."⁴² Many theologians of the early twentieth century perceived the widespread acceptance of astrology in the Empire as a misguided but necessary *propaideia* for Christian salvation, since it theoretically imposed a condition of spiritual enslavement.⁴³ This view is endemic within theological writings of the past century, but also evident in the perspectives of some classicists. For instance, Martin Nilsson comments,

Der Glaube an die Heimarmene, gegen welche die alten Götter nicht vermochten, warf die Menschen der Spätantike in die Arme der magischen Praktiken, der mystischen Erlösungslehren und des Christentums.⁴⁴

For some, belief in astrology was a pathological attitude healed by the orthodox Christian Fathers of the fourth and fifth century. The Patristic writers, through their condemnation of pagan 'irrationalism' and their revival of ancient ideals in a new Christian guise, restored the spiritual peace-of-mind formerly asserted by their Stoic forebears. This view teaches us nothing new about the dynamics of Christian apologetics of the Patristic period, but a great deal about the biases inherent in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarship. Since many of these scholars brought to their sources the training and inclinations of theologians, they never moved far from the tacit agreement that astrologically-determined fatalism characterized a perverted understanding of the true nature of the cosmos, and could be best understood as a manifestation of intellectual and religious ignorance—in Festugière's words, a "decline of rationalism." This interpretation could be amply supported by early Christian ideological discourse, which necessarily exaggerated the extent to which anybody in the ancient world subscribed to 'cosmic pessimism' or felt 'enslaved' by fate, in order to prepare the ground for a new vision of the cosmos. The pervasiveness of anti-astrological discourse in modern Christian theological scholarship stands out in, for example, a 1953 edition of the *Interpreter's Bible*, still easily found in most university and seminary libraries. The passage being discussed is Colossians 2:20:

Christianity set men free from the bondage of this astrological fatalism by teaching that the power of God is greater than any fate or any astral spirits who might be thought to ordain human destiny apart from human will. It

⁴² Murray, *Five Stages*, 177–178.

⁴³ Thus the observations of Ernst Riess, "The Influence of Astrology on Life and Literature at Rome," *The Classical Weekly* 27/10 (1933): 73–78, on the "aberration of the mind" that is astrology in Rome: "the path of development in the Hellenistic religion leads from *Tyche* to *Heimarmene*, and thence to magic and the religions of salvation."

⁴⁴ Nilsson, *Geschichte*, 2.507.

encouraged men to regard themselves no longer as puppets of necessity but as free moral agents, enabled by divinely given strength to rise to the high estate of sons of God, for which they were created.⁴⁵

Indeed, the ideological mechanism inherent in this understanding of late antique religious worldviews still retains some potency today, if one chooses to investigate the question “why did Christianity succeed?” from within the context of Christianity itself.

5. *Freeing Gnosticism from the Burden of ‘Cosmic Enslavement’*

Dodds’ depiction of the period from the second to fourth as the “Age of Anxiety” has only recently fallen into disfavor. Modern scholars have acknowledged the significant diversity of philosophies within the Roman Empire, and have expressed a desire to emphasize difference rather than uniformity within Late Roman imaginative horizons.⁴⁶ Thus the modern Plotinian expert A.H. Armstrong implicitly addressed Dodds’ work when he criticized “generalizations about the *Zeitgeist* of Late Antiquity,” preferring to emphasize the “considerable and irreducible diversities” of the third century.⁴⁷ In a similar vein, an active critic of Dodds has been Peter Brown.⁴⁸ In his chapter,

⁴⁵ *The Interpreter’s Bible* (1953), 11:758–759.

⁴⁶ See the collection of essays by Robert Smith and John Lounibos, *Pagan and Christian Anxiety?* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1984), and R. Gordon, “Fear of Freedom?” *Didaskalos* 4 (1972): 48–60.

⁴⁷ A.H. Armstrong, “Gnosis and Greek Philosophy,” in Barbara Aland, ed., *Gnosis. Festschrift für Hans Jonas* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 112, who aims his barbs directly at Hans Jonas. At the same time, Armstrong generalizes Gnosticism as a movement marked by cosmic pessimism: “A Gnostic ... is a person who feels himself deeply alienated from this world in which we find ourselves and in revolt against the powers which govern it. He reverses the values which are implied for a Greek philosopher in the very word Cosmos ... the cosmos for him is an evil and alien place, a prison and a trap” (89).

⁴⁸ Brown and Dodds had in fact been at Oxford at the same time, and thus involved simultaneously in the new movement to apply psychological principles to the study of history. Peter Brown was perhaps less willing to apply these principles; see P.L.R. Brown, “Approaches to the Religious Crisis of the Third Century A.D.,” in idem, *Religion and Society in the Age of Augustine* (London: Faber & Faber, 1972). In his subsequent study, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), he critiques Dodd’s emphasis on the sense of alienation and loneliness felt by citizens of the second and third century, stating that urban congestion of the later Roman Empire would have produced, if anything, “claustrophobic tensions of proximity” (4). As John Gager, “The Dodds Hypothesis” in Smith and Lounibos, *Pagan and Christian Anxiety*, 7, notes, the difference between the approaches of Dodds and Brown are “apparent rather than substantive”; both posit a crisis of some sort in the third century that “manifests itself in the extraordinary behavior of unusual individuals who reveal the depths and carry the burdens of a world transformed.”

“A Debate on the Holy” in *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Brown emphasizes the need to augment our facile perceptions of the way in which people in Late Antiquity understood themselves and the world around them: “I have long been dissatisfied with the idea of a general ‘crisis’ of the third century as a *passe-partout* explanation for the emergence of the distinctive features of Late Antique religion.”⁴⁹ Brown’s measured skepticism does not actually reject Dodds’ hypothesis of ‘anxiety’ in the Roman Empire, but merely cautions against oversimplifying the manner in which individuals could react to a time of crisis. “I have learned from Professor Dodds more than from any other living scholar,” he concludes, that people “are not so simple, and so do not react to their circumstances in so simple a manner.”⁵⁰

Though contemporary scholars such as Brown and Armstrong are more likely to view the ‘Age of Anxiety’ as an artful construction of a much later age, the related idea that Gnostics felt enslaved to “the nightmare of astrological fatalism” remains a widely held assumption. To cite one prominent example, Gedaliahu Stroumsa’s study *Another Seed* remains one of the most penetrating and fascinating analyses of Gnostic mythologies published in the last thirty years.⁵¹ But Stroumsa maintains that “the desire to escape astral destiny was a common goal of religious life and appeared in otherwise widely different theologies.”⁵²

While I would not dispute the fact that ‘pessimistic’ conceptions of the world can occasionally be found in Nag Hammadi sources, in this volume I resist the impulse to polarize ‘cosmic pessimism’ and ‘cosmic benevolence’ into implicitly ‘illegitimate’ and ‘legitimate’ religious perspectives, the first characterizing Gnosticism and the second, ‘proto-orthodox’ Christianity. Each impulse yields only an oversimplified picture of emergent Christian cosmologies in the second and third centuries. Since the Nag Hammadi library represents a broad anthology of sources, it is helpful for providing a corrective for such oversimplification. Although a number of its tractates explicitly invoke or explore cosmologies, these are differently weighted, valued, described and deployed—not only across Nag Hammadi as a collection, but even within different redactions of a single text, or even within one single tractate.

⁴⁹ Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, 5.

⁵⁰ Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity*, 5.

⁵¹ Guy Stroumsa, *Another Seed. Studies in Gnostic Mythology*, NHMS 24 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984).

⁵² Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 95. See also his comments on “enslavement to fate,” 138–143.

6. *A New Direction*

My goal in this chapter has been to provide only the briefest of overviews about an academic construct over a century in the making. Much work remains to build up a new understanding of emergent Christian cosmologies, one constructed on the shoulders of giants such as Hans Jonas, who did not have the benefit of so many new texts to analyze. New discoveries of ancient sources—the Nag Hammadi codices and the Codex Tchacos, most significantly—and the turn to new methodological approaches mark this era as unprecedented in terms of our possibilities for groundbreaking work.

The work has already begun to replace or at least refine our use of the category Gnosticism. There is no need to rehearse here a longstanding and famous set of discussions on terminology; I have nothing new to contribute other than my insistence that we disentangle the language or the presumed attitude of cosmic fatalism and pessimism from what people have, in my opinion, been too quick to call Gnosticism. I have therefore endeavored in this chapter to furnish examples drawn from key modern scholarship to illustrate how it invokes the tropes of ‘cosmic pessimism’ and ‘enslavement to fate’ to characterize the spiritual tenor of a movement that was not a true movement at all, but a historiographical invention. I suggest, therefore, that we would be better off to reject these characterizations altogether, along with an unconsidered employment of the terminology ‘Gnosticism’ and ‘Gnostic.’

To begin anew, we must re-evaluate the assumption that any single group active in the second to fourth centuries felt itself victimized by, or alone within, the cosmos. To this end, Harvard scholar of Religion Karen King’s excellent book on Gnosticism as a modern field of study deconstructs, in particular, Hans Jonas’s perception of existentialism as a prevailing philosophical ethos of the first four centuries.⁵³

Michael Williams also addresses the modern characterization of ancient ‘Gnosticism’ as ‘anticosmic’ in his seminal book, *Rethinking Gnosticism* (1996). Indeed, he questions the very term (“Exactly how do we imagine that such persons went about ‘rejecting the world?’”).⁵⁴ Williams’ response to the trope of cosmic pessimism is to point out the diversity of views reflected in the Nag Hammadi codices, noting along the way that even texts such as *Hypostasis of the Archons* locate cosmic evil in a specific, limited and contingent place, rather than rejecting the *entire* cosmos as evil. In many cases, the

⁵³ Karen King, *What is Gnosticism?* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2005).

⁵⁴ Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 96.

evil or ‘fallenness’ of cosmic beings (Sophia, Ialdabaoth, Sabaoth) is explicitly described as a work of divine providence, in that it initiates the path to redemption and salvation. Williams’ work undergirds my own work on constructions of the cosmos, particularly in the *Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World*, that will be the subject of later chapters of this book.

Winrich Löhr, in an important but often overlooked article from 1992, takes on the trope of “Gnostic Determinism” from another direction.⁵⁵ He scans patristic and heresiological sources to pinpoint the origin of the idea that Gnostics were strict determinists—here, defined within the scope of ethics rather than cosmology. Interestingly, he notes that Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen actually critique *Stoic* determinism using a set of stock arguments from antiquity, yet pass this element of Stoicism off as ‘Valentinian.’⁵⁶ In other words, there is no substance to Irenaeus’s claim; it is merely a standard critique of an opponent’s theological position applied, *mutatis mutandis*, to the Valentinians. Indeed—such a trope cannot even be properly applied to Stoicism, although the dismissal of Stoics as determinists is prevalent in ancient literature.

Another approach is well represented in the work of the Finnish scholar of Gnosticism, Ismo Dunderberg. In his study of Valentinus and the Valentinians, Dunderberg analyzes different Valentinian approaches to the Creator God.⁵⁷ Taking care to avoid generalizing, he notes two different functions of Valentinian myth. One is to “pave the way for an understanding of this world as a place where the souls sent from above are educated for full salvation.”⁵⁸ The second is to demonstrate the need for a ritual that will make the deceased invisible to the Creator God in the hereafter. Crucially, he notes, “in neither model is this world understood as a threatening place.”⁵⁹ With that, Dunderberg neatly dispenses with the charges of anti-cosmism and cosmic pessimism, drawing on absolutely central ‘Gnostic’ theologies as expressed in the most well-known of the so-called ‘Gnostic’ schools, Valentinianism.

Broad questions lie behind this study, but these questions are nevertheless designed to massage nuances from our texts, not to reduce them to generalities: In what terms is fate explicitly described in Nag Hammadi texts? Can

⁵⁵ Winrich Löhr, “Gnostic Determinism Reconsidered,” *VC* 46 (1992): 381–390.

⁵⁶ Löhr, “Gnostic Determinism,” 383.

⁵⁷ Ismo Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism: Myth, Lifestyle, and Society in the School of Valentinus* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008).

⁵⁸ Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 133.

⁵⁹ Dunderberg, *Beyond Gnosticism*, 133.

we determine the rhetorical function of such language? Can we then move beyond rhetorical criticism and construct a social context for this language? Who precisely viewed fate as a depersonalized, relentless force from which the individual could not escape? Was such determinism truly perceived as absolute? Did these same authors feel themselves to be entrapped, or do they speak as objective external witnesses to what they perceived as a universal truth, or do they use the rhetoric of entrapment and enslavement as a mechanism for devaluating some constructed 'Other'?

The answers the texts themselves yield furnish a radically different picture of cosmology and 'cosmic attitudes'—if indeed one were to accept that any such thing existed—than that which my esteemed predecessors asserted. I see, above all, few indications that any 'Gnostic' group suffered the burden of 'enslavement to Fate,' at least in any absolute and enduring sense. Consistently in our sources, we find a shared conviction: while *heimarmene* certainly exists, it only enslaves the 'Other,' not the members of the group with whom the author himself identifies.

In contrast to Jonas's perception of 'the' Gnostic psyche as mired in fear and alienation, I maintain throughout this book that the language of 'enslavement to Fate' in antiquity was rare. We can understand it best, I suggest, not as an expression of an ancient attitude or *Zeitgeist*, but as part of a rhetorical strategy for demarcating and excluding one group from another. When we find it used, I suspect that it derives from those individuals in closely bound groups who, through a variety of methods and philosophies, came to consider themselves outside the prevailing socio-religious system or ethos. The authors of Nag Hammadi texts such as the *Apocryphon of John*, *On the Origin of the World*, the *Tripartite Tractate*, or *Eugnostos*—while all convinced of the veracity of astral influences as a dynamic principle of the cosmos—were equally convinced that their inexorable hold did not apply to them. The remainder of this book, then, explores the discourse of fate, the cosmos, and the power of the stars in some of our second-century sources—both those within the Nag Hammadi collection and those outside it—placing this discourse within the broadest possible social and intellectual contexts, while following the caveat of Peter Brown: that people (and the texts they leave behind) are not so simple.

CHAPTER TWO

NAG HAMMADI AND THE PROVIDENTIAL COSMOS

We can imagine with what feelings Gnostic men must have looked up to the starry sky. How evil its brilliance must have looked to them, how alarming its vastness and the rigid immutability of its courses, how cruel its muteness! The music of the spheres was no longer heard, and the admiration for the perfect spherical form gave place to the terror of so much perfection directed at the enslavement of man.¹

1. *Hans Jonas and the Starry Sky*

Hans Jonas, one of the earliest scholars to devote attention to ‘Gnostic’ interpretations of *heimarmene*, was familiar with conceptions of fate and divine providence developed within Greek philosophical schools of the Hellenistic era, particularly Stoicism. In Jonas’s assessment, the Stoic concept of *pronoia*, divine providence, effectively and elegantly combined Greek, Egyptian or Babylonian astrological concepts of fate with the Greek concept of *harmonia*. The *heimarmene* that was the felicitous product of this marriage Jonas understood as the harmonious effect of astrologically ordained destiny on “terrestrial conditions and the short-lived beings here.”² The Stoics, in equating *heimarmene* and *pronoia*, had positively expressed the essential microcosm/macroc cosmic relationship of human to cosmos.

In Jonas’s view, however, the development of ‘gnostic cosmic pessimism’ had perverted the providential relationship that, according to Stoicism, the divine could share with the human. In gnosticism as he understood it, “the cosmic logos of the Stoics,” he wrote, was “replaced by *heimarmene*, oppressive cosmic fate.”³ Jonas believed that the gnostics, like the Stoics, had borrowed their concept of *heimarmene* from astrology. But unlike its Stoic

¹ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion*, 261. See also 254–255.

² Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 259.

³ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 254.

prototype, gnostic *heimarmene* became “tinged with the gnostic anti-cosmic spirit.”⁴ Far from the practical action of *harmonia* on the terrestrial plane, gnostic *heimarmene* aimed “at the enslavement of man.”⁵ The pessimism inherent in gnosticism, Jonas maintained, ensured that *pronoia* had been completely abandoned as a positive concept; the starry sky’s rule is “tyranny, not providence.”⁶ He continued,

Never before or after had such a gulf opened up between man and the world, between life and its begetter, and such a feeling of cosmic solitude, abandonment, and transcendental superiority of the self taken hold of man’s consciousness.⁷

Jonas understood gnostic *heimarmene* as a grotesque perversion, or perhaps an inversion, of Stoic *pronoia*, and thus a manifestation of religious Angst in the Age of Anxiety. His assessment would have resounding effects on Gnostic studies. Long after Jonas had put down his pen, Kurt Rudolph summarized ‘the’ Gnostic perspective:

The whole worldview of Late Antiquity, with its idea of *heimarmene* which dominates the gods, the world, and men, is here as if bracketed together and marked with a negative sign. It becomes a prison from which there is no escape, unless the liberating act of the transcendent God and his helpers open up a way on which men ... can escape.⁸

In his study, Rudolph took into account the Nag Hammadi texts unavailable to Jonas when he wrote *The Gnostic Religion*, and effectively nuanced Jonas’s approach and conclusions in his own work. In this way, Rudolph’s work has been instrumental to the field. Yet like his predecessor, Rudolph sought to discover an underlying cohesion to gnostic systems that often smoothed over the sometimes considerable diversity of opinions we find now classified under the increasingly controversial and problematic rubric ‘Gnosticism.’ One area where we see this most clearly is his failure to deconstruct Jonasian understandings of Gnostic cosmology.

What would happen were we to approach Gnostic physics from a set of assumptions rather different from those which Jonas and Rudolph held? Rather than seeking to uncover any overarching Gnostic system, we might

⁴ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 43.

⁵ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 43.

⁶ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 254.

⁷ Jonas, *Gnostic Religion*, 254.

⁸ Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert MacLaughlin (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 58.

instead highlight the different responses that a few Christian writers of the second century—including, but not limited to those who authored some of our tractates found at Nag Hammadi—brought to the issue of cosmic economy. As we do so, however, another caveat is in order; in response to E.R. Dodds, who famously considered Gnosticism as “Platonism run wild” or Heinrich Dörrie’s assessment of Gnostic cosmologies as “the facile musings of mediocre minds,” I argue that to find only irrationality at the core of a ‘Gnostic psyche’ is at once reductionist and arrogant.⁹

I maintain that we must abandon the tenet that Gnostic Christianity was marred by a “progressive devaluation of the cosmos.” To posit a break, or worse, a wrong-minded Gnostic inversion, degradation, or perversion of Graeco-Roman philosophical ideals, is to overlook the significant continuities of thought we find in many so-called ‘Gnostic’ treatises from the Nag Hammadi corpus. It is also to remain blind to the elegance and economy that so many authors brought to a dizzyingly complex philosophical problem: it was their task to coax an essentially pagan speculative cosmology into a new, Christian imaginative landscape, the contours of which remained essentially flexible and uncharted before the fourth century.

2. *The Philosophical Background: A Brief Outline*

Although Jonas was correct that conceptions of providence and fate had developed in the Greek Stoa, by the high Empire—the era in which most of the Nag Hammadi cosmological texts were likely composed—the problem of relationship between providence and fate was at issue in two different philosophical schools active in the Empire: Stoicism and Platonism. In the second century CE, Middle Platonists introduced an innovation into the perceived relationship between *heimarmene* and *pronoia*.¹⁰ In

⁹ Heinrich Dörrie, “Divers aspects de la cosmologie de 70 av. J.-C. à 20 ap. J.-C.,” *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 3/22 (1972): 403. This point had already been made by the Plotinian scholar Hilary Armstrong: “It seems to me a mistake to read the gnostics as if they were bad philosophers,” in A.H. Armstrong, “Dualism,” in Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman, eds., *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1992), 43. As Armstrong recognized, many modern scholars have considerably underestimated the capacity of these Christian leaders to engage the most sophisticated ideas of their age.

¹⁰ Although the designation ‘Middle’ in ‘Middle Platonism’ has recently come under fire, I continue to use it here, mainly for reasons of terminological convenience. The secondary scholarship on Stoic and Middle Platonist interpretations of fate is extensive. Most germane

opposition to the Stoics, they divided *pronoia* into smaller components in order to resolve the paradox of how a divine attribute such as *heimarmene* (as painful experience sometimes proved) could seem arbitrary or worse, unjust. This problem, in fact, had already been anticipated by the “Platonizing, dualistic mystical Stoic” philosopher Posidonius (135–51 BCE), who had declared against Zeno that God was not identical with *physis* and *heimarmene*.¹¹ This formulation was to lie dormant in philosophical thought for over a century until it became fashionable once again in Athenian Platonist circles and perhaps curiously, as we shall see, among Christian heterodox groups of the second century.¹²

Let us briefly consider two Middle Platonist authors, one Greek (Pseudo-Plutarch) and one Latin (Apuleius), and their descriptions of the relationship between providence and fate. In a late-first or second-century *de Fato* treatise erroneously attributed to Plutarch, the anonymous Middle Platonist author responded to his patron Piso’s request for an explanation of the nature and scope of *heimarmene*.¹³ Fate, he explains, could have two aspects, as ἐνέργεια that acted upon matter, or as substance (οὐσία) (*de Fato*

to this discussion is John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) and Stephen Gersh, *Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism: The Latin Tradition* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986). David E. Hahm, *The Origins of Stoic Cosmology* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1977) contains long comprehensive chapters on Stoic cosmology and cosmogony, but does not treat the subjects of fate and providence; see also H.A. Armstrong, *Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967); See, most recently, Mauro Bonazzi and Christopher Helmig, eds., *Platonic Stoicism, Stoic Platonism: The Dialogue Between Platonism and Stoicism in Antiquity* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 2007), especially Robert Sharples’s contribution, “The Stoic Background to Middle Platonist Discussions of Fate,” 169–188.

¹¹ The assessment of Posidonius is from William Chase Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1944), 351.

¹² Dillon resists the urge to attribute this peculiarity of doctrine to any known Athenian school in antiquity, particularly the school of Gaius, the teacher of Apuleius and Pseudo-Plutarch, since it is absent from the extant works of the Gaius’s primary disciple Albinus. See Dillon’s discussion in Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 320. On Albinus’s doctrine of fate, see Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 267–305, and R.E. Witt, *Albinus and the History of Middle Platonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1937).

¹³ This work is included in De Lacy’s Loeb edition of Plutarch (1959). For comments on the fatalism in this work, see E. Amand de Mendieta, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l’antiquité grecque: recherches sur la survivance de l’argumentation morale antifataliste de Carnéade chez les philosophes grecs et les théologiens chrétiens des quatre premiers siècles* (Louvain: Bibliothèque de l’Université, 1945), 104–106; John Dillon, for his part, treats it dismissively: “what is good in him [Ps.-Plutarch] is not original and what is original is very little good” (Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 325).

568C).¹⁴ The final topic of the tractate is *heimarmene's* relation to *pronoia*. Working from an exegesis of Plato's *Timaeus*, the author carefully lays out a threefold division of providence. Primary *pronoia*, he stated, was the "intellection or will of the primary God" (τοῦ πρώτου θεοῦ νόησις εἴτε καὶ βούλησις), the beneficent *logos* which arranges and orders the cosmos (*de Fato* 572F).¹⁵ The will of the 'young gods,' associated in Middle Platonism with planetary influences, constituted a second level of *pronoia* (*de Fato* 572F).¹⁶ This secondary level of *pronoia* was both indistinguishable and inseparable from fate, having been begotten together with it (*de Fato* 572F–573A).¹⁷ Finally, *daimōnes* stationed in the terrestrial regions imposed a tertiary will or *pronoia* as "watchers and overseers [φύλακες τε καὶ ἐπίσκοποι] of human actions" (*de Fato* 572F–573A). According to Pseudo-Plutarch, primary *pronoia* had begotten fate and thus incorporated fate into itself (*de Fato* 574B). Secondary *pronoia* had been "begotten together" (συγγεννηθεῖσα) with fate and therefore was included with it in primary *pronoia*. Tertiary *pronoia*, according to Pseudo-Plutarch, was begotten later than *heimarmene* and thus was contained within fate.

Like the author of the Platonic treatise *On Fate* ascribed to Plutarch, the second-century Platonist Apuleius of Madaura also traveled to study under the teacher Gaius in Athens. Apuleius, too, refuted the idea that fate was the primary cause of all things in his treatise, *De Platone et eius dogmate*. Yet he considered fate *divinam legem*. It was identical with providence, which he defined as *divinam sententiam*. Apuleius also introduced a division of *pronoia* into three components, though he explicitly named only two of these components "providences." *Prima providentia* belonged to the highest of the gods (*exsuperantissimi deorum*) who had organized and commissioned the young gods to create mortal beings (*de Plat.* 1.12). *Secunda providentia* was the power exercised by these gods as they oversaw human activity, in order to "preserve unaltered the order of their father's dispensation" (*immutabilem ordinationis paternae statum teneant*) (*de Plat.* 1.12). The *daimōnes*, too, played some part in the administration of fate. Although Apuleius did not call it "tertiary providence," he added, "*daemonas vero*,

¹⁴ This division of aspects of *heimarmene* can also be found in Calcidius and Nemesius. For Calcidius, see Jan den Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate: His Doctrine and Sources*, *Philosophia Antiqua* 18 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970). See also the summary of Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 320–326.

¹⁵ Compare *Tim.* 29DE on God's beneficent ordering of the cosmos.

¹⁶ Compare *Tim.* 42DE on Plato's association of the planets with the 'young gods' and their administration over matter.

¹⁷ This division is also drawn from *Tim.* 42DE.

quos Genios et Lares possumus nuncupare, ministros deorum arbitrantur custodesque hominum et interpretes, si quid a diis velint: “the *daimōnes* also, whom we may term *genii* and *larii*, are considered to be ministers of the gods and guardians and interpreters for people, if ever they wish anything from the gods” (*de Plat.* 1.12).

The treatises of Apuleius and Pseudo-Plutarch reveal the issues current in first- and second-century Platonist discussions of *heimarmene*. These philosophers maintained, against the Stoics, that *heimarmene* was no longer identical with *pronoia*. Both Pseudo-Plutarch and Apuleius presented *heimarmene* as merely a lower, subordinate aspect of *pronoia*. This separation allowed for God’s will as *pronoia* to act beneficently upon humans, while all evil actions—particularly seemingly random or unjust misfortunes—could be attributed to the more capricious causality of *heimarmene*. Second, there was a question of the relationship between the gods and *heimarmene*: who or what governed the world, according to which principles?

In the *Timaeus*, Plato asserts that God had created an essentially good cosmos, endowed with soul and reason, through his *pronoia* (*Tim.* 30B). To confront the problem of evil, Plato weaves an elaborate cosmic myth in which souls are implanted in bodies ἐξ ἀνάγκη, “according to the dictates of *ananke*” (*Tim.* 42B). Bodies themselves are subject to the *pathemata*, but those who live virtuously may master the passions. Thus the Middle Platonists turned to the *Timaeus* to demonstrate that *pronoia* operated as a power of God, for the benefit of humankind. The *Timaeus* also provided justification to understand some form of necessity or compulsion administered by gods—a more explicitly polytheistic cosmology than the Stoic system which was primarily integrative, pantheistic, and monistic. The *Timaeus*’s association of the ‘young gods’ with the planets meant that *heimarmene*, in these Middle Platonic systems, was primarily planetary determinism, rather than an abstract causal chain that permeated the entire universe.¹⁸ The planets, therefore, were thought to have direct influence on the human beings through the mechanism of *heimarmene*—an idea originally based upon astrological principles, now seamlessly integrated into Graeco-Roman philosophy.

¹⁸ See also *Tim.* 41E, in which the Maker designates a star to each soul, and then proceeds to explain the nature of *heimarmene*, particularly how the “first birth should be one and the same for all” (ὅτι γένεσις πρώτη μὲν ἕσσιτο τεταγμένη μία πᾶσιν).

3. *Pronoia in Some Second-Century Christian Texts*

Since the Christian Nag Hammadi writings are often charged with having emerged from the lunatic fringe of early Christianity, we would do well to contextualize this discussion at the outset by beginning our investigations with the work of Athenagoras of Athens (ca. 133–190 CE), who had a reputation for right-mindedness on theological issues. Addressing the question of cosmic administration, Athenagoras in his apologetic treatise *Legatio ad Graecas* (*A Plea for Christians*) averred that God established angels to administer his creation providentially, “so that (God) might have the universal and general *pronoia* over all things, while the angels would have the *pronoia* over individual things” (ἵν’ ἡ τὴν μὲν παντελικὴν καὶ γενικὴν ὁ θεὸς ἔχων τῶν ὅλων πρόνοιαν, τὴν δὲ ἐπὶ μέρους οἱ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς ταχθέντες ἄγγελοι) (*Leg.* 24.3).

Athenagoras’s philosophical thought reveals a curious theory of evil: the angels who governed this lower *pronoia*, he believed, were not ‘good’ angels but those that had fallen from heaven to become evil spirits (*Leg.* 24.3). It was these fallen angels or *daimōnes* who produced in humans certain “irrational movements” (ἄλογοι κινήσεις)—that is, desires and passions similar to those of the demons themselves (*Leg.* 25.1–27.2).¹⁹

So how unusual was this idea that lower fate was controlled by demons? The second-century Syrian Christian Tatian (120–180 CE) expressed a similar view in his vituperative polemic on Graeco-Roman religion and philosophy, the *Oratio ad Graecas*. Like Athenagoras, Tatian believed that fallen angels governed over the world; they accomplish this, however, through *heimarmene*, not *pronoia*:

Humans became the subject of their [i.e., the angels’] apostasy. For they showed people a diagram of the constellations, and like dice-players they introduced *heimarmene*—an exceedingly unjust thing—which brought both judge and prisoner to where they are now. (*Ad Graec.* 8.1)

¹⁹ On Athenagoras’s theory of providence, see Michael Williams, *The Immoveable Race* (Leiden: Brill, 1985), 130. Compare also Justin Martyr, *2nd Ap.* 7. Justin shifted the explanatory principle for evil from the more abstract *heimarmene* to the more personal agency of wicked demons (φάυλοι δαιμόνες). It was because of the *energeia* of these demons, and not because of fate, that just men such as Socrates had been persecuted. The Stoics, unaware of demonic influences, had erroneously maintained that all things take place according to the necessity of fate. See Elaine Pagels, “Christian Apologists and the ‘Fall of the Angels’: An Attack on Roman Imperial Power?” *HTR* 78 (1985): 301–325.

Since at least one late-nineteenth-century Patristics scholar had accused Tatian of being “half Father, half-heretic,” we might be tempted to find in Tatian’s diatribe evidence for Jonas’s assertion that Gnostic *heimarmene* replaced Stoic *pronoia*.²⁰ Yet Tatian was not ‘Gnostic.’²¹ His approach to the problem of cosmic evil, furthermore, was not fundamentally different from that of his more ‘orthodox’ contemporary, Athenagoras. Both Athenagoras and Tatian drew their understanding of *pronoia* or *heimarmene*, in part, from the pagan philosophy they struggled so hard to refute in their apologetic works. They owed their cosmology, if not their belief in fallen angels, to the Platonism of the first and second century.

In Christianity, as in Middle Platonism, it became necessary to introduce the theory of multiple providences in response to enduring questions concerning the relationship of the divine and human will. Both Christians and pagans accepted that celestial *daimōnes* directly influenced human action, although only in Christianity do we find the conviction that these *daimōnes* were evil, ‘demons’ in the proper sense of the word.

Athenagoras’s and Tatian’s articulations of *pronoia* and *heimarmene* illustrate the desire of certain second-century Christians to explain the nature and source of evil with ‘cosmic’ explanatory principles drawn from Middle Platonist philosophical *koine*. Though members of the ostensible ‘proto-orthodox,’ they drew upon the same streams of cosmological theorizing as other Christians whom modern scholars have labeled ‘Gnostic.’²² Their understanding of fate and providence as lower, demonic forms of causality remind us that speculation on the scope of demonic influence was far from the exclusive preoccupation of heterodox Christianity. Both Athenagoras and Tatian saw ‘evil’—or at least potentially malevolent influence—leaking down into the realm of human activity from the vast seam that had opened up between the lower and higher levels of the cosmos, a seam now teeming with legions of *daimōnes*.

²⁰ I draw the quotation from J.E. Ryland’s introduction to the English translation of Tatian’s *Oration* in ANF (1989), 2.61.

²¹ See the assessment of William L. Petersen, “Tatian the Assyrian,” in Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, eds., *A Companion to Second-Century Christian “Heretics”* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 125–158.

²² I am inclined to think more and more that there was no ‘mainstream’ Christianity in the second century, and the very notion was created anachronistically by Catholicism and later historiography. I use the term here with reservations.

4. *Pronoia in Some Nag Hammadi Texts:
On the Origin of the World (Orig.Wld),
and the Apocryphon of John (ApJn)*

Within certain Jewish and Christian communities of the second century, speculation on the nature of *daimōnes* assumed the most unusual form: startling mythological *midrashim* on Genesis, composed by intellectuals as comfortable with Jewish exegetical techniques as with their Graeco-Roman philosophical *paideia*. These new mythological cosmologies became part of an intellectual effort Gedaliahu Stroumsa elegantly termed “the last significant outburst of mythical thought in Antiquity.”²³ Authors from these circles deftly transformed abstract philosophical principles into agents and characters in a huge cosmic drama. They did not accomplish this, however, by simply inverting these principles, by “bracketing” them “with a big negative sign,” as Rudolph states; not all Gnostic thinkers of the second century simply transformed Stoic *pronoia* into malevolent *heimarmene*. *Pronoia* still played for them an enduring role: the same role, in fact, first articulated by the predominant Greek philosophical schools of the first and second century.

In descriptions of cosmic workings, these mythological or, more properly, cosmogonic treatises from Nag Hammadi sometimes broach the subject of divine providence or *pronoia*. To test Jonas’s assertion that ‘Gnostics’ subverted positive Stoic *pronoia* into oppressive astral fatalism, I propose we examine the use of the concept of providence in two particular cosmogonic treatises from Nag Hammadi: the untitled treatise scholars have called *On the Origin of the World (Orig.Wld)*, and the *Apocryphon of John (ApJn)*. Neither text betrays an unmitigatedly pessimistic cosmology; both treat the subject of *pronoia* with a sophistication that reflects their engagement with Middle Platonist conceptions of a divided or ‘multiple’ providence. I will begin by looking at ideas of a divided or multiple *pronoia* in *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld*, as the authors of these texts—just like their contemporaries, authors of the Hermetica—follow Middle Platonic teachings on a divided *pronoia* in order to preserve concepts of cosmic beneficence and ordering.

The *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld* have become the subjects of increasing numbers of secondary studies in the fifty years since the discovery of the Nag

²³ G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 1. On Greek philosophical mythologies, see S. Sambursky, *The Physical World of Late Antiquity* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962), 215.

Hammadi library. Captivated in part by the compelling beauty yet thoroughgoing strangeness of these texts, modern scholars of Gnosticism have focused almost exclusively on deconstructions of their mythologies.²⁴ Scholars have been particularly fascinated with the manner in which the authors and redactors of these texts elaborated and expanded upon Genesis.²⁵ Since these documents often present astonishing departures from what we as scholars of early Christianity once naïvely considered 'normative' Christian thought, these texts have helped us to redraw the map of Christian imaginative horizons in the first few centuries of the Common Era.

The search for familiar Jewish or Christian elements in what strike us initially as unfamiliar or even subversive texts has also meant that the more traditional Graeco-Roman motifs or influences in them have largely been ignored. A notable exception in recent years has been the important work of Michael Williams and PHEME PERKINS, who discovered significant affinities between *ApJn*, *Orig. Wld* and the multiple-providence *schema* of some Middle Platonists.²⁶ PERKINS focused her investigation on multiple providences in *On the Origin of the World*. Williams, building on PERKINS' work, noted that the author of the *ApJn* included an even more nuanced multiple-providence scheme in his treatise. Their work effectively highlights the significant continuities between Christian and pagan speculative physics which underlie the mythological constructs of Nag Hammadi texts.

²⁴ The first scholar to study the mythological aspects of Gnostic texts has been Michel Tardieu, *Trois mythes gnostiques* (Paris: Études Augustiniennes, 1974). Most recently, see Zlatko Pleše, *Poetics of the Gnostic Universe: Narrative and Cosmology in the Gospel of John* (Leiden: Brill, 2006). For articles, see, inter alia, Ingvild S. Gilhus, "Male and Female Symbolism in the Gnostic *Apocryphon of John*," *Temenos* 19 (1983): 33–43; Marvin Meyer, "The *Apocryphon of John* and Greek Mythology," *SBLASP* (1984): 252; G. Stroumsa, "Polymorphie divine et transformations d'un mythe: L'Apocryphon de Jean' et ses sources," *VC* 35 (1981): 412–434.

²⁵ *ApJn*'s debt to Genesis has been studied by, among others, Søren Giversen, "The Apocryphon of John and Genesis," *Studia Theologica* 17 (1963): 60–76 and most recently, Gerard P. Luttikhuisen, *Gnostic Revisions of Genesis Stories and Early Jesus Tradition*, NHMS 58 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 17–112. For additional background on the creation myth of the *ApJn*, see Robert McL. Wilson, "The Early History of the Exegesis of Genesis 1:26," *Studia Patristica* 1 (1957): 420–437; Orval Wintermute, "A Study of Gnostic Exegesis of the Old Testament," in James E. Fird, ed., *The Use of the Old Testament in the New and Other Essays* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972), 241–270.

²⁶ Michael Williams, "Higher Providence, Lower Providences and Fate in Gnosticism and Middle Platonism," in Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman, eds., *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 483–507; Williams condenses the arguments he makes in this essay in his larger study, *Rethinking Gnosticism*; see also his earlier book, *The Immovable Race*, 129–140. For PERKINS' article, see PHEME PERKINS, "On the Origin of the World (CG II, 5): A Gnostic Physics," *VC* 34 (1980): 36–46.

4.1. On the Origin of the World (Orig.Wld)

On the Origin of the World can be found in two separate redactions in the Nag Hammadi codices (II 5 and XIII 2), although the version in XIII 2 is extremely fragmentary and contains only the first page of the tractate.²⁷ As a whole, the treatise cannot be ascribed to any one known Gnostic school. The author appears to have drawn upon a variety of traditions, Sethian, Valentinian, and Manichean.²⁸ The work bears an obvious relation to the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, but so far scholars of Nag Hammadi have been unable to agree upon the precise nature of that literary dependence. The plausible date for the tractate ranges from the mid-second to the fourth century CE.²⁹

In the opening lines of *Orig. Wld*, the author explains his intentions:

Since everyone—the gods of the cosmos and humankind—say that nothing has existed prior to Chaos [ἡν̄ λαλᾶτε ὡσοῦν εἰς τὴν ἡπ̄χαιος], I shall demonstrate that [they] all erred [ἄ[γ]ῖϛ̄ ἡλ̄λ̄ᾱνα τ̄ηροῦ], since they do not know the [structure] [ἡν̄τ̄[συστασ]ῖς] of Chaos and its root. (97,24–30)

The author then provides a mythological aetiology, not for evil, but for the existence of the chaos he perceived in the world around him.³⁰ To articulate this explanation, he wove an elaborate creation myth based not only upon the book of Genesis, but on the period before Genesis begins.³¹

²⁷ The critical edition I have used for this volume is Bethge/Layton (1989). For notes, I have consulted the excellent edition of Louis Painchaud, *L'Écrit sans titre: traité sur l'origine du monde (NH II, 5 et XIII, 2 et Brit. Lib. Or. 4926[1])* (Quebec: les presses de l'Université Laval, 1995). This text presents considerable challenges to the modern exegete, since it presents, in the words of Louis Painchaud, “à la fois une impression de cohérence et de confusion aux plans littéraire et doctrinal” (*L'Écrit sans Titre [NH II, 5; 97, 24–127, 17]*). For a detailed argument concerning the redactional history of the text, see Louis Painchaud, “The Redactions of the Writing Without Title (CG II.5),” *The Second Century* (1991): 218. The work of Painchaud has added immeasurably to our understanding of this text, which remains, as best we know, a product of a heterodox Christian thinker or group sometime in the second or third century.

²⁸ The tractate is, most often, seen as syncretistic, or as an example of ancient syncretism. See, for instance, Alexander Böhlig and Pahor Labib, *Die koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962); Michel Tardieu, *Trois mythes gnostiques*.

²⁹ For the range, see Bethge, “On the Origin of the World,” 170; PHEME PERKINS, “Gnostic Physics,” 37.

³⁰ Alexander Böhlig, *Die koptisch-gnostische Schrift ohne Titel aus Codex II von Nag Hammadi* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962), 19, notes that the author uses here Hesiod, *Theogony* 116–120 as a source, further demonstrating some Nag Hammadi authors' fascination not merely with Genesis but with the process of reconciling diverse cosmologies from the ancient world.

³¹ The best, most thoughtful and thought-provoking analysis of *Orig. Wld*'s creation myth

The version of *Orig. Wld* extant today does not preserve a fully articulated concept of a higher, hypostasized Pronoia. She is present in a single passage in which the author explains the motive behind the creation of Adam and the ensuing archontic enslavement of humankind:

Now it was in accordance with the Pronoia of Pistis [κατὰ τῆς προνοίας ἡπίστικ] that all this took place, so that the human being might appear before his image [πεφ' εἶνε] and might condemn them [i.e., the archons] through their molded body [εἰς ποικίλασμα]. (113,5–9)

Perkins notes that this passage in *Orig. Wld* corresponds to a parallel passage in *Hypostasis of the Archons*, in which the agent is not the Pronoia of Pistis but the ‘Will of the Father.’³² Perkins omits the connection of Pronoia with divine will in Middle Platonism; Pseudo-Plutarch terms primary *pronoia*, τοῦ πρώτου νόησις εἴτε καὶ βούλησις, the “intellection or will of the primary God” (*de Fato*, 572F). It is possible that the author of *Orig. Wld*, as he adapted the myth of Adam from *Hyp. Arch.*, converted the ‘Will of the Father’ to a primary form of providence, aware of contemporary philosophical ideas that equated the two. At any rate, the purpose of the passage in *Orig. Wld* is to remind its readers or listeners that divine intentionality stood behind the alarming archontic involvement in human activity. The author assured his audience that Pronoia’s active participation in the fall of humankind ultimately would serve both to condemn the archons and to elevate human beings. In this way, he pointed ahead to the conclusion of his tractate and, by extension, to the ‘setting right’ of chaos that he believed would occur at the end of sacred history.

Since *Orig. Wld* lacks the elaborate scheme of aeonic emanations that characterizes the *ApJn*, it comes as little surprise that it also lacks the more developed, generative role of a primary providence. However, the author of *Orig. Wld* devoted a great deal more attention to a secondary providence than we find either in the *ApJn* or in any extant Middle Platonist source. The first incidence of a lower *pronoia* parallels that which we find in *ApJn*; after the emanation of the immortals, Sophia creates a heavenly ‘likeness,’ a veil that separates humankind from the immortals. Outside this veil, which is also termed the ‘aeon of truth,’ there exists only darkness. Sophia creates the leonine Yaldabaoth to rule over all matter that has come forth from the deficiency beyond this veil. Yaldabaoth, ignorant of the existence of any

is Benjamin H. Dunning, “What Sort of Thing is this Luminous Woman? Thinking Sexual Difference in On the Origin of the World,” *J ECS* 17/1 (2009): 55–84.

³² Perkins, “Gnostic Physics,” 41.

being other than himself, divides the firmament. At this time there appear also seven androgynous beings, related to the Hebdomad. The author of the treatise lists their names along with their feminine names or attributes (*Orig. Wld* 100,24–102,2):

Yaldabaoth	Pronoia Sambathas (ΤΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ ΣΑΜΒΑΘΑΣ)
Iao	Lordship (ΤῬῬΤΣΔΔΕΙΣ)
Sabaoth	Divinity (ΤΗΝΤΗΟΥΤΕ)
Adoniaos	Kingship (ΤῬῬΤῬΡΟ)
Eloiaos	Jealousy (ΠΚΩΖ)
Oraios	Wealth (ΤΗῬΤῬῬΜΑΟ)
Astaphaios	Sophia (ΤΣΟΦΙΑ)

After the list, the text concludes, “these are the [seven] forces [δύναμεις] of the seven heavens of [chaos]” (102,1–2). Though the sources have been badly confused here, this list of archons corresponds with that provided by Origen’s Ophite diagram as well as the list in the *ApJn*. The most significant parallel to the *ApJn* for our purposes is the presence of ‘Pronoia’ in the first position on the list of archontic attributes. For the author of *Orig. Wld*, lower providence was in no way an attribute of the divine; it had been transformed into a power of chaos.

Orig. Wld also contains a myth involving a secondary form of *pronoia* unique within the corpus of writings from Nag Hammadi. When the Immortal Human leaves the transcendent realm to enter the world in the form of a light-being, he is invisible to everyone in the cosmos except Ialdabaoth and ΤΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ ΕΤΗΜΜΑΔ, “the Pronoia with him” (108,11). Pronoia falls in love with the immortal, but he loathes her “since she exists in the darkness” (ἦτοϋ Δε νεϋμοστε ἦμος` δε νεσϋι πκακε) (108,16–17). Without the appropriate receptacle for her love, she pours out her light upon the earth. From this day, we are told, the immortal became known as the “Light-Adam, which means ‘luminous blood-person.’”³³ This Light-Adam remains upon the earth for two days before he leaves “the Pronoia which is below in heaven” (ἦτΠΡΟΝΟΙΑ ΕΤῬΠΣΑ ΗΠΤῬ ῆῆ ΤΠΕ) and ascends back to his light (111,31–33). It is clear from the reference to Pronoia in the darkness and this second “Pronoia which is below” that the author had in mind a lower, secondary form of providence.

³³ *Orig. Wld* 108,22–24: ΔΔΔΗ` ΟΥΟΕΙΝ ΕΤΕ ΠΕΦΟΥΩΡῆ ΠΕ ΠῬῬῬΣΝΟϋ` ἦΟΥΟΕΙΝ. The passage contains an elaborate midrashic wordplay on the Hebrew terms ‘earth’ (*adam*, *’adamah*), ‘blood,’ (*dam*), and the Greek term *adamantine*; see Williams, “Higher Providence,” 497; Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 63.

When this lower Pronoia pours her light upon the earth, she creates the androgynous Eros, who has both a male aspect (called in the text *himertos*) and a female aspect termed $\sigma\upsilon\gamma\gamma\chi\eta\ \bar{\nu}\sigma\iota\omicron\upsilon\ \omicron\upsilon\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda\ \tau\epsilon\ \epsilon\bar{\nu}\ \tau\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\alpha\ \bar{\nu}\tau\tau\omicron\nu\omicron\iota\alpha$, “a blood-soul, which is from the essence of *pronoia*” (109,1–6).³⁴ Eros and the first soul (*Psyche*) produce from their desire the rose and the thorn bush, and “beautiful flowers ... from every single virgin [$\bar{\mu}\pi\alpha\rho\epsilon\omicron\iota\omicron\varsigma$] of the daughters of Pronoia [$\bar{\nu}\sigma\upsilon\epsilon\epsilon\epsilon\ \bar{\nu}\tau\tau\omicron\nu\omicron\iota\alpha$]” (111, 9–29). The French scholar of Gnosticism, Michel Tardieu, devoted nearly one hundred pages of his study *Trois mythes gnostiques* to *Orig.Wld's* Eros myth.³⁵ Tardieu sought to understand the myth's structure and imagery within the broader context of Greek and Jewish mythology. But Tardieu's analysis failed to explain the puzzling connection between Eros and Pronoia. For insight, Pheme Perkins turned to philosophical allegories of the Eros myth within Middle Platonist sources. Within this corpus of texts, she notes, Plutarch also alludes to the ‘creation’ of Eros from Pronoia. In his treatise *de Facie Lunae*, Plutarch observed that the initial disorder and separation of the higher cosmic elements caused them to avoid each other in disarray,

pursuing particular [*idios*] and arbitrary [*authades*] motions, since they were in a state in which everything without God is, according to Plato, that is, like bodies lacking mind and soul; until the desired one [*himerton*] came to Nature [*physis*] from Pronoia, when affection or Aphrodite or Eros came into being.³⁶
(*de Facie Lunae* 926F–927A)

Perkins observes, “a Gnostic interpreter could easily read this account as equivalent to the birth of Eros from Pronoia, and the eventual ordering of the cosmos through the activity of providence which is described in *Orig. World*.”³⁷

In *Orig.Wld's* Eros myth, Pronoia initiates the process of generation; more specifically, she introduces sexual desire into the cosmos. “As a result of this desire,” notes Williams, “a certain providential ordering of life in the cosmic realm is effected.”³⁸ According to the *Orig.Wld*, the appearance of sexual desire in the cosmos initiates the unfolding of a generative process that leads inexorably toward death:

³⁴ On the elaborate mythological connection between Pronoia and her blood-fetus, Eros, see also Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 63–67 and Perkins, “Gnostic Physics,” 38–40.

³⁵ Tardieu, *Trois mythes*, 140–214.

³⁶ See also the parallel that Perkins notes between this passage and Plutarch, *de Iside et Osiride* 372EF on Isis's desire (*eros*) for the Good which produces her ‘procreations.’

³⁷ Perkins, “Gnostic Physics,” 39.

³⁸ Williams, “Higher Providence,” 498.

The woman followed the earth, and marriage followed the woman, and reproduction followed marriage, and dissolution followed reproduction.

(*Orig. Wld* 109, 22–25)

The chaos of this contingent cosmos had its structure and root, this author believed, in the generative function of lower providence. This lower *pronoia* worked in conjunction with *heimarmene* to produce Eve's progeny. Since they originated from 'mixed seed,' these children contained within themselves a portion which remained subject to *heimarmene*:

All this took place according to the Pronoia of the Archigenetor so that Eve might beget within herself every mixed seed [σπέρμα], which is joined [ἀρμόζειν] to the *heimarmene* of the cosmos and *heimarmene's* *schemata* and righteousness [δικαιοσύνη]. A plan [οἰκονομία] came into being concerning Eve so that the fashioning [πλάσμα] of the powers [ἐξουσία] would become a container of light.

(*Orig. Wld* 117, 18–24)

This subjection the author did not perceive as necessarily malevolent; *heimarmene's* influence was part of the harmony and *oikonomia* of the cosmos, connected with the principle of 'righteousness.' Ultimately, this author also understood higher providence to have directed these events: παει δε τηρῶ λφωπε κατα τηπρονοια ἡπαρχιγενετωρ, "all this happened according to the Providence of the Archigenetor." Despite the ignorance of the archons, as Perkins recognizes, the author of *Orig. Wld* believed that humans would "eventually come to possess gnosis."³⁹

4.2. Apocryphon of John (ApJn)

The *Apocryphon of John*, in the form in which we have it today, is a cosmological treatise set within the narrative framework of a revelatory discourse.⁴⁰

³⁹ Perkins, "Gnostic Physics," 40.

⁴⁰ For this discussion, I will draw my illustrations and examples from the most complete extant recension of the *ApJn*, NHC II 1. When necessary, I will include parallel material from the other recensions. I follow Waldstein and Wisse's excellent English translation of the *ApJn* (Waldstein/Wisse 1995) unless otherwise indicated.

Irenaeus, writing around 180CE, is the first proto-orthodox Christian author to allude to an *ApJn* favored by 'BarbeloGnostics' (*Adv. Haer.* 1.29); this was evidently not the same text as we have today, but a source for the main revelatory discourse of the first section of the *ApJn*. Scholars Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse have traced the redactional history for this treatise. In their view, an unknown Christian author composed the original *ApJn* from second-century source material, sometime in the early third century. This treatise was subjected to a major redaction in the later third century, mainly through the addition of material. Around the same time, unknown translators rendered both redactions of the original Greek text into three Coptic translations, the shorter version translated at least

The cosmogony of the *Apjn* begins with a lengthy account of the myth of Sophia.⁴¹ Sophia wishes to bring forth a ‘likeness’ (εἰκὴ) of herself.⁴² Since she generates an offspring without her *syzygos* needed to provide bodily substance to this form, Sophia is able to produce merely an inferior product of a different form (μορφή or τύπος), the lion-faced Yaltabaoth.⁴³ At this point, in the words of Elaine Pagels, “the cosmic drama expands in a series of broken symmetries.”⁴⁴ Yaltabaoth, in union with his ἀπόνοια or ‘madness’ produces for himself twelve authorities and angels who collectively govern the world.⁴⁵ Their hegemony, however, is ultimately opposed by the divine

twice. Copies of these translations eventually came to be included in three of the thirteen Nag Hammadi codices. Two independent copies of the long translation of the *Apjn* have been included in NHC II and NHC IV; one copy of the short version is found in NHC III. Finally, the fifth-century Codex Papyrus Berolinensis 8502 (abbreviated in this book as BG) also contains one of the translations of the shorter version.

⁴¹ The myth of Sophia has received a great deal of attention in Gnostic studies. See, for instance, G.W. MacRae, “The Jewish Background of the Gnostic Sophia Myth,” *NovTest* 12 (1970): 86–101; G.C. Stead, “The Valentinian Myth of Sophia,” *JTS* 20 (1969): 75–104; PHEME PERKINS, “Sophia as Goddess in the Nag Hammadi Codices,” in K. King, ed., *Images of the Feminine in Gnosticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 96–112; K. King, “Sophia and Christ in the *Apocryphon of John*,” in *Images*, 158–176; James Goehring, “A Classical Influence on the Gnostic Sophia Myth,” *VC* 35 (1981): 16–23.

⁴² For a general study of the ‘image’ in early Christianity, see Jacob Jervell, *Imago Dei*, FRLANT 76 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960). Dunning, “What Sort of Luminous Woman,” has a useful and extended discussion of the ‘image,’ although his focus is on *Orig.Wld* rather than *Apjn*.

⁴³ The etymology of the name ‘Yaltabaoth’ has sparked a number of articles. See M. Black, “An Aramaic Etymology for Jaldabaoth?” in A.H.B. Logan and A.J.M. Wedderburn, eds., *The New Testament and Gnosis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 69–72; R.M. Grant, “Notes on Gnosis,” *VC* 11 (1957): 148–149; G. Scholem, “Jaldabaoth Reconsidered,” in *Mélanges d’Histoire des Religions offerts à Henri-Charles Puech* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1974), 405–421. On the figure of the demiurge, see G. Quispel, “The Demiurge in the *Apocryphon of John*,” in *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis*, ed. R. McL. Wilson, NHMS 14 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 1–33. On Yaltabaoth’s leonine form, see H. Jackson, *The Lion Becomes Man: The Gnostic Leontomorphic Creator and the Platonic Tradition* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985).

⁴⁴ Elaine Pagels, “Exegesis and Exposition of Genesis Creation Accounts in Selected Texts from Nag Hammadi,” in Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1976), 264.

⁴⁵ To create the other archons, Yaltabaoth copulates with Madness (αφρογῆβῃ μὴ ταπονοια) in both BG 39, 5 and Irenaeus’s parallel account in *Adv.Haer.* 1. 29 (Irenaeus lists the offspring as Wickedness, Jealousy, Discord and Desire). NHC III 16, 7 replaces ἀπόνοια with τῆν ἄγνοιαν, “ignorance,” with either the translator or a Greek copyist mistaking ἀπόνοια for ἄνοια.

BG 39, 6–40, 2 includes at this point additional information lacking in the other MSS. Yaltabaoth and Madness produce twelve angels, each in their own aeon. For each of these twelve angels, Yaltabaoth creates seven more angels, and for each of these seven angels, three more powers, “for a total of 360 angelic beings [ἀγγελία].” There is obviously some confusion here, since the total number of beings should be either 348 or 384, depending

Pronoia, Barbelo, who oversees and guarantees the salvation of the ‘immovable race.’

The author of the *ApJn* included in his cosmology three specific functions for Pronoia: she serves a generative function, taking an active role in the unfolding of the cosmic order; she serves as overseer and director of human action; finally, she initiates and embodies salvific knowledge. According to the *ApJn*, Pronoia appears “out of the brilliance of the light,” to assume herself the likeness [εἶνε] of the light (*ApJn* BG 27, 1–14). Williams describes her function as the “center of intellectual energy through whom the entire intellectual realm actualizes itself.”⁴⁶ As the First Thought, Pronoia becomes μῆντρα μῆτρῆ the “womb of all things” (*ApJn* II 5, 5–6). She asks the Father for assistance, and receives as attendants Foreknowledge [πρόγνωσις], Eternal Life, Truth and Indestructability (*ApJn* II 5, 15–6, 2). Together, these five constitute πεντας ἄϊων ἡτε πῶτ, the “Pentad of the Aeons of the Father” which then generate additional aeonic realms (*ApJn* II 6, 8–9). As the active agency of the Father, Pronoia also begets the Only Begotten One (*ApJn* II 6, 10–18).

The author of the *ApJn* concurred with the Latin Middle Platonist author Apuleius: this higher *pronoia* exercises only a ‘providential’ influence upon humankind. Unlike Apuleius, however, he did not regard *pronoia* as an abstract principle. He understood it as a divine feminine being who set into action the process of salvific, sacred history and who ensures that humans are guided along the path to salvation: it was Pronoia, he believed, who intervened to save the spiritual Eve from being defiled by the archons; it was she who warned Noah about the deluge.⁴⁷ Pronoia’s primary characteristic in the *ApJn* is her providential care and compassion for human beings, a

on one’s understanding of the ambiguous antecedents in the extant text. Aware of this miscalculation, either the copyist or translator of the NHC III *ApJn* (who otherwise parallels the BG) omits this enumeration altogether, while NHC II 30, 9–12 attempts (and fails) to correct the multiplication to equal 365 angels. Despite the faulty multiplication, the point of both the BG 39, 6–40, 2 and the NHC II 30, 9–12 passages is to illustrate a cosmos entirely under the influence of the evil Yaltabaoth, through the cosmological overtones of the numbers 365 and 360—either a reference to days in the year or to the 360 degrees of the zodiacal circle. These single degrees were represented in Egyptian astrology as celestial beings known as the *monomoirai*.

⁴⁶ Williams, “Higher Providence,” 485.

⁴⁷ The Garden: *ApJn* II 23, 24–29; Noah: *ApJn* II 29, 1–3. Williams, “Higher Providence,” 486, notes that Pronoia plays less of an explicitly soteriological role in the shorter recension, appearing only twice: first, to warn Noah, and second, at the account of the fall of the angels; the angels tempt humankind “so that they might not remember their immovable Providence.”

role Williams sees anticipated in Pseudo-Plutarch's description of primary providence as "benefactress [εὐεργέτης] of all things."⁴⁸

Pronoia also plays a more explicitly cognitive role in the *ApJn*, well-suited to a hypostasis of πρόνοια, 'forethought.' Apuleius had already hinted at this cognitive power of *pronoia* when he characterizes it as *divinam sententiam*, 'divine thought' (*de Plat.* 1. 12). In this capacity, Pronoia embodies, in the *ApJn*, humankind's innate capacity for divine perception. In the longer recension of the *ApJn*, Pronoia acts as the first heavenly revealer, startling the archons with the proclamation "Man exists, and the son of man" (*ApJn* II 14, 13–2). She is the source and embodiment of the illuminating gno-sis Adam and Eve receive in the garden (*ApJn* II 23, 24–33).

The author of *ApJn* perceived the divine, hypostasized figure of Pronoia as distinct from a lower, secondary form of *pronoia*. Middle Platonists, as we have seen, assigned secondary providence to secondary gods, likely an attempt to explain the dynamic role of the 'young gods' (νεοὶ θεοὶ) of Plato's *Timaeus* 42D–E in shaping and governing human bodies. In the *ApJn*, this task falls to seven theriomorphic archons, the names of whom have been altered in each recension:⁴⁹

NHC III 17, 20–18, 8	BG 41, 18–42, 10	NHC II 11, 16–35
Aoth, the lion-faced	Yaoth, the lion-faced	Athoth, with a sheep's face
Eloaios, the donkey-faced	Eloaios, the donkey-faced	Eloaiou, donkey-faced
Astophaios, the hyena-faced	Astaphaios, the hyena-faced	Astaphaios, hyena-faced
Yazo, the serpent-faced, lion-faced	Yao, the serpent-faced with seven heads	Yao, serpent-faced with seven heads
Adonaios, the serpent-faced	Adonaios, the serpent-faced	Sabaoth, serpent-faced
Adonin, the monkey-faced	Adoni, the monkey-faced	Adonin, monkey-faced
Sabbadaios, the shining fire-faced	Sabbataios, the shining flame of fire-faced	Sabbede, with a shining fire-face

⁴⁸ Williams, "Higher Providence," 486–487.

⁴⁹ The fourth recension, NHC IV, is too fragmentary here to reconstruct.

Ialdabaoth, their father, gives to each archon his own specific quality or attribute:⁵⁰

BG 43, 12–14		NHC II 12, 16–25	
Yaoth	Pronoia (πρόνοια)	Athoth	Goodness (χρηστός)
Eloaios	Divinity (τιμῆτιοῦτε)	Eloaio	Pronoia (πρόνοια)
Astaphaios	Christhood/goodness (τιμῆτιχῶ)	Astraphaio	Divinity (τιμῆτιοῦτε)
Yao	Fire (πικωρετ)	Yao	Lordship (τιμῆτιχοειε)
Sabaoth	Kingdom (τιμῆτιρρο)	Sabaoth	Kingdom (τιμῆτιερο)
Ad[oni]	Understanding (σύνησις)	Adonein	Envy (πικωρε)
Sabbataios	Sophia (σοφία)	Sabbateon	Sophia (σοφία)

‘Pronoia’ is featured as an attribute of either Yaoth or Eloaio, depending on the manuscript. According to Michael Williams, this secondary *pronoia* corresponds to the *secunda providentia* of the Middle Platonists; it constitutes “an inferior and even malevolent counterpart to the higher divine Providence.”⁵¹

In Plato’s *Timaeus*, the “young gods” are bound to the planets by the ties of soul (*Tim.* 7. 38; 8. 40). When Apuleius, then, associated “young gods” with the function of *secunda providentia*, he must have held in mind their planetary associations. Williams’s argument for a bipartite providence *schema* in the *ApJn* would be further strengthened if we could definitively associate the seven archons with the seven planets.⁵² This association, however, is never

⁵⁰ The text of NHC III is no longer extant; the fragmentary NHC IV here agrees with NHC II. For a similar but incomplete list, see *GosJud* 52, 4–13.

⁵¹ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 204. He hypothesizes elsewhere (Williams, “Higher Providence,” 491) that the original placement for this secondary *pronoia* may have been at the top of this list as in the case of BG 43, 12, in which case it would have governed the cosmic realm just as the higher *Pronoia* governs the aeonic realm.

⁵² Williams himself takes the association for granted (“Higher Providence,” 484). Howard Jackson, “The Origin in Ancient Incantory *Voces Magicae* of Some Names in the Sethian Gnostic System,” *VC* 43 (1989): 69–79, traces the names of the archons Yao, Adonaius, Adonin and Elaios back to Jewish magic. Obviously, the names Yao, Adonaios, Adonin, and Elaios derive from Jewish titles for God; Sabbataios is from the Hebrew ‘Shabbathai,’ the planet Saturn, a verbal play on God as the ‘Lord of Hosts’ or ‘of the seven.’ Tacitus, *Hist.* 5. 4 associates the Jewish God with Saturn, speculating on the connections “of the seven planets that rule the fortunes of humankind, Saturn moves in the highest orbit and has the greatest potency.” See also J. Michl, “Engel,” *RAC* 5 (1952): 230 and more recently, Gideon Bohak, “Hebrew, Hebrew Everywhere?: Notes on the Interpretation of *Voces Magicae*,” in Scott B. Noegel, Joel

made explicit in the *ApJn*. Of these archons and their attributes, we learn only that each corresponds to a firmament (σπερέωμα) in each heaven or aeon (*ApJn* II 12, 26). Because of the evident differences and confusions in these lists, it is difficult to know if the *ApJn* contains (or once contained) a comprehensive cosmology. By the time the text was translated into Coptic, Wisse notes, the Egyptian monks who translated the text in the fourth century only marginally understood much of the original Greek.⁵³ It seems fair to conclude from this that members of these monastic communities, while fascinated by the esoteric cosmological material of the *ApJn*, no longer understood what it signified, nor espoused its cosmology.

On the other hand, the confusion and contradiction of the archon lists when we compare our four versions of the *ApJn* need not necessarily imply that the original text of the *ApJn* never reflected a systematic cosmology. Despite Simone Pétrement's assertion that the *ApJn*'s seven archons follow a Jewish emanationist pattern related to days of the week rather than planets,⁵⁴ the British scholar A.J. Welburn has made an ingenious attempt to draw out the planetary associations of the ruling archons.⁵⁵ Welburn commenced his analysis of *ApJn*'s seven archons by comparing it to two similar lists of seven archons provided by Origen and Irenaeus.⁵⁶ Origen's list contains two identical archons in first and second position, which correspond in the Ophite diagram that is his source with the planets Mercury and Venus.⁵⁷ From this, Welburn was able to reconstruct convincing planetary attribu-

Walker and Brannon M. Wheeler, eds., *Prayer, Magic, and the Stars in the Ancient and Late Antique World* (Pittsburgh: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 69–82, who denies a true Jewish background for Jewish-sounding names.

⁵³ Waldstein/Wisse (1995), 7.

⁵⁴ "The idea that the planets created the world," Simone Pétrement writes in *A Separate God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 65, "does not seem to be deduced from astrology." But Pétrement's argument is misleading. The issue here is not whether the planets created the world, since they do not do so in the *ApJn*, but whether they preceded humankind in the order of creation, and whether or not they exert an influence upon humankind.

⁵⁵ A.J. Welburn, "The Identity of the Archons in the 'Apocryphon Johannis,'" *VC* 32 (1978): 241–254.

⁵⁶ For Irenaeus's archon list see *Adv.Haer.* 1. 30. 5: "the first one, who came from the Mother, is called Ialdabaoth, his son Iao, and his Sabaoth; the fourth is Adonaeus, the fifth Aloaeus, the sixth Oraeus, the seventh and youngest of all, Astaphaeus." For Origen's list, see *Contra Celsum* 6. 24–28: Horaeus (Moon), Aeloeus (Mercury), Astaphaios (Venus), Adonaeus (Sun), Sabaoth (Mars), Iao (Jupiter), Phainon/ Ialdabaoth (Saturn). The list of the seven archons is also inscribed upon a so-called 'Gnostic' gem; see Campbell Bonner, *Studies in Magical Amulets, chiefly Graeco-Egyptian* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1950), 135–138, 284 (#188) and Pl. IX, 188. Finally, see the partial list in *GosJud* 52, 5–13.

⁵⁷ Welburn corrects Origen's widely recognized errors of listing the archons in reverse (since he was reading from a diagram) and (inadvertently?) omitting the fourth archon.

tions for the seven archons of the *ApJn*.⁵⁸ He concludes from this that the *ApJn* list once reflected “a clear and ordered image of the universe.”⁵⁹ This order, Welburn maintains, was “closely allied” to other cosmologies and cosmogonies of the second and third century.⁶⁰

If the author of the *ApJn* understood a secondary form of *pronoia* as an ‘attribute’ of planetary archons, he also understood it as a component of Adam’s body. Pronoia appears in the lists of ‘souls’ with which the archons endow Adam in the *ApJn*. Each archon forges a particular soul that corresponds to components of Adam’s physical body.⁶¹

NHC III 22.19–23.7	BG 49.11–50.5	NHC II 15.14–15.23
Divinity created a bone-soul	Divinity, a bone-soul	Goodness created a bone-soul
Lordship, a sinew-soul	Christhood/goodness a sinew-soul	Pronoia, a sinew-soul
Christhood/goodness and Fire create a fleshly (σαρκική) soul	Fire, a flesh (σάρξ)-soul	Divinity, a flesh-soul
Pronoia, [a marrow]-soul	Pronoia, a marrow-soul “and the entire foundation of the body” ⁶²	Lordship, a marrow-soul
Kingdom, [a blood]-soul	Kingdom, a [blood]-soul	Kingdom, a blood-soul

⁵⁸ Welburn, “Identity,” 245. His reconstructed list reads as follows:

Yaoth/Athoth	Moon
Eloaios/Eloiaio	Mercury
Astaphaios/Astraphaio	Venus
Yao	Sun
Sabaoth	Mars
Adoni/Adonein	Jupiter
Sabbataios/Sabbateon	Saturn

⁵⁹ Welburn, “Identity of the Archons,” 241.

⁶⁰ Welburn, “Identity of the Archons,” 241.

⁶¹ The redactor of the BG terms each creator-archon is itself a ψυχί; in NHC II, however, each archon merely creates a soul.

⁶² R. van den Broek, “The Creation of Adam’s Psychic Body in the *Apocryphon of John*,” in R. van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions* EPRO 91 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 47, explains the BG addition on the basis of *Tim.* 73B, in which Plato states that the marrow formed the beginning of bones, flesh and other elements of the body.

NHC III 22.19–23.7	BG 49.11–50.5	NHC II 15.14–15.23
Understanding, a tooth-soul	Understanding, a skin-soul	Envy, a skin-soul
Wisdom, a hair-soul	Wisdom, a hair-soul	Understanding, a hair-soul

Two of the three manuscripts conclude this section with a pun, $\alpha\gamma\omega \alpha\gamma\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\epsilon\iota$ [μ]πρωμῆ· τηρῶ· “and they ordered [κοσμῆν] the whole man.” The verb $\kappa\omicron\sigma\mu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\nu$ also underscores Adam’s essential connection with cosmic components—the archons ‘cosmicize’ Adam.⁶³ They create Adam in a progression from inside (bone or marrow/Moon) to out (hair/Saturn).⁶⁴ Wholly connected in every aspect of his physical being with the seven planets, Adam is a $\mu\iota\kappa\rho\delta\varsigma \kappa\acute{\omicron}\sigma\mu\omicron\varsigma$ composed of the substance of the heavens, reflective of its order.⁶⁵

⁶³ Welburn, “Identity,” 245, reconstructs the planetary contributions as follows:

<i>Planet</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Attribute</i>	<i>Creates Adam’s</i>
Moon	Athoth , with a sheep’s face	Kindness/Authority	Bone-Soul
Mercury	Eloaios , with a Typhonian face	Forethought	Connective Tissue-Soul
Venus	Astraphaios , with a hyena’s face	Divinity	Flesh-Soul
Sun	Iao , with the face of a serpent and seven heads	Lordship/Zeal	Marrow-Soul
Mars	Sabaoth , with the face of a snake	Kingship	Blood-soul
Jupiter	Adonin , with the face of an ape	Intelligence/Envy	Skin-Soul
Saturn	Sabbede/Sabbadaios with a glowing face of fire	Intelligence/Wisdom	Hair-Soul

Theodore bar Koni reproduces a fragment of an *Apocalypse of John* preserved by Audius, but which seems to be different from the recensions we find here. The order of creation for the soul runs, “My Wisdom made the flesh, and Understanding made the skin, and Elohim made the bones and my Kingdom made the blood. Adonai made the nerves and Anger made the flesh, and Thought made the Marrow.” As Waldstein/Wisse notes, Bar Koni considered this part of a magical treatise. For the full text, see Waldstein/Wisse (1995), Appendix 5, 194.

⁶⁴ The longer recension (NHC II and NHC IV) retains the same order of archontic attributes as the first list. ‘Providence,’ associated with the archon Eloiao, stands second in the list. In the shorter recension (BG 43, 10–44, 4), the redactor has moved it to fourth place. Van den Broek, “Creation,” 46, replaces *pronoia* to its original first position, associating it with marrow, to make the order marrow, bones, sinews, flesh, blood, skin and hair—a progression from inside outward more in accordance with the *Timaeus* 73–76. The redactor’s decision to shift the position of *pronoia* may reflect a desire to place the marrow as the core of the psychic body, according to Williams, “Higher Providence,” 492.

⁶⁵ See Van den Broek, “Creation,” *passim*. According to Van den Broek, medical writers of

5. *Conclusions: Complicating the Starry Skies*

The authors of *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld* both integrated into their cosmological myths a divided form of *pronoia*. The different roles they assigned to these higher and lower providences highlight the fluidity of ideas current in their day. Middle Platonist speculation on fate, free will and demonic activity drew philosophers to debate the nature and scope of both a higher and a lower form of divine causality. These debates, as we have seen, were common enough to have influenced Christian authors as diverse as Tatian, Athenagoras, and the unknown authors of our Nag Hammadi cosmologies. Indeed, the debates left their mark on a number of Christian texts. Michael Williams detects, for instance, another reference to a divided *pronoia* in the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, which distinguishes between a “holy Pronoia” and a Pronoia “without wisdom.”⁶⁶

Within Christian circles, as within Platonist circles, there was no consensus concerning the precise jurisdiction of each form of providence. The author of the *ApJn* associated lower *pronoia* with the passions, but also with the planets. The author of *Orig.Wld* agreed that *pronoia* could be a planetary ‘attribute,’ but also developed an elaborate, procreative role for a lower *pronoia* associated with Eros. Like certain Hermetic writers, as we shall see in chapter five, the author of the *ApJn* linked his understanding of cosmic enslavement with planetary influence: humans were subjected to archontic control because they were fundamentally composed of a lower form of *pronoia*, a type of ‘soul’ instilled by the archons. The author of *Orig.Wld*, by contrast, was convinced that a lower form of *pronoia* enslaved humanity through the introduction of sexual desire into the cosmos: a form of ‘original sin’ transmitted through the seed of the archons and authorities, passed down bodily into each individual. Like their Middle Platonist contemporaries, these authors divided *pronoia* in order to ‘explain’ the evil or ‘chaos’ of the present age. They did not, however, solve the problem of evil by positing an essentially evil cosmos; they confined ‘evil’ influence both spatially and temporally.

the imperial era frequently divided the human body into seven components—an innovation perhaps traced back to Posidonius. The seven components of humankind, however, are never associated with the planets. See Jaap Mansfeld, *The Pseudo-Hippocratic Tract ΠΕΠΙ ΕΒΔΟΜΑΔΩΝ ch. 1–11 and Greek Philosophy* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971), 196–202. The idea of a planetary *melothesia*, however, is well attested in Graeco-Roman astrological literature.

⁶⁶ Williams, *Immovable Race*, 156; *SJC*, NHC III 91, 2–8; *SJC*, NHC III 93, 12–16. He notes as well that the defeat of the archons is described as “to trample on their *pronoia*” or “to humiliate their *pronoia*” (NHC III 108, 16; BG 122, 3; NHC III 119, 2).

As we have seen, second-century ‘Gnostic’ articulations of cosmology do not subvert *pronoia* into a malevolent *heimarmene*. Rather, these writings sought to develop the philosophical systems of the Middle Platonists within a Biblical hermeneutical framework. The *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld* both demonstrate that their authors were well versed in the Middle Platonist teaching concerning a twofold or threefold *pronoia*. Williams has already noted that in the *ApJn* and in *Orig.Wld*:

We have a higher Providence who effects only the highest and most divine level of ordering, and from whom all responsibility for certain lower levels of operation is removed, and assigned to a lower Providence.⁶⁷

These authors remained convinced that there existed a divine Pronoia who played an essential role in the unfolding of salvific history.

The authors of the *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld* adapted the *prima providentia* of the Middle Platonism to a hypostasized divine Pronoia in order to re-interpret the events in sacred history where one could question the opacity of divine intent. The ‘fall’ of Adam and Eve in the garden, the rape of Eve, the expulsion from Paradise—each moment that ostensibly widened the gap between human and divine—could be ultimately understood as “a work of providence” (*Tri.Trac.* 107.20 ff.). These authors likely responded to other interpreters of biblical history who used the story of Genesis to discount both the inherent goodness and divinity of humankind as well as, ultimately, the beneficent and ‘providence’ of God. The Valentinian teacher Ptolemy made this point explicitly his *Letter to Flora*: people who assign creation to an evil being, he asserted, are unintelligent and do not recognize the creator’s providence (Epiphanius, *Pan.* 33. 3. 6). According to Hippolytus, the so-called Naassenes, too, responded to unknown opponents when they averred that no one—not even the players in the theater—spoke or acted without the guidance of providence (*Ref.* 5. 9. 7). These authors offered in place of ‘cosmic pessimism’ an understanding of sacred history in which ‘evil,’ such as *heimarmene*’s involvement in the creation of bodies, only set the stage for higher Providence to intervene and awaken humans from their enslavement. They agreed that, though Providence’s ways may be inscrutable or veiled, the unfolding of the cosmos was taking place according to divine plan.

⁶⁷ Williams, “Higher Providence,” 487.

CHAPTER THREE

‘THIS BODY OF DEATH’: COSMIC MALEVOLENCE AND ENSLAVEMENT TO SIN IN PAULINE EXEGESIS

A Jew from Asia Minor, deeply influenced by his Graeco-Roman environment, a zealous *apostolos* to fledgling Christianity, Paul remains a source of fascination to scholars today for the complexity—and paradoxically, the simplicity—of his thought. The period of Paul’s career falls outside the chronological boundaries of this study. Yet his correspondence with certain first-century Christian communities offers an opportunity to observe how one dynamic visionary conceived and articulated his own understanding of the vast imaginative world which extended from the fertile grounds of first-century philosophical speculation. Paul’s seven undisputed letters and six disputed letters were to have such a profound impact upon later Christians that it would be impossible to examine Christian articulations of cosmic structure and the nature of fate unless we first understand the degree to which many Christians based their various convictions upon innovative exegeses of Paul.

This chapter offers an examination of Pauline passages on the nature, structure and inhabitants of the cosmos. My specific concern is the degree to which Paul envisions the cosmos as a malevolent, enslaving entity: what, for Paul, is the relation of the Christian to the inhabitants and influences of the cosmos? What part, if any, does astrological fatalism play in his articulations of the heavens? I begin my analysis with the undisputed Pauline epistles, then turn to the Pauline trajectory which the deutero-Pauline Ephesians and Colossians follow as their authors continue in the tradition of their spiritual leader.

It is my assertion—and here I diverge from the majority of scholars on the subject—that cosmic pessimism within second to fourth-century Christianity (particularly, though by no means exclusively, ‘Gnostic’ Christianity) finds its root not just in prevailing Graeco-Roman conceptions of a malevolent cosmos, but also in later exegeses of the Pauline corpus.¹ Any Christian

¹ Perhaps oddly, much scholarship remains blind to Pauline notions of the demonic,

concerned to articulate and develop the idea of an enslaving cosmos needed to look no farther than Paul. Gnostic authors, in particular, had such a profound respect and fascination for the Pauline corpus that Paul's status as an apostle within orthodox circles teetered perilously close to the abyss for a century or so. As Tertullian observed, Paul was the '*apostolos haereticorum*.' It comes as no particular surprise, then, that the unknown author of the *Hypostasis of the Archons* begins his account of the creation of humankind with a gesture of acknowledgement to Paul, or more accurately, the unknown author he believed was Paul, the 'great apostle':

On account of the hypostasis of the authorities, inspired by the Spirit of the Father of Truth, the great apostle, referring to the "authorities of the darkness" [Col 1:13] told us that "our contest is not against flesh and [blood]; rather, the authorities of the cosmos and the spirits of wickedness" [Eph 6:12]. I have sent (you) this because you inquire about the reality [of the] authorities.

(*Hyp.Arch.* 86, 20–28)

The *Hypostasis of the Archons* paints a vivid picture of hostile, enslaving cosmic beings bent on the destruction of humankind. The basic premise of this treatise—that humans must contend against evil spiritual entities—the author draws from his interpretation of Ephesians and Colossians. To determine one source for the Christian devaluation of the cosmos, then, I will discuss in this chapter the extent to which Pauline rhetoric of enslavement informed 'Gnostic' soteriological systems through specific exegetical patterns and hermeneutical concerns.

enslaving cosmos as it searches for the genesis of Christian cosmic malevolence. The older generation of scholars of Gnosticism (Anz, Bousset, Jonas, Rudolf, to name only a few) have overlooked Paul's influence in gnostic cosmology. Hans Jonas, for instance, in his classic study *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist*, FRLANT 51, 63 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1934) vol. 1, 183ff., suggests cosmic pessimism first arises in paganism and spreads to Gnosticism. For a similar aetiology, see also Jörg Büchli, *Der Poimandres: Ein paganisiertes Evangelium* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 132. A few modern scholars, however, have been more open to Paul's influence on heterodox Christian thinkers. Simone Pétrement, in her study *A Separate God: The Christian Origins of Gnosticism* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1990), 71, stresses the twin influence of the Pauline corpus and the Gospel of John as integral to the origins of Gnosticism: "the idea of tyrants reigning in the heavens ... would necessarily have to have been prepared by the Pauline and Johannine vision of the world as dominated by the forces of error." In the United States, Elaine Pagels has examined the Pauline impact on certain Gnostic writings in, inter alia, her book *The Gnostic Paul: Gnostic Exegesis of the Pauline Letters* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press, 1975) and her article, "Exposition and Exegesis of Genesis Creation Accounts in Selected Texts from Nag Hammadi," in Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson Jr., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1986), 45–56. In this study, because of space and time restraints, I have chosen not to examine the impact of the Gospel of John in early Christian cosmologies, though I concur with Pétrement and Pagels that it was as influential as the Pauline corpus.

Paul asserts that the baptized Christian is free, both morally and (if such a distinction can be drawn) ontologically. If we choose for a minute to push this assertion further and ask, "free from what?"—a question that undergirds early Christian exegesis of Paul's writings—we must consider the cosmological dimensions of the question. For certain Christian writers, freedom from the world through baptism involved freedom from fate, as well as freedom from the stars and planets which imposed various categories of vice upon humankind through the action of malevolent antipathies. The Valentinian teacher Theodotus, then, could declare, "Before baptism ... fate is real, but after it the astrologers are no longer right" (*Exc.Theod.* 78, 1). If, then, certain Christian exegetes adopted from Paul the conviction that the inhabitants of the cosmos malevolently influence humankind, they also adopted Paul's 'solution.' Paul understood baptism as a cosmological event. Properly carried out, it could annul the power of these cosmic beings. It could bring the recently baptized into a new relationship with the cosmos. For this reason, then, I make the focus of the latter half of this chapter Paul's teachings on baptism and its relation to the issues of freedom and enslavement.

1. *The Demonic Intermediaries of Paul's Cosmos*

Like many in his own day, Paul conceptualized the cosmos as essentially a dynamic *politeia*.² In Romans 8:38–39 he enumerates three hierarchical categories of celestial beings—ἄγγελοι, ἄρχαί, δυνάμεις—"powers" and "archons" as heavenly counterparts to positions of earthly authority.³ In the

² For the category, see Hans Bietenhard, *Die himmlische Welt im Urchristentum und Spätjudentum* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1951). For recent studies of Jewish cosmologies, see Martha Himmelfarb, *Ascent to Heaven in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Adela Yarbro Collins, "The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypse," in John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy and Other Worldly Journeys*, 57–92. More broadly, but with wonderfully learned contributions, see Ra'anan Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed, eds., *Heavenly Realms and Earthly Realities* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). For Greek parallels to the cosmos as a political entity, see G.E.R. Lloyd, "Greek Cosmologies," in his *Methods and Problems in Greek Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 141.

³ For a summary of scholarship on Pauline designations of intermediary beings, see P.T. O'Brien, "Principalities and Powers and their Relationship to Structures," *Reformed Theological Review* 40 (1981): 1–10. For older studies, see O. Everling, *Die paulinische Angelologie und Dämonologie* (Göttingen, 1888), 66 ff.; G. Kurze, *Der Engels- und Teufelsglaube des Apostels Paulus* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1915); Gordon Rupp, *Principalities and Powers* (New York: Epworth, 1952); G.B. Caird, *Principalities and Powers. A Study in Pauline Theology*

Corinthian correspondence, Paul utilizes similar vocabulary; in 1 Cor 15:24, the adversaries of Christ are, again, *πᾶσαν ἀρχὴν καὶ πᾶσαν ἐξουσίαν καὶ δύναμιν* (“all rule, authority, and power”). The precise function of these celestial beings, other than their general character as adversarial, Paul does not treat in his letters, which has provided grist for at least two centuries of modern eisegetical work; thus commentators such as Gordon Rupp (1922) can describe the rulers and powers as “supernatural cosmic forces, a vast hierarchy of angelic and demonic beings who inhabited the stars and ... were the arbiters of human destiny,” enslaving humankind in a “cosmic totalitarianism.”⁴

Paul, as every NT scholar will readily admit, had virtually no interest in the human figure of Jesus. The nexus of his conversion experience on the road to Damascus was an experience of the resurrected Christ which initiated, as James Robinson terms it, a “dramatic transformation into the spiritual realm, granting [Paul] a completely superhuman knowledge of Jesus.”⁵ At this moment, Paul perceives himself as spiritually elevated: “From now on,” Paul writes, “we regard no one from a human point of view; even though we once regarded Christ from a human point of view, we regard him thus no longer” (2 Cor 5:16).⁶ The central event in Paul’s Christianity is not Jesus’s

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); G.H.C. MacGregor, “Principalities and Powers: The Cosmic Background of Paul’s Thought,” *NTS* 1 (1954): 17–28. The first scholar to articulate Paul’s debt to Jewish apocalyptic in his adoption of the term ‘principalities and powers’ was Hendrik Berkhof, in his monograph *Christ and the Powers*, trans. John Yoder, 2nd ed. (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1953). Berkhof’s analysis, however, is flawed, since he claims that Paul “demythologized” the principalities and powers of Jewish apocalyptic, understanding them instead as designations of purely earthly, secular powers. G.B. Caird adopts a similar line of interpretation; he interprets the ‘powers’ as, variously, “pagan powers, including the state” and the law. His view is more nuanced in his later commentary on Ephesians, in which he acknowledges, “[T]he real enemies are the spiritual forces that stand behind all institutions of government, and control the lives of men and nations.” See G.B. Caird, *Paul’s Letters from Prison* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976), 91. The observation that Paul understands secular structures of power as direct correlates to demonic rule, however, remains useful to us. On this, see M. Barth, *The Broken Wall. A Study of the Epistle to the Ephesians* (Chicago: Judson Press, 1959). Barth’s point is well taken: Paul is aware of the angelic or demonic links between these subheavenly and earthly rulers, and despite O’Brien’s criticism that Barth “wishes to have it both ways” (O’Brien, 4), the ambiguity and political dimensions of the Pauline language of “archons, principalities and powers” resurfaces in many early Christian texts.

⁴ Gordon Rupp, *Principalities and Powers*, 11–12.

⁵ James M. Robinson, “Jesus from Easter to Valentinus (or to the Apostles’ Creed),” *JBL* 101 (1982): 5–37.

⁶ See Gal 1:11–12, in which Paul justifies his apostolic claims: “The gospel which was preached to me is not accorded to humans, for I neither received it from a human, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.”

crucifixion at the hands of Roman authorities; instead, Paul transposes the crucifixion onto a new scale of cosmic significance. The “archons of this age” in their ignorance have “crucified the Lord of glory” (1 Cor 2:8).⁷ It remains a hermeneutical issue whether one chooses to perceive these archons in 1 Cor 2:8 as clearly demonic (since they are directly responsible for the death of the savior) or merely ignorant, existent on a fundamentally different level from God and Christ and therefore ontologically incapable of playing any other role in the cosmic drama than that to which they have been assigned. In 1 Cor. 15:25, however, there is no room for ambiguities; the archons are the “enemies of Christ.”⁸

For Paul, a man committed to preaching the imminence of the Eschaton, the celestial powers dominate human activity only in the present age, an age which he clearly sees as a *Gotterdämmerung*. Christ died in order to deliver the Christian ἐκ τοῦ αἰῶνος τοῦ ἐνεστώτος πονηροῦ, “from this present evil age” (Gal 1:4). In 1 Cor. 2:6, αἱ ἀρχαὶ τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου (‘archons of this age’) have only contingent power.⁹ They are unable to comprehend true wisdom; their hegemony will draw to a close since the present hierarchy or σχῆμα of the cosmos is “passing away” (παράγει) (7:31). For the Christ-follower, however, the battle for cosmic hegemony has already been won. In 1 Cor. 15:24 Paul exults in the victory of Christ over “all rule, authority and power.” In Romans 8:39, the celestial powers serve an inhibiting function only for those who have not been converted; for the Christian, none of these powers is δυναστεύει ἡμᾶς χωρῖσαι ἀπὸ τῆς ἀγάπης τοῦ θεοῦ (“able to separate us from the love of God”).

Who governs this group of celestial powers? Simone Pétremont notes that on one occasion, Paul assigns the group a leader, when he speaks in 2 Cor 4:4

⁷ Cf. John 14:30. R. Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel (London: SCM Press, 1954), 173, considers these terms as “proof” for the existence of “gnostic groups” in the first century.

⁸ There has been a great deal of secondary scholarship on the degree to which Paul borrowed this idea of hostile cosmic beings from Jewish apocalyptic. A full examination of this issue, however, lies beyond the scope of this book. Suffice to say that while Paul draws some of his vocabulary from Jewish heterodox sources, none of our extant Jewish pseudepigrapha contain the phrases ‘prince of this world’ or ‘god of this *aeon*.’ Pétremont comments (*Separate God*, 57) that Jewish writings never characterize angels or angelic beings as either evil or ignorant. It remains a mystery where Paul derives his particular understanding of the cosmos. The most attractive answer to the puzzle is offered by Pétremont (*Separate God*, 58): “the reason Paul considers the angels of the world, or the rulers of the age, evil or at least blind is quite clear and is adequately explained by Christianity itself ... it is the crucifixion that demonstrates the blindness of the rulers.”

⁹ See Judith Kovacs, “The Archons, the Spirit, and the Death of Christ: Do We Need the Hypothesis of Gnostic Opponents to Explain 1 Cor 2:6–16?” in J. Marcus and M. Soards, eds., *Apocalyptic and the New Testament*, (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1989), 217–236.

of ὁ θεὸς τοῦ αἰῶνος τούτου, “the god of this *aeon*”.¹⁰ Later, the author of Ephesians (2:2) will speak similarly of an ἄρχων τῆς ἐξουσίας τοῦ ἀέρος, “archon of the power of the air,” the ἀήρ being a reference to the lowest stratum of the heavens. It is Pétrement’s conviction that these Pauline designations pave the way for the adversarial ἄρχων τοῦ κόσμου τούτου (“archon of this world”) of the Gospel of John.¹¹ We may note, however, that Paul does not use a figure equivalent to Satan in his cosmology. Instead, the archons and authorities collectively rule the cosmos until the Eschaton. Paul’s implicit assumption here seems to be that this archontic hold on humankind has been built into the cosmic order. The author of this cosmic order, then, must be God himself. Although Paul never explicitly draws this conclusion in his writings, the point was not lost on later Gnostic thinkers. The ramifications (both theological and sociological) of Paul’s implied cosmology are so striking, it comes as no surprise that the author of *Hypostasis of the Archons*, among others, sought to explain its origin.

2. Pauline Cosmology and the Question of Astral Fatalism

For both Paul and his continuators, evil supernatural beings waged an incessant battle against humankind. Human capacity for sin provided abundant, graphic evidence of their malevolent control. In the Pauline worldview, then, the tendency for humans to sin becomes part of the dynamics of the cosmos. The author of Ephesians, after Paul, amplified this: we are “children of wrath by nature” (Eph 2:3). We sin because we are inexorably compelled to do so by higher beings. But how, precisely, should we understand this causal link between demonic beings and human behavior? Here, we are led back to the issue of fatalism and free will. Since, in the popular cosmological systems of the first century, celestial bodies serve an identical function—to compel humans to act in a particular manner—does Paul mean to connect the “archons, authorities and powers” in any way with the stars and planets? When Paul speaks of Christ-followers as free of their malevolent influences, does he imply that astrological fatalism no longer applies to them? Although

¹⁰ Pétrement, *Separate God*, 53.

¹¹ John 12:31, 14:30, 16:11. Other NT passages seem to suggest that their authors considered the world to be under the rule of celestial beings other than God. In Heb 2:5 the author writes: “for it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking.” In a similar vein, the author of Luke obviously considers the devil to be *kosmokrator*, since he offers Jesus earthly power: “To you I will give all this *exousia* and their glory; for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will” (Luke 4:6; see also Matt 4:8).

these connections between Pauline cosmological powers and fatalism seem tenuous, two particular references raise the intriguing possibility that Paul may in fact have been alluding to the Christ follower’s state of freedom from astral or planetary fate.

In the passage we have already cited from Romans 8:38–39, Paul refers to a number of celestial entities which negatively influence human activity, inasmuch as they potentially inhibit human freedom. The Christ-follower, however, is not subject to their influence:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels [ἄγγελοι] nor archons [ἀρχαί] nor powers [δυνάμεις] ... nor height [ὑψωμα] nor depth [βάθος], nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We encounter references to angels, archons and powers in Jewish apocalyptic writings.¹² Paul appears to draw the terms ὑψωμα and βάθος, not directly from Jewish sources, but from technical astronomical vocabulary of the first century CE.¹³ These terms refer specifically to the range of influence of the stars.¹⁴

A second significant Pauline passage suggests that astrological fatalism may have undergirded Paul’s understanding of the cosmos as an enslaving entity. “When we were children,” Paul teaches in Galatians 4:3, “we were enslaved by the elements of the cosmos” (ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου ἡμεθα δεδουλωμένοι). After the conversion of the Christian community in Galatia some of his congregation evidently lapse back into questionable religious practices, for Paul continues in Gal 4:8:

Formerly, when you did not know [γνῶται] God, you were in bondage [ἐδουλεύσατε] to beings that by nature are no gods; but now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements [τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα] to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years [ἡμέρας παρατηρεῖσθε καὶ μῆνας καὶ καιροὺς καὶ ἔνιαυτούς].

¹² See, for instance, 2 *Enoch* 4’s “archons of the stellar orders.” The *Test. Adam* 4:4, presents the fourth order in the six orders of heavenly beings as “authorities” who administer all the heavenly bodies; whether or not this Jewish, however, remains controversial. The term δυναμεις can be found in some MSS of the LXX of Isa 34:4 as well as Philo, *De mut. hom.* 8:59.

¹³ For βάθος, see Vettius Valens, *Anth.* 241. 26; for ὑψωμα see Plutarch, *Moralia* 149A, 782E. The evidence for astrological vocabulary has been collected by H. Lietzmann, *Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, An die Römer* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1928), 88–89, and by Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, 80.

¹⁴ So Gustav Stählin, “Das Schicksal im Neuen Testament und bei Josephus,” in O. Betz, ed., *Josephus-Studien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1974), 319–343.

Paul uses the term *stoicheia* only on these two occasions. The word itself is unusual. It derives from the Greek *στοίχος*, ‘row’ or ‘rank,’ and *στοιχείος*, ‘standing in a row.’¹⁵ How precisely Paul understands the term is far from clear, but we may infer that worship of the *stoicheia* is somehow connected to calendrical observance, observation of, as he says, “days, months, seasons and years.” The elements themselves seem, in Paul’s view, neither inherently evil nor particularly powerful. They are intimately connected with the religious observances of the Galatian community prior to their conversion, and thus likely an element of first century polytheist worship in Asia Minor.¹⁶ They are beings considered divine by non-Christians; an understanding which Paul strives to correct when he states that they “by nature are no gods” (*φύσει μὴ οὐσιν θεοῖς*).

The definition of *stoicheia* in Galatians has proved a thorny exegetical dispute for centuries. The issue has generated scores of scholarly articles and at least two recent dissertations over the past fifty years.¹⁷ David Bundrick has recently organized prevailing scholarly opinion on the meaning of *stoicheia* in Galatians into three categories.¹⁸ One theory, which Bundrick entitles the “Principal Interpretation,” holds that the *stoicheia* stand for the elementary principles of anything from mathematics to “the rudimentary religious teaching possessed by the race [i.e., the Jews].”¹⁹ Early proponents

¹⁵ LSJ 1648. For philological analyses of this term, see Gerhard Delling, “Stoicheion,” *TDNT* 7.670–687; Adolf Lampe, “Elementum,” *RAC* 4.1073–1100; A. Adam, “Die sprachliche Herkunft der Wortes Elementum,” *NovTest* 6 (1963): 229–232; W. Burkert, “STOICHEION: eine semasiologische Studie,” *Philologus* 103 (1959): 167–197.

¹⁶ The other possibility is that they were a facet of worship within the proselytizing Jewish Christian groups which had infiltrated Paul’s communities. Modern scholarship seems equally divided between the two interpretations.

¹⁷ For the dissertations, see A.J. Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements of the World: An Exegetical Study in Aspects of Paul’s Teaching* (Kampen: J.H. Kok, 1964); C.J. Kurapati, *Spiritual Bondage and Christian Freedom According to Paul* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Princeton Theological Seminary, 1976). For articles, see Bo Reicke, “The Law and this World According to Paul: Some Thoughts Concerning Gal 4:1–11,” *JBL* 70/4 (1951): 259–276; E. Pfister, “Die στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου in den Briefen des Ap. Paulus,” *Philologus* 69 (1910): 411–427; Eduard Schweitzer, “Slaves of the Elements and Worshipers of Angels: Gal 4:3, 9 and Col 2:8, 18, 20,” *JBL* 107/3 (1988): 455–468; E. Schweitzer, “Die ‘Elemente der Welt’ Gal 4:3, 9; Kol 2:8, 20,” in Otto Böcher and Klaus Haacker, eds., *Verborum Veritas: Festschrift für Gustav Stählin* (Wuppertal: Theologischer Verlag Rolf Brockhaus, 1970).

¹⁸ David R. Bundrick, “*Ta Stoicheia tou Kosmou* (Gal 4:3),” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 34/3 (1991): 353–364. A similar taxonomy is offered by J. Louis Martyn, “Christ, the Elements of the Cosmos, and the Law in Galatians,” in L. Michael White and O. Larry Yarbrough, eds., *The Social World of the First Christians*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1995).

¹⁹ D.A. Black, “Weakness Language in Galatians,” *General Theological Journal* 4 (1983); see also Herman Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia*, The New Interpreter’s

of this view included both Luther and Calvin, who believed *stoicheia* meant 'ceremonial legislation.'²⁰ The danger of this interpretation is that it presupposes an antiquated (not to mention offensive) view of Judaism as 'elemental' in the sense of 'elementary' or even 'rudimentary.' The critical notes to the Oxford Annotated Bible (RSV) betray the anti-Jewish bias latent in this interpretation. While translating στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου as "elementary spirits of the universe" in the body of the text, the notes emend this translation to "'rudimentary notions of the world' referring to elementary religious observances."²¹ These observances are, it seems, "Jewish fast-days, new moons, Passover seasons, and sabbatical years."²²

A second group of scholars maintains that the term constitutes a "formal word for the material components of the cosmos"—that is to say, the four elements, or possibly the sun, moon and stars. Bundrick characterizes this as the "cosmological view."²³ New Testament scholars such as Ernest Burton,²⁴ and W.L. Knox²⁵ choose this line of interpretation. These scholars maintain that the Galatians were worshipping celestial *bodies* (as distinct from celestial *beings*), but do not necessarily identify this worship as Jewish calendrical observance. Instead, they tend to invoke the history of the word *stoicheia* in Greek philosophical literature. Originally Stoic terminology to designate the four fundamental elements earth, air, fire and water, the term *stoicheia* makes its way into a wide variety of later pagan sources, including Cicero,²⁶ Pseudo-Callisthenes,²⁷ the Orphic Hymns,²⁸ and the Hermetica.²⁹

Commentary on the New Testament, Vol. IX (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956), 151, who likewise translates *stoicheia* as "rudiments."

²⁰ Later proponents include Walter Wink, in his article "The 'Elements of the Universe' in Biblical and Scientific Perspective," *Zygon* 13 (1978), and Bandstra, *The Law and the Elements*, who terms the *stoicheia* "inherent components," i, 46.

²¹ Oxford Annotated Bible, RSV, 1413.

²² Oxford Annotated Bible, RSV, 1414.

²³ Bundrick, 357.

²⁴ Ernest Burton, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1952), 173–176.

²⁵ W.L. Knox, *St. Paul and the Church of the Gentiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1939), 108 ff.

²⁶ See, for instance, Cicero on the ascent of the soul in the *Tusculum Disputations* 18–19: "Of the soul belongs the four classes of *stoicheia*."

²⁷ Ps. Callisthenes 1. 3 (13. 1).

²⁸ Orphic Hymns 5. 4.

²⁹ *Kore Kosmou* (SH I, 409, 486, 23, 25; 490, 14). For other attestations in Roman literature, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 236–252; Vett. Valens, *Anth.* 293, 27. For Christian attestations, see 2 Peter 3:10, 12 and also *Sib. Or.* 2. 206. Warning of a final conflagration, the oracle reads "then all the elements of the world will be bereft—air, land, sea, light, vault of heaven, days,

Philo, Paul's nearest Jewish contemporary, accuses the pagans of worshipping the *stoicheia*.³⁰ Like Paul, he notes that pagans mistakenly worship the elements as gods. Some people, he says, "revere the elements, earth, water, air, fire, which have received different names from different peoples: Hephaestus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter." But Philo is quick to offer a corrective: the elements themselves are merely "lifeless matter incapable of movement by itself."³¹ Philo's careful words reveal to us that, at least for some, worship of the heavenly bodies may have had a place within certain first-century Jewish circles. The Galatians may have been participating in Jewish rituals which somehow involved some combination of the observance of "days, months, seasons and years," a reverence for the sun and moon, or astrological piety.³²

A final group of scholars, whose most eloquent proponent remains the New Testament scholar Bo Reicke, espouses a 'personalized-cosmological' interpretation, in which the *stoicheia* signify not inert matter but personal spiritual powers or astral spirits.³³ The dominance of this view is immediately evident from the most popular English rendering of the στοιχεῖα τοῦ

nights." Note that there is no "demonizing" of the elements here, nor are they personal spirits. For a similar usage, see also *Sib. Or.* 3, 80; 8, 337.

³⁰ Philo, *De Abrahamo* 68–88.

³¹ Philo, *Vita Contemplativa* 3–4.

³² Recently, Timothy Thornton, in his article "Jewish New Moon Festivals: Galatians 4:3–11 and Colossians 2:16," *JTS* 40 (1989): 97–100, has examined the popularity of Jewish New Moon festivals within Jewish Diaspora communities. As evidence, he cites primary sources such as the early second-century *Letter to Diognetus* 4.5, written by a Christian critical of Jewish piety: "and their attention to the stars and moon for the observance of months and days ... who would regard this as a proof of piety and not rather as a proof of foolishness?" For a similar statement, see also the *Kerygma Petrou* 5.41, quoted in Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* VI, 5, 14. Thornton presents numerous examples from much later figures such as John Chrysostom and Pseudo-Ambrosiaster to illustrate how these Christians understood the phrase τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου to refer to new moons and Sabbaths, which are dependent on the cycles of the moon and the sun. Thornton, "New Moon Festivals," 100, asserts, "The moon and the sun (seen not from a detached astronomical perspective, but as spiritually potent masters) were aspects of the *stoicheia* from which Christians had been freed." But this tells us only about the *Nachleben* of Galatians, and nothing about the first-century context of the passage. The references to Jewish New Moon rites must also be treated with caution, since they derive from later Christian exegeses of Galatians itself. They also must be seen in the context of polemical Christian accounts of Jewish worship of the stars. For these, see for example Acts 7:42; *Kerygma Petrou* fr. 4; Aristides, *Apology*, 3 ff., esp. 14; Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* 6. 15, 21 ff.; Origen, *Commentary on John* XIII, 17; Origen, *Contra Celsum* 1. 26. 5, 6; Eusebius, *Prep. Ev.* 13. 15.

³³ Reicke, "The Law," 261 ff., prefers to translate *stoicheia* as "kinds of elemental spirits or angels."

κόσμου as “the elemental *spirits* of the universe.”³⁴ Reicke does not hesitate to interpret the *stoicheia* of Galatians with ministers of fate. “Paul’s speech on the observation of days, months and years,” he states, “makes us think of the astrological fatalism of antiquity.”³⁵ Other prominent New Testament scholars choose, as Reicke does, to interpret the *stoicheia* of Galatians as ministers of astral fatalism. Hans Dieter Betz, for instance, in his *Semeia* commentary on Galatians 4:3 explains:

The Graeco-Roman (and Jewish) syncretism of the time of Paul is characterized by a very negative view of the world; the κόσμος was thought to be composed of four or five “elements” which are not simply material substances, but demonic entities of cosmic proportions and astral powers which were hostile towards man.³⁶

Betz continues:

... the common understanding was that man is hopelessly and helplessly engulfed and oppressed by these forces. They play capricious games with man from the time of his entering into the world until his departure. While working inside of man, they make up the body, yet they also encounter him from the outside, in that he has terrible and traumatic experiences of whatever “Fate” has in store.³⁷

Both Betz’ and Reicke’s interpretation of Galatians depends upon an identification of the *stoicheia* with other celestial beings in Paul’s letters (such as the angels who minister the law in Gal 3:19). It must be emphasized, however, that Paul himself never makes this association. If indeed Paul speaks elliptically in Galatians about the doctrine of fatalism when he speaks of “enslavement to the weak and beggarly elements,” he appears to be setting a precedent. No other extant first-century text discusses the *stoicheia* as ministers of astral fatalism.³⁸ Nevertheless, Paul’s conviction that enslavement

³⁴ See, for instance, the Oxford Annotated RSV, 1413–1414. Some scholars tend to further anthropomorphize the term *stoicheia*; F.F. Bruce’s preferred translation of στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου, for instance, is “lords of the planetary spheres.” See F.F. Bruce, “The Colossian Heresy,” *BSac* 141 (1984): 204–205.

³⁵ Reicke, 264.

³⁶ Hans-Dieter Betz, *Galatians*, Hermeneia New Testament Commentaries (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981), 205.

³⁷ Betz, *Galatians*, 205.

³⁸ The sole exception to this statement, to my knowledge, would be a Greek papyrus dated by C.J. Kurapati to 81 CE, which refers to Dios (Zeus) associated with the *stoicheia* which determine the destiny of human beings. From this Kurapati concludes, “The idea of *stoicheion* representing astral influence was circulating during Paul’s time. Therefore, bondage to *stoicheia*, according to Paul, means life dominated by the tyranny of astral

was intrinsic to the human condition, taken together with his assertion that the Christian has found release from this enslavement, is difficult to understand *apart* from the rhetoric of escape from fate, whether Graeco-Roman or Jewish. If indeed Paul speaks in Galatians of cosmic fatalism, we have in his letters the earliest testimony of a Christ-follower who speaks as one released from the bondage to astrally-determined fate.

The author of Colossians seems to respond to a very similar crisis in his community as that which had provoked Paul's angry letter to the Galatians. Like Paul, he too condemns observation of the *stoicheia*. In Colossians, he warns his community "beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy [διὰ τῆς φιλοσοφίας] and empty deceit [ἀπάτης], according to human tradition [κατὰ τὴν παράδοσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων], according to the *stoicheia* of the cosmos, and not according to Christ" (Col 2:8). Though it is by no means clear to what the author alludes here, we do know that his community, like the Galatians, participate in a form of religious observance he considers inappropriate. The author, like Paul, considers his community above the need to observe the *stoicheia*. "If," he asks, "dying with Christ, you died to the elements of the cosmos [ἀπὸ τῶν στοιχείων τοῦ κόσμου], why do you obey rules and regulations [δογματίζεσθε] as if still in the cosmos?" (2:20).³⁹ Modern

spirits" (56–57). However, Walter Wink presents convincing evidence that Kurapati dates the papyrus too early; see Wink, 244.

The *locus classicus* for *stoicheia* as demonic beings remains the *Testament of Solomon*, an originally Jewish text heavily redacted by a Christian, probably in the third century. In the *TestSol*, the thirty-six decan figures introduce themselves in Pauline language: "we are the *stoicheia*, the rulers of the darkness of this age." Often cited in modern sources as definitive 'proof' that Christians understood *stoicheia* to be astral demons, to my knowledge the *TestSol* presents the sole extant example of this phenomenon. The term is more common in much later sources, such as the late Byzantine romance *Kallimachos and Chrysorrhoe*, in which the evil sorceress is called a soul-sucking *stoicheia*. The Hermetic *Kyranides* gives explicit instructions for conjuring up one's own *stoicheion* by means of an anchovy head and a starfish. Still today, the term *stoicheion* signifies 'demon' in Modern Greek. For the later history of the term, see K. Dietrich, "Hellenistische Volksreligion und byzantinisch-neugriechischer Volksglaube," *Angelos* 1 (1925): 2 ff.; W.H.P. Hatch, "τὰ στοιχεῖα in Paul and Bardaisan," *JTS* 28 (1927): 181 ff.; C. Blum, "The Meaning of στοιχεῖον and its Derivatives in the Byzantine Age," *Eranos* 44 (1946): 315–326.

³⁹ Eduard Schweitzer, "Slaves of the Elements," 464–465, notes that the author of Colossians never utilizes the Greek technical term νόμος, the noun found in the LXX to translate 'Torah.' Instead, we find the noun δόγματα and the verb δογματίζεσθαι (2:14, 20), terms Schweitzer links explicitly with the Pythagoreans, rather than with the Jews. From this he concludes that the author of Colossians responds not to a crisis involving observance of the Torah, but rather the practice of asceticism, "which frees the soul from its contacts with the earthly temptations so that it will be pure enough to pierce through the elements of heaven." He asserts that the concern of the community is to purify the soul, which may have led the

interpreters of this passage are quick to identify Colossian’s *stoicheia* with ministers of astral fatalism:

[T]hey are related to the great constellations, and conceived as astral divinities which control the spheres and are thus masters of human fate. The doctrine which Paul combats, then, appears to involve a) an exposition of the nature of the physical world and man’s place within it in terms of astrological determinism; and b) instruction in the cult practices (asceticism, taboos, angel worship) which will propitiate these astral spirits and enable the devotee to attain fullness of life.⁴⁰

The Colossian Christians must recognize that they now exist on a spiritually higher level; as P.T. O’Brien notes, “the Christians at Colossae have died and were raised with Christ out from the sphere of influence of the powers.”⁴¹ ‘Paul’ underscores this conviction with no fewer than three references to the new spatial relationship between the Christian and the *stoicheia* (3:1–3):

If, therefore, you have been raised up [συνηγέρθητε] to the Christ, seek the things above [ἄνω], where the Messiah is, sitting to the right of God. Fix your mind on the things above, [ἄνω], not those on earth. For you have died [ἄπεθάνετε] and your life has been hidden with Christ in God.

When, later, certain Christian authors read and interpreted Galatians and Colossians, they understood the *stoicheia* not as astral spirits, but as fundamental constituents of matter. In the Valentinian teacher Ptolemy’s creation account preserved by Irenaeus and Epiphanius, Achamoth generates the *stoicheia kosmou* bodily from her grief and terror.⁴² Others argued that the human body is actually constructed from the *stoicheia*; in the creation myth attributed to another Valentinian, Nicotheus, the external, psychic Adam is composed from—and thus controlled by—“the power of *heimarmene* and the four *stoicheia*.”⁴³ Still others advocated freeing oneself from the nefarious influence of the *stoicheia*. In the *Treatise on the Resurrection* the pupil Rheginos is exhorted to gain the resurrection for himself by fleeing the “divisions and the fetters”—likely an allusion to Galatians 4:9. The author continues: “it is fitting for each one to practice in a number of ways, and he shall be released from this *stoicheion*, that he may not be misled but shall himself receive again what at first was.”⁴⁴ Here, the *stoicheion* seems to refer to a

Colossians to take over “a lot of the Jewish commandments [which] would indeed be a return to their old way of life” (466).

⁴⁰ Francis Beare, “Colossians,” *Interpreter’s Bible*, 193.

⁴¹ O’Brien, “Principalities and Powers,” 9.

⁴² *Adv. Haer.* I, 4. 2; Epiphanius, *Pan.* 31.

⁴³ The myth has been preserved by Zosimus, *Comm. Omega* 11.

⁴⁴ *Treat. Res.* 49, 14–35.

realm in which the elements are possibly perceived as ruled by invisible powers, from whom or which the Valentinian Christian may gain escape through proper religious or ascetic *praxis*. Although Rheginos is still himself ‘enslaved,’ his teacher guides him along the sure path to a greater spiritual freedom. As a final example, the Valentinian teacher Theodotus describes the diminished power of the *stoicheia* in the context of a baptismal catechesis preserved in fragments by Clement of Alexandria. When a soul is transformed through baptism, he teaches, “it is no longer weak and subject to the invisible and visible cosmic beings” (οὐκέτι ἀσθενῆς καὶ τοῖς κοσμικοῖς ὑποκείμετος)⁴⁵—an idea remarkably similar to that which Paul expresses in Galatians. Theodotus continues that the Spirit “given to us from above” which the Christian receives at baptism “rules not only over the *stoicheia*, but also over the powers and the evil archons” (οὐ στοιχείων μόνων, ἀλλὰ καὶ δυνάμεων κρατεῖ καὶ ἀρχῶν πονηρῶν).⁴⁶

Paul and his anonymous continuators penned letters to their communities in the face of relentless opposition from other Christian leaders. In the case of Colossians, one of these opponents had infiltrated the community there, claiming authority on the basis of certain “visions which he has entered into” (Col 2:18).⁴⁷ The characteristics of religious observance that this competitor advocated included the propitiation of celestial beings and the observance of particular laws (*dogmata*). One modern interpreter explains the appeal of this sect:

It reflects in its own way the typical Hellenistic interpenetration of philosophy and cult, which springs from the desire to find and to give effect to the true relation between the inward life of man and the universe in which his lot is cast ... ritual observances and ascetic practices [provide the means] by which men might keep themselves in the proper relation to these “elemental spirits” and through them to the cosmos itself.⁴⁸

If this is true (and I believe it is), Paul and his continuators fought not so much against another *cosmology* but against another *soteriology*. Both Galatians or Colossians present a picture of a cosmos dominated by cosmic beings. Both authors implicitly agreed with their opponents that such

⁴⁵ *Exc.Theod.* 79.

⁴⁶ *Exc.Theod.* 81.

⁴⁷ Those keen on connecting the Colossian ‘heresy’ with paganism make much of the fact that the verb ἐμβατεύω was a technical term in the mystery religions. See Dittenberger, *Orientalis graeci inscriptiones selectae*, Vol. 2, 530 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1903).

⁴⁸ Beare, 138–140.

beings do in fact exist, and that they did control human existence through imposition of particular commandments and laws. The difference lies not so much in the imaginative framework by which Paul and the deutero-Pauline authors interpreted the human condition, but in the choice of whom to propitiate to escape from spiritual oblivion.

Many modern scholars remain too tempted to play off Pauline Christianity against what they perceive as the wildly speculative cosmology and angelology of Paul's opponents. We frequently encounter, for instance, passages such as this:

If the elements of nature are assumed to have their counterparts in the stars and planets, and these in turn are believed to influence human life and destiny under the rule of the masters of the sphere—the elemental spirits of the universe—the same paralyzing fatalism casts its baneful pall over all human effort and moral aspiration. The superstitious fears of the forces of the universe, which plagued the pre-Christian Greek world, return, and man seeks a spurious salvation, striving to put himself into right relations with the powers that control his fate by cult practices that are likely to be devoid of moral quality.⁴⁹

Despite their authors' best intentions, these passages only serve to underscore the fact that both Pauline Christianity and its opponents offered their adherents the same thing: freedom from astral fatalism. Paul's opponents chose as their path certain ascetic practices (hardly foreign to Pauline Christianity) and propitiation of angelic beings in order not to remain, to borrow Beare's words, "puppets of necessity." Pauline Christianity, on the other hand, presented Christ as the only true savior from a life of spiritual bondage, and baptism as the only true medium of salvation.

Ultimately, Paul and his continuators shared with their various communities—even with their opponents—various versions of an unspoken but mutually understood cosmological 'myth.' We are not left with enough pieces of this puzzle to discern the precise nature of this myth, yet we can reconstruct its shape. Celestial beings populate the cosmos. These beings appear to exert some form of contingent control over a significant portion of the human race through three specific means. They control vice, they control human behavior, and finally, they control law. In the Pauline worldview, these beings act in direct opposition to Christ, whom they had crucified in their ignorance. Christ, however, emerged victorious from his confrontation with the powers. Paul transformed the shame of Jesus's crucifixion as a

⁴⁹ "Colossians," *Interpreter's Bible*, 192.

despised criminal into an act which subverted the cosmic order. This “Christ-event,” in Paul’s understanding, initiated no less than the “reconciliation (καταλλάγη) of the cosmos” (Rom 11:15; 2 Cor 5:19).⁵⁰

The question remains to what degree Christians could consider themselves free from these cosmic powers. For many Christians, as we shall see, Christ’s victory over celestial powers did not automatically release humankind from their domain; it only introduced the possibility that Christians may be saved through his intervention. The seeds for this pessimism had been sown already by Paul himself. According to his understanding of the cosmos, humankind had not yet been “redeemed.” The individual’s endless struggle against sin Paul (and later, his continuators) considered a fundamental proof that one is not free but rather is acted upon by foreign, cosmic agents. “I find it then a law [νόμος],” observes Paul in Rom 7:20, “that evil [τὸ κακόν] is present within me, the one who wishes to do good.” He continues (7:23): “I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members” (7:23). Yet the repeated references in both the disputed and the undisputed letters of Paul to freedom from bondage, couched in the language of a new, spatially-conceived relationship with the cosmos, raises for us new questions about the way in which certain early Christians in Pauline communities envisioned their relationship to the cosmos.

3. Baptism and the Cosmos in the Pauline and Deutero-Pauline Letters

So far in this chapter we have discussed the nature and structure of the Pauline cosmos. Yet we cannot understand discussions of this kind adequately without an acknowledgement of Paul’s soteriology. First, we must understand that this soteriology is intimately connected with Paul’s own ecstatic experiences. Paul’s conversion resulted in a profound transformation, after which he no longer perceived things *κατὰ σάρκα* (“according to the flesh”; 2 Cor. 5:15), but from a spiritual or ‘pneumatic’ perspective. He had been “changed into [Christ’s] likeness” (τὴν αὐτὴν εἰκόνα μεταμορφούμεθα;

⁵⁰ Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1993), 119 indicates that the noun *καταλλάγη* and its verb *καταλλάσσειν* cannot be found in the Septuagint, but is common in the Graeco-Roman world. Its root, *ἀλλ-* signifies ‘to make otherwise,’ perhaps in the sense of changing a relationship to God or the cosmos. For a comprehensive study of the term, see Jacques Dupont, *La réconciliation dans la théologie de saint Paul* (Louvain: Publications universitaires de Louvain, 1953) esp. 7–15.

2 Cor 3:18). As Alan Segal notes, Paul "believes his salvation to lie in a body-to-body identification with his heavenly savior, who sits on the divine throne and functions as God's glorious manifestation,"⁵¹ and even more saliently, "Paul considers ... that the whole process of salvation has been revealed to him."⁵²

John Gager has also explored the psychological ramifications of Paul's conversion experience on his theology and soteriology, particularly Paul's curiously ambivalent assessment of the Law. He summarizes the effects of this conversion:

- [Paul's] repeated statements that salvation results in a new creation, a new definition of humanity, a transformation in which our lower physical nature is supplanted by a higher spiritual nature.
- His affirmation that the law, as manipulated by the power of sin, plays an essential, if preparatory, role in the divine plan of salvation; and his undying memory that his own persecution of Christians had been based on a zealous loyalty to the law.
- And finally, his tendency to divide history into two stages, and to characterize these stages as opposites—body/spirit, law/grace, law/spirit, death/life, sin/love, loss/gain.⁵³

As Gager notes, Paul expounds his fundamental message of Christ crucified as the Lord of glory rhetorically, through a series of verbal reversals, transitions and antitheses; the three antitheses I consider most germane to this analysis remain 'law' versus 'faith,' 'flesh' versus 'spirit' and 'slavery' versus 'redemption.' We can re-examine each of these related antitheses from the perspective of cosmology. In the Pauline cosmos, for example, the law enslaves the flesh. The ministers of this law, as Paul informs us in Gal 3:19, are angelic beings. The newly baptized Christian, however, moves out of the realm of the Law, beyond the jurisdiction of these beings into a state of moral and ontological freedom.

3.1. *'Law' versus 'Faith'*

Paul uses the term $\delta \nu\acute{o}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ with an ambiguity recognized and discussed in a wealth of modern scholarship.⁵⁴ A comprehensive analysis of Paul's

⁵¹ Alan Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 35.

⁵² Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 67.

⁵³ John Gager, "Some Notes on Paul's Conversion," *NTS* 27 (1981): 702.

⁵⁴ There exists a huge bulk of secondary scholarship on Pauline interpretations of the

understanding of the Law lies well beyond the boundaries of this study. To illustrate the debate which still rages, I can offer here only the representative example of Joseph Fitzmeyer, who in his Anchor Bible commentary on Romans distinguishes four distinct meanings of $\delta\ \nu\acute{o}\mu\omicron\varsigma$ in Romans alone: (1) law in a figurative sense; (2) law in a generic sense; (3) Torah; and (4) Mosaic Law.⁵⁵ Still, some of Paul's articulations of the law defy pat categorization. When, in Gal 6:14, Paul replaces the term 'law' with the term 'cosmos,' he takes for granted a particular association of the two not immediately discernable to modern interpreters, particularly those embroiled in the debate concerning whether Paul repudiates the Torah.⁵⁶ For this association, E. Schweitzer offers perhaps the best intuitive guess. "Paul replaces the term 'law' by the term 'world,'" he suggests, "probably because it is the world and its elements that, in the view of the opponents, separate them from the realm of salvation."⁵⁷ Schweitzer's desire to keep Paul 'orthodox,' however, leads to an oversight; it is not the view of Paul's opponents that the cosmos keep Christians from the salvation, but Paul's *own* view.

Paul's letter to the Romans, particularly chapter seven, contains his most comprehensive teachings on the law. Paul continues here with his bleak assessment of the law we find also in 2 Cor 3:7–9 where it brings death and condemnation. No flesh can be justified through deeds of the law (Rom 3:20). It causes wrath (4:15) and arouses $\pi\alpha\theta\eta\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ ('passions'; 7:5).⁵⁸ Paul speaks in Romans of two laws, the first spiritual, the second carnal: "I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (7:23), and "with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin" ($\acute{\epsilon}\gamma\omega\ \tau\acute{\omega}\ \mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\ \nu\omicron\iota\ \delta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\epsilon\acute{\upsilon}\omega\ \nu\acute{o}\mu\omega\ \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon\ \tau\eta\ \delta\grave{\epsilon}\ \sigma\alpha\rho\kappa\iota\ \nu\acute{o}\mu\omega$

law. Some useful recent studies include C.H. Dodd, "Natural Law in the NT," *New Testament Studies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1954); J.M.G. Barclay, "Paul and the Law: Observations on Some Recent Debates," *Themelios* 12 (1987): 5–15; P. Benoit, "The Law and the Cross according to St. Paul: Romans 7:7–8:4," in his *Jesus and the Gospel*, vol. 2, trans. Benet Weatherhead (New York: Herder & Herder, 1973), 11–39; E. Larsson, "Paul: Law and Salvation," *NTS* 31 (1985): 425–436; H. Raisänen, *Paul and the Law*, 2nd ed. (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1983); R.B. Sloan, "Paul and the Law: Why the Law Cannot Save," *NovTest* 33 (1991): 35–60. Two ground-breaking studies remain Lloyd Gaston's "Paul and the Torah," in Alan Davies, ed., *Anti-Semitism and the Foundations of Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1979) and more recently, John Gager, *The Origins of Anti-Semitism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).

⁵⁵ Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 237.

⁵⁶ E. Schweitzer, 467.

⁵⁷ E. Schweitzer, 467.

⁵⁸ Paul borrows the term $\pi\alpha\theta\eta\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ from Greek ethical terminology; see for instance Plutarch, *Moralia* 1128e.

ἀμαρτίας, 7:25). Paul’s understanding of two laws seems to relate to his earlier statement, “the law is spiritual [πνευματικός] but I am carnal [σάρκινος], sold under sin” (7:14). When spiritual law acts upon *sarx* with which it is fundamentally incompatible, the law appears to function only negatively; it prevents understanding (7:15). It prevents the individual from doing what he or she wishes and forces him or her to behave contrary to the impulse not to sin “but what I hate, that I do” (7:15).

According to Paul’s letter to the Galatians, the law keeps humankind under restraint (3:23). It is contingent and limited, appointed through angels (4:5, 3:19, 23).⁵⁹ The *stoicheia* are its guardians and stewards (4:2). Law contains a ‘curse’ (κατάρα; Gal 3:10). Its adherents are enslaved (Gal 4:24). In his analysis of Galatians, Bo Reicke has observed that Paul uses the terms slavery ὑπὸ νόμου and slavery ὑπὸ τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου synonymously.⁶⁰ Reicke concludes: “Paul actually considers all the non-Christian world, both Jewish and heathen, to be subject to the Law or ‘elements’ of the universe.”⁶¹ There is some connection, then, between Paul’s understanding of Law as slavery and worship of the ‘weak and beggarly elements’ as slavery.

From his detailed exegeses of Paul’s letters, Reicke demonstrates that στοιχεῖον and κόσμος are not neutral philosophical terms; Paul employs them in a “theological sense ... considered to stand in a state of opposition to God and his saving grace.”⁶² Paul associates the terms with the fallen world, with flesh, and with corruptibility.⁶³ In Gal 3:3 for instance, Paul accuses his community of having returned to life in the flesh. In the previous verse, the error of the community was their continued observance of the “works of the Law.” In Gal 5:17 Paul contrasts flesh and spirit; in the next verse, he states that those not under the Law are under Spirit, before returning to the flesh/Spirit contrast in v. 19.⁶⁴

Many New Testament scholars have interpreted Paul’s words “let no one disqualify you, insisting on self-abasement and worship of angels” as

⁵⁹ We find the idea of the angelic intermediaries of the law also in Acts 7:53: “You who receive the Law *as delivered by angels* and did not keep it ...”.

⁶⁰ Bo Reicke, “The Law and This World,” 259: “it seems necessary to follow this interpretation if we consider v. 9, where the Galatians, who were guilty of being eager followers of the Jewish law, are accused of return to τὰ στοιχεῖα and of wishing to serve them again.”

⁶¹ Reicke, 259. See also Bundrick, (*Ta Stoicheia*, 355): “whatever *stoicheia* means it must apply in some way to both Jews and Gentiles.”

⁶² Reicke, 264–265.

⁶³ Reicke, 265.

⁶⁴ See also Rom 6:13; Gal 2:19; Rom 6:2,10; 8:10; Gal 4:24, 29 for the son of the servant woman born κατὰ σάρκα rather than κατὰ πνεῦμα.

evidence that Paul's opponents in Galatia encouraged some type of 'gnosticizing' angel cult. Paul's vilification, however, seems instead directed toward those who choose to return to a life marked by observance of the law (possibly the Torah, though we are unable to be sure), which he understands as the primary apparatus employed by the angels or *stoicheia* to enslave humankind.⁶⁵ Paul does not assert that there is any fundamental difference between Judaism and paganism; both are a form of bondage.⁶⁶ For him, then, all those who have not been converted to Christianity are enslaved. The primary mechanism of this enslavement is the law; whether natural law or Torah we are unable to discern. The agents of this enslavement are celestial beings.

Why would Paul assign the administration of the law to celestial beings, possibly even malevolent celestial beings? The notion that angels were present at the moment that Yahweh gave the Law to Moses is well attested in Jewish tradition of the first few centuries.⁶⁷ In Jewish tradition, however, the angels function positively as mediators or guardians of the Law, without any hint of the negative implications of enslavement we detect in Paul's writings. Indeed, the angels in this positive role *vis-à-vis* the Law enters into early Christian tradition as well, without any hint of "demonization."⁶⁸ Yet through Paul's startling assessment of the Law as (a) ordained not by God but by angels, and (b) as a mechanism of human enslavement, Paul's writings encouraged a perspective evident in certain Gnostic circles: the law is a demonic enslaving entity directly opposed to God's rule. In the Valentinian *Testimony of Truth*, for example, the law is the "errant desire

⁶⁵ Curiously, a few early Christian writers mention Jewish worship of angels, although this in nowhere directly associated with observance of the Torah. See Aristides, *Apol.* 14. 4.

⁶⁶ Scholars remain divided on this issue; my conviction here is supported by, among others, Burton; Lightfoot; Reicke; Rendall, in "Galatians," *The Expositor's Greek Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980): 510–513, and Bundrick, *Ta Stoicheia*, 355. Others, such as Bandstra, *Law*, 59–60, insist Paul speaks exclusively of Jewish converts to Christianity, rather than both Jewish and Gentile converts. John Gager, in his *Origins of Antisemitism*, follows Gaston in his insistence that Paul considered the Torah a form of bondage only for gentiles, who did not need it for salvation. Gager bases his argument on Paul's discussion of the law in Romans, especially Rom 7:1 ("what then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means!"), and 7:12 ("so the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and just and good.").

⁶⁷ This association appears to be founded upon the LXX translation of Deut 33:2, ἐκ δεξιῶν αὐτοῦ ἀγγέλου μετ' αὐτοῦ. See also Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 15.136; *Jubilees* 1. 27. Lloyd Gaston, "Paul and the Torah," 61, asserts that Paul considered Torah negatively only for gentiles; Gaston justifies his hypothesis by noting that it was "common in certain circles" to believe that the law was administered by the seventy guardian angels of the nations, who were present at Mt. Sinai.

⁶⁸ See *Shepherd of Hermas*, 8. 3. 3 on the angel Michael.

of the angels, demons and stars" (29, 15). To serve the law is to be unable to perceive the truth, since "no one can serve two masters" (29, 25). Other Nag Hammadi authors could choose a more startling way to interpret Paul's teachings on the Law. Rather than understanding Law as antithetical to God, these thinkers held that the God of Judaism was actually a malevolent angel, determined to bind humankind in a spiritual bondage characterized by blind servitude of commandments and empty observances.⁶⁹ The scholar of Gnosticism, Simone Pétrement, concurs:

We certainly do not think that Paul ever considered the God of Genesis as an angel. But the criticism of the Law by regarding it as given by the angels, as subjecting humanity to the rule of the angels, prepared the ground for the placing of the God of the Law and consequently the God of Genesis on the same level as the angels.⁷⁰

In a cosmos in which creation has been "subjected to futility," the Torah is no longer able to provide redemption. With this startling idea, Paul pushes his understanding of the Law beyond where any Jew of the first century would be likely to go.

3.2. 'Flesh' versus 'Spirit'

In his teaching on the resurrection, Paul draws a distinction between two different types of bodies: "There are celestial bodies [σώματα επουράνια] and there are terrestrial bodies [σώματα επίγεια]" (1 Cor 15:40). Adam, the first 'human of dust,' sets the type for others who are similarly 'psychic' in their physical constituency. Paul then contrasts Adam with the 'heavenly' man, Christ, who becomes the type of the 'pneumatic' human. Although Paul indicates in Phil 3:21 that Christ will transform our physical bodies at the Eschaton and "change our lowly body to be like his glorious body" there remained, even in Paul's day, the question between the flexibility of these two anthropological categories. Could the sarkic human become pneumatic? The answer may have been "yes," but it led to a second question: would this event take place at baptism, or at the Eschaton? Paul unfortunately, provided only conflicting answers. We can be sure only that the two ontological categories remained distinct in his mind; hence he tells his community in Romans 7:9: "you are not in the flesh ... you are in the πνεῦμα, if in fact God's πνεῦμα dwells in you."

⁶⁹ See, for instance, Irenaeus's criticism of Simon Magus in *Adv.Haer.* 1. 2.

⁷⁰ Pétrement, *Separate God*, 63.

In the Corinthian correspondence, Paul indicates that the *pneuma* lives within the Christian (1 Cor 11:16) in a manner analogous to the way in which Christ lives within (13:5). This *pneuma*, further, is of the same quality as Christ; it works in humankind as a ‘likeness’ (εἰκῶν) of the Lord (2 Cor 3:18). It makes the Christian one *pneuma* with him (1 Cor 6:17). In 1 Cor 2:6–16, Paul stresses the importance of the *pneuma* as the medium for knowledge of God.⁷¹

For Paul, *sarx* was simply unable to comprehend the nature of God.⁷² Humankind, in his view, was not able to perceive God because, notes Bertil Gärtner, it made use “of the wrong ‘tool’ namely [its] own capacity for wisdom, which belongs to this world and the *sarx*.”⁷³ Humankind can only receive this wisdom through God’s *pneuma*; Paul writes, “we have not received the *pneuma* of the cosmos, but the *pneuma* which is from God [we receive so] that we might know what God has given us” (1 Cor 2:12) for πνευματικοὶ πνευματικαὶ συγκρίνειν—as Gärtner nicely translates, “what belongs to the *Pneuma*-sphere can only be understood (or: interpreted) by those who possess the *Pneuma*” (2:13). Those who are unable to receive this *pneuma* (expressed variously as ὁ κόσμος, ὁ ψυχικός, or τὸ σὰρξ) consider it only μωρία (‘foolishness’; 2:18).⁷⁴ Paul writes that the ψυχικός ἄνθρωπος does not receive

⁷¹ See also 1 Cor 12:3, “No one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.”

⁷² Paul here appears to be expressing a common belief in Graeco-Roman antiquity that “only like can be known by like.” The corollary of this belief is often expressed by the trope, “you do not understand earthly things, and you seek to know heavenly things?” For examples from classical antiquity, see Wayne Meeks, “The Man From Heaven in Johannine Sectarianism,” *JBL* 91 (1973): 53 n. 36.

⁷³ B.E. Gärtner, “The Pauline and Johannine Idea of ‘To Know God’ against the Hellenistic Background: The Greek Philosophical Principle ‘Like by Like’ in Paul and John,” *NTS* 14 (1967–1968): 217.

⁷⁴ It remains an open question (both in Pauline and Gnostic studies) whether Paul refers here to a particular class of Christians spiritually incapable of perceiving the *pneuma*, or whether he refers only to some type of pre-conversion state. Bultmann, for instance, in his *Glauben und Verstehen* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1965), vol. I, 42 ff., considers the *pneuma* the ‘special gift’ given only to pneumatic humankind rather than to all Christians. The question has been further complicated by the famous suggestion that Paul usurps the ‘gnosticizing’ language of his opponents against them in his division of humankind into either the two categories of *psychic* and *pneumatic*, or the three categories of *psychic*, *sarkic* and *pneumatic*. See Walter Schmithals, *Gnosticism at Corinth*, trans. John F. Steely (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971); B. Pearson, *The Pneumatikos-psychikos Terminology in 1 Corinthians: A Study in the Theology of the Corinthian Opponents of Paul and its Relation to Gnosticism* (Missoula, MO: Scholars Press, 1973). Against Bultmann, it seems more likely that Paul speaks of two fundamentally incompatible stages of human spiritual development, with the first *sarkic* stage best understood as a precursor to the second, spiritual stage. This is nicely expressed by Gärtner, “The Pauline and Johannine Idea,” 220, with whom I concur. He states, “I find

what belongs to the *pneuma* of God ... and is not able to understand it, as it is perceived by means of the *pneuma* (πνευματικῶς ἀνακρίνεται) (2:14); in other words, spiritual perception is a type of closed system by which only the higher can perceive the higher. Humankind, in its natural state, never possesses the medium by which it may know God.⁷⁵ Certain later readers would deliberately interpret Paul’s teachings in 1 Corinthians in such a way as to draw an ontological distinction between themselves (as *pneumatic*) and the bulk of humanity (as *psychic*):

For the psychics (ψυχικοί) will not be able
to reach the pneumatic (πνευματικοί)
because they are from below,
but he/she is from above.⁷⁶

Paul states consistently that the law governs the flesh. He also hints that celestial beings or forces such as the angels (Gal 3:19) or *stoicheia* (Gal 4:2) are ministers to this law. Since the notion of cosmic sympathies and antipathies was widely recognized in antiquity, it is an intriguing possibility that Paul (or at the very least, his ‘Gnostic’ readers) understood ‘the law’ as the forces which the celestial beings exercised upon the flesh. These forces, compelling the individual to act in a way contrary to one’s desire for goodness, provoke sin. In Galatians 5:18–19, Paul reminds his community “if you are led by the *pneuma*, you are not under the law” before immediately launching into a list of the “works of the flesh”: *porneia*, uncleanness, lewdness (ἀσέλγεια), idolatry, the making of magical potions (φαρμακεία), hatred, contention (ἔρις), zeal, outbursts of wrath (θυμοί), selfish ambitions (ἐριθει-αί), dissensions (διχοστασίαι), schisms (αἰρέσεις), murders, and drunkenness (5:19–21). We find a similar list in a similar context in 1 Cor 6:9–10, as well as in Col 3:5.⁷⁷ Paul and his successors likely adopted such vice lists from

it misleading to concentrate heavily on how to separate mankind or the Christians into different groups as if this was the chief concern of the apostle. His main interest is rather with the *Pneuma* as the only true medium of revelations and knowledge.”

⁷⁵ So Gärtner, 221.

⁷⁶ *Hyp.Arch.* 87,17–20. See also Norea’s response to the chief archon at 92,25–26: “I am not from you, [but] I came from above.”

⁷⁷ The longest catalogue of vices, in fact, lies elsewhere in the Pauline corpus: Rom 1:29–31, where Paul paints a picture of the human condition in which he and other Christians no longer play a part. There are also three vice lists in the Pastoral epistles: 1 Tim 1:9–10; 1 Tim 6:4–5, and 2 Tim 3:2–4. Finally, Mark 7:21–22 preserves a twelve item vice list: fornication, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, malices, deceit, lasciviousness, envying, railing, pride and foolishness. These twelve vices, interestingly, are the ostensible result of a “singular evil principle” in humankind. The author of Matt 15:19 has reduced this list to six. See B.S. Easton, “New Testament Ethical Lists,” *JBL* 51 (1932): 2.

Jewish ‘Two Ways’ teachings; these lists are commonplace within Jewish and early Christian writings.⁷⁸ They likely also formed an important part of baptismal catechesis.⁷⁹ Incapable of combating the laws which govern the flesh, trapped into enslavement—this is the relentlessly nihilistic picture of the human condition which Paul presents to his listeners. “Oh wretched man that I am,” he cries, “who will deliver me from this body of death? (Rom 7:25).”

3.3. “Slavery” versus “Redemption”

In Romans 7:3 and 8:1–2 Paul contends that the Christian is free from bondage to sin and death, as well as bondage to the law. Nevertheless, he rarely uses the noun ἐλευθερία, ‘freedom’ and its verb ἐλευθεροῦν, since Paul does not imagine that ‘freedom’ is an attainable state. Instead, he asserts that humankind, by its nature, must remain in service to something. The choice lies in which power to serve: “Do you not know,” Paul informs his community in Rom 6:16, “that if you yield yourselves to any one as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness?” The members of his community thus become, in his eyes, “slaves of righteousness” (Rom 6:18) or “slaves of God” (Rom 6:22). Similarly, in Philippians, Paul avers that Christ confers on Christians the right to become not citizens of the world, but “citizens of heaven” (Phil 3:20).

The Law, for Paul, acts as a *paidagogus* which keeps people temporarily “in custody” until the time during which they will become citizens of heaven.

⁷⁸ For the earliest extant vice lists in Jewish tradition, see the 1QS (*The Community Rule*) from the Dead Sea Scrolls and the *Test Reuben* 2. 2, 3. 3–7; for the Christian tradition, note the lists in the *Didache* 2. 1–7; 3. 1–8; 5. 1. A more complete catalogue of vice lists in Jewish, Christian and pagan writings of our period can be found in Easton, “New Testament Ethical Lists.” Easton begins with the outdated assumption that these lists derive from “ethical teachings of the Stoa” (1). For a different view, see Franz Cumont, “La roue à punir les âmes,” *RevueRelig* 72 (1915): 384–388; This topic has also captured the interest of German New Testament scholars, such as Anton Vögtle, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament: exegetisch, religions- und formgeschichtlich Untersucht*, NTAbh 16 (Münster: Aschen-dorffschen, 1936) and Siegfried Wibbing, *Die Tugend- und Lasterkataloge im Neuen Testament und ihre Traditionsgeschichte unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Qumran-Texte* BZNW 25 (Berlin: A. Topelmann, 1959).

⁷⁹ For abstention from vice as a preparation for Christian baptism, see M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 171; Peder Borgen, “Catalogues of Vices, the Apostolic Decree, and the Jerusalem Mission,” in Jacob Neusner et al., eds., *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 126–141. In primary texts, see Mark 10:19, *Didache* 2. 1–3; Pliny, *Letter to Trajan* 110.

To illustrate his conviction, Paul employs an analogy. The son of a patrician family shares his social status with mere slaves, since he is merely a νήπιος, 'infant' kept under guard by ἐπιτρόποι καὶ οἰκονόμοι (Gal 4:1–4). But when God sends Christ in the *pleroma* of time, he redeems those under the law and elevates them from νήπιοι to the status of υἱοί, 'sons' and κληρονόμοι, 'heirs.'

Paul made it clear to the Romans that as long as people live without Christ, they are under law's dominion (Rom 7:1). Since, however, the law binds only the living, those who have 'died with Christ' are free. Thus he can proclaim in 7:4, "you have died to the law through the body of Christ" (ἐθανατώθητε τῷ νόμῳ διὰ τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ),⁸⁰ an idea he repeats in 7:6: "now we have been delivered [κατηργήθημεν] from the law, having died to what we had been seized by, so that we should serve in the newness of the spirit and not in the oldness of the letter." Paul employs similar language of enslavement and freedom to refer to the body and its inherent sinfulness: "our old self [ὁ παλαιὸς ἡμῶν ἄνθρωπος] was crucified [συνεσταυρώθη] with Christ, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed [δεδικαίωται] from sin" (Rom 6:6–7).

Rather than 'freedom' from the celestial powers, Paul speaks in Rom 3:24 of ἀπολύτρωσις, 'redemption,' literally a 'loosening' or 'freeing' of the individual from the forces which have now become opposed to the individual. This term as we find it in the LXX refers exclusively to the emancipation of slaves, a sense consistent with its use in Graeco-Roman legal documents of the first century where it is used of the sacral manumission of slaves.⁸¹ Paul uses this technical term in a "cosmic sense," as Joseph Fitzmeyer notes; creation itself is freed eventually "from its bondage to decay and brought to the glorious freedom of the children of God 'who are groaning inwardly as they wait for the redemption of their bodies.'"⁸² In the second century, Valentinian Christians would come to understand *apolytrosis* not as an abstract concept but as a metaphor for the sacrament of baptism, the point of which was to restore the individual's relationship from a state of slavery to cosmic powers to his or her rightful place in the Father.⁸³ We must now examine the

⁸⁰ See also Rom 7:6; 5:20–21; 6:11, 18, 22; Gal 2:19–20; 3:23.

⁸¹ For the LXX citations, see for instance Dan 4:34; Exod 21:8. See Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 122 for further citations.

⁸² Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 123. He quotes Rom 8:21–23.

⁸³ Nicola Denzey Lewis, "Apolytrosis as Ritual and Sacrament: Determining a Ritual Context for Death in Second-Century Marcosian Valentinianism," *J ECS* 17/4 (2009): 525–561.

degree to which Paul himself attributed this 'redemption' from to the power and purpose of baptism.

4. *Baptism and Freedom in Paul's Letters*

Paul's evocative depiction of human existence did not remain relentlessly bleak. He limited his nihilism—in proper Greek philosophical form—to contempt for the body and for the law which acts upon it. Throughout his letters, Paul offered one consistent, unequivocal statement on the law: it no longer applied to the individual who lived 'in Christ.' In order to escape the forces which act upon the body, one had to 'die' symbolically to the body and to the law. In Paul's understanding, there were two forms of this death. First, Christ's death redeemed the Christians "from the curse of the law" (Gal 3:13). He had made all Christians free (Gal 5:1). In Rom 7:4, Paul reminds the community that they had become "dead to the law through the body of Christ." Paul states further that the law which governs the flesh has been abrogated by the law of the Spirit: "for the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom 8:2).

The canonical gospels present baptism as a ritual purification. For Paul, baptism could offer far more than mere ritual ablution.⁸⁴ It provided a rebirth onto a new plane of spiritual existence, beyond the realm of influences that provoke sin. It transformed the physical body into a new, spiritual body.⁸⁵ Finally, it could be an opportunity to participate bodily and spiritually in Christ.⁸⁶ When Paul writes, "we have grown into union with [Christ]"

⁸⁴ The secondary scholarship on this subject is voluminous. For scholarship on early Christian baptism, see Edward P. Myers, *A Study of Baptism in the First Three Centuries* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Drew University, 1985); A. Benoit, *Le baptême chrétien au second siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1953); G.R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1962); G. Bornkamm, *Early Christian Experience* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969); O. Cullmann, *Baptism in the New Testament*, trans. J.K.S. Reid (London: S.C.M. Press, 1953). On Pauline baptism, see E. Fascher, "Zur Taufe des Paulus," *TLZ* 80 (1955): 643–648; E. Klaar, "Zum paulinischen Taufverständnis," *ZNW* 49 (1958): 278–282; D. Mollat, "Symbolismes baptismaux chez Saint Paul," in *Lumière et Vie* 26 (1956): 61–84; N.R. Peterson, "Pauline Baptism and 'Secondary Burial,'" *HTR* 79 (1986): 217–226; R. Schnackenburg, *Baptism in the Thought of St. Paul* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1964); C. Spicq, "La théologie paulinienne du baptême," *Questions liturgiques et paroissiales* 24 (1939): 130–148; E. Schweitzer, "Dying and Rising with Christ," *NTS* 14 (1967–1968): 1–14.

⁸⁵ Segal, *Paul the Convert*, 64, argues that Paul adopts the idea that baptism is an ascent and spiritual transformation from apocalyptic and mystical Judaism's *tevilah*, a ritual immersion to prepare for coming into God's presence.

⁸⁶ Rom 12:5; Gal 3:27–28; 1 Cor 2:6, 6:16, 12:27.

in a likeness [ὁμοίωμα] of his death (Rom 6:5),” the Greek term ὁμοίωμα signifies, in Fitzmeyer’s words, “not merely the abstract idea of ‘likeness’ but the concrete image that is made to conform to something else.”⁸⁷

In Romans 6:3–9, Paul develops his unique baptismal theology, in which each Christian participates through baptism into Christ’s death, entombment, and resurrection: “all we who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death” (ὅσοι ἐβαπτίσθημεν εἰς Χριστὸν Ἰησοῦν, εἰς τὸν θάνατον αὐτοῦ ἐβαπτίσθημεν). He continues in Rom 6:6–9:

For we know that our old human was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be made ineffective [καταργηθῆ], so that we should no longer be slaves to sin [τοῦ μηκέτι δουλεῦν ἡμᾶς τῇ ἁμαρτίᾳ] ... And if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also continue to live with him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, will never again die.

The Christian is buried and raised from the dead with Christ, so that, as Paul says, “we too should walk in the newness of life” (Rom 6:4). Similarly, in 2 Cor 5:17, the baptized Christian becomes a καινὴ κτίσις, a “new creation” in Christ.⁸⁸ The ‘reconciliation’ or radical transformation of the cosmos takes place with each new Christian who is baptized.

For Paul, Christ has the power to replace the irrecoverable carnal bodies of the believers with a new, spiritual body.⁸⁹ In Phil 3:21, Paul tells his community that Christ will “transform [μετασχηματίσει] our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.” In Rom 12:2, he exhorts Christians not to be conformed to the cosmos, but to “be transformed [μεταμορφοῦσθε] by the renewing of your mind.” First Corinthians’ famous passage at 15:44 concerning the nature of the resurrection body, “sown in a psychic body [σπείρεται]

⁸⁷ Fitzmeyer, *Romans*, 436. Fitzmeyer takes his evidence from the term ὁμοίωμα in the LXX of Exod 20:4, Deut 4:16–18 and 5:8.

⁸⁸ For 2 Cor 5:17 as language drawn from a baptismal context, see Jervell, *Imago Dei: Gen. 1:26 in Spätjudentum, in der Gnosis und in den Paulinischen Briefen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960), 16, 209. Paul likely draws his language here from Jewish proselyte baptism. A passage in the Babylonian Talmud compares a newly-baptized proselyte to “a child newly born”: *Yebamoth* 62a; *Bekoroth* 47a. See Wedderburn, “Soteriology,” 72 and Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Origin of Christian Baptism,” *Studia Liturgica* 19 (1989): 28–46. For the impact and trajectory of early Christian baptismal theology during the second to fourth centuries, see my discussion in chapter 5.

⁸⁹ For an excellent discussion of the theme of “replacing flesh with spirit” in late antique religious literature, see William C. Grese, “Unless Ye Be Born Again,” *JBL* 107/4 (1988): 677–693, and Gärtner, “The Philosophical Principle of ‘Like by Like’ in Paul and John.” For precedents in mystical Judaism for Paul’s language, see Alan Segal, “Paul and the Beginning of Jewish Mysticism,” in John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy and Other Worldly Journeys* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1995), 93–120.

σῶμα ψυχικόν], raised in a pneumatic [πνευματικόν] body,” too, describes this transformation: “just as we have borne the image of the human of earth [κάθως ἐπορέσαμεν τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ χοίκοῦ],” says Paul, “we shall also bear the image of the human of heaven (φορέσομεν καὶ τὴν εἰκόνα τοῦ ἐπουρανίου)” (15:49). At the time of the resurrection those who are not dead

will all be changed [ἀλλαγησόμεθα], in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed [ἀλλαγησόμεθα]. For this perishable must put on imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality.

(15:51–53)

When this transmutation of the physical body has taken place, Paul teaches, death shall be vanquished: “O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?” (15:55). But here he concludes, “the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law” (15:56).

Baptism, in the form of mystical participation in Jesus’s death, releases the individual from the compulsion of the law. In Rom 7:6, then, Paul avers, “but now we have been delivered from the law, having died to what we were held [κατειχόμεθα] by, so that we should serve in the newness of the Spirit [πνεῦμα] and not in the oldness of the letter [γράμμα].” Similarly in Gal 2:19 Paul states he has “died to the law in order that I might live to God.” He exhorts, “If you are led by the spirit, you are not under the law” (Gal 5:18). The Christian has been released from slavery to the law, and from the “body of death.”

An indifference to sin, Paul argues, proves that the individual is free from the forces that act upon the body. He declares in 1 Cor 6:12 that “all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.” It is for this reason that Paul rebukes the community in his letter to the Galatians: the Christians there subject themselves to enslavement when they permit themselves to be subject to earthly laws: “but now after you have known God, or rather are known by God,” Paul chastises, “how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements [τὰ ἀσθενῆ καὶ πτωχὰ στοιχεῖα] to which you desire again to be in bondage?” (Gal 4:8). In Paul’s understanding, then, Christians live (at least in theory) in a state of moral freedom, since most conventional morality is of a lower order of law. The author of Colossians addresses the same problem when he censures his community for observing the decrees that govern ordinary people such as “do not taste” and “do not touch” (Col 2:19). Christ has “cancelled the written code” to which the *stoicheia* minister.

5. *The Deutero-Pauline Tradition*

The continued, perceived problem of evil, as well as the undeniable and self-evident delay of the Eschaton, necessitated a modification of Paul's teaching on the "war in the heavens." For the author of Colossians, the subjugation of the heavenly authorities has already been definitively accomplished through the *parousia* of Christ. In 1:16 the rulers (ἀρχαί), powers (κυριότητες), thrones (θρόνοι) and authorities (ἐξουσίαι) are a part of the substance of Christ, having been created in him, through him, and for his benefit. According to Col 1:20, the heavenly powers have been reconciled into Christ so that universal peace has been restored. In Colossians, then, the sense of an ongoing cosmic battle is much more difficult to extract from the text. Nor is the cosmos malevolent, raging inexorably against humankind.

As in Gal 4:24–25, the Colossian Christians have been released from their obligation to the law or 'written code.' The author expresses the moment of release in dramatic, symbolic imagery (Col 2:13–14):

When you were dead in your trespasses and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all the trespasses, wiping out the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it out of the Middle [ἐκ τοῦ μέσου], nailing it to the cross. And having put off [ἀπεκδυσάμενος] the powers and authorities, he exposed them openly, triumphing over them by the cross.

The powers and authorities have been completely subjugated, their weakness exposed by Christ. As P.T. O'Brien observes, "their period of rule is finished."⁹⁰ Since the Christian has been released from the tyranny of these cosmic spirits, the author of Colossians encouraged his community to live in freedom (2:16–17).

The unknown author of the deutero-Pauline epistle to the Ephesians agreed that Christ has abolished in his flesh "the law and its commandments in decrees" (τὸν νόμον τῶν ἐντολῶν ἐν δόγμασιν καταργήσας) (2:14). He, too, subtly alters 1 Cor 15:24: Christ was no longer merely victorious over the

⁹⁰ O'Brien, 5. This passage likely stands behind *Gospel of Truth* 20, 22–21, 2, a clear example of a second-century 'cosmicization' of a New Testament passage: "For that reason, Jesus appeared; he put on that book; he was nailed to a tree; he published the edict of the Father on the cross. O such great teaching! He draws himself down though life eternal clothes him. Having stripped himself of perishable rages, he put on imperishability, which no one can possibly take away from him. Having entered the empty space of terrors, he passed through those who were stripped naked by oblivion, being knowledge and perfection, proclaiming the things that are in the heart of the [Father] in order to [...] teach those who will receive teaching."

celestial powers—God had removed him ὑπεράνω πάσης ἀρχῆς καὶ ἐξουσίας καὶ δυνάμεως καὶ κυριότητος (“far above all rule and authority, power and dominion”) and subjected all things to his rule (1:20–22). In other words, for the author of Ephesians, Christ operated on a higher level than the authorities. He is κεφαλὴ ὑπὲρ πάντα τῆ ἐκκλησίᾳ, ἥτις ἐστὶν τὸ σῶμα αὐτοῦ, τὸ πλήρωμα, “head over all things in the church, which is his body and *pleroma*” (1:22–23).

Despite Christ’s enthronement over the heavenly rulers, however, the author of Ephesians maintained that these beings still exerted an influence over people on earth. Dissolute behavior ‘proved’ that people live dominated by the ‘aeon of this age.’ The ‘archon of the authority of the air’ continued to rule the ‘sons of disobedience,’ forcing them to act “in the lusts of their flesh” (2:3). After baptism, however, humans were no longer “children of wrath by nature” (2:3). God made Christians “alive with Christ,” that is to say, he transmuted their beings into part of the ‘body of Christ,’ or into the *pleroma*.

For the author of Ephesians, Christ no longer engaged in a cosmic battle with malevolent supernatural beings. Instead, the battle was fought on an entirely different ground: as the body of Christians increased numerically through conversions and gained strength morally through abstention from sin, it helped “build up the body of Christ.” Thus the author called repeatedly for his community to “put off the old self” and “put on the new man” (4:24) “so that the body of Christ may be built up ... into a complete man” (4:12–13). As a communal entity, the Christians would be built into a κατοικητήριον (‘dwelling-place’) of God “in spirit” (2:22). As the ‘body of Christ,’ the followers of Christ become themselves the medium for the defeat over the archons: “through the church,” wrote the author, “the manifold wisdom of God might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms” (3:10; see also 2:6–7).

As proof that they are no longer subject to the authority of the rulers, the author of Ephesians exhorted the members of his community to live free from sin. The forces of cosmic evil fought not with Christ, but rather were locked in a constant struggle for the hearts and souls of humankind. Christians must be ever vigilant (Eph 6:11–12),

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers [ἀρχαί], against the authorities [ἐξουσίαι], against the world rulers of this darkness [τοὺς κοσμοκράτορας τοῦ σκότους τούτου] against the spirits of evil [τὰ πνευματικὰ τῆς πονηρίας] in the heavenly realms.

They must protect themselves with the full armor (πανοπλίαν) of God, “so that on the day of evil,” the author exhorted, “you may be able to resist, and

having accomplished all, to stand [στῆναι]" (6:13). By altering the locus of the battle against evil from the cosmos to the human psyche, the author of Ephesians changed dramatically the degree to which Christians could feel empowered to wage their own internal battle against the forces of darkness. The Christian became an active, rather than a purely passive, agent. Ephesians' emphasis on "building up Christ's body" added a component of social responsibility to this individual struggle; each Christian's victory over sin—however insignificant it may seem on its own—would lead inexorably and eventually to the salvation of the entire community.

It would be difficult to overestimate the impact of Paul's teaching on the 'body of death' over the past two thousand years as we have sculpted our notions of the body, shame, and sin. And though we can acknowledge the centrality of the Pauline devaluation of the body in later Christian theologies, I suggest we have lost sight of a fundamental manner in which certain early Christians—perhaps more than we might at first suspect—interpreted and understood Paul's words. Our Post-Enlightenment minds, for the most part, are no longer accustomed to making the link between the human body and the celestial bodies—a fundamental dogma that survived antiquity to provide the basis of Renaissance science and speculation. When Paul includes lengthy vice lists to identify particular types of sinful behavior which afflict the 'carnal man,' we know that at least some later Christians came to understand these vice lists, over time, as the direct result of malevolent planetary or zodiacal influences.⁹¹ The triumph of the Christian at baptism over vice became the proof that the power of the planets had indeed been vanquished. When Paul contrasts the *νήπιοι* and *δοῦλοι* enslaved by the *στοιχεῖα* and *κόσμος* with those elevated by baptism to the status of *υἱοί* and *κληρονόμοι*, we have what may be the earliest Christian rhetoric of escape from fate. When the Christian receives a new 'birth,' literally a new *genesis*, at baptism, the 'written code' has been annulled—the slate had been wiped clean from the enslavement of astral destiny. Christ had wrested the individual from the 'body of death.'

In the next chapter, I will explore the manner in which the Pauline notion of enslavement to astral powers undergirded Christian articulations of *heimarmene* as an operative force in the cosmos. In the following

⁹¹ Richard Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonology* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1988); M.W. Bloomfield, "The Origin of the Concept of the Seven Cardinal Sins," *HTR* 34 (1941): 121–128; G. Mussies, "Catalogues of Sins and Virtues Personified," in R. van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1991), 315–335.

chapters, I will discuss the manner in which certain Christian writers considered baptism, following the Pauline model, as the path to freedom from the malevolence influences of astrological destiny.

CHAPTER FOUR

HEIMARMENE AT NAG HAMMADI: THE APOCRYPHON OF JOHN AND ON THE ORIGIN OF THE WORLD

1. Introduction: Approaching Ancient Constructions of Fate

How is fate discussed in ancient texts? Who in antiquity considered fate to be enslaving? Who viewed fate as a depersonalized, relentless force from which the individual could not escape? Was such determinism truly perceived as absolute? Did these same authors feel themselves to be entrapped? Did they speak as witnesses to what they perceived as a universal truth, or did they use the rhetoric of entrapment and enslavement as a mechanism for devaluating an Other? I ended my first chapter with these questions; I am convinced that they must drive our study of fate in Nag Hammadi texts.

I also ended the first chapter of this study with an observation and a provocative suggestion: when we do find the rhetoric of ‘enslavement to fate’ within so-called ‘Gnostic’ texts of the second and third century of the Common Era, it exists solely within the context of insider/outsider discourse. Fate, in other words, enslaves only those who have not converted to a particular group or community, a perspective that reflects the high degree of tension between members of that group and those outside their social, intellectual or religious world. Since *all* Christians of the second century—whether we choose to call those who produced the Nag Hammadi documents ‘Gnostic’ or not—still struggled within illegitimate or at least disaffected communities within the Roman Empire, it is easy to comprehend how certain Christian authors might comprehend fate as enslaving or oppressive—and (crucially) a direct cosmic correlative of the earthly Empire—but then claim to exist outside that system of astral fatalism.

To apply an emic/etic hermeneutic to those texts from Nag Hammadi that explicitly mention fate is a step beyond the generalizing principles of Hans Jonas. It is to ask what sort of work, rhetorically, the trope of ‘enslavement to fate’ does, both within the logic of the text itself, as well as within the broader self-understanding or self-identity of the presumed community behind the text. My conclusions fall more in line with the century-old work of Richard

Reitzenstein on *heimarmene* or astral determinism as a ‘problem already solved’ within religious communities of antiquity.¹

But first, let us put the issue of the supposed universality of ‘enslavement to fate’ into some context. The discovery of the Nag Hammadi codices in 1945—texts to which, of course, neither Reitzenstein nor Jonas had access—provide an ideal proving ground for the prevalence of astral fatalism as an ancient ‘Gnostic’ attitude. In fact, astral fatalism as a concept plays only a very minor role in most of the Nag Hammadi documents. The word *heimarmene*, specifically, is mentioned in only six of the Nag Hammadi library’s fifty-two tractates. At the conclusion of the Hermetic *Discourse on the Eight and Ninth* (NHC VI, 6), Hermes advises his son to preserve his sacred teachings for posterity on steles of turquoise, and to write an oath, “lest those who read it bring the language into abuse, and not [use it] to oppose the acts of *heimarmene*” (*Disc.* 8–9 61, 22–30) (μηπως τονομασια νηνογνητ̄ς ερωγν ε̄ν ογκακογρια ν̄γι νετ̄ ναωω μηλωωμε ουτε ετ̄μη̄ ουβε ν̄ρβηογε ν̄χιμαρμενη).² Two other tractates, *Eugnostos* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*, explicitly reject *heimarmene* as a source of either being or influence (*Eugnostos* 70, 12–71, 1; *SJC* 92, 19–93).³ Three remaining tractates—the *Trimorphic Protennoia* (*Tri.Prot.*) *ApJn* (upon which the relevant passage of the *Tri.Prot.* is based), and *Orig.Wld*—contain elaborate, though conflicting, notions of *heimarmene* and its influence. All three authors adopted *heimarmene* as a causal principle within the cosmic *oikonomia*; yet they disagreed on both the precise effects and the ultimate consequences of fate’s influence. In this chapter, I will discuss the use of the concept of fate in these latter two texts—*ApJn* and *Orig.Wld*—since we have already laid the groundwork for these texts’ perspectives on *pronoia*. I will reserve discussion of *Tri.Prot.*’s presentation of *heimarmene* for chapter six.

2. Heimarmene: A Brief History of the Term

Before any explicit analysis of the use of the term *heimarmene* in *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld*, it is necessary to briefly review the history of the concept in Greek philosophy, particularly in Stoicism and Middle Platonism, since the authors

¹ Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, 77.

² The warning is not unique in Hermetic literature; see Zosimus of Panopolis in *Commentary on the Letter Omega*, who comments that some try to ‘use force’ against fate; this may reveal fundamental differences of opinions between what some problematically call ‘magicians’ who use ritual means to abrogate fate.

³ See intro, pp. 2–8.

of our Nag Hammadi texts appear to have been at least familiar with Stoic and Middle Platonist teachings on fate. The term ἡ εἰμαρμένη derives from the past participle of μείρομαι, “to receive as one’s portion or due.”⁴ We find in the writings of Greek tragedians as well as the rhetors of the fourth century BCE the related verbal forms εἰμάρτο and εἰμαρμένον, as well as two other words used to express notions of causality, μοῖρα (‘destiny,’ an ancient Greek concept found in Homer, often personified as a goddess or a group of three goddesses, the Moirai) and ἀνάγκη (necessity or cosmic compulsion).⁵ Plato is our first author on record to use the term ἡ εἰμαρμένη in a technical sense, although at no point does he offer a philosophical analysis of fatalism. He mentions *heimarmene* only in passing, as a traditional idea with which he is familiar, but which he rejects;⁶ thus Socrates, in Plato’s *Gorgias*, dismisses *heimarmene* as an invention of stupid women (512). Other philosophers, however, developed a more integrative or holistic concept for *heimarmene*. For the Pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus, *heimarmene* was a cosmic law, part of the process of becoming, the σπέρμα τῆ τῶν πάντων γενέσεως or the “seed of the generation of all things” (*De placitis philosophorum* 1. 28). But

⁴ LSJ 1093–1094. This etymology does not seem to have been widely employed in antiquity; numerous other alternative etymologies are offered by various philosophers, as in εἰμαρμένη from εἰρομένη e.g. Diogenes Laertius, 7. 149 + SVF 2. 915: ἔστι δ’ εἰμαρμένη αἰτία τῶν ὄντων εἰρομένη.

We encounter numerous personifications of the forces of destiny in Greek and later, Roman sources, such as Τύχη, Ἀνάγκη, Μοῖρα, and the Μοῖραι. For additional philological studies of Graeco-Roman fate, see S. Eitrem, “Moirai,” *PW* 5. 2 (1932), col. 2473–2475 and W. Gundel, “Heimarmene,” *PW* 7, col. 2640–2642; S. Eitrem, “Schicksalmächte,” *Symbolae Osloenses* 13 (1934): 47–64; Anton Anwander, “Schicksal Wörter in Antike und Christentum,” in *Zeitschrift für Religions und Geistesgeschichte* 1 (1948): 315–327; 2 (1949): 48–54, 128–135 and Margaret E. Reesor, “Necessity and Fate in Stoic Philosophy,” in John Rist, ed., *The Stoics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 187–202.

⁵ For Homeric μοῖρα, see for instance *Iliad* 16. 433 ff.; *Odyssey* 3. 236 ff. Lines such as these have continued importance for Christian philosophers, who frequently included Homeric tags in their discussions of fate. For the role of ἀνάγκη in defining the essential characteristics of the tragic hero, see Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, 1316, 1317; Euripides, *The Phoenicians*, 1763. For the sophists, see Antiphon, 1, 21; Demosthenes, *De Corona*, 296, *Funeral Orations*, 1394; Isocrates 10. 52. For a discussion of *moira* in early Greek literature (in need of updating), see William Chase Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1944); for Latin literature, see Valerio Neri, “Dei, Fato e divinazione nella letteratura latina del I sec dC,” *ANRW* 16/3 (1974): 1974–2051. For a brief discussion of τύχη as enslaving in Greek historiography that represents the older view against which I contend in this volume, see G.J.D. Aalers, “The Hellenistic Concept of the Enviousness of Fate,” in M.J. Vermaseren, ed., *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1979), 1–8.

⁶ *Republic* X, 566A, 619C; *Phaedrus*, 255B; *Phaedo*, 115A; *Gorgias*, 512E; *Theaetetus* 169C; *Laws*, IX, 873C, X, 904C; *Tim.*, 89C.

Heraclitus's statement remains one of the few extant early Greek philosophical reflections on *heimarmene*. By the fourth century BCE, *heimarmene* had not, so far as we know, received any systematic philosophical treatment, although it was an ancient idea with which most educated people would have been familiar. The rise of the Stoic school in the Hellenistic period was to prove crucial in the articulation of *heimarmene*, particularly as it related to other systems of causality.

Our earliest Stoic fragments preserve wordplays on ἡ εἰμαρμένη that explore and develop an image of fate as a causal chain: *heimarmene* was the αἰτία τῶν ὄντων εἰρομένη ("cause of the chain of being"), or the εἰρμός αἰτίων, ("chain of causes").⁷ The image of the chain persisted in Stoic philosophy of the Roman period. Cicero, who had encountered the Stoic philosopher Posidonius (135–51 BCE) in Rome, defined *heimarmene* as the *ordinem seriemque causarum, cum causae causa nexa rem es se gignat* (Cicero, *de Div.* 1.125),⁸ and Aulus Gellius, quoting Chrysippus (c. 281–208 BCE), the *sempiterna ... et indeclinabilis series rerum et catena* (Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 7. 2. 1).

The primary head of the Stoic school, Zeno (334–262 BCE) defined *heimarmene* abstractly, as a δύναμις κινητική, a "kinetic force" (*SVF* 1. 175, 176). Chrysippus (280–207 BCE), Zeno's eventual successor and the 'second founder of Stoicism,' gave to *heimarmene* a more nuanced influence as a δύναμις πνευματική, a 'pneumatic force' (*SVF* 2. 913).⁹ Just as *heimarmene* was for Chrysippus related to *pneuma*, it was also identical to the λόγος τοῦ κόσμου, or the λόγοι καθ' ὄντη τὰ μὲν γεγονοντα γέγονε, τὰ δὲ γενησόμενα γενήσεται ("logos according to which the things that have happened have happened, that happen happen, and that will happen, will happen") (*SVF* 2. 913).¹⁰

⁷ αἰτία τῶν ὄντων εἰρομένη: Diogenes Laertius 7. 149 = *SVF* 2. 915; εἰρμός αἰτίων: *SVF* 2. 917, 918, 920.

⁸ Cicero's engagement with Greek ideas of Stoicism is technical and complex; I do not treat it in this volume because it does not address the theme of cosmic attitudes. For a brief summary and some comments on Cicero's response to Chrysippus and Epicurus, see Robert Sharples, "The Problem of Sources," in Mary Louise Gill and Pierre Pellegrin, eds., *A Companion to Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 442–444.

⁹ Michael Lapidge, "Stoic Cosmology," in John Rist, ed., *The Stoics* (Berkeley: University of California, 1978), 176, explains this term in relation to the causal chain of *heimarmene*: "if cosmic *pneuma* had spatial extension, it also had temporal extension; and this is what is meant by Chrysippus' definition ... of fate as a pneumatic force." For further background on Chrysippus's concept of fate, see G.L. Duprat, "La doctrine stoïcienne du monde, du destin et de la providence d'après Chrysippe," *AGPh* (1910): 473.

¹⁰ See also Cicero, *de Div.* 1. 55. 126 = *SVF* 2. 921: *Ex quo intellegitur ut fatum sit non id quod superstitiose, sed id quod physice dicitur, causa aeterna rerum, cur et ea quae praeterierunt facta sint, et quae instant fiant, et quae sequentur futura sint.*

No extant Stoic fragment from the Hellenistic period suggests that *heimarmene* could be either constraining or enslaving. Rather, it was part of the divine Mind or Νοῦς Διός that permeated the cosmos.¹¹ It was also indistinguishable from providence (*pronoia*), an energy that emanated from the divine and acted upon humankind—a relationship William Chase Greene described as “two faces of a single reality.”¹² The early Stoics took for granted the existence and beneficence of *pronoia*; it was as natural as heat to a fire or sweetness to honey (*SVF* 2. 1118). For Zeno (*SVF* 1. 176), the uninterrupted series of necessary causes he termed *heimarmene* was only an aspect of *pronoia* or nature, *physis*. For Chrysippus, *logos* and *pronoia* were given by Zeus and together comprised *heimarmene*. In a fragment from his treatise *On Destiny*, Chrysippus describes *heimarmene* as the λόγος τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ προνοίᾳ διοικουμένων, the “*logos* of those things that are organized by *pronoia* in the cosmos” (*SVF* 2. 913). Since providential power could only act toward the Good, humans were not so much ensnared by *heimarmene* as guided by it as a divine principle. No particular event, Chrysippus asserted, not even the smallest, could take place otherwise than in accordance with universal *physis* and its *logos*.¹³ A universal will, of which human free will formed a part, guided humans inexorably toward the Good.

By the second century of the Roman Era, the idea that Stoics had posited a thoroughgoing determinism had reached Platonist circles. Plutarch (46–120 CE), for example, attributed to Stoicism the generalization that *heimarmene* is “invincible, not to be overpowered, and victorious over everything” (*de Stoic. Repug.*, 46. 1055D).¹⁴ *Heimarmene*, he believed, ought instead to be contrasted with τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, (“what is in our power”). For the early Stoics, however, such a distinction between human responsibility or action and *heimarmene* would have been inconceivable. As Jean-Joël Duhot has pointed out, Chrysippus and his contemporaries subjected human will to *heimarmene* because they did not perceive an essential distinction between human and cosmos; both were indissolubly linked, formed of the same

¹¹ On this, see Greene, *Moira*, 338. For other Stoic passages that equate *logos* with *heimarmene*, see *SVF* 1. 160; *SVF* 1. 187; *SVF* 2. 913.

¹² Greene, *Moira*, 342. For references, see *SVF* 1. 41; *SVF* 1. 176; *SVF* 2. 937. For the best recent discussion of the issue in Stoicism, see Suzanne Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1998).

¹³ *SVF* 2. 937: τούτων οἴεται Χρῆσιπποι οὔτε μικρὸν οὔτε μέγα παρὰ τὸν τοῦ Διὸς λόγον εἶναι καὶ νόμον καὶ δίκην καὶ πρόνοιαν.

¹⁴ Further into the treatise, Plutarch defines *heimarmene* as “the causal law that cannot be overcome, prevented or averted” (αἰτία ἀνίκτος καὶ ἀκώλυτος καὶ ἄτρεπτος).

οὐσία, animated by the same πνεῦμα.¹⁵ Whatever course of actions humans chose to follow, it would be impossible to act independently of the divine chain of causality that was *heimarmene*. This holistic aspect of Stoic philosophy was incompatible with the later notion of ‘freedom of the will’ as τὸ ἐφ’ ἡμῖν, which developed not within Stoicism but within other strands of Greek philosophy. Chrysippus and his successors were left struggling to reconcile Epicurean or Skeptic concepts of free will and human responsibility within an essentially incompatible philosophical system.

From a Stoic perspective, the equivalence between *heimarmene* and *pronoia* assured that, as Duhot states, destiny could only unfold according to the best possible plan, since God is capable only of the highest good.¹⁶ According to Plutarch, Chrysippus wished to show that there was no fault in the universe, since it was arranged according to the best possible nature (*de Stoic. Repug.*, 1051C). To make room for the existence of evil, Cleanthes developed a solution: all that comes through *pronoia* is fated, he stated, but all that is fated is not necessarily providential.¹⁷ In the third century BCE, Cleanthes thus became the first to distinguish between *heimarmene* and *pronoia*. The division came from his desire to remove moral responsibility from fate and providence and place it within the realm of human action. Later Stoics followed Cleanthes’ example. Posidonius declared that *heimarmene* fell third in a natural progression from Zeus: “First is Zeus, the second, Nature, the third, fate.”¹⁸ The Stoics were forced to abandon their earlier formulation of Zeno, who found in Zeus, *heimarmene* and the divine *Nous* the expression of an identical active principle.¹⁹

An earlier generation of scholars has generally agreed that it was within Hellenistic Stoicism that *heimarmene* acquired particular psychological overtones, that is to say, as a repressive, ineluctable force. Many scholars

¹⁵ Jean-Joël Duhot, *La conception stoïcienne de la causalité* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1989), 267.

¹⁶ Duhot, *La conception stoïcienne*, 255.

¹⁷ *SVF* 2. 933: “*ex quo fieri, ut quae secundum fatum sunt etiam ex providentia sint. Eodemque modo quae secundum providentiam ex fato, ut putat Chrysippus. Alii vero, quae quidem ex providentiae auctoritate, fataliter quoque provenire, nec tamen quae fataliter ex providentia, ut Cleanthes.*”

¹⁸ Posidonius, in H. Diels, *Doxographi graeci* (Padua: EDAM, 1961), 324a4. Posidonius also counsels people not to resign themselves to Fate, but to “do battle with their own weapons.” Compare Seneca, *Ep.* 113, 28.

¹⁹ *SVF* 1. 102: ἐν τε εἶναι θεὸν καὶ νοῦν καὶ εἰμαρμένην καὶ Δία πολλαῖς τε ἑτέραις ὀνομασίαις προσονομάζεσθαι: “God, intellect, fate and Zeus are one, and they are called by many other titles as well.” The doctrine is also attributed to Chrysippus; see J. Mansfeld, “Providence and the Destruction of the Universe in Early Stoicism,” in M.J. Vermaseren, ed., *Studies in Hellenistic Religions* (Leiden: Brill, 1979), 129–188.

have understood Stoicism's 'descent into irrationalism' as a consequence of the Greek fascination with astrology.²⁰ Richard Norris, in his book *God and World in Early Christian Theology* (1966) provides a fine illustration of this perspective:

Stoic determinism, which on the one hand produced the high-minded ethic of virtue for virtue's sake, on the other hand stimulated the ordinary man's sense of helplessness and oppression before the world-system. It joined with astrological doctrines and with ideas of the rule of Fate or Fortune to encourage a feeling that the terrestrial world is a kind of closed prison house in which the life of man is subjected to forces beyond his control.²¹

A similar point was made in 1945 by Emmanuel Amand de Mendieta, who believed that the twin influences of orientalism and astrology

contribuèrent puissamment par leur active propagande à implanter, dans la plèbe mêlée des villes et dans la foule des esclaves ruraux, la croyance à l'inexorable et toute-puissante Fatalité, inscrite dans les configurations des astres.²²

Since Stoic philosophers appear at some unspecified point to have accepted the theoretical principles of astrology into their metaphysics, *heimarmene* eventually became synonymous with the influence of the stars or planets on humankind.²³ This new, pernicious *mixis* of doctrine had its most profound impact, according to Norris and Amand de Mendieta, on 'ordinary man,' who presumably did not possess sufficient intellectual sophistication to resist its ensuing psychological effects.

In reality, however, many Christian scholars coming to the subject as theologians rather than specialists in ancient philosophy, overstated the extent to which astrology and philosophy were melded in the Hellenistic era. If we examine our extant Stoic fragments, we learn only that Zeno accepted that divination was possible, presumably through the principle of causality.²⁴ We can add to this the modern hypothesis that the Stoic idea

²⁰ Even more recent commentators suggest that astrology was the motivating factor that introduced *heimarmene* into philosophy; see Duhot *La conception stoïcienne*, 243: "C'est peut-être l'astrologie qui a fait du destin un concept philosophique."

²¹ Richard Norris, *God and World in Early Christian Theology* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1966), 24.

²² Amand de Mendieta, *Fatalisme et liberté*, 15.

²³ On Stoic use of astrology, see J. Moreau, *L'Âme du monde de Platon aux stoïciens* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1939), 169; Franz Boll, "Der Stern Glaube in seiner historischen Entwicklung," *Kleine Schriften* (Leipzig: Köhler & Amelang, 1950).

²⁴ *SVF* 1. 173: *Sed cum Stoici omnia fere illa (scil. divinationis genera) defenderent, quod et Zeno in suis commentariis quasi semina quaedam sparsisset.*

attributed to Posidonius of all things being linked through divine sympathies left open the door to the possibility that stars could influence bodies.²⁵ In fact, *heimarmene* as predominantly astral or planetary determinism was not fully developed by the early Stoics; we find it a commonplace only, as we shall see in the next chapter, in the Hermetic writings of the early and late Empire. In brief, the influence of astrology on philosophical systems did not precipitate a devaluation of *heimarmene* as a concept in the Hellenistic era. The Hellenistic Stoics, like most philosophers of that period, firmly believed in the divinity of the celestial bodies.²⁶ Chrysippus asserted, for instance, that the stars govern the cosmos in accordance with *pronoia* (*SVF* 2. 527). As gods, the stars and planets exercised a type of providential power over human affairs.

By the time that the *Apocryphon of John* and *On the Origin of the World* were composed in the second or third centuries CE, Stoic cosmology was, in the words of Michael Lapidge, a “dead letter” that had “passed from the domain of philosophers to the domain of poets.”²⁷ To put this differently, within philosophical discourse of the Roman Empire (both pagan and non-pagan) *heimarmene* already played a largely rhetorical function. Invoking *heimarmene* as a causal agent could therefore serve various rhetorical ends. It marked an intellectual as fluent in the philosophical *koine* of the high and late Empire. It stood as an example of an outdated, antiquated cosmology that could then be ultimately juxtaposed against a new, enlightened worldview—be it Christian, or Platonist, to give only two examples. Whether or not a community accepted *heimarmene* signified its validity and its value, as well as its ability to offer in *heimarmene's* place a more potent doctrine of salvation.

²⁵ Democritus was the first philosopher to speak of the direct correlation between the human body and the cosmos as a *μακρὸς κόσμος* to a *μακρὸς κόσμος*. Posidonius articulated this relationship as “cosmic sympathy,” in which the stars and planetary bodies could act directly upon corresponding human bodies or parts of human bodies since they shared the same nature. It is unclear whether the notion of divine sympathy originated with Posidonius. A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1944–1954), 1. 196, 222 ff., traces the doctrine of divine sympathies to Bolus of Mendes, the ‘Democritean,’ who lived ca. 200 BCE. On cosmic sympathy, see also Cicero, *de Div.* 1. 57. 129–130; 2. 14. 33–15. 35. For a study of Posidonian divine sympathy, see K. Reinhardt, *Kosmos und Sympathie* (Munich: C.H. Beck, 1926).

²⁶ See Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars: A History of an Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 55–61.

²⁷ Michael Lapidge, “A Problem in Stoic Cosmology,” *Phronesis* 18 (1973): 185.

3. Heimarmene in the Apocryphon of John

Let us return to the influential text, the *Apocryphon of John* (*ApJn*). In the previous chapter I had analyzed that text's deployment of a multiple-providence scheme drawn from contemporary Middle Platonist doctrine. *Heimarmene* or planetary fate was, in Middle Platonism, widely regarded as the lower component of this divided fate, as we find it in the *ApJn*. At the same time, the *ApJn* is unusual among Nag Hammadi texts in that it locates the origins of *heimarmene* in a complex, mythological drama concerning the origins of human deception and enslavement.

The author of the *ApJn*, like so many of his second-century contemporaries, was convinced that humans were composite beings, the complex products of various levels of cosmic matter and influence. In its cosmogony, the archons of *ApJn* form (πλάσσειν) a 'choic' or earthy Adam from the *stoicheia*: earth, water, fire and a lower order of πνεύμα (*ApJn* II 20, 35–21, 9). As a product of the imperfect, spiritually-deficit archons, Adam was composed of darkness and desire (ἐπιθυμία), through the agency of the 'counterfeit' or 'contrary' spirit, the ἀντίμιμον or ἀντικείμενον πνεύμα.²⁸ In the *ApJn*, the ἀντίμιμον or ἀντικείμενον πνεύμα functions as the chief instrument of spiritual enslavement.²⁹

Contributing to the pressing second-century debates on spiritual possibility and divine election, the author of the *ApJn* framed his theological reflections in a dialogue between John and the Lord on the fate of souls after death: πᾶσοις ἡΨΥΧΟΥΣ ὡς τῆροϋ σενᾶουχαῖ εἰσοϋν᾽ εποϋοειν᾽ εἰτ᾽ ἔββηϋ, ("Lord, will all souls be brought safely into the pure light?") (*ApJn* II 25.16). Salvation was guaranteed for all those who bore the darkness and desire of the body with equanimity and the expectation of deliverance (*ApJn* II 21–26, 11). At the heart of this issue for the author, though, lay the question of the involvement and influence of the counterfeit spirit. What would be the fate of the souls on whom the counterfeit spirit had descended? "When they have come out of their flesh," John asks, "where will they go?" (ῥοταν᾽ εἰϋωᾶνει εἰωολ ρ᾽ ἡ τοϋσαρζ᾽ εἰϋᾶνωκ᾽ εἰτωᾶ) (*ApJn* II 26, 25). The Lord's response reveals that

²⁸ In *ApJn* II 21, 9 the Greek term ἀντίμιμον πνεύμα is rendered by the Coptic πειπῖῃᾶ εἰτωῃῃῃῃ. NHC III 26, 19 retains the Greek πειῃῃῃῃῃῃῃῃῃῃ [πῖῃῃῃᾶ]. Both versions seem identical in concept with the 'contrary spirit' (πῖῃῃᾶ ἡᾶῃῃῃῃῃῃῃῃῃ) of NHC II 26, 27, 36; 27, 32.

²⁹ For a philological and form-critical analysis of the ἀντίμιμον πνεύμα in Nag Hammadi literature, see A. Böhlig, "Zum Antimimon Pneuma in den koptisch-gnostischen Texten," in his *Mysterion und Wahrheit: gesammelte Beiträge zur spätantiken Religionsgeschichte* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968); Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 37–39.

the author of *ApJn* understood the action of the counterfeit spirit as equated somehow with the action of *heimarmene*; when John inquires into the origin of the counterfeit spirit, Jesus responds with an account of the origin of *heimarmene*:³⁰

NHC II 28, 12–32

[the Chief Ruler] made a plan with his authorities [ἐξουσία], which are his powers, and together they committed adultery with Wisdom [σοφία], and bitter fate [εἰμαρμένη] was begotten through them, which is the last of the changeable fetters. And it is of a sort that is interchangeable. And it is harder and stronger than she with whom the gods united and the angels [ἄγγελοι] and the demons [δαίμων] and all the generations [γενεά] until this day. For from that fate [εἰμαρμένη] came forth every sin and injustice and blasphemy and the chain of forgetfulness and ignorance and every severe command [παραγγελία] with serious sins and great fears. And thus the whole creation [κτίσις] was made blind, in order that they may not know God, who is above all of them. And because of the chain of forgetfulness their sins were hidden. For they are bound with measures and times and moments [καιρός], since fate is lord over everything.

BG 72, 2–12

[The Chief Ruler] made a plan with his powers [ἡεφῶσι] and they begot fate [εἰμαρμένη] and bound by means of measures and times and moments

the gods of the heavens and angels [ἄγγελοι] and demons [δαίμων] and men,

so that all of them would be in its bond,

for it to be lord over everyone—an idea that is evil and perverse.

Recognizing that humans possessed a capacity for *gnosis* or spiritual perception higher than his own, the chief archon initiated his plan to enslave humankind through the powers of fate. The two recensions reproduced here agree that *heimarmene* had its origin in a sexual act. They also agree that fate is more powerful than the archons which created it; it is $\bar{\eta}\chi\omicron\epsilon\iota\varsigma\ \alpha\lambda\bar{\eta}\bar{\nu}\ \pi\tau\tau\eta\rho\iota$,

³⁰ I follow the English translation of Waldstein/Wisse (1995) with some alterations.

“lord over everything/everyone” (*ApJn* II 28, 32). The longer recension adds additional details on the nature of fate’s enslaving influence: binding people with “measures and times and moments,” it acted primarily upon the human psyche; it imposed vices which inhibited cognitive processes: forgetfulness, ignorance, and fear.³¹ Of these, the author considered forgetfulness perhaps the most significant consequence of fate’s hegemony since it characterized, in his opinion, the human condition: τὰ τε θε ενταγτ<ρ>ετκτικισ τηρς ρ βλλη’ δεκαδς ηνογογνη πνογτε ετῆπογ τηε τηρογ, “thus the whole creation was made blind, in order that they may not know God, who is above all of them.”

The author of the *ApJn*—or perhaps a later redactor—included a second account of the origin of spiritual enslavement almost immediately after he recounted the origin of *heimarmene*. Though this second account does not explicitly mention *heimarmene*, it again explains the source of the counterfeit spirit. When the archons of the *ApJn* fail in their attempt to take ‘daughters of men’ as wives, they make a plan together: “they created a despicable spirit [ἡνογῆνα εφωης], who resembles the Spirit who had descended, so as to pollute the souls through it” (*ApJn* II 29, 24–25). The angels change themselves into the likeness (εινε) of the women’s husbands, and fill them with the spirit of darkness (πῖνα ἡκακε). With bribes of gold and silver, the fallen angels αγωκ ἡρρωμε ερραι δερνηος ἡροογω και ενταγογρογ ἡωωγ εγωρῆ ἡμοογ εἰ δερ ἡπλανη “steered the people who had followed them into great troubles ... with many deceptions” (*ApJn* II 29, 33–30, 2).³² It is not clear why the story of *heimarmene* is told here for a second time, although such reduplication of narrative appears to be a distinctive feature of the *ApJn*.³³

³¹ Scholars have understood “measures and times and moments [καιρός]” as a general reference to astrology. While this is certainly plausible, I detect also the influence of Gal 4:9–10. “But now after you have known God, or rather are known by God, how is it that you turn again to the weak and beggarly elements, to which you desire again to be in bondage? You observe days and months and seasons and years” or even Plato’s *Laws* 4. 709B: “God controls all that is, and *tyche* and *kairos* co-operate with God in the control of human affairs.”

³² Compare *ApJn* BG 75, 1: “and they steered them into temptation [πειρασμός]” and III 39, 3: “and they [steered] them into distractions [περισπασμός].” Pagels, “Exegesis and Exposition of Genesis Creation Accounts in Selected Texts from Nag Hammadi,” in Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1976), 272, sees in *Hyp.Arch.*’s parallel passage an allusion to 1 Cor 7:32: “Let those who remain unmarried devote themselves to the Lord without distraction [ἀσπερισπάστως].”

³³ See the observations of Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), esp. 222 ff.

The author of the *ApJn* perceived the influence of the demonic behind humanity's collective existence "in a state of distraction." The nature of these distractions, according to the enumeration of the *ApJn*, was not primarily theological error. They constituted a map of sins and practical concerns; as Elaine Pagels notes, "what motivates these authors, as much as any interest in cosmological speculation, is common concern with urgent practical matters, especially sexual desire, intercourse, marriage and procreation."³⁴ I suggest, however, that the author or community of the *ApJn* would not have understood "practical matters" apart from the context of cosmological speculation, since human impulses—the sexual drive in particular—stemmed from the deposit of the archons or the influence of celestial demons.

In the short recension of the *ApJn*, as a consequence of the fall of the angels humans are unable to remember $\bar{\eta}\tau\epsilon\gamma\pi\rho\nu\omicron\iota\alpha \epsilon\tau\epsilon \mu\alpha\sigma\kappa\iota\mu$, "their immovable Pronoia" (*ApJn* III 38, 12; BG 74, 12). In the longer recension, we are provided with greater detail into the precise nature of the consequences:

They [the people] became old without having enjoyment. They died, not having found truth and without knowing the god of truth. And thus the whole creation [$\chi\tau\acute{\iota}\sigma\iota\varsigma$] became enslaved forever, from the foundation [$\chi\alpha\tau\alpha\beta\omicron\lambda\acute{\eta}$] of the cosmos until now. And they took women and begot children out of the darkness according to the likeness [$\epsilon\iota\kappa\epsilon$] of their spirit ... and they hardened themselves through the hardness of the despicable spirit [$\bar{\eta}\pi\epsilon\pi\eta\bar{\nu}\alpha \epsilon\tau\omega\eta\varsigma$] until now.
(*ApJn* II 30, 2–11)

The counterfeit spirit, then, works either through the cosmic mechanism of *heimarmene* or directly through human bodies, transmitted through sexual intercourse. Alexander Böhlig notes that it is created along with humankind, passed down through human sperm and "mit dem Kind aufwächst und zunimmt."³⁵ Pagels goes a step farther. She intimates that the *antimimon pneuma* is the sexual impulse: "underlying the whole drama [of the *ApJn*] is an assumption shared by many others: that sexuality and spirituality are essentially—but antithetically—related energies: the first is the insidious, dark side of the second."³⁶ The *antimimon pneuma* works in opposition to the

³⁴ Elaine Pagels, "Exegesis and Exposition of Genesis Creation Accounts in Selected Texts from Nag Hammadi," in Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1976), 259. See a similar assessment by Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 206: "I suspect that this is a version of the complaint about what some might call fate's fickle finger—the inequitable variety in human characteristics, or sudden and not obviously *merited* disasters or triumphs."

³⁵ Alexander Böhlig, "Zum Antimimon Pneuma," 165, 171.

³⁶ Pagels, "Exegesis and Exposition," 264.

true *pneuma*, which, by contrast, cannot be inherited, only given by Epinoia from beyond the cosmos.

Elaine Pagels intimates that the author of the *ApJn* understood the *antimimon pneuma* as identical to the sexual impulse. It is equally true that it is identical with *heimarmene*—an identification emphasized by the dual account of its origins. Both *heimarmene* and the *antimimon pneuma* derived from an archontic plan to enslave humankind, to rob it of its spiritual knowledge. Both originated from the first act of sexual intercourse in the cosmos—an action that initiated a watershed of sin, distraction and spiritual blindness. The consequences of *heimarmene* and the *antimimon pneuma* are also identical: humans live and die in a state of ignorance, never to recognize the ‘God of truth.’

Do the *ApJn* passages on *heimarmene* suggest ‘cosmic pessimism’? What we learn is that *heimarmene* takes on various forms and bears various implications for human behaviors, but the text does not suggest that these are absolute, inescapable, or universal cosmic characteristics. Williams observes: “When the passage [on *heimarmene*] is viewed in isolation, it is not clear whether its intent is to assert that all human action is determined by fate.”³⁷ He continues, “fate imposes upon human beings certain constraints that render them vulnerable to wrong choices.”³⁸ Still, while fate can lead people in the wrong direction through the malevolent action of the Counterfeit Spirit, the *ApJn* suggests that people can still exercise the power of making choices, whether bad or good. If this is determinism, it is of a sort that was perfectly in line with other ways to discuss will and the power of choice in antiquity.

4. *Heimarmene in On the Origin of the World*

Like the related text the *ApJn*, *Orig. Wld* also devotes a passage to the action of fate in the form of *heimarmene* in a discursus about demonic influence. As in the *ApJn*, the author of *Orig. Wld* adopted the ancient theme of 1 Enoch’s ‘Myth of the Watchers’ to develop its cosmogonic narrative of demonic archons who move between the lower cosmic realms and the earth. Sophia Zoe, angered at the archons’ attempt to rape Eve, chases them from their heavens, where they become evil demons upon the earth

³⁷ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 207.

³⁸ Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 207.

(*Orig.Wld* 121, 28–35). The author makes explicit the activities of the seven archons:

Now, when the seven rulers were cast down from their heavens onto the earth, they made for themselves angels, numerous, demonic, to serve them. And the latter instructed humankind in many kinds of error and magic and potions and worship of idols and spilling of blood and altars and temples and sacrifices and libations to all the spirits of the earth. (*Orig.Wld* 123, 4–12)

The archons initiate this attempt to lead humankind astray through their “coworker, fate [ἸΤΟΥΘΒΡΡ̄ ρΩΒ ΧΙΜΑΡΜΕΝΗ] who came into existence by the concord between the gods of injustice and justice [ΚΑΤΑ ΤΣΥΝΨΩΝΙΑ ΖΙΤῆ ἸΝΟΥΓΤΕ ἸΤΑ ΔΙΚΕΙΑ Μῆ ΤΔΙΚΑΙΟCΥΝΕ]” (*Orig.Wld* 123, 12–14). Thus *heimarmene* works as a tool of the demonic archons, a mechanism by which they are able to enslave humankind:

And thus when the world came to be in distraction, it wandered astray [ἀφ-ῤῥιλλανασθῆ] throughout all time. For all those who are on the earth served the demons from the foundation (of the earth) until the final consummation [ΤΣΥΝΤΕΛΕΙΑ]—the angels of righteousness and the people of unrighteousness.³⁹ (*Orig.Wld* 123, 15–20)

Heimarmene provided a demonic aetiology for the religious errors of those the author observed around him; fallen angels had introduced spiritual amnesia into the cosmos, by their transgression twisting a harmonious cosmic order into disorder and chaos.

Yet the author of *Orig.Wld* did not perceive *heimarmene* as permanently enslaving, but as a necessary part of the cosmic *oikonomia* that worked upon the lower components of human being. It was, as PHEME PERKINS notes, a “natural law.”⁴⁰

5. Conclusions: Reevaluating and Rethinking Heimarmene

Hans Jonas believed that Gnostics had transformed the beautifully ordered cosmos of the Stoics into a ‘cosmos of chaos’ from which there was no hope of escape. Jonas, as many scholars before and after him, understood

³⁹ Notice the planetary pun: the cosmos ‘distractedly erred’ or ‘wandered’ (πλανάω) at all times, led by the planetary forces of the seven rulers.

⁴⁰ Perkins, “Gnostic Physics,” 41. As a natural law, the archons are less powerful than *heimarmene*; they are unable, for example, to shorten Adam’s lifespan ΕΤΩΒ ΧΙΜΑΡΜΕΝΗ ΕΤΚΗ ΕΡΡΑΙ ΧΙΜ ἸΨΟΡΤΙ, “because of *heimarmene*, which was established since the beginning” (*Orig.Wld* 121, 16).

Gnosticism as a species of late antique nihilistic philosophy that consistently and characteristically inverted or subverted existing contemporary philosophical traditions—whether pagan, Jewish, or ‘orthodox’ Christian. Yet the evidence from Nag Hammadi indicates a deliberate, precise and nuanced understanding of fate’s action and consequences. *Heimarmene* was not a ‘blunt hammer’ concept that shifted communities into pessimism and despair. Rather, it was a useful heuristic device to understand human difference, particularly the difference we exercise in our spiritual choices and sexual lives.

If the collection of references to *heimarmene* in these texts reflect a diversity of opinions on the nature and scope of fate, then the confusions and debates of their authors differed in no way from those of their Middle Platonist contemporaries. Still a matter of discussion was the precise relationship between fate and lower providence. Less ambiguous was the equation of fate or lower providence with the action of *daimōnes* stationed around the earth as guardians of human affairs. In Hermetic teachings, these celestial *daimōnes* were often associated with the passions and often explicitly identified with *heimarmene*. The connection between passions, demons, and *heimarmene* is also made clear in the *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld*. Yet here, the influence of key Jewish apocalyptic texts—particularly *1 Enoch*—can be felt as it pushes Middle Platonist demonology in a new, even startling direction.

Recently, Takashi Onuki offered the theory that Gnostic providence schemes, particularly in the *ApJn*, were a direct attack on Stoic ideas of providence, especially the equation of providence and fate.⁴¹ If the authors of *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld* reacted to any Stoic tenet, I counter, it was not only their notion of a beneficently ordered cosmos (which failed to adequately explain the reality of sin and misfortune), but also the caricatured Stoic depiction of fate as absolute and inescapable. Michael Williams has already made this point in his study *Rethinking Gnosticism*: “the description of fate’s activity as well as the subsequent mythic narrative reveal that fate [in the *ApJn*] is not perceived as determining all human action or decision.”⁴² PHEME PERKINS reaches a similar conclusion concerning the cosmology of *Orig.Wld*: “the adaptation of the doctrine of three levels of providence ameliorates the severity of fate and demonic denomination in the lower world.”⁴³

⁴¹ Takashi Onuki, *Gnosis und Stoa: eine Untersuchung zum Apokryphon des Johannes* (Freiburg: Universitätsverlag, 1989), 99–145, 159.

⁴² Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism*, 206.

⁴³ Perkins, “Gnostic Physics,” 45.

The authors of *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld* were far from strict determinists; their cosmologies left ample room for escape from the spiritually compromising influences of fate. In the *ApJn*, ‘enslavement to fate’ meant that individuals were inspired by the power of the counterfeit spirit; that influence, however, could be emptied out of them and replaced with the salvific power of Pronoia. This belief was a sort of ‘soft determinism’—a perspective these authors shared with other Christians of the second century—in which humans were drawn up to God not solely through the power of their own free will, but by God’s providence, in the lovely metaphor of the church historian Rebecca Lyman, “like bits drawn to a magnet.”⁴⁴ Though Lyman makes this analogy in her discussion of Justin Martyr’s experience of Christ, we can find examples from Valentinian Christianity as well; in a hymn preserved in the *Tri.Trac.*, the Savior is “the providence of those for whom he providentially cares” (*Tri.Trac.* 66, 21–22). In the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, the Lord comes down to earth as a guide to humankind, “in order to transfer those who believe in Christ from fate to his providence” (ἵνα μεταθῆ τοὺς εἰς τὸν Χριστὸν πιστεύσαντας ἀπὸ τῆς Εἰμαρμένης εἰς τὴν ἐκείνου Πρόνοιαν) (*Exc.Theod.* 74. 2).

At the beginning of this chapter, I reintroduced my hypothesis that *heimarmene* language in second-century texts is frequently framed within a discourse of alterity. In other words, the trope of ‘enslavement to fate’ functions to divide those within a particular community (the ‘free’) from those outside that community (the ‘enslaved’). In both *ApJn* and *Orig.Wld*, we can see clear examples of such a dynamic. In the *ApJn*, the account of those under *heimarmene*’s sway has a distinct distancing function. The action of *heimarmene* is exactly outlined through specific list of vices or characteristics involved. Chief among these is participation in a sexual existence—sexual activity generally, but also conjugal relations in particular—that is to say, there is a concern not just with sexual intercourse as part of the malevolent control of the counterfeit spirit, but also the production of offspring. Therefore we can locate or situate *heimarmene* language in these texts as deriving from an author who privileges sexual continence and purity. ‘Enslavement to fate’ is the explanation posited for the existence of the human sexual drive; fate works together with the ‘counterfeit spirit’ to replace an appetite for the spirit, in some, with an appetite for the flesh. Sexuality and procreation exist because for fate to continue its hold, it depends

⁴⁴ Rebecca Lyman, *Cosmos and Christology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 47.

upon the production of new bodies. One way out of such existential enslavement, therefore, is to suppress or deny one's sexuality, and to refuse to produce children.

While the primary social and rhetorical function of the 'enslavement to fate' in *Apjn* is to divide those who are sexually active from those who are celibate, *Orig.Wld* employs the trope quite differently; here, fate's 'distraction' leads people to improper religious behavior. After the seven archons work with their 'co-worker,' *heimarmene*, to ensure that humans will go astray (*Orig.Wld* 123, 12–14), they also employ angels to help pull people away from the right spiritual direction: "And [fallen angels] instructed humankind in many kinds of error and magic and potions and worship of idols and spilling of blood and altars and temples and sacrifices and libations to all the spirits of the earth" (*Orig.Wld* 123, 4–12).

Note here that what is specifically being targeted is pagan religious practice: first of all, sacrifice and the temple cult as part of the official landscape of Roman imperial religion, but also 'magic and potions' as part of village or non-imperial level religion. Thus the author expresses a profound disaffection from the main forms of religious expression in his day.

Those Nag Hammadi authors who accepted the existence of *heimarmene* agreed upon one thing: humans are composite beings. The mortal body is directly controlled or governed by celestial powers, which act upon it through the imposition of vice. Yet this 'pessimism' is not absolute; since humans also contain within themselves the seeds of the divine, they also contain the potential to be reconnected with their divine source.

The diversity of opinions on *heimarmene* revealed in our sources highlights the points of debate in the second century. Some Christians rejected the notion of *heimarmene* as plainly erroneous; others incorporated vivid depictions of its administration to account for the spiritual malaise they perceived around them. At no point, however, does the rhetoric of 'enslaving fate' exist within the context of people feeling themselves to be enslaved. Rather, some attested that the human condition (of which they no longer considered themselves a part) was essentially and inherently one of enslavement. Those who embraced such a perspective also believed there existed certain modes of escape from this enslavement. Salvation, not enslavement, remained the central concern of these Christian authors. If *heimarmene* exists, our texts provide the antidote.

CHAPTER FIVE

MIDDLE PLATONISM, *HEIMARMENE*, AND THE *CORPUS HERMETICUM*

One of the rare instances of the term *heimarmene* in the Nag Hammadi corpus occurs in one of its Hermetic tractates, an untitled treatise scholars now call *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth* (NHC VI, 52, 1–63). There, the reference to *heimarmene* occurs in the colophon, where Hermes Trismegistus warns, “And write an oath in the book, lest those who read the book bring the language into abuse, and not (use it) to oppose the acts of fate” (ΜΗΠΩΣ ΤΟΝΟΜΑΣΙΑ ΝΗΟΓΗΤΙΣ ΕΞΟΥΝ ΕΪ ΟΥΚΑΚΟΥΡΓΙΑ ΝΒΙ ΝΕΤ ΝΑΩΩ ΠΠΧΩΩΜΕ ΟΥΤΕ ΕΤΗ† ΟΥΒΕ ΝΕΒΗΟΥΕ ΝΧΙΜΑΡΜΕΝΗ) (*Disc.* 8–9 62, 22–30).¹ Significantly, the explicit instruction here is to use the book to oppose the acts of fate. Have we found, in this relatively brief and otherwise unattested tractate, evidence for ‘Gnostic’ pessimism and fatalism?

To begin to answer this question, we can first divide Christian ‘Gnostic’ texts from the pagan *Hermetica*, and consider if the Hermetic corpus might reveal a discrete set of theoretical responses to the cosmos. In so doing, we can gain a broader sense of the way that *heimarmene*, as a concept, was deployed across a range of Hermetic treatises.

1. *The Hermetica*

The philosophical dimensions of *heimarmene* and its mixing with theoretical and practical astrology during the Roman Empire had a profound impact on the *Hermetica*, a group of pagan religious texts that grew out of the fertile soil of Graeco-Egyptian religious tradition and philosophical speculation. The richly diverse corpus of Hermetic literature drew heavily upon the

¹ For an interesting brief article on this text but one which does not explicitly discuss the problem of fate, see Jean-Pierre Mahé, “Mental Faculties and Cosmic Levels in The Eighth and Ninth (NH VI, 6) and Related Hermetic Writings,” in Søren Giversen, Tage Petersen, and Jørgen Podemann Sørensen, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions* (Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences, 2002), 73–83.

philosophical *koine* of the Roman Empire.² We find in it elements of Middle Platonism, indigenous Egyptian motifs, Jewish apocalypticism, Sethianism, astrology, alchemy, Stoicism—in short, virtually all the strands of spiritual teachings and traditions available in late Roman Egypt.

The *Hermetica*, as a corpus of ancient writings, has been woefully ignored in modern scholarship. The problem is not accessibility; unlike the Nag Hammadi texts, the *Hermetica* were never lost and enjoyed a fruitful *Nachleben* in the Renaissance³ and then again in the early twentieth century, where the texts were favored by transcendentalists and mystics such as Helena Blavatsky and Aleister Crowley.⁴ As a consequence of their tenacity, we have, unusually, three critical editions of the corpus: an early and imperfect one from Sir Walter Scott, followed by A.D. Nock's and A.-J. Festugière's multi-volume compilation, and, most recently, a new English translation and commentary by Brian Copenhaver.⁵ All three critical editions maintain the late Byzantine compilation's division of the corpus into seventeen separate Greek tractates. Included in the broader category of *Hermetica* is the Latin *Asclepius*, the forty Hermetic excerpts (some very fragmentary)

² The classic study of the religious milieu of the *Hermetica* has been A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, 4 vols. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1944–1954). Of particular use for this study has been vol. 1, *L'astrologie et les sciences occultes*, and vol. 4, *Le dieu cosmique*. Also worthy of note as an older study is Richard Reitzenstein, *Poimandres: ein paganisiertes Evangelium: Studien zur griechisch-ägyptischen und frühchristlichen Literatur* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1904). I am also indebted to Garth Fowden's study of the socio-historical context of the *Hermetica*: Garth Fowden, *The Egyptian Hermes. A Historical Approach to the Late Pagan Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988). Also essential reading are the editions and observations of Jean-Pierre Mahé, *Hermès en Haute-Égypte*, 2 vols., (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1978). For editions of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, I have consulted the recent English translation of Brian Copenhaver, *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Aesclepius in a New Translation* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). Absolutely indispensable as a critical edition is the four-volume edition of A.D. Nock and A.-J. Festugière, *Corpus Hermeticum*, 4 vols., (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1972), abbreviated in this study as NF, from which I have drawn all the Greek citations of the *Hermetica* used here.

³ The classic study remains Frances Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).

⁴ One of the first translations in the modern era is that of G.R.S. Mead, *Thrice Great Hermes: Studies in Hellenistic Theosophy and Gnosis*, vol. 2 (London: Theosophical Publishing Society, 1906). The *Hermetica* still hold considerable allure for some; witness the Dutch private library founded by Joost Ritman, *Bibliotheca Philosophica Hermetica* in Amsterdam, which contains over 20,000 books on esotericism, including a 1471 edition of the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

⁵ Two of the three I have already cited in full; the remainder is Sir Walter Scott, *Hermetica. The ancient Greek and Latin writings which contain religious or philosophic teachings ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924–1936).

collected by the Byzantine epitomizer Joannes Stobaeus around the year 500 CE in his *Anthology*, and three additional Hermetic writings from the Nag Hammadi library: *Discourse on the Eighth and Ninth*, *Prayer of Thanksgiving* (NHC VI, 63, 33–65, 7); and a fragmentary copy of *Perfect Teaching* (NHC VI, 65, 15–78, 43), the latter two being contained in editions of *Asclepius*.⁶

Of modern scholars of ancient Hermeticism, Garth Fowden has done the most to ‘locate’ the Hermetic writers in late Roman Alexandria.⁷ Fowden argued, against Nock and Festugière, that all Hermetic texts drew from the eclectic and energizing environment of late antique Egypt, with its complex interplay of Graeco-Egyptian, Roman, Jewish, and early Christian milieu.⁸ It preserves the religious worldview not of the Graeco-Roman elite, but of a Roman Egyptian emergent class of intellectuals, literate rather than deeply learned, deliberately creating an eclecticism that reflected their intellectual and spiritual aspirations.

One would think that the accessibility of the *Hermetica*—as well as their unusually *longue durée*—would have prompted further study. But Hermetic writings have rarely been taken as seriously as they should. Their marginalization in scholarship can be attributed directly to the assumptions and prejudices that I outlined in the first chapter of this volume. The *Hermetica* were always seen as examples of the decline of Greek philosophy in the Roman period, the bastard mongrel children of ‘proper’ philosophy. This characterization is, of course, quite unfair and awaiting rehabilitation. The problem, in fact, is threefold:

⁶ On these Hermetic writings in general, see M. Krause, “Zur Bedeutung des gnostisch-hermetischen Handschriftenfundes von Nag Hammadi,” in M. Krause, ed., *Essays on the Nag Hammadi Texts in Honor of Pahor Labib* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); K.-W. Tröger, “On Investigating the Hermetic Documents Contained in Nag Hammadi Codex VI,” in R. McL. Wilson, ed., *Nag Hammadi and Gnosis* (Leiden: Brill, 1978), 117–122.; Martin Krause, “Die hermetischen Nag Hammadi Texte,” in S. Giversen, T. Petersen and J. Podemann Sørensen, eds., *The Nag Hammadi Texts in the History of Religions*, 61–72.

⁷ Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, esp. 122. Other attempts, less comprehensive, are made by Jean-Pierre Mahé, “La voie d’immortalité à la lumière des Hermetica de Nag Hammadi et de découvertes plus récentes,” *VC* 45 (1991): 147–175; J. Peter Södergård, *The Hermetic Piety of the Mind: A Semiotic and Cognitive Study of the Discourse of Hermes Trismegistus* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2003), esp. 73 ff.

⁸ For the Jewish features, see B.A. Pearson, “Jewish Elements in the ‘Corpus Hermeticum 1,’” in R. van den Broek and M.J. Vermaseren, eds., *Studies in Gnosticism and Hellenistic Religions presented to Gilles Quispel* (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 336–348. For the Egyptian background, see E. Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine* (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press, 1984).

1. The *Hermetica* are examples of a very Roman penchant for hybridity.⁹ The *Hermetica* draw on Stoicism and Platonism, but also incorporate foreign elements such as, most saliently, classical Egyptian (or else, Egyptianizing) motifs so as to constitute a unique corpus of literature. This hybridity is a consequence of the environment in which the *Hermetica* were born; nevertheless, earlier generations of classicists eschewed such hybridity because the Hermetic writings were no longer ‘purely’ Greek philosophy but were tainted with other, implicitly irrational systems.
2. The knowledge-systems with which the *Hermetica* engage—besides Middle Platonism, which many modern commentators had already considered in a state of decline in the late second century CE—happened to be those that many nineteenth- and twentieth-century scholars held in most contempt: astrology is the clearest example of these, although there are also associated knowledge-systems such as *pharmakia*, numerology, alchemy, and divination, which likewise tend to be marginalized. For this reason, Sir Walter Scott chose to omit much of the astrological material from his edition of the *Hermetica*, branding it “rubbish.”¹⁰ Critical reading of these texts—including the preparation of critical editions—was more exorcism than exegesis. When texts were not omitted outright from collections, they were subjected to the scathing critiques of modern scholars; virtually every page of Nock and Festugière’s edition of the Hermetic is peppered with evaluations of the texts’ “banalité” or “cliché.”
3. The ‘turn’ to ritual alluded to in many of these texts induced a profound discomfort among some classicists, who tended to see ritual as plainly silly or embarrassing. Ritual activity among the Hermetists, therefore, could only be perceived as further evidence of decline.

As a consequence of these prejudices, the *Hermetica* have traditionally been divided up into the ‘Higher’ (or ‘philosophical’) *Hermetica* and the ‘Lower’

⁹ On hybridity theory in post-colonial discourse, see Homi Bhabha, “Unsatisfied: Notes on Vernacular Cosmopolitanism,” in Laura Garcia-Moreno and Peter C. Pfeiffer, eds., *Text and Nation: Cross-Disciplinary Essays on Cultural and National Identities* (Columbia, SC: Camden House) 191–207, and Robert Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995). I have replaced the older and less accurate term ‘syncretism’ with ‘hybridity’ here as applied to the *Hermetica* because of the political implications implicit in the construction of Hermetic writings and their specific social location; as a class of subaltern literature they function, I argue, partly to destabilize or disrupt the colonial narratives of creation and philosophical discourse of the Graeco-Roman elite.

¹⁰ See George Sarton’s review of Scott’s edition in *Isis* 8/2 (1926): 343–346.

(or ‘magico-religious’) *Hermetica*. The philosophical *Hermetica* represent Middle Platonist philosophy in its most strenuously rationalizing form. The ‘magico-religious’ *Hermetica* are those texts which draw on what scholars such as Nock and Festugière regarded as philosophy’s antitheses: magic and ritualizing, superstitious religion. History of Religions scholars, indeed, insisted upon the lack of relationship between the Higher, purely Greek *Hermetica* and the Lower astrological sources that had, in the words of one commentator, absorbed the “sickly vapours of Egyptian theology.”¹¹ Another scholar disdained the popular Hermetic writings which reveled in “magic, witchcraft and alchemy” as “a disgrace to the cream of the family” and as “Hermetic bastards” with their “hocus-pocus in the lower regions.”¹² In actual fact, however, the distinction between Higher and Lower *Hermetica* is as arbitrary as it is unhelpful, as a range of modern scholars now acknowledge.¹³ The Hermetic corpus is highly diverse, with its only common feature the various texts’ attribution to the legendary Hermes Trismegistus.

During the Roman Empire, authors such as those who penned the *Hermetica* combined Greek philosophy with Graeco-Egyptian astrology. The degree to which astrology undergirds Hermetic writings varies dramatically from one text to another. Some lack astrological referents altogether. Some, like the Latin *Liber Hermetis*, offers us unique insight into astrology in late Ptolemaic Egypt; it describes the decans, the thirty-six segments of the zodiacal circle. Other *Hermetica* offer applied astrology, such as the *Book of Asclepius Called Myriogenesis* that offers a medical guide based on astral sympathies, the *Fifteen Stars, Stones, Plants and Images* (an astrological pharmaceutical text); the *Holy Book of Hermes to Asclepius* (astro-botanical); and the *Peri Seismon*, that associated earthquakes with particular astrological signs. And although these books are no longer extant, surely the *Book of Zoroaster* and the *Book of the Configurations of Heimarmene which are Beneath the Twelve*, which the author of the *Apocryphon of John*’s long recension cites in its astrological passage, must have derived from this same genre

¹¹ Thaddeus Zielinsky, “Hermes und die Hermetik II: der Ursprung der Hermetik,” *Archiv für Religionswissenschaft* 9 (1906): 27–30.

¹² G. van Moorsel, *The Mysteries of Hermes Trismegistus* (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Utrecht, 1955), 10.

¹³ The first was Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, who was roundly punished for his approach, but later (albeit posthumously) vindicated; for the revisionist views, see Mahé, *Hermès*, 2:449–450, Peter Kingsley, “*Poimandres*: The Etymology of the Name and the Origins of the Hermetica,” *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 56 (1993): 19, and Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 116–118. The history of the Reitzenstein controversy is detailed by Iversen, *Egyptian and Hermetic Doctrine*.

of astrological *Hermetica*. Indeed, there must have been many more such texts; the preservation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* by generations of Christian clerics ensured that the only texts to ‘make the cut’ were those already compatible, in some way or another, with a late ancient or Byzantine Christian worldview; thus we must consider this process of selection and expurgation when we consider what view(s) of *heimarmene* emerges from our extant documents.

Considering the Hermetic corpus’s ‘twin’ background in astrology and philosophy, one might assume that we would encounter *heimarmene* as a fundamental determinative principle from which these texts posited an inexorable enslavement. In actuality, the *Hermetica* do present, however inchoate, a theory of salvation from enslavement which generally points not toward ritual nor to a savior god, but to a process of interiorization and the quest for *gnosis*.¹⁴ With this as their end, we can see the revelation of astrological knowledge systems including discussions of *heimarmene* within Hermetic texts as a necessary prolegomenon for salvation. Knowledge of the decans, for example, could in a sense induce salvation—just as knowledge of the cosmos in Jewish apocalyptic could in a sense symbolize freedom from the cosmos rather than participation in it. Indeed, the *Hermetica* are often more akin to Jewish apocalyptic than to Greek philosophy in their focus on revelation and experience. And just as Jewish apocalyptic texts are hardly perceived as deterministic in their cosmology, so ought we to refrain from applying the term ‘cosmic pessimism’ to the outlook of these Graeco-Egyptian treatises.

Those Hermetic texts that lack overt astrological data likewise concern themselves fully with the quest for salvation, this time construed primarily as a proper understanding of cosmic principles, the chief among these being the complex relationship between *heimarmene* and *pronoia* as dual cosmic forces—the first frequently construed as negative, the second as positive. Nevertheless, the reconciliation or collocation of these two forces becomes a chief preoccupation of many Hermetic authors. This active work in locating *heimarmene*, qualifying it, understanding it, and ultimately reassigning it as a fundamentally divine operating principle in the cosmos follows various trends in Middle Platonism, as I will outline in this chapter.

¹⁴ Roelof van den Broek, “Gnosticism and Hermetism in Antiquity: Two Roads to Salvation,” in Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff, eds., *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); more dated is Gilles Quispel, “Hermes Trismegistus and the Origins of Gnosticism,” *VC* 46/1 (1992): 1–19.

The Hermetic authors were particularly fascinated with the problem of fatalism. The term *heimarmene* appears time and time again in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and in numerous Hermetic fragments preserved by Stobaeus.¹⁵ In particular, three pivotal Hermetic treatises (*Poimandres*, *Asclepius*, and *Corpus Hermeticum* 12) devote lengthy discussions to the subject of fate. It is my intention in this chapter to refocus our attention on the use of the term *heimarmene* in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, particularly as articulated in those three texts. A discussion of *heimarmene* in *Hermetica*, however, can go nowhere without addressing significant philosophical developments in Middle Platonism. There are in this philosophical movement innovations in the language of *heimarmene* or ‘enslavement to fate’ that reflect cunning attempts to reconcile the problem of fatalism and human free will.

2. Middle Platonic ‘Dualism’ and the Devaluation of *Heimarmene*

Middle Platonism—a purely modern appellation—designates an emergent philosophical ‘school,’ (loosely construed) from the second century BCE to the second century CE that turned toward Plato’s teachings but sought to reconcile those teachings with other intellectual streams. Philo of Alexandria (ca. 30 BCE–45 CE), Plutarch of Chaeronea (ca. 45–125 CE), and Numenius of Apamea (fl. 150–176 CE) remain the most famous proponents of Middle Platonism. Middle Platonists brought into philosophical discussions a marked interest in cosmology, at the time when Stoic philosophy shifted its focus from cosmology to ethics. We will focus on Numenius’s contributions to the Hermetic milieu here.

Three significant movements in Middle Platonism bear on the subject at hand:

1. The development of what some scholars have identified as ‘cosmic pessimism,’ that is to say, a new and negative evaluation of the cosmos as contaminated by matter and, thus, by evil.
2. The introduction of demonology, that is to say, a shift in conceptualization from a unified cosmos to one that is multi-layered, with malevolent beings arrayed in the lower cosmic strata.
3. Attempts to articulate the workings of this newly complex cosmos, which include the dividing up of principal forces such as *heimarmene*

¹⁵ Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 175, records that the word *heimarmene* occurs ten times in *CH* XII, 5–9, eight times in the *Asclepius* (19, 39–40) and five times elsewhere in the Greek Hermetic corpus (*Poim.* 9, 15, 19; *CH* XVI, 11, 16).

or *pronoia* into different aspects that can then be located, or relocated, in or to different regions of the cosmos. Since in all these innovations or iterations the cosmos remains both powerful and integrally connected with human existence, it logically follows that the point of these cosmological speculations bore directly on implications for human activity, particular in the exercise of things such as free will.

2.1. *Cosmic Pessimism?*

Behind new articulations of *heimarmene* in the late first and early second centuries stood a new and measured devaluation of matter and the material. We do not know the precise scale or intellectual impact of this devaluation, although it is much noted in modern scholarship. E.R. Dodds, in *Pagans and Christians in the Age of Anxiety*, argued that such negative re-evaluation of the cosmos constituted a unifying feature of late antique philosophy, but it is difficult to find evidence of this outside of a relatively small collection of fragmentary sources.¹⁶ One such source is Numenius of Apamea—a complex figure who apparently drew into his philosophy influences from the Brahmins, Magi, Jews and Egyptians circulating in the Empire.¹⁷ The human soul, Numenius apparently taught, became infected or encrusted with vice on its descent through the heavenly gate of Cancer.¹⁸ The incarnation of the

¹⁶ E.R. Dodds, *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 13.

¹⁷ John Dillon, *The Middle Platonists, 80 B.C. to A.D. 220* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 363. Proclus notes disapprovingly that Numenius incorporates astrology and mystic rites into Platonism (Proclus, *frag.* 35; 84.14, des Places). The extant fragments of Numenius have been gathered and edited by Edouard des Places (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1973). For a summary of Numenius's philosophy, see Rudolf Beutler, "Numenios," *PW Suppl.* 7 (1940): 664–678.

¹⁸ The passage has been retained in Macrobius, in *Somnium Scipionis*, 1. 11. 11; 1. 12 (Willis, 47–50). On evil and souls, see also Aeneas of Gaza, in *frag.* 49 (des Places, 94). Scholars have debated whether Numenius really had in mind a descent of the souls through the planetary spheres, as Macrobius suggests. The first critical editor of Numenius's works, Leemans, held that Numenius did indeed posit a descent through the celestial spheres as the source of evil influences on humankind. This was refuted by Beutler, in his review of Leeman's edition in *Gnomon* 16 (1940): 111–115. Leeman's theory has since been defended by his student de Ley (Hermann de Ley, *Macrobius and Numenius* [Brussels: Latomus, 1961]) and M.A. Elferink, *La descente de l'âme d'après Macrobe* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), 35 and more recently, Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991), 87. Against these scholars in favor of Beutler has been Ioan Culianu, who notes that the surviving sources state only that the soul passes through the gate of Cancer before incarnation and through the gate of Capricorn after death. I.P. Culianu, "Ordine e disordine delle sfere," *Aevum* 55 (1981): 50, states (quite

soul, therefore, always involved the influence of maleficent powers that act upon matter, which is to say, upon the body (fr. 48, 43). Numenius associated these maleficent powers with the planetary gods, who were themselves partly composed of base matter (fr. 50). He considered this matter to be both 'non-being' and the source of evil (fr. 4a).

Though the extant fragments of Numenius's work have not left us with enough material to fully reconstruct his philosophical positions, he is widely credited (or blamed) for having introduced cosmic pessimism into Middle Platonism, from which it then allegedly entered the esoteric *koine* of the second century.¹⁹ We do not possess any of Numenius's teachings on *heimarmene*, but we do know that, in his view, *pronoia* did not act beneficially toward humankind. It had been compromised by the *pathemata* so that

there cannot be found in the realm of generation any entity immune to vice, neither in human creations, nor in nature, nor in the bodies of animals, nor yet in trees or plants nor in fruits, nor in the flow of air, nor in the expanse of water, nor even in the heaven itself, since everywhere it entwines itself with Providence [*ubique miscente se providentiae*] like the pollution of an inferior nature. (fr. 52) (des Places, 116)

Numenius distinguished himself, then, for being the first Middle Platonist we know of to offer a 'pessimistic' cosmology, although, properly speaking, he did not state that the cosmos was evil; only matter itself was. The cosmos was flawed only inasmuch as its discrete constituents had become mingled with each other.

However Numenius himself understood the process of matter and providence 'mixing,' certain authors after his time invoked his authority for their conviction that evil human actions were the direct result of heavenly influence.²⁰ Numenius's thought apparently had a profound impact the *Chaldean Oracles* and the *Hermetica*. Within the *Chaldean Oracles*, the world of matter is considered a tomb or prison from which the soul must escape, divesting itself of the garment ($\chi\iota\tau\acute{\omega}\nu$) acquired during the descent through the

rightly I think) that it would be erroneous to interpret this passage as evidence for Numenius's cosmic pessimism. Des Places refused to engage the issue and did not include the Macrobius passages on the influences acting upon the soul. For Macrobius's intellectual context, see J. Flamant, *Macrobe et le Néoplatonisme latin à la fin du IV^e siècle* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1977).

¹⁹ See, for instance, philosopher J.P. Kenney's comment on the *Tripartite Tractate* in Richard T. Wallis and Jay Bregman, eds., *Neoplatonism and Gnosticism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), 200: "The theology of the *TriTrac* is closest in its philosophical design to the sort of Middle Platonism represented by Albinus or Numenius."

²⁰ For example, Arnobius, *Adversus Nationes*, 2. 11. 16.

planetary spheres.²¹ The soul entrapped in the body “finds herself within the sphere of influence of *heimarmene*” (Proclus, *de Providentia et Fato*, 179. 22 [Lewy, 265]). With matter perceived as degraded or defiled, the process of generation became, ironically, a process of inexorable corruption, infinitely repeated through cycles of birth, death and rebirth.²² *Heimarmene*, essentially linked as it was with the process of generation, became itself devalued as a consequence.

2.2. Demonology in Middle Platonism

In the second century of the Common Era, speculative demonology came into its own as a subsection of philosophy. Numerous ‘demon lists’ composed by scores of anonymous Christians, Jews, and pagans reflect an almost obsessive desire to taxonomize and localize *daimōnes*, to ‘set right’ a cosmos now fragmented into a multiplicity of levels and layers, each governed by its own demon.²³ We find within some Middle Platonist writings a new, subordinate type of *heimarmene* administered by lesser cosmic beings, *daimōnes*. This lower *heimarmene*, like planetary fatalism, acted directly on human beings, but particularly on the psyche, where Pseudo-Plutarch and Apuleius maintained it induced *παθή*, or irrational passions. For these authors, the sublunary zone was teeming with *daimōnes*.²⁴ These *daimōnes*

²¹ Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, xxv. Proclus refers to a treatise by Julian, ‘*Ἐν ἐβδόμῃ τῶν Ζωνῶν*’, which may have been seven chapters of the oracles discussing the seven planetary spheres through which souls descend and ascend. See Proclus, *in Tim.* 3. 27. 10, and E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951), 284. According to Ruth Majercik, it is difficult to determine whether the ‘hylophobia’ of the Oracles was drawn from Numenius’s teachings or vice versa; some sort of direct dependence is, however, clear. Festugière, “La religion grecque à l’époque romaine,” *REG* 64 (1951): 482, maintains that Numenius influenced the Oracles; the opposite view is expressed by Ruth Majercik, *The Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translation and Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 3 (esp. n. 11); E.R. Dodds, “Numenius and Ammonius,” in *Entretiens sur l’antiquité classique: les sources de Plotin* 5 (1960): 10–11, and des Places, *Fragments*, 17.

²² On the process of generation as equivalent to corruption, see *SH* 3. 11. 31 (NF #IIa). Note the interesting parallels with *Orig. Wld’s* description of *heimarmene* at 117, 18–24.

²³ On Middle Platonist demonological treatises, see Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 46–47. On ‘demon lists,’ see Jonathan Z. Smith, “Toward Interpreting Demonic Power in Late Antiquity,” *ANRW* 2. 16. 1 (1968): 425–439; David Frankfurter, “An Architecture for Chaos: The Nature and Function of Demons,” in idem, *Evil Incarnate: Rumors of Demonic Conspiracy and Satanic Abuse in History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Richard Greenfield, *Traditions of Belief in Late Byzantine Demonologies* (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1988).

²⁴ When translating or discussing non-Christian sources in this book, I have endeavored to transliterate the Greek *δαίμων* as ‘*daimōn*’, to avoid the negative connotations Christianity has lent to the term ‘demon.’

could be associated with various causal powers, not necessarily only with *heimarmene*; Plutarch, for instance, discusses the influence of *daimōnes* he identifies as fates or ‘Moirai.’ Each of these *daimōnes*, he states, receives into their care a human being at birth, over which it will rule for the duration of the human’s earthly existence. Plutarch tells us that the consequence of demonic, stellar influence is that each person “received the mingled seeds of each of the passions [*pathemata*]”—a condition that explains why, in his view, human nature “possesses much unevenness” (*On Tranquility of Mind*, 474 BC).²⁵

3. *Heimarmene in the Hermetica*

Despite their diversity, the prevailing view of *heimarmene* in Hermetic texts is not pessimistic. In philosophically-oriented *Hermetica*, care is often taken to maintain a position of neutrality; at any rate, the Hermetic authors consider philosophy, knowledge, and contemplation of the cosmos as antidotes to any limited, contingent negative effects *heimarmene* might exercise. One might argue, however, that the ‘magico-religious’ *Hermetica* would be the place to find the clearest expressions of cosmic pessimism and the idea that humans are enslaved by fate. Indeed, we can and do find occasions of such language there. But taken as a whole, the *Hermetica* display—as we might expect from a diverse corpus—a range of perspectives on fate.

3.1. *Poimandres* (CH 1)

The short revelatory treatise entitled *Poimandres* is perhaps the best known of the Hermetic writings.²⁶ The date of the original Greek composition of the *Poimandres* is unknown. C.H. Dodd, who devotes an entire chapter of his *The Bible and the Greeks* to dating the CH 1, refuted the thesis of Walter Scott and Richard Reitzenstein that the text grows out of a Valentinian context: “The *Poimandres* is rather more likely to fall before than after this date

²⁵ Plutarch has in mind here Plato’s myth of the process of ensoulment from the *Tim.* 42. On this, see Frederick E. Brenk, *In Mist Apparelled: Religious Themes in Plutarch’s Moralia and Lives* (Leiden: Brill, 1977); Dillon, *Middle Platonists*, 216–221.

²⁶ The assumed Greek etymology of the title, ‘Shepherd of Men’ has been very convincingly dismantled by Peter Kingsley, who instead points to the Coptic “*P-eime-nte-res*”: “the knowledge/understanding/intelligence of [the supreme sun god] Re.” See Kingsley, “*Poimandres*,” 1–24. For a study that compares themes in *Poimandres* and CH 13—but which does not explicitly treat the subject of *heimarmene* in either tractate—see Jonathan Peste, *The Poimandres Group in Corpus Hermeticum* (Göteborg: University of Göteborg Press, 2002).

[i.e., 130–140 CE], and there is no evidence which would conflict with a date early in the second century or ever late in the first century.”²⁷ Whatever the date of this document, it is clear that the author was familiar not only with elements of Greek philosophy, but also with the book of Genesis, with which it maintains many points of contact. These striking affinities with Genesis have drawn into question its author’s relation to Judaism or Christianity.²⁸

In the cosmogony of the *Poimandres*, the demiurge, as “god of fire and spirit,” crafts seven governors (διοίκεται) who encompass the sensible world in concentric circles (*Poim.* 9). Their administration, Hermes explains, is called *heimarmene* (*Poim.* 9). Far from acting malevolently or oppressively, these governors each give a share of its own order (τὰς ἰδίας ταχέως) to the primal *anthropos*, motivated not by their desire to enslave but to care for the human (*Poim.* 13).²⁹ The model here is most likely Plato’s *Timaeus*, where seven ‘young gods’ attend to the creation of the primal androgyne. The identification of these seven governors with the seven planets is not made explicit at this point; however, it is clear that the seven governors work in conjunction with *heimarmene* and *pronoia* to set into motion the cycle of births (*Poim.* 19).

The seven governors are implicated in the administration of the body; to identify too closely with the body and its appetites is therefore to be enslaved, indirectly, to *heimarmene* (*Poim.* 19). A suggestive parallel to the *Poimandres*’ cosmogony is the so-called *Kosmopoïa* of Leiden, in which seven gods are born from the laughter of the primary god. Together these encompass the cosmos. In this text, however, the seven planetary gods together do not comprise or govern *heimarmene*; instead, the fifth god is named Moira, “and she was the first to receive the scepter of the world.” Moira does not have supreme power; the text states that Hermes “contests with her,” presumably for control of human souls.³⁰

The seven governors are, in a later passage of the *Poimandres*, loosely identified with the seven planets and explicitly associated with particular kinds of vice. This association is articulated in a passage that details the

²⁷ C.H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks* (London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1935), 64.

²⁸ See Pearson, “Jewish Elements.” The book also has affinities with the *Apocryphon of John*, in terms of perspective, cosmology, and soteriology. More in-depth comparison might yield interesting results.

²⁹ Reitzenstein, *Poimandres*, 68–81, 102, considered the subjectivity of humans to planetary fate in this treatise a Jewish, Christian or ‘Gnostic’ (as opposed to Egyptian) theme.

³⁰ For the text, see *PGM* 13, through to lines 343, the “Eighth Book of Moses.” The formula is repeated after lines 161, 471, and 697. The title *Kosmopoïa* is from Festugière, *Révélation*, 1. 296, 300–303; Copenhagen, *Hermetica*, 97.

soul's escape from the governors' influence: the moon contributes τὰ ἀύχη-
τικὴν ἐνεργεία καὶ μειωτική, "the power of increase and decrease"; Mercury,
τὰ μηχανή τῶν κακῶν δόλων, "evil scheming"; Venus, lust (ἡ ἐπιθυμητικός); the
sun produces τὰ ἀρχοντικὴν ὑπερηφανία, a "proud desire to rule"; Mars, impi-
ety and audacity (ἡ τόλμᾶ); Jupiter causes τὰς ἐφορμὰς τὰς κακάς τοῦ πλούτου,
a "desire for wealth" (*Poim.* 25).

This idea of *προσαρτέματα* or planetary influences in the form of vice
persisted through late antique paganism; in the fourth century, the Vergil
commentator Servius preserved a fragment of an earlier teaching on the
descent of the soul:

When souls descend, they draw with them the sloth of Saturn, the wrath of
Mars, the lust of Venus, the yearning for money of Mercury, and the desire to
rule of Jupiter.³¹ (Servius, *In Aen.* 6. 714 [Thilo, 2. 98. 21–24])

The soul could be divested of these influences, but only when it was released
from the mortal body and could shed these encrustations as it travelled
back to its divine source. Death, ultimately, would vanquish the power
and influence of *heimarmene*. Kurt Rudolph termed this process "the birth
process in reverse."³²

This association of the planets with specific kinds of vice is endemic
in a range of second-century literature, although never consistently. For
example, a similar idea can be found in a Hermetic fragment preserved by
Stobaeus entitled *On Fate*:

There are seven wandering stars which circle at the threshold of Olympus, and
among them ever revolves unending Aion ... to these same stars is assigned
the race of men; and we have in us Moon, Aeus, Ares, the Lady of Paphos [i.e.,
Venus] Kronos, Sun and Hermes. Wherefore it is our lot to draw in from the
aetherial life-breath tears, laughter, wrath, birth, speech, sleep, desire. Tears
are Kronos; birth is Zeus; speech is Hermes; anger is Ares; the Moon is sleep;
Aphrodite is desire; and the Sun is laughter, for by him ... laugh all mortal
minds, and the boundless universe.³³ (*SH* 1. 5. 14; *NF* #XXIX)

³¹ Servius reproduces a slightly different list at *In Aen.* 11. 51 (Thilo, 2. 482): the soul derives
from the sun, the body from the moon, blood from Mars, inventiveness from Mercury, a desire
for honors from Jupiter, passions from Venus, and tears from Saturn.

³² Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. Robert McL. Wilson
(San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985), 186.

³³ For similar lists, see Macrobius, *Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* 1. 11–12 (Willis,
47–50); Porphyry, *de Regressu Animae* 16. 10–13; 17. 3–14; 40. 11–16, 42, on the *mala mundi*
the soul must shed on its ascent; Plutarch, *de sera numinis vindicta* (in Plutarch, *Moralia*, ed.
de Lacy and Einarson, LCL, 1959): meanness (Mercury); cruelty (Mars); luxury (Venus), and
envy (Jupiter). According to Ioan Couliano, *Psychanodia I: A Survey of Evidence Concerning
the Ascension of the Soul and Its Relevance* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982), 46–47, the list preserved in

Humans are twofold in nature: mortal in body, but immortal in essence. Even though we are immortal, as long as we are bound in bodies we are subject to fate; as the author of *Poimandres* makes clear, although humans are above the cosmic framework, they became slaves within it (*Poim.* 15). This fundamental dualism—the direct heritage of Platonic thought—means that the body is fundamentally connected with sexual intercourse and the cycle of physical birth and death:

Providence, through *heimarmene* and the cosmic harmony, caused sexual intercourse and established nativities ... the one who loved the body that came from the error of desire remains erring in darkness, suffering sensibly the effects of death. (*Poim.* 19)

In the *Timaeus*, Plato asserts that God had created an essentially good cosmos, endowed with soul and reason, through his *pronoia*. Confronting the problem of evil, Plato weaves an elaborate cosmic myth in which souls are implanted in bodies ἐξ ἀνάγκη, “according to the dictates of *ananke*” (*Tim.* 42B). Bodies themselves are subject to the *pathemata*, but those who live virtuously may master the passions. Hermetic authors such as the anonymous author of the *Poimandres* turned to the *Timaeus* to demonstrate that *pronoia* operated as a power of God, for the benefit of humankind. The *Timaeus* also provided justification to understand some form of necessity or compulsion administered by gods—a more explicitly polytheistic cosmology than the older, Stoic system which was primarily integrative, pantheistic, and monistic. The *Timaeus*’s association of the ‘young gods’ with the planets meant that *heimarmene*, in these Middle Platonic systems, was primarily planetary determinism, rather than an abstract causal chain that permeated the entire universe.³⁴ The planets, therefore, were thought to have direct influence on the human beings through the mechanism of *heimarmene*—an idea originally based upon astrological principles, now integrated into Graeco-Roman philosophy.

Ultimately, *Poimandres* suggests a fundamentally divided cosmos in which the enlightened individual is only partially trapped by virtue of having been born into the human cycle of birth and death. Nevertheless, a passage out of death and the domain of fate is offered through separation from

the Hermetic treatise *Panaretos* includes social standing (Jupiter), nemesis (Saturn), erotic life (Venus), and courage or audaciousness (Mars).

³⁴ See also *Tim.* 41E, in which the Maker designates a star to each soul, and then proceeds to explain the nature of *heimarmene*, particularly how the “first birth should be one and the same for all” (ὅτι γένεσις πρώτη μὲν ἕσσιτο τεταγμένη μία πᾶσιν).

the body—if not of the soul at death, than through *askesis* or withdrawal from the pull of the flesh.

3.2. *Asclepius*

If Plato's *Timaeus* stood behind the teachings on fate in the *Poimandres*, other Hermetic texts turned to different Greek intellectual traditions. In a long digression on fate and the influence of the gods in the Latin *Asclepius* (perhaps a later interpolation) Hermes explains the cosmic *oikonomia* in terms drawn directly from Stoic physics:

What we call *heimarmene*, Asclepius, is the necessity in all events, which are always bound to one another by links that form a chain. *Heimarmene* is the maker of everything, then, or else the supreme god, or the ordering of all things in heaven and earth made steadfast by divine laws.³⁵ (*Asclep.* 39)

Here, *heimarmene* and *ananke* are inseparably bound together. *Heimarmene*, however, precedes *ananke* since it causes births; *ananke* follows by imposing action on beings through the power of compulsion. The author then adds a third element, order, to emphasize the inherent goodness of the divine plans: "*Haec ergo tria, eimarmene, necessitas, ordo, [vel maxime] dei nutu sunt effecta, qui mundam gubernat sua lege et ratione divina*: These three, then—*heimarmene*, *ananke* and *taxis/ordo*—are in the very fullest sense the products of God's assent, who governs the world by his own law and divine plan" (*Asclep.* 39). These authors resisted Middle Platonist concepts of a fragmented *pronoia*; they chose instead a more integrative cosmology based on ancient ideas of divine sympathies as well as a fundamental cosmic monism. The reference to the chain is also a learned and ancient etymology.³⁶

Like *Poimandres*, however, the *Asclepius* also associates the planets and *heimarmene*:

The so-called seven spheres have the *ousiarchai* or heads called Fortuna and *Heimarmene*, whereby all things change according to nature's law and a steadfast stability that stirs in everlasting variation. (*Asclep.* 19)

The *ousiarchai* in this text are a category of gods; *heimarmene* acts to diversify the cosmos, but in a manner identical with *pronoia*—that is to say,

³⁵ The word *heimarmene* at the beginning of the passage is an editorial reconstruction; see NF 2. 349. For the Stoic resonances in this passage, see Copenhaver, *Hermetica*, 257–258; NF 2. 19. 3–4.

³⁶ For example, *SVF* 2. 915; 2. 917, 2. 918, 2. 920, and note #98, ch. 4.

according to the divine principles of law and stability. The cosmos, here, is neither enslaving nor malevolent.

3.3. Corpus Hermeticum 12

One of the philosophical *Hermetica*, CH 12, bears the title: *Discourse of Hermes Trismegistus: On the mind shared in Common, to Tat*. This ‘common mind’ (*nous*) links those in possession of reason with the cosmos; those who do not possess mind are beset by irrational anger and irrational longing. Tat quickly asks his father about fate, bringing the standard Graeco-Roman critique of Stoic determinism:

If it is absolutely fated for some individual to commit adultery or sacrilege or to do some other evil, how is a person still to be punished [...] when he has acted under compulsion of fate? (CH 12. 5)

Hermes answers,

Everything is an act of fate [Εἰμαρμένης γὰρ πάντα τὰ ἔργα], my child, and outside of it nothing exists among bodily entities. Neither good nor evil comes to be accidentally. Even one who has done something fine is fated to be affected by it, and this is why he does it: in order to be affected by what affects him because he has done it. (CH 12. 5)

Here, fate is ‘inexorable’ in the sense that nothing exists apart from it; but it is a neutral force that suffuses the world. Hermes continues that “all things are the works of fate” (Εἰμαρμένης γὰρ πάντα τὰ ἔργα) (CH 12. 5) and “all people are subject to fate” (καὶ πάντες μὲν ἄνθρωποι πάσχουσι τὰ εἰμαρμένα) (CH 12. 6). Yet there exists a force greater than fate:

Those who possess reason, whom (as we have said) mind commands [τὸν νοῦν ἡγεμονεύειν], are not affected as the others are. Since they have been freed from vice, they are not affected as a consequence of being evil. (CH 12. 6–7)

And further:

Nous, the soul of God, truly prevails over all, over *heimarmene* and law and all else. And nothing is impossible for mind, neither setting a human soul above fate nor, if it happens that a soul is careless, setting it beneath fate. (CH 12. 9)

Here, the influence of older Greek Stoic views is evident. Whereas the dominant source for the *Poimandres*’ teaching on fate was Plato’s *Timaeus*, the author of this text discusses fate as an impersonal cosmic force in terms very similar to those we find in the fragmentary writings of the old Stoics. But new, here—and reflective of Middle Platonist and Roman Stoic ideas—is the idea that those who possess reason are connected to the divine

Nous, which allows them to transcend even fate.³⁷ The sage, then, remains essentially free, because he or she has rejected vice and exists purely at the level of mind. This teaching is not unusual; we find, for instance, a similar idea expressed by the fourth-century alchemist Zosimus of Panopolis:

Hermes and Zoroaster say that philosophers as a class are superior to Fate because they neither rejoice in her good fortune, for they are master over pleasures, nor are they thrown by the evils she sends, as they always lead an inner life. (Comm.Omega 5)

Zosimus discusses the spiritual possibilities of the *anthropos pneumatikos* who has “come to know himself”: “when he has come to know God, he must hold fast to the ineffable Triad, and leave Fate to work what she will upon the clay that belongs to her, that is, the body” (Comm.Omega 7).

4. Dividing Fate

The first issue to challenge the Middle Platonists was the precise relationship between fate and providence. Apuleius and Pseudo-Plutarch had ‘solved’ the problem of evil by relegating *heimarmene* to a lower aspect of the divine principle of *pronoia*. Yet the farther one moved from the divine source in the chain of cosmic emanations, the more room that opened up for the capricious or even deleterious effects of planetary gods and *daimōnes* upon humans. To complicate the issue further, Platonist philosophers needed to define and reconcile *heimarmene* and *pronoia* with the related causal principles of chance (τύχη), and necessity (ἀνάγκη).

We find these debates clearly reflected in Hermetic treatises, which articulate a wide range of conflicting views.³⁸ Not all Hermetic authors adopted the solution to the problem of fate and providence we find in Middle Platonist treatises. Some preferred to adhere to old Stoic articulations of fate; thus one Stobaeian excerpt quotes Chrysippus defining *heimarmene* as the λόγος τῶν ἐν τῷ κόσμῳ προνοία διοικουμένων (“the principle of the world economy of *pronoia*”) (SVF 2. 913); another equates *ananke* and *pronoia*: Ἀνάγκη ἐστὶν κρίσις βεβαία καὶ ἀμετάτρητος δύναμις προνοίας (“*Ananke* is an unalterable decision and an unsurpassable power of *pronoia*”) (SH 1. 4. 7b; NF #XIII).

³⁷ For *gnosis* as an antidote to fate, see NF 1. 186, n. 25; 1. 193–195.

³⁸ For some comments on the interrelationship between providence, necessity, fate, order and nature in the *Hermetica*, see NF, lxxix–lxxxiii, where the issue is described as “la doctrine assez confusé et peu cohérente des écrits hermétiques.” Nock also devotes a lengthy appendix to the problem of fate in Hermetic texts, particularly the *Asclepius*, in NF 1. 193–195.

The question that Hermetic authors posed most frequently was the nature of the relationship between *ananke*, *pronoia*, and *heimarmene*. Some Hermetic authors adopted a Platonist, rather than Stoic, understanding of causal principles. They presented various hierarchies of these principles, often clearly articulated, as in this Hermetic fragment: *πρόνοια θεία τάξις, ἀνάγκη προνοίᾳ ὑπηρέτις* (“*pronoia* is divine ordering; *ananke* is subservient to *pronoia*”) (*SH* 1. 41. 1b; *NF* #XI, 46). One treatise presents a careful analysis of the interrelationship between these three causal principles which reflects three separate levels of causation, each with its own sphere of influence:

Now the intelligible substance, if it has drawn near to God, has power over itself, and in saving itself, it also saves the other part. As long as it is by itself, it is not subject to *ananke*, and its choice is in accordance with *pronoia*. But if it falls away from God, it chooses the corporeal nature, and in that way it becomes part of this world ... thus reason depends on *pronoia*, that which is irrational depends on *ananke*, and the attributes of the body depend on *heimarmene*.
(*SH* 1. 4. 8; *NF* #VIII)

The author questioned what part of each human being was controlled by which aspect of cosmic causality, and whether any part of the human organism remained free from these various forms of causality. The ‘intelligible substance,’ as the highest divine principle within each person, acted “in accordance with *pronoia*.” This substance could remain free of the influence of *ananke*, which governs the lower cosmos and irrational impulses, or of *heimarmene*, which governed solely “the attributes of the body.”

Not all Hermetic philosophers agreed that *ananke* ruled the passions and *heimarmene* ruled the body. For some, this distinction was arbitrary. One Hermetic author, while still maintaining the distinction between *pronoia* and *heimarmene*, maintained that there was little effective distinction between *heimarmene* and *ananke*:

And that which dominates the whole cosmos is *pronoia*; and that which maintains and envelops it is *ananke*; *heimarmene* pushes all things in a cyclic movement, working in accordance with *ananke* (for it is the nature of *heimarmene* to constrain). It is *heimarmene* that causes generation and corruption.
(*SH* 1. 5. 16 [*NF* #XIV])

In either case, the power of *heimarmene* and *ananke* seems for this author to be associated with the cyclic movements of the stars and planets, which acts in turn according to the principle of compulsion. We find in other Hermetic texts similar imprecise distinctions between *ananke* and *heimarmene*:

Now *pronoia* is the *autotelos logos* of the supercelestial God; that *autotelos logos* has under it two subordinate powers, namely, *ananke* and *heimarmene* ... [and] *heimarmene* is subservient to *pronoia* and *ananke*.³⁹

(*SH* 1. 5. 20 [NF #XII])

Although this author drew the subordination of *heimarmene* to *pronoia* from Middle Platonism, his claim with which he begins his discussion, οὐκ ἔστι τόπος ἔρημος προνοίας (“there is no place destitute of *pronoia*”) derived from older, Stoic sources (*SH* 1. 5. 20 [NF #XII]). Whatever the relationship Hermeticists perceived between different levels of cosmic causality, however, most agreed that *pronoia* was a divine principle that guided the highest part of humans toward the Good.⁴⁰ *Heimarmene* and *ananke* were inferior causal principles of contingent, limited scope.

5. *Astral and Planetary Heimarmene in the Hermetica*

In the late second century, Clement of Alexandria vividly described a procession he witnessed in Alexandria in honor of the god Osiris:

Behind the singer comes the hour-priest [ὥροσκόπος], who is holding his insignia, the hour-measure [ὥρολόγιον] and the astronomical palm leaf [φοῖνιξ ἀστρολογίας] in his hand. He must always have in his mouth the astrological books of Hermes, being four in number, of which the first is about the arrangement of the fixed stars, the second about the movements of the sun and the moon and the give planets, the third about the encounters and illuminations of the sun and the moon, and the last about the rising of the stars.

(*Strom.* 6. 4. 35–36)

Jacco Dielemann notes that although there is the temptation to interpret the hour-priest as one “whose duty was to cast horoscopes, predicting a person’s fate,” in reality the title *horoscopos* is a translation of an early Egyptian title already known from the Middle Kingdom (2040–1640 BCE). The duty of these priests was twofold: to observe the proper division of the day into hours for ritual purposes, and to determine which hours of the day were auspicious or inauspicious, a science Dielemann properly calls hemerology,

³⁹ See also NF #IV, 7, NF #VII, 1 and NF #XI, 5 in which *pronoia* and *ananke* seem to be related or perhaps identical, though the precise relationship is impossible to discern; note the comments in NF, lxxx1.

⁴⁰ Beyond the examples I have provided above, see also NF #VIII, 2–4, in which the causal order is *pronoia*, *ananke*, *heimarmene*. In NF #XIV *pronoia* is distinguished from *heimarmene* and *ananke*, which are equated. See also CH 16. 2 in which the author defines *ananke* as merely another name for *heimarmene*.

not astrology. Furthermore, hemerology was not based upon astrological principles, but on mythology. He writes,

The Egyptian hour-priests were only interested in the stars as far as they could help them with the general measurement of time for calendrical and ritual purposes. As for predicting the future, the Egyptians preferred recourse to mythological precedents instead of the regular movements of the stars.⁴¹

In other words, the astrology of the *Hermetica* did not come from indigenous Egyptian religion, although by the Roman period, Egypt came to be viewed as one of the two cradles of astrology (the second being Babylon). In reality, the introduction of natal or fatalistic astrology to the *Hermetica* was a Roman Egyptian innovation. Nor did astrology unseat traditional Egyptian uses of the stars for hour-marking. Signs of the zodiac were introduced in the Ptolemaic period to appear, spectacularly, in late-period Egyptian temples such as the temple of Dendera, but there is little indication that Hellenistic astrology replaced Egyptian notions of the action of the stars. Personal horoscopes began to appear in Roman period, but are not especially well attested. Thus an overabiding concern for astral fatalism seems not to characterize Egyptian, Graeco-Egyptian, or Roman-Egyptian theology. When astrology does ‘catch on’ in Egypt—at least, in the form of the astrological *Hermetica*—it seems to be another element of the *Hermetica*’s distinctive hybridity. And as the example of the *Stromateis* illustrates, it is also easy to mistake the presence of the astrological *Hermetica* and the *horoscopos*-priest as there for prognostication rather than for marking auspicious hours for ritual purposes.

By the second century of the Common Era, many philosophers considered *heimarmene* indistinguishable from the power of the celestial bodies. We do not know when and how this association was first made. Yet philosophers questioned whether the primary administrators of *heimarmene* were the planets or the stars—an issue concerning which we find no consensus in the Hermetic literature.

⁴¹ Dielemann contends that astrology in the pharaonic period was only “rudimentary.” (Jacco Dielemann, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual 100–300 CE* [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 140); compare Otto Neugebauer, “The History of Ancient Astronomy,” in O. Neugebauer, *Astronomy and History: Selected Essays* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1983), 33–98, 40, 57–58, and Briant Bohleke, “In Terms of Fate: A Survey of the Indigenous Egyptian Contribution to Ancient Astrology in Light of Papyrus CtYBR Inv. 132(B),” *Studien zur altägyptische Kultur* 23 (1996): 11–46. For later texts, see Otto Neugebauer and Richard A. Parker, *Egyptian Astronomical Texts III* (London: Lund Humphries, 1969).

Although we find in the *Asclepius* and *Poimandres* the association of *heimarmene* with the planets, some Hermetic authors rejected planetary *heimarmene* in favor of various theories of astral determinism. For one author, Nature (*physis*) engendered a sympathetic relationship between the human body and the stars, in accord with *heimarmene*, which derives from the stars (*SH* 1. 49, 3; *NF* #XX). We find a similar idea reflected in another fragment: “*Heimarmene* is the cause of the disposition of the stars. It is the inevitable law according to which all things have been ordered” (εἰμαρμένη δὲ αἰτία ἐστὶ τῆς τῶν ἄστρων διαθέσεως. Οὗτος νόμος ἄφυκτος, καθ’ ὃν πάντα τέτακται) (*SH* 1. 5. 16; *NF* #XIV). Among those who considered *heimarmene* specifically astral fatalism, most agreed that the stars were subordinate to *heimarmene*. One fragment illustrates this relationship:

The stars serve [ὑπηρετοῦσιν] *heimarmene*. For no one can escape *heimarmene* or protect himself against its harshness. For the stars are the foot-soldiers [ὄπλον] of *heimarmene*; it is in accordance with *heimarmene* that they bring all things to pass for the world of nature and for humans.⁴²

(*SH* 1. 82, 5; *NF* #XII)

In general, those Hermetic treatises that describe *heimarmene* as the function of the stars rather than of the planets tend to devalue or even demonize fate. The author of *Corpus Hermeticum* 13 advocates steeling oneself ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ κόσμου ἀπάτης, (“against the deceit of the cosmos”). The twelve signs of the zodiac, he claimed, acted directly upon the σκῆνος or ‘tent’ of the body through the imposition of vice (*CH* 13. 7, 12). In *Corpus Hermeticum* 13, the signs of the zodiac fill the body with “the irrational torments of matter,” which Hermes then identifies as twelve specific vices (*CH* 13. 7). The *CH* 13, however, does not explicitly term zodiacal influence *heimarmene*. The association is made more boldly in the *Chaldean Oracles*. In the Chaldean system, *heimarmene* was identical with φύσις.⁴³ Since *daimōnes* were thought in this system to control and define Nature, to escape *heimarmene*, in the words of Ruth Majercik, was “to escape the control of sublunar demons which incite the passions ... and not ... to escape the domination of astral and/or planetary powers above the moon.”⁴⁴ Both the fragments of the *Chaldean*

⁴² On this fragment, see J. Kroll, *Die Lehren des Hermes Trismegistos* (Münster: Aschen-dorff, 1914), 212 ff.

⁴³ Proclus, *On the Platonic Theology*, 317 (fr. 102, Majercik): “do not gaze at Nature; her name is Destiny.” See also Michael Psellus, *PG* 122, 1145 (fr. 103 Majercik): “Do not aid in increasing fate. The wisest of the Greeks designate fate as nature.”

⁴⁴ Ruth Majercik, ed., *Chaldean Oracles: Text, Translations, Commentary* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 18.

Oracles and the *CH* 13, then, reflect the Stoic idea that the process of self-divination must be initiated through mastery of the *pathemata*. Hermes in *CH* 13 advises Tat to “leave the sense of the body idle, and the birth of divinity will begin. Cleanse yourself of the irrational torments of matter” (κατάργησον τοῦ σώματος τὰς αἰσθήσεις, καὶ ἔσται ἡ γένεσις τῆς θεότητος· κάθαραι σεαυτὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἀλόγων τῆς ὕλης τιμωριῶν) (*CH* 13. 7). What is new here is the association of the *pathemata* with *daimōnes*, and the tendency to associate these *daimōnes* either with the stars or with the influence of fate.

According to *Corpus Hermeticum* 16 (*The Definitions of Asclepius to King Ammon*), each star is assigned its own *daimōn*. “Thus deployed,” Hermes observes, διατεταγμένοι οὖν ὑπηρετοῦσιν ἐκάστῳ τῶν ἀστέρων, ἀγαθοὶ καὶ κακοὶ ὄντες τὰς φύσεις, τουτέστι τὰς ἐνεργείας: “[the *daimōnes*] follow the orders of a particular star, and they are good and evil according to their natures, that is to say, their energies” (*CH* 16. 13). Each star-*daimōn* takes charge of an individual:

When each of us comes into being and receives a soul, we are taken possession of [παραλαμβάνουσι] by demons who are on duty at the exact moment of birth, arrayed under each of the stars. From moment to moment they change places, not staying in position but moving by rotation. These demons, then, having entered the body into the two parts of the soul, torment it, each according to its own *energeia*.⁴⁵ (CH 16. 15)

This possession is visceral, its implications terrifying:

[T]hey reshape our souls to their own ends, and they rouse them, lying in ambush in our muscle and marrow, in veins and arteries, in the brain itself, reaching to the very guts. (CH 16. 14)

The author makes it clear that the action of these sidereal *daimōnes* is identical with *heimarmene*: “So, with our bodies as their instruments, the *daimōnes* govern this earthly government. Hermes has called this government *heimarmene*” (*CH* 16. 16).⁴⁶

The author of the *Corpus Hermeticum* 16 also describes the action of *heimarmene* as the result of legions of *daimōnes* stationed around the sun, who oversee human activity (*CH* 16. 10). Having been granted authority

⁴⁵ According to Festugière, the author of the *CH* 16 alludes to the thirty-six decan figures (NF 2. 240 n. 35, 3. xl–lxi). See also *SH* 1. 21. 8 (NF # VI) on the *energeia* of thirty-six (decan) gods. Festugière also detects in the use of the verb ἐταγείν (‘to array, arrange, be ordered’) a reference to the astrological theory of aspects, in which geometrical configurations of the stars signify the linking of particular celestial powers; see Copenhagen, *Hermetica*, 206.

⁴⁶ On the connection between fate and the *daimōnes*, see Jonas, *Gnosis* 1. 193–199; NF 2. 241, n. 46; Mahé, *Hermès*, 1. 39.

(ἐξουσία) over all things, these *daimōnes* precipitate natural disasters such as hurricanes and thunderstorms, as well as famines and wars, which they send as punishment for human irreverence. The author of *Corpus Hermeticum* 16 shared with Apuleius and Pseudo-Plutarch the understanding that *daimōnes* exercised a form of causality as ‘overseers’ of human activity. But Apuleius and Pseudo-Plutarch had never themselves associated the *daimōnes* with star-gods or stellar bodies.

6. Conclusions

In this chapter, I highlighted a number of issues under debate in the Hermetic corpus in its discussions of *heimarmene*. During the period in which the Hermetic writings came to be composed, the Middle Platonists that provided the chief intellectual inspiration for the Hermetists had moved away from a more integrative Stoic conception of *heimarmene* as a universal principle that worked through all things; it was theoretically possible, they argued, to stand outside its influence. Hermetists, like the Middle Platonists, also engaged in active debate to define and delineate *heimarmene* from other cosmic causal principles such as necessity and providence; this was partly an attempt to save the principle of divine providence from the reality of misfortune and evil, which could be attributed to the lesser principle of fate.

Certain Hermetic texts identified *heimarmene* as the influence of specific celestial bodies or beings, though a debate remained concerning whether *heimarmene* was planetary, astral, or zodiacal. This shift from *heimarmene* as a general cosmic force to specifically an astral or planetary force scholars of the *Hermetica* have historically understood as having emerged from Egyptian religion now grafted, for better or worse, onto Greek Stoicism. In fact, astrology was not natively Egyptian as a science, and the new fascination with it was more a product of the age than with the preservation of authentic Egyptian astrological traditions.

The new fascination with demonology in Middle Platonism further complicated notions of *heimarmene* as the *energeia* of *daimōnes*—usually envisioned as the passions or *pathemata* that afflict the human psyche. These *daimōnes* also became associated with stars in Graeco-Egyptian culture of the second century. Thus certain *Hermetica* reflect a new, albeit widespread, idea that the star-demons imposed vice through the soul’s descent into the body before birth, or that at birth, an individual’s horoscope kept him or her bound to a discrete set of planetary and zodiacal vices. This process was

now called *heimarmene* by some Hermetic writers. The astrological power of *heimarmene* could be transcended naturally at death, as the soul returned through the cosmic spheres to its source, or else through self-cultivation, where a Hermetist would recognize his or her identity with the higher power of *Nous*.

In the *Hermetica*, we see a process by which *heimarmene* came to be devalued in the context of a dualistic philosophy in which spirit was distinct from matter. *Heimarmene* was often thought only to act upon matter (usually the body) or upon a lower component of the soul. Though *heimarmene* could have malevolent or deleterious effects on the body through the imposition of vice or *pathemata*, the higher soul or the rational *nous* remained impervious to its influence.

Finally, we may note that neither in the philosophical discussions of the Middle Platonists nor in the more religiously-oriented philosophical systems represented by the *Hermetica* and the *Chaldean Oracles* do we find a single author who considered himself to be enslaved by *heimarmene's* influence.

CHAPTER SIX

WAYS OUT I: INTERVENTIONS OF THE SAVIOR GOD

Few passages in ‘Gnostic’ literature are as evocative as the long ending or Pronoia Hymn from the *Apocryphon of John’s* long recension (NHC II, 30, 12–31, 25).¹ In this remarkable passage, Pronoia speaks in the first person in richly poetic terms, describing her three successive descents into the lower cosmos in order to awaken and redeem her own:

I am the Providence of the pure light; I am the thinking of the virginal Spirit, who raises you up to the honored place. Arise and remember that it is you who hearkened, and follow your root, which is I, the merciful One, and guard yourself against the angels of poverty and the demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you, and before of the deep sleep and the enclosure of the inside of Hades.
(*ApJn* II 31, 12–23 [trans. Wisse/Waldstein, 173])

If ever I could produce an antidote for the misconception that Gnostic cosmology was pessimistic or nihilistic, it would be this passage, so beautifully written and conceptualized. The [unnamed] recipient of Pronoia’s revelation is moved to tears by a profound experience of awakening and the expectation of immanent release from bondage:

Bitter tears he wiped from himself and he said, “Who is it that calls my name, and from where has this hope come to me, while I am in the chains of the prison?”
(*ApJn* II 31, 7–10 [trans. Waldstein/Wisse, 173])

In effect, in the Pronoia Hymn, salvation from contingent cosmic bondage is a two-step process: first, Pronoia descends and physically alters the cosmos so as to make enslavement physically impossible; second, she seals the recipient of salvation “in the light of the water with five seals” (ἐν ποταμῷ ἑκπυροῦ ἐν τῷ ἵερῷ νεκροφάρμακῳ) (*ApJn* II 31, 20).

¹ Scholars debate on whether this passage should be termed a ‘hymn’ or a ‘monologue.’ George MacRae eloquently describes the passage as “a Gnostic liturgical fragment probably recited at a ceremony of initiation much in the manner of a Christian baptismal homily or hymn” in his article, “Sleep and Awakening in Gnostic Texts,” in Ugo Bianchi, ed., *Le Origini dello Gnosticismo: Colloquio di Messina, 13–18 Aprile 1966* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970); Michael Waldstein, “The Providence Monologue in the *Apocryphon of John* and the Johannine Prologue,” *JCS* 3/4 (1995): 369, rejects the term ‘hymn’ since he finds no solid evidence for its use as such.

The *ApJn* taken as a whole makes it clear that those who used this text conceptualized a variety of different ways in which someone might be freed from cosmic enslavement. The *ApJn* as a whole—by which I mean, the treatise in all four of the recensions which we now possess—is complex, suggesting various paths to salvation. These include not simply *gnosis* or recognition of one's spiritual roots, but also abstinence from sexual activity; the cultivation of an attitude of emotional detachment; knowledge of the names and workings of demons (the so-called *melothesia* from the lost *Book of Zoroaster* at II 15, 29–19, 10); sacramental intervention; and last but not least, something akin to 'grace' given freely by the savior.² All these 'ways of salvation' are assembled together into a remarkable *bricolage* where it would be unjust to privilege one means of cosmic release from another. They all work together, or at least, one way does not seem to be more important than another. Likely the fluidity of these ways assured *ApJn*'s widespread popularity in Christian antiquity; it literally offered something for everyone.

The case of the Pronoia Hymn added to one version of the *ApJn* presents us with interesting interpretive challenges; we can assume that it circulated independently in some form, but also that many communities using the *ApJn* otherwise (in short recension) neither possessed it nor knew of it.³ At the same time, if we consider it in isolation, the Pronoia Hymn also raises fascinating questions about the precise path to freedom from cosmic enslavement. Does it happen because the cosmos is altered at Pronoia's descent? Does it happen because of Pronoia's call to awaken? When does it happen: at the call, or at the moment when Pronoia seals the Christian with the Five Seals? And what of that call: does it come from without, from Pronoia as redeemer coming into this cosmos, or does the voice come from within us, bubbling up from inside each individual at the moment of *gnosis*?

Just as different authors presented different schemes of *heimarmene* and its administration, different authors drew varied pictures for ways in which *heimarmene* could be abrogated, annulled, set right, invalidated, or transcended—sometimes more than one way in a single document, as here

² The finest recent study of the text—albeit written for a general audience—is Karen L. King, *The Secret Revelation of John* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006). King adopts a pragmatic, often political reading of the text rather than emphasizing cosmology alone.

³ On the redaction history, see Bernard Barc and Louis Painchaud, "La réécriture de l'Apocryphon de Jean à la lumière de l'hymne final de la version longue," *Le Muséon* 112 (1999): 317–333; Waldstein, "The Providence Monologue"; Turner, "Ritual in Gnosticism," *SBLSP* 33 (1994): 91; Michel Tardieu, *Écrits gnostiques: Codex de Berlin* (Paris: du Cerf, 1984), 43, 340.

in the *ApJn*. In this chapter, then, I want to focus on the first of the ‘ways out’ that we find in the *ApJn*’s long recension: the alteration of the physical cosmos, which I have termed the ‘inverse apocalypse’ model. The motif appears frequently enough in early Christian literature to merit separate and full investigation. In the ‘inverse apocalypse,’ rather than an ordered cosmos literally spinning out of control into oblivion, a redeemer appears to ‘set right’ a disordered cosmos into benevolent order. The second way out indicated at the culmination of the Pronoia Hymn—through sacramental intervention—will be the focus of the next chapter.

1. *Setting Right the Cosmos as Chaos*

In the long recension of *ApJn*, Pronoia twice descends εἰς τὴν τε ἕνδοξον καὶ εἰς τὴν ἐξωθεν εἰρημότητα, “into the midst of darkness and the inside of Amente” to cause Chaos to shake (*ApJn* II 30, 25–26). She descends from the higher aeonic realms to the chaotic sphere of fate, where she destroys the powers that control destiny through the violence of her epiphanic descent. It is easy to map out the incipient model of the cosmos here; there exists an upper cosmic realm of light, the Pleroma (*ApJn* II 30, 16), then a lower cosmic realm described variously as a “midst of darkness,” (τὴν τε ἕνδοξον) a “prison” (ποῦρυτεκο), “the foundations of chaos” (ἕνδοξον ἐξωθεν), and “the inside of Hades” (εἰς τὴν ἐξωθεν εἰρημότητα) (*ApJn* II 30, 25). This realm is inhabited by unnamed beings who are filled with wickedness (κακία) and ignorance. We note that this is a standard ‘Gnostic’ cosmology, and that it probably reflects earlier Jewish models of the cosmos rather than any elaborate Greek or Graeco-Roman model.

As is well recognized, Pronoia descends three separate times into the lower cosmos. My sense from the text is that the first two descents are into the same lower realm; it is not the case, for example, that the second descent penetrates a different and lower level than the first. The language used to describe the realm is the same, in either case. Pronoia’s third descent at *ApJn* II 30.32, however, is more difficult to interpret.⁴ What I find interesting

⁴ The scholar of Gnosticism John Turner detects in a number of texts from Nag Hammadi manifold forms of what he terms a “tripartite structure of spiritual *paideia*” (John D. Turner, “The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom,” *NovTest* 22/4 [1980]: 325). In all four recensions of the *ApJn*, he notes, we find a threefold mission toward spiritual awakening articulated in the form of three separate ‘descents’ of divine, hypostasized entities. In the first descent, the Autogenes Christ causes the Chief Archon to blow his *pneuma* into the inert golem, Adam (*ApJn* BG 51–52, 1). This

here is that the cosmos is identical with the human body: $\alpha\epsilon\iota\upsilon\omega\alpha\kappa' \epsilon\zeta\omicron\gamma\iota\eta$ $\epsilon\tau\iota\mu\eta\tau\epsilon \bar{\eta}\rho\omicron\upsilon\gamma\omega\tau\epsilon\kappa\omicron \epsilon\tau\epsilon \pi\acute{\alpha}\iota \pi\epsilon \pi\epsilon\omega\tau\epsilon\kappa\omicron \mu\pi\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$: “I entered *into the midst of their prison, which is the prison of the body*” (italics mine). The act of entering into the lower cosmos is, at once, an incarnation into the flesh. The prison is the Middle, the inside of Hades, but it is simultaneously the human body, which is conceptualized as a place of darkness and a dwelling place of demons. This cosmology appears to be consistent with the long recension’s demon list at II, 15, 29 ff., in which the demons thoroughly ‘cosmicize’ Adam.

As many commentators have noticed, the theme of Pronoia’s descent through the lower cosmos in the Pronoia Hymn has parallels with the Johannine Prologue, where the Logos descends into the cosmos and is met with darkness and opposition: “he was in the cosmos and the cosmos came into being through him; but the cosmos did not recognize him. He came into his own [realm] and his own [people?] did not recognize him” (Jn 1:10–11).⁵ However, the Johannine Prologue lacks an overt description or

pneuma, spiritually awakening Adam, constitutes the *fluidum* that links him to the divine. In the second descent, the Epinoia of the Light appears in the form of Zoe, the spiritual Eve or in the form of the tree of *gnosis* (*ApJn* BG 52, 18–53, 20; 59, 6–60, 20). Finally, the Christ of the frame story reveals the nature of the salvific gnosis to John (*ApJn* BG 75, 11–15). The brilliant redactional work of Bernard Barc and Louis Painchaud demonstrates how an earlier version of the *ApJn* was redacted so as to bring it in line with the additional ending of the Pronoia Hymn by a so-called “Pronoia Redactor,” resulting in subtle changes to the motif of Pronoia’s descent in the text as a whole. See Barc and Painchaud, “La réécriture.”

⁵ On Johannine cosmic anthropology, see Jeffrey Trumbower, *Born from Above: The Anthropology of the Gospel of John* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1992). For comments on the relationship between the Johannine Prologue and the Pronoia Hymn, see Peter Hofrichter, *Im Anfang war der “Johannesprolog”: Das urchristliche Logosbekenntnis, die Basis neutestamentlicher und gnostischer Theologie* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 1986), 215–221. Most article commentaries focus specifically not on the Pronoia Hymn but on the literary relationship between the related Protennoia descent of the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Johannine Prologue. See, for instance, G. Robinson, “The *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Prologue of the Fourth Gospel,” in James E. Goehring, Charles W. Hedrick, Jack T. Sanders, and Hans Dieter Betz, eds., *Gnosticism and the Early Christian World: In Honor of James Robinson* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1990), esp. 45. Craig A. Evans, “On the Prologue of John and the *Trimorphic Protennoia*,” *NTS* 27 (1981): 395–401; James M. Robinson, “Sethians and Johannine Thought: The *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Prologue of the Gospel of John,” in Bentley Layton, ed., *The Rediscovery of Gnosticism: Proceedings of the Conference at Yale, March 1978*, vol. 2: *Sethian Gnosticism*, ed. Bentley Layton (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1981), 643–661; Yvonne Janssens, “Une source gnostique du prologue?” in Marinus de Jonge, ed., *L’Évangile de Jean: Sources, Rédaction, Théologie* (Gembloux: J. Duculot, 1977), 355–358; Yvonne Janssens, “The *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Fourth Gospel,” in Alastair Logan and Alexander J. Wedderburn, eds., *The New Testament and Gnosis: Essays in Honor of Robert McL. Wilson* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), 229–245, esp. 235; Alastair Logan, “John and the Gnostics: The Significance of the *Apocryphon of John* for the Debate about the Origins of the Johannine Literature,” *JSN* 43 (1991): 41–69, esp. 58–59.

personification of the celestial orders. It also carefully distinguishes the descent of the Logos into the darkness as the act of incarnation into a *specific* human receptacle.⁶ In this way, the human body is 'decosmized' in the Johannine Prologue; in the *ApJn*, however, the connection between cosmos and body is intimate and precise. I suspect this is because the incarnational theology of the Gospel of John is predicated upon exclusivity: the Logos descends not into *all* flesh, but into one specific human form that is Jesus Christ. By contrast, Pronoia in the Pronoia Hymn descends into an unnamed body (the recipient is merely identified as 'him') that thus becomes transformed and awakened—and which by its anonymity becomes the paradigm of the individual Gnostic. Put differently, the reader or listener to this Hymn is meant to identify with the recipient of salvation, not to wonder at the Logos's unique incarnation into flesh and thus be transformed only by 'believing into' Jesus and God's act of sending his only-begotten Son into a particular body located in space and time.

The question remains: what is the relation between the 'inverse apocalypse' motif and Pronoia's descent into human flesh? Just as her descent into the cosmos disrupts and 'sets right' the demonic order of the macrocosm, her descent into the human body of the redeemed disrupts then 'sets right' the demonically-ordered microcosm of the body. This purge of the demonic results in the redeemed awakening from their 'prison,' which manifests in the body as ignorance or spiritual sleep. Thus Pronoia's actions are thoroughly permeative; her salvific powers literally soak through all cosmic layers and beings to profoundly alter or 'tune' it back into harmony.

We find this 'setting right' of the disordered cosmos in other texts contemporary with the *ApJn*. The theme appears to cross the boundaries of modern categories; it is shared between texts as diverse as the Sethian *Trimorphic Protennoia*, the Valentinian *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, and the somewhat vexingly eclectic untitled tractate we call *On the Origin of the World*. In a particularly developed form, we also find the 'inverse apocalypse' in the *Pistis Sophia*. All we can securely discern from its frequent appearance is that different authors and communities of the second century freely adopted (and adapted) the motif. At the time, however, it would have been a significantly new and perhaps even subversive idea, given the emphasis in Greek philosophy since the time of Plato on the order and beauty of the cosmos. Let us

⁶ See my comments in Nicola Denzey, "Genesis Traditions in Conflict?: The Use of Some Exegetical Traditions in the *Trimorphic Protennoia* and the Johannine Prologue," *VC* 55/1 (2001): 20–44.

turn, then, to the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *On the Origin of the World*, and the *Pistis Sophia* for their rendering of the ‘inverse apocalypse’ motif.

2. Trimorphic Protennoia

The *Trimorphic Protennoia* (*Tri.Prot.*) is the sole extant treatise of the highly damaged NHC Codex XIII, only eight leaves of which survive. It is undated, unascribed, and exists only in a single version. Its author, apparently familiar with either the *ApJn* or an older tradition behind the *ApJn*, developed the theme of Protennoia’s three successive descents into the cosmos.⁷ The knowledge that the fabric of the cosmos had been profoundly altered was, for this author, no less than a “mystery [μυστήριον], ineffable and not to be divulged by any mouth” (*Tri.Prot.* 41, 3–6). Protennoia discloses this mystery of cosmic disruption/rectification to her community in her first of three long discursive sections: they were no longer bound to the fetters of demonic constraint. “Every bond I loosed from you,” she reveals, “and the chains of the demons of the underworld I broke” (ἸΝΣΑΥΖ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΔΕΙΒΩΛ· ἸΜΜΟΥ ΕΒΟΛ ἸΗΤῆ ἈΥΩ ἸΜΠΡΕ ἸἸΔΑΙΜΩΝ ἸΕΜἸΤΕ ΔΕΙΣΟΛΠΟΥ) (*Tri.Prot.* 41, 4–6).

The second of three discourses in the *Tri.Prot.* bears the ancient title *On Fate*. It describes more fully this process of cosmic disruption and rectification; on Pronoia’s ascent as Voice, “all together the elements [στοιχεῖα] trembled, and the foundations of the underworld and the ceilings of chaos shook” (ΔΥΝΑἸΝ ΤΗΡΟΥ ΖΙΟΥΣΟΠ’ ἸΓΙ Ἰ[Σ]ΤΟΙΧΙΟΝ ΑΥΩ ἸΣἸΤΕ ἸΕΜἸΝΤΕ ἸἸΜΕΛΩΤ ἸΠΧΑΟΣ) (*Tri.Prot.* 43, 8–11). The powers that govern fate, thrown into panic and confusion, consulted one another:

And the lots [χλήροι] of *heimarmene* and those who apportion the planetary domiciles [οἶχοι] became greatly disturbed at a loud heavenly voice. And the thrones of the powers were disturbed since they were overturned, and their King was afraid. And those who run courses after *heimarmene* [i.e., the planets] abandoned their number of circular motions upon the path [i.e., the ecliptic], and they said to the Powers, “What is this disturbance and this

⁷ For the literary relationship between *Tri.Prot.* and *ApJn*, see the summary in John Turner, “The Gnostic Threefold Path to Enlightenment: The Ascent of Mind and the Descent of Wisdom,” *NovTest* 22/4 (1980): 326–327, especially n. 3. The two scholars who have done considerable work on the problem, Roelof van den Broek and Michael Waldstein, concur that the Hymn presents an earlier re-formulation of Wisdom traditions that were then adapted and ‘masculinized’ to fit the motif of a male Redeemer as the Logos. See R. van den Broek, “Von der jüdischen Weisheit zum gnostischen Erlöser: zum Schlußhymnus des Apokryphons des Johannes,” in idem, *Studies in Gnosticism and Alexandrian Christianity*, NHMS 39 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 86–116; Michael Waldstein, “The Providence Monologue.”

shaking that has come upon us through a hidden Voice [belonging] to the exalted Speech? And our entire habitation has been shaken, and the entire circuit of our path of ascent has met with destruction, and the path upon which we go, which takes us up to the Archigenitor of our birth, has ceased to be established for us.”
(Tri.Prot. 43, 13–26)

For the author of the *Tri.Prot.*, the entire astrological mechanism of *heimarmene*—its astrological ‘lots’ and ‘domiciles’ and the procession of the constellations along the ecliptic—had been shaken out of its foundations by the beneficent power of Protennoia. This is no mere ‘apocalypse’ or destruction of the cosmos; the author of this passage is familiar enough with contemporary astrology to use specific terminology (οἶκος, κλήρος, even *heimarmene*). The point is made clearly: Protennoia profoundly disrupts astrological fate and its enslaving effects on human genesis.⁸ Individual horoscopes no longer have any predictive power, and individuals are now free from any cosmic ties.

Part of the nature of *gnosis*, for the author of *Tri.Prot.*, was to recognize that destiny had already been vanquished; the powers of astral destiny no longer held humanity in thrall. Despite the profound disruption of this cosmos which the author of the *Tri.Prot.* knew had taken place, however, the revelation of this information as the most ineffable, secret *mysterion* revealed by Protennoia suggests that the author believed that humankind as a whole continued to struggle in a state of spiritual blindness, thinking themselves subject to fate when in fact they had been released.

3. On the Origin of the World (Orig.Wld)

On the Origin of the World, similarly, begins with the author’s promise to explain the nature of chaos and its root. It ends with an apocalypse. To be precise, it ends with an inverse apocalypse: rather than moving from a state of order to disorder, the author of *Orig.Wld* believed that the cosmos had already been reordered from a state of chaos. The Logos is sent to expose “the seven authorities of Chaos and their impiety” (*Orig.Wld* 125, 21). Assuming the molded bodies of the archons, the ‘perfect ones’ would destroy their reign:

⁸ For comments on astrological resonances, including a possible reference to Ptolemy’s *Tetrabiblos* 3. 10. 129, see John Turner’s introduction to the *Tri.Prot.* in NHS XXVIII, 446, notes to 43, 13 and 43, 23–24, and Bentley Layton, *The Gnostic Scriptures* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 96, note d.

When they revealed the incomparable truth, they put to shame every wisdom of the gods, and their *heimarmene* was discovered to be condemnable; their power dried up, their dominion was destroyed, and their *pronoia* [and] their glories became [empty]. (Orig. Wld 125, 25–32)

The ‘perfect ones,’ by their presence in the cosmos, had subverted *heimarmene* and canceled the circuits of the stars that bound humans into their astrological destiny (Orig. Wld 126, 13). In the *Orig. Wld*, as in the *Tri. Prot.*, the motif of the inverse apocalypse is fully developed and presented as a ‘mystery’ that culminates the text.

4. Pistis Sophia

In the great cosmological revelatory treatise *Pistis Sophia*, the Savior’s disciple Maria asks if Jesus had come to fulfill the words of the Isaiah 19:3: “where now Egypt, where are thy soothsayers and thy astrologers?”⁹ She expresses concern about those who have been taught *τμάρια ἡμάρμων ἡμάρμενη*, “the magic of the archons of the *heimarmene*” by the fallen angels, wondering if they still have the ability to foresee the future now that Jesus has appeared on earth (PS 1, 20). The Savior explains that he has gone up to the ‘*heimarmene* sphere’ and taken away “a third of their power” by turning the cosmic pole “for the salvation of all souls” (PS 1, 20). The action threw into misalignment the spatial relationships between the constellations and planets and, by extension, the influence or *ἀποτελέσματα* of the stars:

When the astrologers find the *heimarmene* and the sphere rotated to the left, according to the first distribution, then their words will concur and they will say what is due to happen. But when they meet the *heimarmene* or the sphere rotated to the right, they do not speak anything of the truth, because I have rotated their (periods of) influence and their quadrangles and trines and eight-fold figures, since their periods of influence remained turned to the left from the beginning. (PS 1, 21)

As a consequence, the author of the *Pistis Sophia* explains that the careful work of astrologers was in vain: horoscopes had become effectively invali-

⁹ The traditional (late) dating of *PS* seems to me in need of revisiting with new eyes. The standard critical edition of the *Pistis Sophia* used here is Violet MacDermot, trans., and Carl Schmidt, ed., *Pistis Sophia*. The Coptic Gnostic Library (Leiden: Brill, 1978). See also Carl Schmidt, in Walter Till, ed., *Die koptisch-gnostische Schriften I*, 3rd ed. (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1962).

dated:¹⁰ “Those who do not know their paths ... will find nothing of the truth, but they will be confused in great confusion, and they will be in great error” (*PS* 1, 21). These earthly consequences, however, were only a shadowy reflection of a greater chaos that the Savior had brought to the archons of the aeons; they wandered in confusion in their spheres and heavens in error, not understanding their own paths (*PS* 1, 21). The author obviously plays here with the standard Greek pun on the word for planet, *πλανήτης*, and the verb *πλανάω*, to “wander” or “err.”

In a provocative article, Horace Hodges points out the highly technical nature of *Pistis Sophia's* astrological theory, including jargon such as ‘squares,’ ‘trines’ and ‘(periods of) influence.’¹¹ Jesus tells his disciples that he rotated the sphere of the zodiac first to the left then to the right, such that the stars would seem to move eastward along the ecliptic, then westward, thus thwarting the predictive powers of the astrologers based on now-antiquated knowledge of celestial movements. Hodges raises the possibility that somehow, the Hellenistic Greek astronomer Hipparchus’s ‘discovery’ of the precession of the equinoxes (an apparent eastward motion of the zodiacal signs) and ‘trepidation’—an apparent retrograde motion of the stars—eventually made its way into the *Pistis Sophia's* soteriology and cosmology. Since Hipparchus’s work was known and cited by the Roman Greek astronomer Ptolemy (90–168 CE), it is perhaps not entirely controversial to suggest that Hipparchus’s discoveries ‘trickled down’ to various religious authors of the second century CE, who posited in turn that only a deity of tremendous power might have effected such a dramatic cosmic shift as rotating the cosmic axis. Furthermore, the workings of this deity were known only to a privileged few through revelation or initiation;

¹⁰ For Jesus’s subversion of fate in the *PS*, see especially H.-C. Puech, *En quête de la gnose* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978), 1:84–85, esp. n. 28, 241; Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1964), 1:193–194; Jean Doresse, *The Secret Books of the Egyptian Gnostics* (New York: AMS, 1970), 68–74, esp. n. 8. Doresse interprets the turning of the spheres in terms of the seventh letter of Pseudo-Dionysios on Joshua 10:12–13: “And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed.” See also 2 Kings 20:9–11; Isaiah 38:8: “So the sun turned back ... the ten steps by which it had declined.” The crucifixion, too, was marked by an eclipse in the synoptic gospels; see Mt 28:45; Mk 15:33; Lk 23:44. I am not as convinced as Doresse, however, that these Biblical passages formed the conceptual background for Jesus’s turning of the cosmic spheres in the *Pistis Sophia*; the motif fits too well into a Graeco-Roman context.

¹¹ Horace Jeffrey Hodges, “Gnostic Liberation from Astrological Determinism: Hipparchan ‘Trepidation’ and the Breaking of Fate,” *VC* 51/4 (1997), 368. In my opinion, Hodges accepts too uncritically the outdated notion that individuals in antiquity suffered a sense of cosmic pessimism and enslavement; nevertheless, the article provides some interesting insights into the cosmology of a woefully neglected text.

others (most notably, here, the supposedly learned astrologers peddling an alternate and intractable theory of determinism) only perpetuated a theory of enslavement that had been stealthily and irrevocably undone.

5. *Jesus Christ as a Star-God*

Three of the texts I have discussed so far—the *ApJn*'s Pronoia Hymn, the *Tri.Prot.*, and *Pistis Sophia*—associate the end of the reign of *heimarmene* with the coming of a divine Savior. Their authors envisioned this Savior—whether articulated as Jesus, a form of Pronoia (*ApJn*) or Protennoia (*Tri.Prot.*)—as powerful enough to alter the fabric of the cosmos. But how precisely could a divine Savior alter the cosmos? This much, at least, remained an open question, and second-century authors expressed different perspectives. The texts with which we have been concerned in the last few chapters suggest that their authors believed the transformation took place on two separate levels. On one level, the Savior produced a physical change in the structure of the cosmos, usually by altering the established path of the planets and stars. Thus this Savior appeared, in an important sense, not merely to liberate individuals, but to liberate the entire cosmos, to set right a cosmic order which had become subverted through the actions of legions of celestial *daimōnes* or *archontes*.

The theme of the 'setting right' of the cosmos through the power of a celestial Redeemer has parallels in other religious movements of the second century CE, and thus appears to have been a more-or-less standard way of conceptualizing divine power in the high Roman Empire. In the last century, scholars devoted a great deal of attention to the popularity in the first and second centuries of cults dedicated to 'Savior gods' or *kosmokratores*, literally 'rulers of the cosmos.'¹² A specific component of the *kosmokrator's*

¹² For specific studies, see E.B. Allo, "Les dieux sauveurs du paganisme gréco-romain," *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 15 (1926): 5–34, and the collection of essays compiled by S.G.F. Brandon, *The Saviour God: Comparative Studies in the Concept of Salvation* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1963); more general studies include Franz Cumont, *The Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (New York: Dover, 1956); A. Dieterich, *Abraxas: Studien zur religionsgeschichte des späteren Altertum* (Leipzig: Druck und Verlag von B.G. Teubner, 1891); A.-J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. IV: *Le dieu cosmique* (Paris: Lecoffre, 1943); Jean Pépin, *Théologie cosmique et théologie chrétienne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1964); R. Reitzenstein, *Poimandres* and idem, *Hellenistic Mystery Religions: Their Basic Ideas and Significance*, trans. John E. Steely (Pittsburg: Pickwick, 1978). For the use of the myth of the savior god Attis in second-century 'gnostic' writings, see

power could be the ability to abrogate the power of *heimarmene*. In fact, the popularity of the ‘Savior god’ in the Empire and the power of this god to dominate, bend, or annul fate scholars widely perceived as ‘proof’ that the weight of *heimarmene* lay heavy on the hearts of all Romans: “there was widespread longing in the Graeco-Roman world for a connection to a power capable of overcoming the forces of the cosmos which, according to astrological doctrine, were in control of human destiny,” writes David Ulansey in his recent book, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*.¹³ Festugière had much earlier expressed a similar perspective. Speaking of the psychological disposition of Roman citizens in the second and third century, he claimed, “Ils savent qu’ils sont enchaînés.”¹⁴ He perceived a wide variety of religious options available to those who felt ‘enchained’ to astrological destiny: “pour échapper à la fatalité, l’on se tourne vers la magie, l’on court aux dieux sauveurs, aux dieux qui délivrent, des religions à mystères.”¹⁵

Here we can make some observations. First, in the context of the Roman Empire, spiritual power was construed cosmically, just as had political power since long before. Second, Christians were apparently willing from a very early date (witness the Johannine Prologue if not the *Tri.Prot.* or the Pronoia Hymn, thus from the second half of the first century CE) to conceptualize the Christian deity as wielding significant cosmic power, perhaps partly by adapting Jewish Wisdom traditions that saw Wisdom as co-attendant to God. Third, none of these sources evince any sense of individuals feeling trapped in the cosmos, but quite the opposite: the revelation is consistently one of profound liberation from a perverted cosmic order. The order has been routed, but yet it still appears to persist for those who are ignorant of its destruction or correction. This sense that cosmic enslavement exists but only as a state of ignorance for others underscores my general argument in this book: that ‘enslavement to fate’ is merely a rhetorical stance against religious interlopers or competitors who offered competing religious or spiritual options (for instance, the astrologers and soothsayers castigated in the *Pistis Sophia*). As an ideological position, it locates its authors as purveyors of privileged esoteric knowledge that brings with it

Josef Frickel, *Hellenistische Erlösung in christlicher Deutung: Die gnostische Naassenerschrift*, NHMS 19 (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984). The entire idea of a savior god is now rightfully undergoing significant re-thinking; see Jaime Alvar, *Romanising Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras*, trans. Richard Gordon (Leiden: Brill, 2008).

¹³ David Ulansey, *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries* (New York: Oxford, 1988), 86.

¹⁴ Festugière, *L'idéal religieux*, 106.

¹⁵ Festugière, *L'idéal religieux*, 106–107.

an existential freedom. Various purveyors, furthermore, proffered the same product: a pole god or savior god at the helm who worked on an almost unimaginably large scale to alter the physical cosmos, tuning it from discord to harmony—if only for those with ears to hear. At this point, it would be instructive to compare these Christian texts with other second-century savior cults in Rome.

5.1. *Isis and Egyptian Religions*

Isis remains the mostly widely employed example of a savior god who could free her supplicants from fate. Inscriptions from the Hellenistic period record pious initiates' supplications and gratitude to a goddess who is "Mistress of fate, who creates destiny," or "Mistress of life, ruler of fate and destiny."¹⁶ We find the idea that Isis transcended and controlled fate as early as the Hellenistic era; in an aretology from Cyme dated between 306–283/282 BCE, the goddess proclaims:

I am she who rises in the dog-star
I separated the earth from the heaven
I showed the paths of the stars.
I ordered the course of the sun and the moon

I am living in the rays of the sun
I govern the path of the sun
Everything obeys me
I deliver those who are enchained.
I overcome Fate [τὸ εἰμαρμένον].¹⁷
Fate submits to me.¹⁸

¹⁶ D. Müller, "Ägypten und die griechischen Isis-Aretalogien," *ASAW* 53/1 (1961), 84 n. 8. On Isis as an embodiment of fate, see Jaime Alvar, *Romanising the Oriental Gods*, 122–124.

¹⁷ Note the use of the unusual neuter form τὸ εἰμαρμένον. According to Jan Bergman, "I Overcome Fate, Fate Harkens to Me," in H. Ringgren, ed., *Fatalistic Beliefs in Religion, Folklore and Literature* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1967), 41, this neuter form *heimarmenon* is attested elsewhere only once, in Theodoret, *Eccl. His.* 6. 14. Bergman suggests that the neuter form we find in the aretology may correspond to an earlier Egyptian word for fate.

¹⁸ The hymn has been translated in Festugière, *L'idéal religieux*, 107–109. For studies, see P. Roussel, "Un nouvel hymne grecque à Isis," *REG* 42 (1929): 137 ff.; A.-J. Festugière, "A propos des arétologies d'Isis," *HTR* 42 (1949): 209 ff., and the review by A.D. Nock of Harder's "Karpokrates von Chalkis und die memphitische Isispropaganda," *APAW* 14 (1943) in *Gnomon* 21 (1949): 221 ff.; D. Müller, "Isis-Aretalogien," 79–85. Roussel, Festugière and Nock consider the last two lines a later addition to the original aretology; Bergman (p. 41) tentatively disagrees. The Isis hexameters at Andros proclaim δεσμῶν δ' ἀέκουσαν ἀνάγκαν ἀνλύω, "I untie the bonds of Necessity, reluctant through she be" (*IG* 12. 5, 739 = RICIS 202/1801).

A later Isis hymn from Cyrene confirms the cosmic power of the goddess: “the stars do not go their own course if they have not received my command [ἐντολή].”¹⁹

The convert to Isis’s cult received a new birth, free from an astrally ordained genesis.²⁰ In Apuleius’s *Golden Ass*, Isis informs Lucius: *scies ultra statuta fato tuo spatia vitam quoque tibi prorogare mihi tantum licere* (“you shall know that I and I alone have the power to prolong your life beyond the bounds appointed as your fate”) (*Metam.* 11. 15). Isis releases Lucius through the power of her providence; she announces: *iam tibi providentia mea inlucescit dies salutaris*, (“the day of salvation already begins to dawn for you through my providence”) (*Metam.* 11. 5. 4).²¹

The theme of the ‘lord/mistress of fate’ may indeed be earlier than the Hellenistic period. Dieter Müller maintained that Isis’s role as a liberator from fate derived not from a Greek context, but from Egyptian religious conceptions.²² The gods Re, Amon, Ptah, Khnum, and Hathor were likewise designated, at one time or the other, ‘lords of fate.’²³ There are certainly strong examples of the savior god liberating his followers from fate in other Graeco-Egyptian or Roman Egyptian religions. In the *PGM*, for example, Hermes acts as the ‘regulator of human destinies,’ a function he may owe to his counterpart, the god Thoth;²⁴ he presides over justice and fate.²⁵ Another aretology proclaims the Graeco-Egyptian god Serapis as a savior from the

¹⁹ W. Peek, *Der Isishymnus von Andros und verwandte Texte* (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1930), 129.

²⁰ On fate in Isis cults, see Bergman, “I Overcome Fate,” 37–51; NF 1. 193–195; S. Morenz and D. Müller, *Untersuchungen zur Rolle des Schicksals in der ägyptischen Religion* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1961); C.J. Bleeker, “Die Idee des Schicksals in der altägyptischen Religion,” in C.J. Bleeker, ed., *The Sacred Bridge: Researches into the Nature and Structure of Religion* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1963), 112 ff.

²¹ See also *Metam.* 11. 10. 4 in which Lucius speaks of *deae summatis auxiliariis providentia*, “the helping providence of the highest goddess,” and, in view of his imminent ‘transformation,’ *deae maximae providentia adluctantem mihi saevissime fortunam superare*, “through the providence of the greatest goddess I overcame Fortune, who attacked me so fiercely.”

²² Müller, “Isis-Aretalogien,” 79–85.

²³ Hans Bonnet, *Reallexikon der ägyptischen Religionsgeschichte*, 2nd ed. (New York: W. de Gruyter, 1971).

²⁴ *PGM* 13, 613–614, 633–635, 708–714. Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 22; see also Morenz and Müller, *Rolle des Schicksals*, 28–29.

²⁵ Fowden, *Egyptian Hermes*, 24. The priests of Hermes’ cult may have claimed a similar power to release individuals from fate. According to Fowden (who cites as evidence Proclus, in *Platonis Rem Publicam Commentarii* 2. 3444–3445), the Hermetic priest Petosiris was said to have some control over the workings of necessity.

Moirai.²⁶ One ‘spell’ in the *PGM* adjures Serapis to “preserve me from the might of the stars, hold me back from the cruel compulsion of fate, allot me a happy destiny, bless my life, O Lord, with all goodness; for I am thy slave and protégé.”²⁷ Another reads:

Protect me from all my own astrological destiny [τὰ τῆς γενέσεως μου], destroy my foul fate [ἀπάλειψον μου τὰ τῆς εἰμαρμένης κακῶν]; apportion good things for me in my horoscope, increase my life even in the midst of many goods, for I am your slave and petitioner and have hymned your valid and holy name, lord, glorious one, ruler of the cosmos, of ten thousand names (?) ... [[Serapis]].

(*PGM* 13. 632–640; Betz [1992], 187–188)

5.2. *Mithras*

Recently, Mithraic scholar David Ulansey has argued that the complex cosmological symbolism of Mithraic iconography represents a code which, when properly understood, revealed the central ‘mystery’ of Mithraism: Mithras alone possessed the power to rotate the cosmic axis.²⁸ This esoteric knowledge carried profound implications for the Mithraic initiate; he acknowledged that, in Ulansey’s words, “the entire cosmos was completely under [Mithras’s] control.”²⁹ Initiation into the Mithraic mysteries implied a type of ‘cognitive salvation,’ in which the initiate’s perception of cosmology became radically re-ordered and re-oriented following the revelation of a new, transcendent celestial order. Mithras, through his power to alter the cosmic fabric, could deliver his protégés from “the forces of fate residing in the stars.”³⁰ Certainly Mithraic iconography bolsters this theory, featuring as

²⁶ The fragment has been edited by A. Abt, “Ein Bruchstück einer Serapis-Aretalogie,” *ARW* 18 (1915): 257 ff. See also P. Roussel, “Quelques documents nouveaux relatifs à Sérapis,” *Revue d’histoire et de littérature religieuses* 7 (1921): 33–43.

²⁷ Quoted by Dieterich, *Abraxas*, 178.

²⁸ Ulansey, *Origins*, 95. Ulansey’s highly controversial theories have been challenged by, among others, Manfred Clauss, *The Roman Cult of Mithras*, trans. Richard Gordon (London: Routledge, 2000). Older work on Mithraism includes Franz Cumont’s two-volume study, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra* (Paris, 1896–1899); M.J. Vermaseren, *Mithras: The Secret God* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963); R. Merkelbach, *Weihgrade und Seelenlehre der Mithrasmysterien* (Opladen: Westdeutscher, 1982). Scholars have been divided on whether or not Mithraism developed cosmology to the degree that Ulansey argues; for those who maintain the argument that some sort of cosmology was central to Mithraism, see besides Ulansey and Merkelbach, the work of Roger Beck, especially *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leiden: Brill, 1988) and “The Mysteries of Mithras: A New Account of their Genesis,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 88 (1998): 115–128.

²⁹ Ulansey, *Origins*, 125.

³⁰ Ulansey, *Origins*, 125.

it does stone reliefs of Mithras turning the zodiacal wheel or holding the planetary spheres.³¹

5.3. *Other Non-Christian Evidence*

A whole class of gods, ‘pole-gods,’ were credited with the ability to turn the cosmic axis. The *PGM*, for example, contains a supplication to the constellation Arcturus:

Bear, bear, you who rule the heaven, the stars, and the whole world; you make the axis turn and control the whole cosmic system by force and compulsion; I appeal to you.³² (*PGM* VIII, 686–690)

In the same collection, Helios is addressed as,

Golden-haired Helios who wields the flame’s untiring light, who drives in lofty turns around the great pole ... from you come the *stoicheia* arranged by your own laws which cause the whole world to rotate through its four yearly turning points.³³ (*PGM* VIII, 74–79)

Apollo and Perseus, likewise, were ascribed in antiquity as ‘pole gods’ able to turn the cosmic spheres.³⁴ In summary, the language and iconography of salvation in the cults of Mithras, Isis, and Serapis suggest that the power of the god to abrogate the powers of fate remained central to the theology of a number of religious movements in the first few centuries of the Common Era. The same language also figures in the magical papyri, indicating that the motif of the ‘pole god’ or cosmic ‘savior god’ found widespread diffusion in the Roman Empire.

³¹ See the collection edited by M. Vermaseren, *Corpus inscriptionum et monumentorum religionis mithriacae* (CIMRM), 2 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1956, 1960), especially CIMRM 985 (Mithras holding the planetary spheres); CIMRM 245 and CIMRM 545 (Mithras with the sky beneath his cape); CIMRM 860 (Mithras breaking out of the cosmic egg); and CIMRM 1083 (Mithras within the zodiacal arch).

³² Compare the prayer to Selene in *PGM* VII, 880–881 (Betz, 147). According to Stobaeus, Bear is the name of one of the ruling decans located in the center of the cosmos; he is the cosmic axis around which the Zodiac revolves. See Stobaeus, *Exc.* 6. 3–5, NF 1:34–35.

³³ See also *PGM* IV, 263–271 (Betz, 43); *PGM* XIII, 213ff. (Betz, 177); *PGM* XIII, 718ff. (Betz, 189). Compare Julian, *Hymn to the Sun* 1. 368, who says that the sun (Helios) frees our souls completely from the power of genesis or the force of the stars exercised at one’s nativity, and raises them up to realm of Pure Intellect.

³⁴ Apollo: see Plato, *Cratylus* 405D; Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1. 17. 7. Hippolytus, *Ref.* 4. 49. 2 records the belief that Perseus was “the winged axis which pierces both poles through the center of the earth and rotates the cosmos.”

5.4. *Christian Iterations*

Certain Christians appear to have borrowed this idea of a figure powerful enough to overcome celestial malevolence; they envisioned Jesus himself as a god capable of triumphing over the celestial orders. Festugière recognized this long ago: “Et le Seigneur lui-même,” he observed, “sur plus d’un cœur chrétien, rayonnera comme un dieu de victoire qui a triomphé des astres.”³⁵ We find a similar perspective expressed by Paul Wendland of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule*:

[O]n the one hand men crave freedom from the tyranny of evil spirits who beset them on all sides with manifold dangers. On the other hand they groan under the weight of astral religion, which makes them the sport and plunder of the star-gods; a mighty deity who is able to control fate is needed to deliver man from bondage to the archons and from the rule of εἰμαρμένη and ἀνάγκη ... from the second century on Christ is more frequently extolled as a deliverer from the power of fate.³⁶

Numerous scholars have observed that certain early Christians envisioned Jesus as a *kosmokrator* capable of devastating the most intractable cosmic order.³⁷ Members of the *religionsgeschichtliche Schule* were quick to point out that Jesus as ‘savior god’ made sense within a Roman context; indeed, it was expected of the gods that they had the power to free the pious initiate from fetters of *heimarmene*.

As we have seen from the case of the *Pistis Sophia* (where the theme finds its most developed form) a variety of Christian sources preserve the idea that Jesus came to vanquish celestial powers by radically re-orienting the cosmos. The idea is there, if only incipiently, in key Pauline passages, including 1 Cor 2:6–8, Ephesians 6:12, and Colossians 2:14–15. Our next earliest Christian evidence is Ignatius, who in his *Letter to the Ephesians* 19.2–3, likens Jesus to a new star that troubles the other stars, making magic impossible:

How then was he revealed to the aeons?
 A star shone in heaven,
 Brighter than all the stars,
 And its light was ineffable,
 And its novelty caused astonishment;
 All the other stars together with the sun and moon.

³⁵ Festugière, *L’idéal religieux*, 108; see also 110, 113, n. 10.

³⁶ Paul Wendland, “Hellenistic Ideas of Salvation,” 350. See further Wendland, *Die hellenistische-römische Kultur* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972), 177, n. 1; 400.

³⁷ See also A. Dieterich, *Abraxas*, 61–62.

Became a chorus for the star,
 And it outshone them all with its light;
 And there was perplexity as to whence came this novelty so unlike them.
 Thence was destroyed all magic,
 And every bond vanished.³⁸

Hippolytus reports that the Naassenes termed Jesus the *'aipolis'* "who both revolves and carries around the entire cosmical system by his revolutionary motion" (*Ref.* 5. 3).³⁹ In the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, the Valentinian theologian Theodotus defines *heimarmene* as "a concourse of many opposing powers" (σύνοδος πολλῶν καὶ ἐναντίων δυνάμεων) (69.1). From this 'revolt and warfare' between celestial beings, the Lord descends to transfer believers from the influence of *heimarmene* to his own beneficial *pronoia* (*Exc.Theod.* 74. 2). Theodotus believed that if the cosmos had been reduced to chaos, it had also been irrevocably altered by the advent of the Lord. Christ's providential power had restructured the cosmos and 'set right' celestial chaos.

In the third century, even Clement of Alexandria would adopt the image of Jesus as *kosmokrator*, in the guise of a new Orpheus bringing the music of the spheres to re-tune the cosmos:

Behold the might of the new song! It has made men out of stones, men out of beasts. Those, moreover, who were as dead, not being partakers in the true life, have come to life again, simply by listening to this song. It also composed the universe into melodious order, and turned the discord of the *stoicheia* to harmonious arrangement, so that the whole κόσμος might become ἁρμονία.

(*Exhortation to the Heathen* 1. 3, trans. Roberts-Donaldson, ANF)

Clement drew his imagery from Greek mythology, from Paul's teachings in Galatians about the discordant and enslaving *stoicheia*, but also from

³⁸ William R. Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 93, surmises that Ignatius draws upon a pre-existent myth based upon the account of the Magi, upon which Matthew draws as well. For arguments against this, see R.E. Brown and John P. Meier, *Antioch and Rome* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 25.

³⁹ In certain Christian texts, the cross also appears as a cosmic pole: in the *Martyrdom of Andrew* 1. 14, for instance, the cross is "fixed in the cosmos in order to establish the unstable things" (πέπηχαι γὰρ ἐν τῶν κοσμῶν τὰ ἄστατα στηρίχης); in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (NHC III, 2 63,19–64,9), too, the savior comes to nail the thirteen aeons (ἀφωφτ ἡἷλγῆμας ἡπῆνῆτωφοντε ἡἷλων) and fix them in the heavens; through this action, chaos is ordered. Michael Williams, *Immovable Race* 149, interprets the "nailing of the powers" in this text with "the redemption of individuals from the control of astrological fate." The *1st Ap.Jas* 13, 6–9 from the Tchacos Codex also contains a reference to the cosmic axis; see now the interesting article by Franklin Trammell, "The God of Jerusalem as the Pole Dragon: The Conceptual Background of the Cosmic Axis in *James*," in A. DeConick, ed., *The Codex Judas Papers*, 337–366.

Roman orientalizing cults such as those of Mithras and Isis. His rhetoric of a harmonious cosmos tuned from the discordant *stoicheia* through the powerful voice or sound of Christ would resonate with many Christians, including those who had read the *Tri.Prot.*'s account of Pronoia's descent as Sound, Voice, and Logos tuning the cosmos of chaos into order.

6. *Conclusions*

Michael Williams, in his study *The Immovable Race*, recognized the cosmological significance of Pronoia's descent for the community behind the *ApJn*:

It is from this prison of chaotic disturbance and change that those who belong to the 'immovable race' are redeemed. Fate is not considered immutable or inescapable. Fate is transcended through the 'setting right' accomplished by Pronoia.⁴⁰

Though fate had been 'set right,' the author of the *ApJn* still might characterize the world as a 'cosmos of chaos.' The 'immovable race' may have been redeemed, but the behavior of others outside this group of the elect demonstrated how deeply entrenched they were in the patterns of archontic or demonic enslavement. But armed with the new, true knowledge of their origins in the Father that had been revealed in the *ApJn*, the community listening to the Pronoia Hymn knew that they themselves had already been transformed. They awaited only the final moment in which that transformation would be sealed. The beautiful Pronoia hymn, far from being an isolated example of an individual being wrested from cosmic enslavement by the power of a Savior, actually taps into a deep wellspring of language and imagery in the Graeco-Roman world on the profound connection between a savior figure, the pious individual, and the shape, the very fabric, of the cosmos itself.

⁴⁰ Williams, *Immovable Race*, 135.

CHAPTER SEVEN

WAYS OUT II: BAPTISM AND COSMIC FREEDOM: A NEW GENESIS

The epiphany of the *Apocryphon of John* occurs when in a moment of divine revelation, the protagonist John recognizes that he is constituted of a fundamentally different substance than the lower celestial beings. This moment of epiphany coincides with, and corresponds to, the sacramental rite of baptism. In the Pronoia Hymn that culminates the long recension of the *ApJn*, Pronoia descends and confers the Five Seals on Adam, who asks,

Who is calling my name, and from where has this hope come to me, while I am in the chains of this prison? (*ApJn* II 31.8–10)

Let us return to Pronoia's magisterial speech, with which I began the last chapter. It still has much to reveal to us about the nature of cosmic constrain and release:

And I said, I am the Pronoia of the Pure Light; I am the thinking of the virginal spirit, he who raised you up to the honored place. Arise and remember, that it is you who hearkened, and follow your root, which is I, the merciful one, and guard yourself against the angels of poverty and demons of chaos and all those who ensnare you, and beware of the deep sleep and the enclosure of Hades. (*ApJn* II 31, 10–22, trans. Wisse/Waldstein, 173)

At the culmination of these words, Pronoia raises up the one she has awakened and prepares to baptize or 'seal' him "in the light of the water with five seals" (*ApJn* II 31, 24).

Pronoia's speech crystallizes and condenses a fundamental myth of spiritual origins into liturgical form. If we consider sacred texts such as the *ApJn* in a liturgical setting—as I believe we must—we may understand them in a new way. As the listeners of the *ApJn* heard these words read to them as they stood preparing for baptism, they saw themselves as new Adams, called forth like him to 'arise and remember.'

As I discussed in the last chapter, the communities that read and utilized the *ApJn* could escape the influences of *heimarmene* in a variety of ways. One could abstain from sexual intercourse and thereby avoid the *fluidum* that transmitted the ἀντίμιμον πνεῦμα.¹ One could recognize that one belonged

¹ So Elaine Pagels, "Exegesis and Exposition of Genesis Creation Accounts in Selected

to a different genealogical line than that which was produced by the fallen angels and human women, apart from seminally-transmitted contamination.² The very act of *hearing* the text of the *ApJn* being read aloud itself conferred a form of salvation. The speeches of Pronoia in *ApJn*'s long recension, in particular, constituted a sort of 'performative utterance'; they were intended to bring *gnosis* to the listener, each of whom understood that he or she was, in essence, identical to the primordial Light-Adam. Finally, one could turn to the sacraments (such as baptism, or the baptismal rite of the Five Seals) that provided a new birth apart from *heimarmene* and the ἀντίμιμον πνεῦμα and sealed that new identity based on freedom from the lower cosmic forces and connection with higher forces.

This moment of spiritual or cognitive transformation, in which an individual recognized that he or she stood in an elevated position in relation to the lower cosmic powers, formed part of the conceptual associations in the Late Empire with the term 'rebirth'—*anagenesis* or (used less frequently in Christian texts) *palingenesis*. Originally a Stoic term for the rebirth of the cosmos following periodic *ekpyrosis*, Christian writers, already in the first century, began using the term παλιγγενεσία in a universal sense.³ The term *palingenesis* implies a repeated cycle of rebirth; Plutarch, Lucian, Varro and other writers of the Roman period altered the application of this word

Texts from Nag Hammadi," in Charles W. Hedrick and Robert Hodgson, Jr., eds., *Nag Hammadi, Gnosticism and Early Christianity* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1976), 265, and especially her concluding sentence, p. 278: "The ontological structure of being itself as well as the historical structure of divine revelation impose the demand of celibate renunciation upon all genuinely 'gnostic' Gnostics." As an interesting comperandum, note Augustine's apparent conviction that the original sin is transmitted from generation to generation via human sperm. On this, see Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1985), 109.

² This, generally construed, is the thesis of G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1984), with which I concur. Stroumsa states that 'Gnostic' mythology "created a new ontological level, building a pantheon of heavenly figures in order to solve the problem of human genealogy" (*Another Seed*, 53), and further on the same page, "The Gnostics, who were fundamentally different from common humanity and who did not share its fate throughout history, considered themselves to belong to a race or seed that was different, being both immovable and eternal. Whereas other men remained under the rule of the archontic Heimarmene, the gnostics did not obey the orders of any king." On Gnostic self-definition as a different race, see also Michael Williams, *The Immovable Race: A Gnostic Designation and the Theme of Stability in Late Antiquity* (Leiden: Brill, 1985); F. Fallon, "The Gnostics: the Undominated Race," *NovTest* 21 (1978): 271–288.

³ Büchsel, *TDNT* 1.686–689. The term *palingenesis* occurs twice in the New Testament: Titus 3:5 and especially, Mt 19:28: "assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration [ἐν τῇ παλιγγενεσίᾳ], when the son of man sits on the throne of his glory, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

from the rebirth of the cosmos to the rebirth of the individual soul.⁴ Christian authors frequently employed the term, however, as a synonym for baptism, with our first attestation of this use in the Pastoral letters: “Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, through the washing of regeneration [διὰ λουτροῦ παλιγγενεσίας] and renewing of the holy spirit” (Titus 3:5). We also encounter the term ἀναγεννάω in 1Pet 1:3, 23 as a technical term for baptism. The English expression ‘to be begotten again’ also translates the Greek γεννάω ἄνωθεν, a construction that exploits the dual meaning of ἄνωθεν as both ‘again’ and ‘from above.’⁵

Certain Christian authors chose to emphasize these cosmic dimensions of rebirth already present in second-century baptismal language. By the second century, they offered potential converts the assurance that their Savior could redeem those who placed their faith in him, through the power of the baptismal sacrament. Seen against the largely static cosmologies of the Graeco-Roman philosophies that formed the imaginative universe of Roman citizens, one of the benefits of baptism was its assurance that *heimarmene* could be superseded immediately, rather than at death, as part of the soul’s natural process of ascent through the cosmic spheres.

At least one question to explore more fully, then, is the connection between sacraments and release from *heimarmene*. Among the documents I have discussed in the last three chapters (*ApJn*, *Orig.Wld*, *Tri.Prot.* and *Pistis Sophia*), only *Orig.Wld* lacks any reference to a sacrament during the course of the discussion on the nature of fate. The author of the *Pistis Sophia* clearly relates the release from *heimarmene* to the savior’s conferral of the sacraments: “have you not brought mysteries into the world so that with them people should not die through the archons of the *Heimarmene*?” Maria asks the Savior (*PS* 3, 109, 16–20). In the threefold descent of Pronoia in the *ApJn*, Pronoia both subverts fate and confers the baptismal rite of the ‘Five Seals’ upon the recipient of her revelation.⁶ The *Tri.Prot.* also invokes the ‘Five Seals’ rite in the salvific actions of Protennoia against *heimarmene*.⁷

⁴ LSJ, sv. “παλιγγενεσία.”

⁵ On the NT usage of the terms, see further Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, 240–241; Joseph Ysebaert, *Greek Baptismal Terminology* (Nijmegen: Dekker and van de Vegt, 1962), 90 ff. For a more general and now outdated study from a member of the History of Religions school, see P. Gennrich, *Die Lehre von der Wiedergeburt, die christliche Zentrallehre in dogmengeschichtlicher und religionsgeschichtlicher Beleuchtung* (Leipzig: A. Deichert, 1907).

⁶ *ApJn* II 1, 31, 24; IV 1, 49, 4.

⁷ *Tri.Prot.* 48, 31; 49, 27–28; 47, 29; 50, 9–10. The Five Seals as a term for baptism is also found in *GosEg* IV 2, 56, 25; 58, 27–28; 59, 27–28; 66, 25–26; 74, 16; 78, 4–5; *GosEg* III 2, 55, 12;

The authors of these diverse texts debated the correspondence between the Savior's power to subvert fate on a structural level by altering the physical order of the cosmos, as well as on a personal, soteriological level, through the introduction of the baptismal sacrament.

The general topic of baptism in ancient Christianity is huge and well beyond the scope of the present volume. I will confine myself here to those texts that directly collocate baptism with the language of freedom from the cosmos. This collocation is actually present in a variety of Christian literature, crossing the boundaries between modern categories such as 'heretical' and 'orthodox,' 'Sethian' and 'Valentinian,' and even 'pagan' and 'Christian.' To underscore this point, I will focus on three key figures: Justin Martyr, Theodotus, and Tatian—all contemporaries in second-century Rome, yet very different thinkers and theologians. Nevertheless, all three figures describe their baptismal experiences in essentially cosmic terms.

1. Justin Martyr and the 'Proto-Orthodox' Christian Baptismal Tradition

Sometime during the reign of Antoninus Pius (138–160 CE), a young man named Justin arrived from Asia Minor to explore the schools of philosophy catering to members of Rome's elite: young, aimless men well schooled in the traditions of their fathers.⁸ In his *Dialogue with Trypho*, Justin describes

63, 3; 66, 3; *UnBruce* 32, 10. Their shared use of sacramental technology is one of the factors that leads many scholars to group these texts together under the rubric 'Sethian Gnosticism.' Since certain Jewish pseudepigraphical writings share features of the Five Seals rite, this sacrament may have had its origin in Jewish sectarian circles. Compare *Testament of Levi* 8, 2–10; 2 *Enoch* 22; *Odes of Solomon* 11,7–16. For a recent commentary on the Five Seals rite, see John Turner, "Ritual in Gnosticism," *SBLASP* 33 (1994): 140–141, and Jean-Marie Sevrin, *Le dossier baptismal séthien: Études sur la sacramentaire gnostique* (Quebec: les presses de l'université Laval, 1986). It should be said that Sethian texts evince close associations between baptism and the cosmos, particularly envisioning baptisms as celestial or as combined with a process of cosmic ascent. I have decided not to discuss Sethian baptism here despite its cosmological overtones because Sethian texts do not often describe baptism as 'rebirth,' nor make the association between baptism and the release from *heimarmene*. Those texts that do (*viz. ApJn* and *Tri.Prot.*) I have already discussed in the previous chapter.

⁸ Justin draws his theological vocabulary directly from Graeco-Roman philosophy and remains intellectually indebted to it. For studies of Justin's philosophy, see Craig D. Allert, *Revelation, Truth, Canon, and Interpretation: Studies in Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho* (Leiden: Brill, 2002); L. Barnard, *Justin Martyr: His Life and Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967); Henry Chadwick, *Early Christian Thought and the Classical Tradition: Studies in Justin, Clement, and Origen* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1974); Rebecca Lyman,

his long process of education and conversion to Christianity. Searching for a deeper meaning in his life, the young Justin had, like many of the educated young men of his age, approached the schools of philosophy active in second-century Rome. His first foray into philosophy, so he informs us, brought him to the Stoics (*Dial. Tryph.* 2. 1–2). Justin, who already knew at least the basic tenets of various Greek philosophical schools operating in his day, was aware that the idea, for example, of the *logos*—so prominent in the Gospel of John—was as much a Stoic tenet as it was Christian. He admired the Stoics for their understanding that the penetrative *logos* had entered “into every race of humans.”⁹

But Justin quickly became disillusioned with the Stoics—or so he tells us. There were certain things, he insisted, they had gotten completely wrong. The first was the idea of the ἐκπύρωσις or periodic universal conflagration that would eventually completely consume the cosmos.¹⁰ That the world could be created, destroyed by fire, then recreated in an undying cycle contradicted both Jewish and Christian notions of a created world existing within linear time. Justin reserved his most caustic criticism, however, for the Stoic position on free will. Stoics were, he asserted, firm believers in astral fatalism; human will remained powerless in the face of higher cosmic forces. Justin attributed to Stoic philosophy the view that humans could do or suffer nothing contrary to fate (*Dial. Tryph.* 2. 1–2). In his critique of this position, Justin adopted a stance, ironically, that could have come directly from the mouth of a Roman Stoic: “But neither do we affirm that it is by fate [καθ’ εἰμαρμένην] that people do what they do or suffer what they suffer,” he claimed in his *Second Apology*, “but that each person by free choice [προαίρεσις] acts rightly or sins” (*2nd Ap.* 7).

It was his visit to a Platonist teacher which seemed to provoke in Justin’s young mind the greatest sense of curiosity, followed by the youthful outrage of disappointment mingled with scandal. The Platonist had claimed his teachings would allow the philosopher to see God ‘face-to-face.’ The Platonist’s pretension, to Justin, was the conviction that philosophy alone could elevate the intellect to the level of the divine. The impetus, Justin maintained, needed to come from the other direction, from God to the individual. God’s will alone was sufficient to elevate the individual beyond the

Christology and Cosmology: Models of Divine Activity in Origen, Eusebius, and Athanasius (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993).

⁹ On Justin’s view of Stoicism, see P. Montini, “Elementi di filosofia stoica in S. Giustino,” *Aquinas* 28 (1985): 457–476.

¹⁰ *1st Ap.* 19. 5; 20. 1–2, 4; *2nd Ap.* 8. 3; cf. *Dial. Tryph.* 1. 5.

reach of compulsion and fate. Thus at baptism, God produced what Justin described as an “illumination [φωτισμός] of understanding [διάνοια]” (*1st Ap.* 61).¹¹

“At our first birth [Ἐπειδὴ τὴν πρώτην γένεσιν],” Justin explained in his *First Apology*, an open letter addressed to Antoninus Pius, “we were born without our knowledge [ἀγνοοῦντες] according to cosmic necessity [κατ’ ἀνάγκην], by our parents’ sexual intercourse [μίξις]” (*1st Ap.* 61). This ‘first birth’ in which those “brought up in bad habits and wicked training” existed only as “children of necessity and ignorance” (*1st Ap.* 61) contrasted with a new birth (ἀναγεννήσις) free from such constraints.¹² At baptism, Justin felt that God had severed the invisible threads of influence and coercion that tied him to the lower, contingent cosmos. After baptism, Justin believed, he and his fellow Christians had been offered a new genesis, a new birth. No longer “children of necessity and ignorance,” Jesus Christ had transformed them into “children of choice [προαίρεσις] and knowledge [ἐπιστήμη]” (*1st Ap.* 61).

Considering the primary import of baptism in the Church to be the “forgiveness of sins,” Adolf Harnack, in his *History of Dogma*, claimed that “notions of baptism have not essentially altered” since the middle of the second century.¹³ Christians such as Justin would certainly have agreed that baptism was necessary for the remission of sins; but as we have seen, they also maintained that baptism provided a ‘regeneration’ or ‘rebirth into God.’ In fact, we find remarkable homogeneity in early Christian discourse on the language employed to convey this sense of rebirth and its effects on individual Christians. Members of the ‘proto-orthodox’ (such as Justin) and those authors often labeled ‘Gnostic’ by modern scholars (such as the Valentinian teacher Theodotus) employed identical language to express their belief that baptism was transformative, a new birth which could wrest the individual from *heimarmene* and the current social order which was the concrete expression of *heimarmene*’s influence.

¹¹ It is perhaps significant that this shift in perception and concomitant devaluation of the cosmos came not at the moment of Justin’s conversion to Christianity, but at the moment of baptism. In a sense, this distinction obviates A.D. Nock’s early work (1933) on conversion and comparisons with Lucius’s ‘conversion’ to the Isiac mysteries in Book XI of Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*. Justin’s rather intellectual conversion and subsequent ‘change of perception’ at baptism mirrors that of Tatian (*Ad Graec.* 29. 1).

¹² For a modern theological commentary on the context of this passage, see Cullen Story, “Justin’s Apology I: 62–64: Its Importance for the Author’s Treatment of Christian Baptism,” *VC* 16 (1962): 72–78.

¹³ A. Harnack, *History of Dogma* (New York: Dover, 1961), 2:149.

This particular way of conceptualizing baptism as creating a new body with a new genesis is already present in Christian writings of the early second century CE. For instance, according to the early second-century author of the *Epistle of Barnabas*, “when we received remission of sins [λαβόντες τὴν ἄφεσιν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν], and put our hope in the Name, we became new [καινοί], being created again from the beginning [πάλιν ἐξ ἀρχῆς κτιζόμενοι]; wherefore God truly dwells in us, in the habitation which we are [ἐν τῷ κατοικητηρίῳ ἡμῶν ἀληθῶς ὁ θεὸς κατοικεῖ ἐν ἡμῖν]” (*Epistle of Barnabas* 16.8). In the second-century *Shepherd of Hermas*, Christians “go down into the water, dead, and come up alive.”¹⁴ Among Christian writers of the latter half of the second century, Irenaeus described baptism as ‘regeneration into God’¹⁵ and a ‘new birth’ (*Adv. Haer.* 4.27.2). Theophilus of Antioch (ca. 180 CE) likewise speaks of the “waters of regeneration” through which “all those who come to the truth are born again” (*Ad Autolyicum* 2.16).

The deliberate blurring of lines between baptism, death, and rebirth in early Christianity has obvious New Testamental roots—witness, for example, Jesus’s dialogue with Nicodemus in John 3.¹⁶ The language of death and baptism is, if anything, intensified in the Pauline corpus. Colossians 2:12 employs the stark language of death and burial to describe Christian baptism: συνταφέντες αὐτῷ ἐν τῷ βαπτισμῷ, ἐν ᾧ καὶ συνηγήρθητε διὰ τῆς πίστεως τῆς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἐγείραντος αὐτὸν ἐκ νεκρῶν, “buried with him in baptism, in which you also were raised with him through faith in the workings of God, who raised him from the dead.” These New Testamental texts became, evidently, the basis for a developed baptismal theology in the second century, in which death and rebirth were collocated with baptismal discourse in early liturgies.

The archaeological evidence of early Christian baptisteries also makes concrete the conceptual associations between baptism, burial, and rebirth.¹⁷

¹⁴ Hermas, *Similitudes* 9. 16. 4: εἰς τὸ ὕδωρ οὖν καταβαίνουσι νεκροὶ καὶ ἀναβαίνουσι ζῶντες. See also the *Mandates* 2.1. For other examples of baptism as rebirth in early sources, see *Acts of Thomas* 132; *Gospel of Thomas* 22; *Clementine Homilies* 7.8; 11.26; *Sibylline Oracles* 8.313 ff.

¹⁵ *Adv. Haer.* 1. 21. 1; 3. 17. 1; elsewhere, Irenaeus writes, “For as we are lepers in sin, we are made clean, by means of the sacred water and the invocation of the Lord, from our old transgressions; being spiritually regenerated as new-born babes” (*Fragments*, 34).

¹⁶ See, among others, Mk 1:9–11; Mt 3:15; Acts 2:1–41; Acts 8:36; Acts 10:47–48; 1Pet 1:13 ff., 2:2.

¹⁷ Franz Dölger, “Zur Symbolik des altchristlichen Taufhauses,” *AuC* 4 (1934): 153–187; M. Ben Pechat, “The Paleochristian Baptismal Fonts in the Holy Land,” *Studiū Biblici Franciscani Liber Annuus* 39 (1989): 165–188. For other conceptual associations between baptism and death in early Christianity, see A. Fausone, *Die Taufe in der frühchristlichen Sepulchrkunst* (Vatican City: Pontificio Istituto di archeologia cristiana, 1982).

The baptistery from Dura-Europos is modeled after a second-century tomb, complete with niche and arcosolium.¹⁸ The Christian catechumen, led to the baptistery, confronted the tomb; entering into it, he or she experienced a symbolic death and rebirth. The cosmological significance of the rebirth at Dura-Europos was heightened by the stars painted on the underside of the arcosolium—reminding us that according to other contemporary accounts of baptism, the rite could also be conducted at night, beneath the canopy of stars. The Roman catacombs, too, preserve distinct baptisteries located among, and occasionally directly in, grave chambers.¹⁹

In summary, a wide swath of Christians in the second century drew freely upon discourses of freedom and rebirth when conceptualizing the profound changes available to an individual at baptism. Far from a contingent, ritual act affecting only the social status of an individual in relation to group or society, baptism was thought to have implications that restructured an individual's existential relationship to the cosmos. A neophyte could recognize, post-baptism, that she or he now existed in a state of freedom, having been wrested from the cosmic bondage that had previously enslaved her or him. Although the binary enslavement/freedom seems to express the 'cosmic pessimism' of so-called Gnosticism according to key figures such as Hans Jonas, in actual fact we find the same language featured prominently in virtually all the 'proto-orthodox' writers of the second century. Indeed, from the extant writings of Justin Martyr, we would be hard-pressed to find a more striking example of cosmic pessimism and the conviction that Jesus Christ, through baptism, had vanquished fate.

2. *Theodotus and the Valentinian Context*

Hans Jonas's position, that the Valentinians must be located along the trajectory of Gnostic groups which repudiated sacramentalism, has been abandoned following the discovery of a previously unknown corpus of Valen-

¹⁸ M. Rostovtzeff, *Dura-Europos and Its Art* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1938); for site reports see Clark Hopkins, *The Discovery of Dura-Europos* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979). See also A. Wharton, *Refiguring the Post Classical City* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Two Roman catacombs, the catacombs of Priscilla and the catacombs of Pontian, contain baptisteries, and perhaps others as well. The subject has not been well studied, but see Vincenzo Fiocchi Nicolai, "Considerazioni sulla funzione del cosiddetto battistero di Ponziano sulla via Portuense," in *Il Lazio tra antichità e medioevo. Studi in memoria di Jean Coste* (Rome: Quasar, 1999), 307–316.

tinian tractates in the Nag Hammadi library.²⁰ Valentinian sacramentalism has been the focus of a large number of key studies in recent years.²¹ Much of the scholarship on Gnostic ritual over the last twenty years has concerned itself with Valentinian interpretations of baptism. Part of the reason for this interest stems from the elaborate accounts of Valentinian baptism in Patristic sources, which may now be augmented by the Nag Hammadi finds.

On the specific topic of baptism as an escape from fate, our finest source remains the *Excerpta ex Theodoto*, the short passages that Clement of Alexandria gathered from the late-second-century Valentinian teacher Theodotus. Together, the fragments comprise a baptismal catechesis. Here, we find a discussion of two separate baptismal sacraments. The first water baptism is a 'sealing' performed while invoking the Trinity. The primary function of this sealing is to render the individual impervious to the 'threats' of the cosmic powers:

For he who has been sealed by Father, Son and Holy Spirit is beyond the threats of every other power and by the three Names has been released from the whole triad of corruption. "Having borne the image of the earthly, it then bears the image of the heavenly [1 Cor 15:49]." (*Exc.Theod.* 80. 3)

This baptism, as in the Nag Hammadi text called *A Valentinian Exposition*, grants the Christians power over sins and the impure spirits, who are said now to "tremble" at those whom previously they enslaved and address them respectfully as servants of God (*Exc.Theod.* 78). As in the *Valentinian Exposition*, the first baptism constitutes a sort of exorcism, by which the initiate receives the "power to walk upon scorpions and snakes" (*Exc.Theod.* 76. 2–3).

In the excerpts, baptism is also a symbolic rebirth out of the grasp of the evil beings who control the unbaptized:

Therefore baptism is called death and an end of the old life since we leave behind the evil archons, but it is also called life according to Christ, of which he is sole Lord. (*Exc.Theod.* 77. 1)

²⁰ Hans Jonas, *The Gnostic Religion: The Message of the Alien God and the Beginnings of Christianity* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), 175.

²¹ See for instance, Elaine Pagels, "A Valentinian Interpretation of Baptism and Eucharist—And its Critique of 'Orthodox' Sacramental Theology and Practice," *HTR* 65 (1972): 153–169; M. Desjardins, "Baptism in Valentinianism" (unpublished paper delivered at the 1987 meeting of the AAR/SBL); Eric Segelberg, "The Baptismal Rite According to the Coptic-Gnostic Texts of Nag Hammadi," *Studia Patristica V*, ed. F.L. Cross, TU 80 (Berlin, 1962); C. Trautmann, "Organisation communautaire et pratiques rituelles," *Histoire et archéologie* 70 (1983): 44–51; H. Green, "Ritual in Valentinian Gnosticism," *Journal of Religious History* 12 (1982): 109–124.

At this moment, too, Theodotus concludes, “we are born again, becoming higher than all the other powers” (ἀναγεννώμεθα, τῶν λοιπῶν δυνάμεων ἀπασῶν ὑπεράνω γινόμενοι) (*Exc.Theod.* 76. 4).

For Theodotus, Christ had transformed the physical body so that it was no longer ἀσθενής και τοῖς κοσμικοῖς ὑποκείμενος ὄρατοῖς τε και ἀοράτοις, “weak and subject to the visible and invisible cosmic beings” (*Exc.Theod.* 79. 1). Since the advent of baptism initiated by Christ, the astrologers were no longer right in their prediction of individual nativities (*Exc.Theod.* 78. 1). Baptism literally provided a new genesis, wiping off a horoscope until it became a *tabula rasa*.

The effect of this new birth on the individual, according to Theodotus, was profound; he draws on Pauline language to make a sophisticated set of associations between the body, death, rebirth and a change of state. Theodotus observed that baptism does not physically transform the initiate:

The power of the transformation of the one who is baptized does not concern the body but the soul, for the person who comes up [out of the baptismal water] remains [physically] unchanged. (*Exc.Theod.* 77. 2–3)

The power of transformation altered only the ψυχή, not the body. The soul was transformed by means of a symbolic transmutation of gender; originally the offspring of the female, it was formed (μορφωθέντες), made more male, and became a ‘son of the bridegroom’ (υἱὸς Νυμφίου) (*Exc.Theod.* 79). As Theodotus states earlier:

As long as we were children of the female only, as of a dishonorable union, we were incomplete, childish, without understanding, weak, and without form, brought forth like abortions, in short, we were children of the woman. But having been given form by the Savior, we are the children of the husband and of the bridal chamber. (*Exc.Theod.* 68)

The use of the Pauline terms τέκνα, νήπια, and ἀσθενή stand in opposition to the equally Pauline terms ‘perfected’ and ‘mature,’ which are the implicit transformations of the initiates in the post-baptismal state. The initiates are given form (μορφωθέντας) by Jesus as a consequence of the baptism; the individual receives, as it were, a new pneumatic body.²² In what has been described as a summation of what Gnostic thinking is all about,²³ Theodotus concludes,

²² On μορφωθέντας as a technical term in so-called ‘Gnostic’ baptism, see Wayne Meeks, “Image of the Androgynous: Some Uses of a Symbol in Earliest Christianity,” *History of Religions* 13/3 (1974): 191, and Turner, “Ritual,” 153.

²³ The assessment is Ismo Dunderberg’s, in his essay “The School of Valentinus” in Marjannen and Luomanen, *A Companion*, 81.

Until [μέχρι] baptism, they say, fate [ἡ εἰμαρμένη] is real, but after it the astrologers are no longer right. But it is not only the washing [τὸ λουτρὸν] 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 [γέννησις] is and what rebirth [ἀναγέννησις].

(*Exc.Theod.* 78.1–2)

In Theodotus' system, baptism is inseparable from *gnosis*, and *gnosis* constitutes a knowledge of one's origins in the divine realm; as Simone Pétrement observes, "se connaître, c'est avant tout savoir qu'on n'est pas du monde, qu'on est de Dieu, et que, puisqu'on est de Dieu, on retournera à Dieu."²⁴

Theodotus appears to have paraphrased his idea that baptism provided a release from fate from an unusual source: a letter of the first-century Stoic philosopher Seneca. "Fortune does not have the long reach with which we credit her," wrote Seneca, "she can seize only the one who clings to her" (*Non habet, ut putamus, fortuna longas manus; neminem occupat nisi haerentem sibi*). The release from fate could only be accomplished "though the knowledge of the self and the world of nature" (*sola praestabit sui naturaeque cognitio*). The nature of this self-knowledge, in Seneca's words, concerned "whither it is going and whence it came, what is good for it and what is evil, what it seeks and what it avoids" (*quo iturus sit, unde ortus, quod illi bonum, quod malum sit, quid petat, quid evitet*) (*Ep.* 82. 6).²⁵ Seneca addressed these words to a friend, significantly, in a letter entitled "On the Natural Fear of Death." The soul was released from Fortuna, Seneca believed, not through the sacraments or through the intervention of a savior, but 'naturally,' that is to say, after it had been released from the body after death and travelled upward through the celestial spheres.

Theodotus reinterpreted Seneca's teaching on the release of the soul through knowledge within a sacramental framework. Death was no longer the only way in which an individual could be released from fate—nor was

²⁴ Simone Pétrement, *Le dieu séparé: les origines du gnosticisme* (Paris: Cerf, 1984), 197.

²⁵ For comments on Theodotus's use of Seneca's teachings, see A. de Conick, *Seek to See Him: Ascent and Vision Mysticism in the Gospel of Thomas* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1996). For the Graeco-Roman philosophical context of Seneca's teachings, see, among a large bibliography, A. Norden, *Agnostos Theos: Untersuchungen zur Formengeschichte religiöser Rede* (Berlin: B.G. Teubner, 1913), 95–109; Paul Veyne, *Seneca: The Life of a Stoic*, trans. David Sullivan (New York: Routledge, 2003); Folco Martinazzoli, *Seneca: Studio sulla morale Ellenica nell'esperienza Romana* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 1945); more particularly, see S. Bartsch and David Wray, eds., *Seneca and the Self* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially the essays by Martha Nussbaum, "Seneca on Fortune and the Kingdom of God," and Elizabeth Asmis, "Free Yourself!: Slavery, Freedom and the Self in Seneca's Letters."

mere intellectual knowledge of one's spiritual origins. Only participation in a profound ritual interaction might free the soul.

Like Justin, Theodotus worked on two distinct exegetical and theological levels. He freely adapted and adopted a Roman philosophical idea (the ideal of the *sapiens* liberating the soul from fate through *gnosis* and self-mastery) while also developing a sophisticated reading of Pauline baptismal language and anthropology. Like Justin, too, Theodotus expressed an exhilarated sense of existential freedom from fate, identifying baptism as the precise moment in which the savior unbound the ties that held him to the lower, contingent cosmos.

3. A Third Voice: Tatian

Theodotus eloquently expressed the manner in which Christians could reinterpret and rework a Graeco-Roman philosophical cosmology from the basis of their experience as converts to Christianity. In this, he is similar to his contemporary Tatian (120–180 CE).²⁶ A Syrian by birth, Tatian had travelled to Rome, perhaps to study under Justin Martyr; like Justin, we read that he arrived in the great city after becoming disenchanted with his quest for 'truth' (*Ad Graec.* 29. 1).

Of the six titled works attributed to him, Tatian's sole surviving work is a vitriolic diatribe against Greek culture and learning, the *Oratio Ad Graecos*.²⁷ Here, his plea that pagans tolerate Christianity stands incongruously with Tatian's strident condemnation of all things Greek. As for his often unusual theological notions preserved in his *Oratio*, they challenge scholarly definitions of what constituted 'proto-orthodox' Christianity in the second century. On the other hand, Tatian was not affiliated with any known sectarian school in his day, thus seems to have been a relatively independent voice.²⁸ In the fourth century, Epiphanius of Salamis included Tatian and

²⁶ For a good biographical profile, see William L. Petersen, "Tatian the Assyrian" in Antti Marjanen and Petri Luomanen, eds., *A Companion to Second-Century Christian 'Heretics'* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 125–158. This concise essay replaces the longer, theologically-oriented study of Martin Elze, *Tatian und seine Theologie*, *Forschungen zur Kirchen- und Dogmengeschichte* 9 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1960).

²⁷ The lost works are *On Animals* (see *Ad Graec.* 15.2); *On Perfection According to the Savior*; *Problems*; *On the Six Days of Creation*, plus *To Those Who Have Propounded Ideas About God*, which may or may not have ever been composed; see Petersen, "Tatian," 128, n. 8. For a critical edition, I have used here M. Whittaker, ed., *Tatian. Oratio ad graecos and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982).

²⁸ Such, anyway, is the assessment of Petersen, "Tatian," 133. He does, however, detect some

his followers in his enumeration of known heretics—not for Tatian’s often astonishing interpretations of cosmology, but for the radical encratism that he adopted later in life (*Pan.* 1. 46. 1. 6). Though espousing a slightly different theology, Tatian, just as Justin Martyr and Theodotus, interpreted baptism as a cosmological event that radically reoriented the individual’s perception of the cosmos.

In the *Oratio Ad Graecos*, Tatian claims that he had been “begotten again and obtained understanding of the truth” (καὶ γὰρ ἀναγεννηθεὶς καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἀληθοῦς κατάληψιν) (*Ad Graec.* 5. 10). He exhorted others to do the same: “‘Die to the world’ [ἀπόβησθε τῷ κόσμῳ] by rejecting its madness; ‘live to God’ by comprehending him and rejecting the old birth [τὴν παλαιὰν γένεσιν]” (*Ad Graec.* 11. 10–13). Making a pun on the adjective ‘planetary’ (which also has the sense in the original Greek of ‘wandering’ or ‘erring’) to refer to the demons who govern *heimarmene*, Tatian exhorts the Christian to recognize his or her status above their control:

We are above fate [ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ εἰμαρμένης ἔσμεν ἀνώτεροι] and instead of planetary demons [ἀντὶ πλανητῶν δαιμόνων], we have come to know one lord who does not err; we are not led by fate and have rejected its lawgivers [οὐ καθ’ εἰμαρμένην ἀγόμενοι τοὺς ταύτης νομοθέτας παρητήμεθα].²⁹ (*Ad Graec.* 9. 7–10)

Tatian’s words remind us that though Christians of antiquity took the expression ‘to be born again’ from Paul and the Gospel of John, the philosophical associations of the term ‘genesis’ in the second century meant that they understood this ‘new birth’ at baptism in a more technical sense than we do today, as literally a new ‘horoscope’ or ‘nativity’; more precisely, a new genesis meant a new birth apart from one’s horoscope that one had received at one’s original birth.³⁰ Thus Tatian describes ordinary nativity under the control of a demonically-administrated *heimarmene*: “Murderers and murdered, rich and poor, all are fate’s offspring, and every individual horoscope provided delight for the demons as if in a theater” (Οἱ φονεύοντες καὶ οἱ φονευόμενοι καὶ οἱ πλουτοῦντες καὶ οἱ πενόμενοι τῆς αὐτῆς εἰμαρμένης ὑπάρχουσιν

vaguely Valentinian resonances to Tatian’s thought, although I agree that these were most likely simply part of the intellectual *koine* of second-century Rome.

²⁹ On the pun *πλανᾶω*, see Wisdom 5:6: where the wicked say ἄρα ἐπλανήθημεν ἀπὸ ὁδοῦ ἀληθείας, καὶ τὸ τῆς δικαιοσύνης φῶς οὐκ ἔλαμψεν ἡμῖν, καὶ ὁ ἥλιος οὐκ ἀνέτειλεν ἡμῖν, or Deut 11:28 (LXX). Some examples of the pun in patristic literature have been collected by M. Smith, *Clement of Alexandria and a Secret Gospel of Mark* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 9.

³⁰ LSJ 343, *cn.* γενέσις. The dictionary lists ‘nativity, geniture’ as the second meaning after ‘origin, source.’

ἀπογεννήματα, πᾶσά τε γένεσις ὡσπερ ἐν θεάτρῳ τερπωλῆν παρέσχε τούτοις) (*Ad Graec.* 8. 1). But Tatian scorned the demonically-generated system of *heimarmene*; he felt that he existed apart from its influence: “let them [i.e., the Greeks] keep their fate,” he wrote, “I have no wish to worship the planets” (ἐχέτωσαν οὗτοι τὴν εἰμαρμένην. Τοὺς πλανήτας προσκυνεῖν οὐ βούλομαι) (*Ad Graec.* 10. 1–2).

Although many Christians of the second century believed that the soul could only free itself from planetary influence at death, others adopted a striking new paradigm: they believed that they had been stripped clean of planetary vice; the new ‘genesis’ received at baptism left the Christian free of the vice that the planets impose upon the soul. After Tatian claims that he had “no desire to worship the planets,” he continues his invective:

How then can I accept the doctrine of fate-ordained nativity [γένεσιν τὴν καθ’ εἰμαρμένην] when I see that those who administer it are like this? I have no desire to rule, I do not wish to be rich; I do not seek command, I hate fornication, I am not driven by greed to go on voyages; I am not in competition for athlete’s garlands, or tormented by ambition; I scorn death, rise above every kind of sickness, do not let grief consume my soul. (*Ad Graec.* 11. 1)

In his biographical sketch of Tatian, William Petersen considers Tatian’s words here as evidence of his dismissive, arrogant personality.³¹ I read the passage differently, however. Tatian’s words here become fully comprehensible only in light of second-century philosophical discussions of planetary influences. Tatian states explicitly that he is free from behavior which for him, as for many of his contemporaries, had planetary associations. In the Hermetic tractate *Poimandres*, for instance, seven governors rule the human body through the imposition of particular kinds of vice: the moon contributes τὴν ἀύχηντικὴν ἐνέργεια καὶ μειωτικὴν, “the power of increase and decrease”; Mercury, τὴν μηχανὴν τῶν κακῶν δόλων, “evil scheming”; Venus, lust (τὴν ἐπιθυμητικὴν); the sun produces τὴν ἀρχοντικὴν ὑπερηφανίαν, a “proud desire to rule”; Mars, impiety (τὸ θράσος τὸ ἀνόσιον) and audacity (τῆς τόλμης); Jupiter causes τὰς ἐφορμὰς τὰς κακὰς τοῦ πλοῦτου, a “desire for wealth” (*Poim.* 25). This idea of *προσαρτέματα* or planetary influences in the form of vice persisted through late antique paganism.³²

We can compare Tatian’s claim, “I have no desire to rule,” with “the proud desire to rule” that the author of the *Poimandres* believed derived

³¹ Petersen, “Tatian,” 134–136.

³² See my discussions on pp. 73–76.

from the sun—a human tendency which Servius, later, would associate with Jupiter. “I do not wish to be rich” counters the influence of Jupiter in the *Poimandres* and Mercury in Servius’s commentary. “I hate fornication” may have been Tatian’s repudiation of sexual desire, consistently associated with the planet Venus in ancient astrology. Servius also explicitly attributes two of the other passions Tatian mentions—ambition and grief—as associated with Jupiter and Saturn, respectively.³³ The other passions Tatian mentions (greed and the fear of death) do not have parallels in the planetary lists I have cited above; the precise nature of planetary attribution, however, remained essentially flexible in second-century astrological teachings.

Tatian claimed to be free from planetary influences because at his new birth at baptism, his astrologically ordained nativity had been effectively annulled, as he himself makes clear. He had gained a new genesis, a new nativity. In his oration, Tatian clearly rejects popular Greek astrology as patently ridiculous. Yet he did not actually reject the cosmological *schema* employed by his contemporaries. Tatian believed that fate existed, if only as a demonic construct. The planetary demons could influence humankind; people, in his opinion, through the power of free choice, chose to participate in sinful influences, or conversely, to reject them. He exhorted Christians, however, not simply to disbelieve theoretical astrology, but to realize that, at baptism, they had literally risen above fate’s grasp.

For Christians such as Tatian and Theodotus, then, rebirth at baptism had the full force of a new horoscope—or more precisely, a new existence apart from an astrologically determined horoscope. Since the planets were responsible for vice, those who were unbaptized lived at the mercy of the celestial powers who worked upon their subjects through *συμπάθεια*. But baptism elevated the Christian literally and figuratively beyond the realm controlled by the powers. For this reason, Theodotus interprets the Book of Psalms’ “trampling upon the scorpion and the adder” (Psalm 91:13) as part of the soul’s ascent, as it passes above the realms of the archons: serpentine, monstrous beings. Theodotus employs words in the Greek which describe the new, spatially-conceived domination of the powers: “we are born again, becoming higher [*ὑπεράνω*] than all the other powers” (*Exc.Theod.* 77. 1). Tatian, too, considered his community to exist on a spiritual level “higher than fate” (*ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ εἰμαρμένης ἔσμὲν ἀνώτεροι*).

³³ Servius, *In Aen.* 11. 51 (Thilo, 2. 482): the soul derives from the sun, the body from the moon, blood from Mars, inventiveness from Mercury, a desire for honors from Jupiter, passions from Venus, and tears from Saturn.

4. *Collocating Baptism and Salvation: Two Discourses of Cosmic Freedom*

The texts from Nag Hammadi which discuss baptism never employ the terminology of rebirth, nor directly express freedom from *heimarmene*. Yet their authors clearly envisioned baptism as a release from cosmic powers and a transition from life ‘in the cosmos’ to life on a higher spiritual level. For the author of the *Trimorphic Protennoia*, for example, the descent of an individual into the ‘water of life’ removed him or her from the cosmic forces of chaos (48, 7–10). The author of the Nag Hammadi subtractate *On Baptism B*, part of a larger treatise scholars have entitled *A Valentinian Exposition*, either composed or recorded a hymn replete with poetic language and imagery. The hymn probably followed a baptismal rite. Although heavily restored, this hymn speaks of the Christian’s *anabasis* “from the carnal [σαρκικόν] into the spiritual [πνευματικόν]; from the physical [φυσικόν], into the angelic” (*On Baptism B*, 42, 14–16). According to the Valentinian author of *On Baptism B*, baptism raised the individual out from the world into the Pleroma and into true ‘Sonship.’ It could transform the actual physical constituency of the body from ‘seminal bodies’ (ἰσώμα ἡσπερματικόν) to bodies with a ‘perfect form’ (ἀγμορφῆ τελεία) (48, 29–30).

The *Gospel of Philip*, too, expresses the conviction that the baptismal sacrament was necessary for Christians of their communities to acquire salvation. Like *On Baptism B*, the *GosPhil* interpreted baptism as a type of cosmic event in which Christ transformed initiates’ physical or spiritual constituency in order for them to reenter the place of their origin in the higher celestial realms. This ‘esoteric’ interpretation of what must have resembled externally the baptismal rite of the more proto-orthodox Christians accords with other Valentinian theologians of the second century. Irenaeus noted that Valentinians drew a distinction between a primary baptism instituted by the earthly Jesus for the remission of sins—a rite they shared with other streams of Christianity in the second century—and a secondary ‘baptism’ instituted by Christ for ‘perfection,’ termed ἀπολύτρωσις.³⁴ *Apolutrosis*, as Elaine Pagels notes, “releases the spiritual from the psychic components of

³⁴ *Adv.Haer.* 1. 21. 2. According to Irenaeus, Valentinians traced the first or ‘psychic’ baptism to John the Baptist, who brought a water-baptism for the remission of sins, while the second or ‘pneumatic’ baptism had been initiated by Christ who baptized ‘with the holy spirit.’ For a detailed analysis of Valentinian ἀπολύτρωσις, see Nicola Denzey Lewis, “*Apolutrosis* as Ritual and Sacrament: Determining a Ritual Context for Death in Second-century Valentinianism,” *J ECS* 17/4 (2009): 525–561.

his cosmic existence, redeeming him altogether from the jurisdiction of the demiurge, and restoring him into unity with his Pleroma, that is, with the Mother and Father beyond.”³⁵

The Valentinian designation of the term *apolytroxis*, literally, a ‘freeing’ or ‘loosening,’ probably developed from Valentinian exegeses of Paul’s letters. Clever exegetes could easily interpret the term within a baptismal context. In Rom 8:23 Paul uses ‘adoption’ and *apolytroxis* as synonyms; in Eph 4:30 the holy spirit ‘seals’ (σφραγίζειν) Christians “for the day of *apolutrosis*” (εἰς ἡμέραν ἀπολυτρόσεως). In Rom 8:38–39, following his reference to the imminent *apolutrosis* of Christians, Paul continues,

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers ... nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul’s allusion to celestial beings which formed a barrier between Christians, before *apolytroxis* made possible free access to God, contributed to the Valentinians’ conviction that *apolytroxis* ought to be understood as a soteriological, not eschatological, event. If one were to question the implications of the word *apolytroxis*, “from what are we being freed?” it was clear enough from Paul’s teachings that *apolytroxis* implied a freedom from “angels, principalities and powers” as well as from the cosmos itself. If *apolytroxis* was indeed a synonym for baptism, Valentinians could find in Paul justification for their interpretation that baptism was far more than a mere lustration for the repentance of sins. It signified a radical re-orientation, a release, from a pre-baptismal state of enslavement to celestial powers.

5. Conclusions

The idea that a spiritual rebirth reoriented an individual’s relationship to the cosmos permeates Christian writings of the second century. But Christians were only tapping into what had become a broader discourse. In fact, we find it in a variety of Roman-era cultic settings. For example, the *Corpus Hermeticum* 13 (part of a corpus which abounds in accounts of *palingenesis* or ‘rebirth’) bears the subtitle “A Secret Dialogue of Hermes Trismegistus on the Mountain to his son Tat: On Being Born Again, and on the Promise to be Silent.” In it, Hermes refers to the body as a ‘tent’ (σκήνος), which had been ‘constituted from the zodiacal circle’ (ἐκ τοῦ ζωοφόρου κύκλου συνέστη)

³⁵ Elaine Pagels, “A Valentinian Interpretation of Baptism and Eucharist—and its Critique of ‘Orthodox’ Sacramental Theology and Practice,” *HTR* 65 (1972): 162.

(*CH* 13. 12). At the moment of divine awakening or spiritual rebirth, these astral influences that envelop the individual like so many layers of soiled clothing are purged at an instant (*ἐλαύνονται*), permitting the construction of a new being who sees not with earthly eyes, but with the unsullied vision of the mind (*CH* 13. 11).

The *locus classicus* for the language of rebirth as freeing an individual from cosmic constraint in Latin literature of the second century is Lucius's conversion to the mysteries of Isis in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, which elevates him '*per omnia ... elementa*' onto a new level where fate has no hold over him (*Metam.* 11. 23. 12). "*Accessi confinium mortis et calcato Proserpinae limine per omnia vectus elementa remeavi*" writes Apuleius, who elsewhere describes Lucius's conversion to the mysteries of Isis as a 'new birth' ("*sua providentia quodam modo renatos ad novae reponere rursus salutis curricula*") (*Metam.* 11. 21. 9).

Christians differed from their pagan contemporaries in clearly associating such conceptual and spiritual rebirth specifically with the rite of baptism. For many Christians, too, the scope of this re-evaluation at baptism had broad sociological implications that they did not appear to have for Graeco-Roman Hermetists or initiates into mystery religions. These Christians did not simply come, at a stroke, to devalue the cosmos; they often came to view the entire established Graeco-Roman order as the earthly reflection of a debased celestial order. Time-honored tropes of Graeco-Roman cosmology could be repudiated as mere shadows of a more profound truth concerning the structure and dynamism of the cosmos. Indeed, the implications of this new cosmology resonated far more deeply than a simple rejection of the Roman ideals of, for instance, *paideia* or *traditio*. Certain Christians conceptualized two fundamentally different ontological strata. Society operated within the constraints of a lower level of creation—flawed and contingent—while those who were baptized and thus initiated participated in a new order, the laws of which were entirely alien.

Christian baptism was, at least in part, a cognitive act by which the individual perceived the profundity of that cosmic *redemptio*; it evoked the realization (properly: *gnosis*) that he or she was no longer held in thrall within a cosmos of chaos. The cognitive act of salvation worked through the medium of a sacrament or *mysterion* that allowed an individual, for the first time, to perceive that the cosmic event had taken place. This sacrament effected a change in the individual, either through a transformation of perceptions, or of the body, or of the psyche.

All Christians of the second century would concur: baptism cleansed an individual from sin. But different groups of Christians in the second century

offered diverse perspectives and interpretations on whether the primary significance of baptism was purification, the remission of sins, exorcism, or an opportunity for 'rebirth' or even 'redemption' from this cosmos.

The three Christians on whom I have focused in this chapter—Theodotus, Justin Martyr, and Tatian—all believed that baptism had provided the opportunity for a deeply spiritual experience in which they were drawn closer to the divine source or 'illuminated.' Baptism—at least ideally—permitted the initiate to experience the full impact of a savior's power, as he or she was transported spiritually out of the cosmos onto a new plane of spiritual existence. This journey, however it was experienced, provided a new birth, a new 'genesis' for the individual. It removed the individual from a life in which he or she was blindly enslaved to sin, into a new life in which he or she lived in moral freedom. Christians of the second century universally agreed that baptism, as an event, had resounding cosmological ramifications. Justin, Tatian and Theodotus leave us the testimonials of three Christians who experienced the full force of baptism as a profound event, capable of drawing the individual into a new relationship with the cosmos.

CHAPTER EIGHT

ASTRAL 'DETERMINISM' IN THE *GOSPEL OF JUDAS*

No discussion of astral determinism in second-century discourse can now be complete without an examination of the recently discovered *Gospel of Judas* in the Codex Tchacos.¹ The word 'star' or 'stars' is used on numerous occasions within this curious, compelling Sethian text—more than in any other single tractate from Christian antiquity. And Jesus addresses Judas with what seems to be a clear admonition about the malevolent power of astral determinism: "Judas, your star has led you astray" (*GosJud* 45, 13–14).

Central to my investigation in this chapter will be Jesus's claim in the *Gospel of Judas* that each person follows his astral destiny (42, 7–9). It is far from clear, however, what this means in the context of the text itself. Is it a general statement, or does Jesus simply mean each *disciple* has his own star? Given that in this document, the twelve disciples are probably types of the twelve signs of the zodiac, how do we contend with Judas's role as the 'thirteenth,' and his connection to astral destiny? Does Jesus have an astral destiny? Finally, is there a seminal relationship between the cosmological sections of the text and the dialogical sections in which Jesus teaches Judas about the "error of the stars"?

The *Gospel of Judas* differs from the other texts I have discussed in this book, in that the cosmological system to which it alludes has little, if anything, to do with Middle Platonist debates on the nature and scope of *heimarmene*. Indeed, the word *heimarmene* is not to be found in the text as it exists, and I doubt that when the document is fully restored, it will be found there. The concept of Providence or Pronoia is likewise absent. I conclude from these striking absences that we have, in the *Gospel of Judas*, a text which draws on a rhetoric about the power of the stars that derives not from current debates between learned intellectuals on Graeco-Roman cosmology, but from a different source: Jewish apocalyptic writings

¹ I have used here the critical edition of Rudolphe Kasser and Gregor Wurst, eds., *The Gospel of Judas, Together with the Letter of Peter to Philip, James, and a Book of Allogenes from Codex Tchacos. Introductions, Translations, and Notes by Rodolphe Kasser, Marvin Meyer, Gregor Wurst, and François Gaudard* (Washington, DC: The National Geographic Society, 2007).

from the late Second Temple Period. I argue that this ‘gospel’ reflects a Jewish cosmological system—more emanationist than systematic—and a Christian writer who was deeply concerned with the type of apocalyptic speculation that we find in Jewish apocalyptic texts of the Second Temple Period.

1. *Stars in the Gospel of Judas*

I begin with a simple first task: noting that the word ‘star’ (σῑογ) appears fifteen times in our extant manuscript—more often than in any other Christian text from this period of antiquity. The word is also confined to specific portions of the narrative—in dialogic material between Jesus and Judas—which, to me, strongly suggests that the other cosmological portion of the narrative from 47, 2 to 54, 12 derives from a separate and independent source. There, we find no stars but ‘luminaries’ (φωστῑη), which (as I shall discuss below) are somewhat different, deriving from Jewish sources that, harkening back to passages like Exod 3:2 and Deut 4:15, equate light with divine epiphanies. Nevertheless, the two sections (sources?) are related through their cosmic imagery.

As to *GosJud’s* theory of the stars, there are a few other initial basic observations to be made:

1. The stars in this text are not signifiers or luminaries merely adorning the heavenly realms as in Philo’s writings or in later Christian theology, but they apparently exert force; they lead Judas and the disciples to “err” (45, 13).² There is an obvious pun here on the Greek word for planets (πλάνητες ἀστέρεις or πλανήτοι) that ‘wander’ or ‘err’ (πλανῶ). Thus the stars here appear at face value to be connected to a specific kind of determinism—sidereal determinism—but not necessarily planetary or zodiacal determinism. Whether or not this determinism is connected to planetary or zodiacal systems should remain, for now, an open question.

2. Each of the twelve disciples has his own star (42, 7–8), including Judas, whose star Jesus says leads Judas ‘astray.’ Judas’s own star is mentioned on four separate occasions: 45, 13–14, after Judas’s Temple vision; 55, 10–11, where Jesus tells Judas “your star will ru[le] over the [thir]teenth aeon.” The

² For Philo, see my note 10. To cite here only one later Christian articulation of the same idea, see Clement of Alexandria, *Ecl.Proph.* 55 (3. 152. 15–19).

third usage comes in the midst of a set of four verses in Septuagintal style (56, 21–24):

Already your horn has been raised,
And your wrath has been kindled,
And your star has passed by,
And your heart has [become strong].

The final usage occurs at the end of the gospel, as Jesus issues his final instructions to Judas: “Lift up your eyes and look at the cloud and the light within it and the stars surrounding it. And the star that leads the way is your star” (57, 16–20).

So what are we to make of this? Initially, commentators such as Marvin Meyer explained the ancient theory that each person has his or her own star, appearing first in Plato’s *Timaeus* (41d–42b) and still present in, for example, Clement of Alexandria’s writings.³ But I am led here immediately to two questions. First, does Judas’s being led astray function positively or negatively within the narrative itself? Second, should the assertion that Judas and the other disciples all have their own star be interpreted as a more general theory of sidereal determinism: that *everyone* has a guiding star? I am not prepared to say that this is the best interpretation of the passages in *GosJud*; it is not clear to me that the experiences of Judas and the disciples are meant to stand for the experience of ordinary Christians. It could be that the correspondence is particular and specific.

3. Stars work in concert with angels or spirits (37, 4–5; 40, 16–17; 41, 4–5). This idea is very common in antiquity, appearing in both Jewish and pagan sources. According to *Corpus Hermeticum* 16, for instance, each star is assigned its own *daimōn*. “Thus deployed,” Hermes observes, “[the *daimōnes*] follow the orders of a particular star, and they are good and evil according to their natures, that is to say, their energies” (*CH* 16, 13). The third-century Platonist Porphyry, too, equates stars and *daimōnes*,⁴ as does Nag Hammadi’s *Paraphrase of Shem*, which states that the star-*daimōnes* control life on earth.⁵ The *Testimony of Truth* calls the old leaven [of the law] the “errant (πλάνη) desire of the *daimōnes* and stars.”⁶ However, the word *daimōn* never appears in *GosJud* as a synonym for ‘star’—just for Judas (more on this

³ Clement of Alexandria, *Ecl. Proph.* 55. 1 (3. 152. 14 ff.).

⁴ Porphyry, *De Regressu Animae* 34. 10–12 (Bidez).

⁵ *Paraphrase of Shem*, NHC VII, 27, 25 ff.; see also 34, 7.

⁶ *Testimony of Truth*, NHC IX, 29, 15–18.

later!). We find instead an equation of 'star' with 'angel.'⁷ This pairing appears to derive from Jewish traditions, starting as early as Deut 4:19 where the stars form part of the angelic 'host of heaven.' In *1 Enoch* angels are as numerous as the stars (43:2); they regulate the stars' courses and thus the seasons of the year (75:3). *Second Enoch* alludes to the angels who govern the stars (*2 Enoch* 4). From Jewish apocalyptic literature also derives the language of stars governed by 'archons' (*2 Enoch* 4) and 'authorities' (*Testament of Adam* 4:4).

4. It is difficult, if not impossible, to assign any location to the stars in *GosJud*, because the text's cosmological sections (47, 2–54, 12) appear unrelated to the dialogic passages in which Jesus speaks of the stars. The text's cosmology accounts for the creation through emanation of various luminaries (φω-στῆρ), but these do not appear to be stars. We cannot tell, therefore, if the author of *GosJud* thought that the stars were all located in one sphere, or in concentric spheres, or if, in fact, he thought of them as contained in spheres at all. Where the stars are located, however, presumably has ramifications for helping us determine whether or not they are understood to be *causal* (ruling *heimarmene* in a general sense) or merely *locative*, corresponding to the souls of Judas and the twelve on earth as their celestial counterparts in the aeons. Plenty of ancient sources, both Jewish and 'Gnostic,' feature stars in the heavens that function metaphorically rather than causally; not every text featuring powerful stars necessarily points to an espousal of Greek astrology. Let me give here two examples: Philo follows Plato's *Phaedrus* in holding that the fixed sphere of the stars surrounds the seven planets and marks the boundary between the cosmos and the purely intelligible world of divinity.⁸ But he does not equate this fixed sphere with the zodiac (which, at any rate, is not fixed), nor does he maintain that the stars have any function beyond acting as signs.⁹ In other words, we must be careful not to assume that the stars in *GosJud* are located in, for example, the *heimarmene* realm (as in the *Pistis Sophia*) unless the text makes that clear, or that they necessarily are connected with astral destiny in a general sense. A second key example is the appearance of the Star of Bethlehem in the Gospel of Matthew's infancy narrative (Mt 2). There, the star appears to the Magi, but also to Herod who, as we may recall, is deeply troubled by it (Mt 2:3). In a sense, the star 'leads' Herod to Jesus in a similar way that Judas's star leads

⁷ The same identification occurs in the Greek Magical Papyri; see *PGM* I. 74–76.

⁸ On Philo's cosmology: *Vit. Mos.* 1. 12; *Conf.* 5.

⁹ Stars as merely signs in Philo: *Spec. Leg.* 1. 87–90; *De Opificio Mundi*, 19, 16.

him to the Heavenly Temple, or to complete his 'destiny' at the end of the *GosJud*. The star 'leads' while simultaneously signifying something (the birth of the Messiah), but it is not connected to anyone's astral destiny. It is not part of a theory of astral fatalism or astrology. As Alan Scott observes, "it would appear that in this era astronomical language is often used for purposes which are not astronomical."¹⁰ In the case of the Gospel of Matthew, the conceptual background for the Star of Bethlehem derives from Jewish prophecy, such as Balaam's proclamation that "a star has marched forth from Jacob" (Num 24:17). My suspicion is that we find a similar Jewish worldview behind the *GosJud*.

5. Every single instance of the word 'star' indicates a negative evaluation of them and their power. They are equated with 'error' (46, 1–2; 55, 16–17). Their activity causes Jesus to laugh. They either 'lead' Judas and the disciples, or else they are said to bring things to 'completion' (xωκ) (40, 17–18; 54, 17–18). Their power is limited to lower beings, however, and does not affect Jesus, the primary beings Autogenes and Adamas, the Great Invisible Spirit, or those of the holy generation (ττνεα ετογααβ).

These observations give us a preliminary 'map' to further explore significant issues of interpretation pertaining to star language and imagery in the *Gospel of Judas*. They also lead me to a working hypothesis that follows from a general observation. First, the general observation: although the assumption has been that the text's astrology owes itself to Greek influence, it is important to note that there is nothing particularly Platonic or Ptolemaic about the cosmology of the *GosJud*—nothing beyond what most educated people in the second century held about the influence of the stars, at any rate—and any overt astrological references remain undeveloped in the text.¹¹ Missing are any technical astrological terms that we find in texts such as the *Pistis Sophia*. We should be careful not to make the assumption that there stands a full-blown Greek astrological or astronomical system behind the gospel, unless the text itself leads us in that direction.

Now, my working hypothesis: I suggest that the 'astrology' in *GosJud* derives from sectarian Jewish apocalyptic teachings. Since Judaism was deeply Hellenized throughout the Second Temple Period and post-Second

¹⁰ Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 100.

¹¹ On a presumed Greek astrological system, see, for instance, A. DeConick, *The Thirteenth Apostle: What the Gospel of Judas Really Says* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 25 ff.

Temple Period, I understand any protestations to this component of my argument. To a certain degree, a delineation of 'Jewish' from 'Greek' leads us in the wrong direction. Nevertheless, basic characteristic features of both cosmology and star-language in the *GosJud* can be usefully illuminated solely by drawing comparisons with Jewish apocryphal literature. In its so-called 'astrology,' therefore, the *GosJud* strikes me as drawing clearly on Jewish literary traditions.

2. *The Cosmology of the GosJud*

My contention is that the *Gospel of Judas*, as we have it, weaves together at least two sources, and that the 'frame narrative' in which Jesus invokes star-language (33, 22–47, 1; 54, 13–end) is a separate composition from his explanation of cosmology in 47, 2–54, 12. Both the language and the imagery differ in the two sections. A brief overview of the text's cosmogony and uranography is in order at this point.

The Great Invisible Spirit dominates the cosmic structure, from which emanates Autogenes with four unnamed attendants from two separate luminous clouds (47, 5–26). Next, Autogenes calls Adamas into being by a speech-act (48, 1–2). Adamas, hidden in a cloud of light (48, 21–25) is surrounded by myriads of angels who serve him.¹² So far, the structure here is typically Sethian, mirroring the *GosEg*'s primary Triad Logos-Autogenes-Adamas. At this point, the physical cosmos is laid out. Twelve aeons of the twelve luminaries shine in the heavens (49, 18–19). Each luminary (ΦΩΣΤΗΡ; the word 'star' is absent from these passages) governs six heavens (ΟΥΡΑΝΟΣ) to equal seventy-two luminaries/heavens (49, 23). Each of these seventy-two luminaries in turn governs five firmaments (ΣΤΕΡΕΩΜΑ) producing a total of 360 luminaries/firmaments (50, 2–4).¹³ This cosmos, we learn, is called 'corruption' or 'perdition' (ΦΘΟΡΑ) (50, 14), perhaps because of the fracturing of the cosmos into lower, contingent forms.

¹² Note the similarity to Jewish *merkavah* traditions; the Adamas is like a throne vision of the angel Metatron in the heavens. On these traditions, see Jarl Fossum, *The Name of God and the Angel of the Lord: Samaritan and Jewish Concepts of Intermediation and the Origin of Gnosticism* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1985); Alan Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven: Early Rabbinic Reports about Christianity and Gnosticism* (Leiden: Brill, 1977).

¹³ For seventy-two firmaments, see also the *1stApJas* 26, 16. Here, there seems to be a clear tension between systems of seven and systems of twelve. There are twelve times seven which equal seventy-two; of course, 12×7 is 84 not 72—an error the *GosJud* avoids. For an explanation of the error, see W. Schoedel, "Scripture and the Seventy-Two Heavens of the *First Apocalypse of James*," *NovTest* 12/2 (1970): 118–129.

The governing conceptual paradigm here is not drawn from Ptolemaic cosmology, but is a Sethian-style cosmos based on Jewish or even Babylonian astrological traditions. The numbers 12, 72, and 360 indicate a preoccupation with cosmology not for the purpose of mapping physical space, but the division of time: 12 months, 72 weeks in the Babylonian calendar, and 360 days in a year (= 72 weeks \times 5 days or 12 months \times 30 days). It seems here, then, that the author's prevailing metaphysical occupation was with the construction of *time*, rather than Ptolemaically-ordered *space*. This is not to say that we have tapped into a developed philosophy of time; my point is merely to point out that Greek conceptual models of planets and other luminaries encased in concentric zones around the earth nowhere appear here; instead, the cosmos are emanationist and perhaps calendrical, but not easy to map out spatially.¹⁴

The problem is heightened in *GosJud's* next passages: it then appears that Autogenes has with him 72 luminaries and 72 aeons: "In that place the first human appeared with his incorruptible powers." (50, 18–22). Is this a whole separate realm? The name of this aeon is 'El' (51, 1). Was this meant to be, rather, Eleleth—one of the four chief luminaries of Sethian cosmologies, or is it a sort of incipient and inverted Jewish mysticism that locates the Jewish God (here, 'El') in the chief heaven surrounded by a host of celestial beings? We also find, in this aeon, the first human, his incorruptible powers, and the "cloud of knowing" (50, 18–51, 1).

Next, twelve angels are called into being to rule chaos and the underworld (51, 5–7). First, from a cloud issues forth from the 'rebel' Nebro/Ialdabaoth "whose face flashed with fire and whose appearance was defiled with blood" (51, 8–15).¹⁵ Nebro creates seven angels, including Saklas who is here a separate being from Ialdabaoth, another angel who comes from the cloud (51, 16).

¹⁴ The problem is actually a typical one. The seven planetary archons of Sethian texts such as the *ApJn* are associated not with the Ptolemaic concentric spheres, but with conceptions of a planetary week (Simone Pétrement, *Le dieu séparé* [Paris: du Cerf, 1984], 100). There is a similar lack of spatial correlation between the planetary Mithraic grades and the Ptolemaic order; again, the grades seem connected to time rather than space. See R. Beck, *Planetary Gods and Planetary Orders in the Mysteries of Mithras* (Leiden: Brill, 1988). For Ophite planetary archons connected to time rather than space, see Nicola Denzey, "The Ophite Diagram and other Christian 'Books of the Dead'" in *Essays in Honour of Frederik Wisse, ARC* 33 (2005): 89–122.

¹⁵ There is a wicked archon named Nebruel in the *Holy Book of the Great Invisible Spirit* and a Nebro in the *GosEg*. Hippolytus also notes that the Peretae—who, interestingly, ostensibly considered the stars to be powers of destruction—have an archon named Nebro in their cosmology (*Ref.* 5, 15, 6 [183,30–39, Marcovich]).

The twelve rulers make twelve angels, although the text names only five:

1. [Se]th (?), “who is called the Christ” (?)
2. Harmathoth
3. Galila
4. Yobel
5. Adonaios

The text concludes, “These are the five who ruled the underworld, and first over chaos” (52, 11–13). There are significant parallels here with other Sethian lists, most notably those found in the *ApJn* and the *GosEg*.¹⁶ Let me work through this list backwards, starting with the least controversial. Of Adonaios I have nothing illuminating to say. Yobel, the Hebrew for Ram and thus the Jewish name for the zodiacal sign of Aries, offers the only clear association with the signs of the zodiac. Galila corresponds to the *Apocryphon of John’s* Kalila (cf. *ApJn* NHC III, 16, 20–17, 5; BG 40, 5–18) or Kalila-Oumbri (cf. *ApJn* NHC II, 10, 29–11, 3) and the *Gospel of the Egyptians’* Galila. The second angel, Harmathoth, is clearly a conflation of the first two rulers in the *ApJn’s* three recensions, Harmas and Athoth. I surmise that the combination was probably a scribal error. That leaves us with the troubling name of the first archon. To match with our extant lists, he should be Athoth or Iaoth, but the lacunate manuscript gives no hint that the missing letter was an o, the name had to have ended in -eo. Atheth is a possibility, thus April DeConick’s proposed reading: “[Ath]eth, who is called the Good (*kh(rēsto)s*)” rather than “Seth, who is called the Christ.” I find it more plausible than *krios*, “Seth who is called the Ram” [i.e., Aries].¹⁷

Yet I am not entirely convinced, given the proclivities of the *GosJud*, that “Seth, who is called the Christ” is incorrect. The gospel—which is unrelentingly dark and which (despite some points of contact with Sethian cosmology) does not emphasize Seth or salvation through Seth—may well

¹⁶ Compare *GosEg*, NHC III, 58, 5–22: “The first angel is Athoth. He is the one whom the great generations of men call [...]. The second is Harmas, who is the eye of the fire. The third is Galila. The fourth is Yobel. The fifth is Adonaios, who is called ‘Sabaoth’. The sixth is Cain, whom the great generations of men call the sun. The seventh is Abel; the eighth Akiressina; the ninth Yubel. The tenth is Harmupiael. The eleventh is Archir-Adonin. The twelfth is Belias. These are the ones who preside over Hades and the chaos.” See my observations on pp. 49–50.

¹⁷ So J. van der Vliet, “Judas and the Stars: Philological Notes on the Newly Published *Gospel of Judas* (GosJud, Codex gnosticus Maghâgha 3),” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 36 (2006): 137–152.

be anti-Sethian rather than Sethian. Since the Savior here is identified as 'Jesus' rather than 'Christ' throughout the gospel, it is possible that the author thought that those who equated Jesus with Christ—or who equated Seth with the Christ—were terribly in error, actually calling upon an archon without realizing it when they invoked the name of either Seth or Christ in their prayers.

The twelve angels presumably correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac, but it is frankly difficult to determine a precise correspondence.¹⁸ Thinking on the list of the twelve names as it more generally appears in a variety of sources, A.J. Welburn demonstrates fairly convincingly that the twelve do correspond to the zodiac, as well as to specific planets through astrological systems of planet-sign correlations standard in antiquity.¹⁹ Starting with the only two clear planetary associations (Harmas as Mercury, Iobel as Aries), Welburn reconstructs the list from the *ApJn* with its correlations as follows:²⁰

<i>Archon</i>	<i>Constellation</i>	<i>Planetary association</i>
Iaoth	Leo	(ruled by) Sun
Hermas	Virgo	Mercury
Galila	Libra	Venus
Iobel	Scorpio	Mars
Adonaios	Sagittarius	Jupiter

¹⁸ Compare the attempts of S. Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis: the Coptic Text of the Apocryphon Johannis in the Nag Hammadi Codex II* (Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1963), 205, who essentially gives up on determining any correspondence between archons, planets and constellations in the *ApJn*.

¹⁹ For these systems, see Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis*, 211–212; Tamsin Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (London: Routledge, 1994), 96; F. Boll, C. Bezold and W. Gundel, *Sternglaube und Sterndeutung. Die Geschichte und das Wesen der Astrologie*, (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), 58–59. Each of the signs corresponds to a certain planet which 'rules' over it. The signs of the zodiac commence either at Leo and run in progression through to Cancer, or at Aries and run through to Pisces. The corresponding planets run in a progression from the Sun to Saturn and back inward to the moon. The first system of planet-sign correlations was evidently known by certain early Christians other than the author or redactor of the *ApJn*. In the *Pistis Sophia*, the evil planetary archons are even described as being 'bound' or 'crucified' in their corresponding sign.

²⁰ A.J. Welburn, "The Identity of the Archons in the *Apocryphon Johannis*," *VC* 32 (1978): 250. Welburn notes that NHC II takes Adonaios and Sabaoth as one entity (a mistake repeated by the redactor of the *GosEg*), then moved Kain up a spot and added his brother Abel erroneously, perhaps seeking to complete the pair by word-association (see also Giversen, *Apocryphon Johannis*, 210 who reaches the same conclusion). Care seems to have been taken by the ancient redactor, despite his evident confusion at points in the list to keep separate the first seven rulers from the five who rule over the abyss.

<i>Archon</i>	<i>Constellation</i>	<i>Planetary association</i>
Kain/Sabaoth	Capricorn	Saturn
Abel/Kainan	Aquarius	Saturn
Abiressine	Pisces	(ruled by) Jupiter
Iobel	Aries	Mars
Armupiael	Taurus	Venus
Melcheiradonin	Gemini	Mercury
Belias	Cancer	Moon

The redactors of *Apjn* divided this list of twelve into seven archons who rule the firmaments plus five archons who rule the abyss. As Welburn notes, this is a traditional division in astrology: seven ‘day’ signs lie above the intersection of the celestial ecliptic and equator, the remaining ‘night’ signs below.²¹ The *GosJud* preserves only the names of the five who rule the abyss—fitting for a cosmos shrouded in darkness. Still, there is no real ‘smoking gun’ to connect the five named angels of the *GosJud* to these zodiacal signs or planetary associations.

It seems that the five angels listed in *GosJud* comprise a cosmology based on a (zodiacal? calendrical?) system of twelve rather than a (planetary) system of seven.²² It would be sloppy to introduce or presuppose a system of seven here. In this way, the *GosJud* departs from most Sethian cosmogonic texts that emphasize a Hebdomad, including the *Apjn* and the *GosEg*. According to Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* Book 1, the Sethian system presupposes a Hebdomad composed of the seven stars/planets. We know better than to generalize; nevertheless, the lack of emphasis on the seven strikes me as significant; in my opinion, it is suppressed or ignored because the author’s emphasis is on the twelve disciples, the pattern of twelve that is disrupted by Judas’s departure from the twelve, Matthias’s addition so as to ‘complete’ the Dodecad once more, and the hidden cosmic significance of this shift. This also means, I think, that so-called ‘astrological’ language

²¹ Welburn, 253–254. Unfortunately, the division of signs in astrology (from Aries to Libra above the ecliptic, and from Scorpio to Pisces below) do not correspond with the divisions in the *Apjn*. Welburn’s proposed solution, that the *Apjn*’s list reveals a “solar mystery,” cannot be properly substantiated. It should be added that if van der Vliet is correct in his restoration of the text “Seth, who is called the Ram,” then we have two signs of the five corresponding to the constellation Aries.

²² Welburn, 253–254. For a survey of sources that develop sevenfold planetary systems, see Adela Yarbro Collins, “The Seven Heavens in Jewish and Christian Apocalypses,” in John J. Collins and Michael Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy and Other Worldly Journeys* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 83–84. Also helpful is Jacques Flamant, “Soteriologie et systemes planetaires,” in Ugo Bianchi and M.-J. Vermaseren, eds., *La soteriologia dei culti orientali nell’impero romano* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1982), 223–242.

enters the text because it is a way to articulate the cosmic dimensions of this shift, not because there stands behind the *GosJud* a fully developed Ptolemaic uranography. Not incidentally, we find that some Jewish *literary* sources frequently adopt zodiacal symbolism or language, not because their authors were convinced of the veracity of astrology, but because the twelve signs of the zodiac and the twelve months could so conveniently represent the twelve tribes of Israel.²³ We find a similar emphasis on the number twelve associated with the Heavenly Jerusalem in the Book of Revelation: it has twelve gates, each one guarded by an angel (21:12). On the twelve foundations of the city walls are the twelve names of the twelve apostles (21:14). Twelve jewels adorn the city walls (21:19). Here, the imagery is 'zodiacal' without being determinative; that is, the appearance of an incipient zodiac here does not indicate that that zodiac is connected to a belief in astrological fatalism.

3. *Visions of the Temple: Jewish Cosmological Elements in GosJud*

It is useful at this point to look more closely at the points of contact between elements in this gospel and Jewish sources and imagery. I will focus on one main element here: the text's Temple visions. We find in the *GosJud* incipient *hekhalot* traditions, particularly in the fact that we have not one, but two visions of a Temple. Judas has a Temple vision (44, 24–45, 9)—described as a vision of a great 'house' [οὔνη, restored] to which Jesus responds,

your star has led you astray (ἀπεκκιοῦ πλαν[να] ἡμῶν) ... No person of mortal birth is worthy to enter the house you have seen, for that place is reserved for the holy. Neither the sun nor the moon will rule there, nor the day, but the holy will bide always in the aeon with the holy angels. (45, 14–19)

Remarkably, the disciples also have a Temple vision (38, 2–3), but they see a very different Temple than Judas sees. Theirs is a great house with a great altar served by twelve priests. God's 'name,' the Tetragrammaton, lives in the Temple; a crowd throngs outside. Jesus asks for a description of the priests, so the disciples outline various egregious activities: they are sacrificing their wives and children, committing sodomy and murder, "and

²³ The *locus classicus* for this type of identification remains Philo's description of the symbols of the sun, moon, *stoicheia* and zodiac on the vestments of the High Priest in *Vit.Mos.* 2. 125. Similarly, the fifth Sibylline Oracle, likely of second-century Jewish authorship, gives an extended passage on the 'battle of the stars' utilizing zodiacal language, yet cannot be considered an attestation of Jewish astrology (*Sib Or.* 5. 512–531). For more examples, see also Philo: *de Mig.Abr.*, 32; Josephus, *Bellum* 5. 5. 4; 6. 5. 3; Philo, *Quaes.Gen.*, 4. 164.

the men who stand over the altar are invoking your name” (38, 24–26). Jesus then interprets the vision: the priests are the disciples, the disciples correspond to twelve generations, and the cattle are the people they have led astray (39, 28).

Elaine Pagels and Karen King have read the disciples’ Temple vision allegorically as a reference to the Church and the perceived corruption of apostolic authority; they see the monstrous activities of the priests—namely human sacrifice—connected to the exhortations to martyrdom by some Christians following in apostolic tradition.²⁴ Given the parallel here with the *Testimony of Truth* where the Christians who boast of their salvation through martyrdom do so through the “agency of the wandering stars” (*Test-Truth* 34, 7–10), this way of reading the text is compelling. It seems to me, however, that we should place these Temple visions back within Jewish sectarian literature—much of which is rife with images of the Temple, both in its earthly, degraded form and as the Heavenly Temple.

My initial impression upon first reading the *GosJud* was that while Judas sees the uncorrupted Heavenly Temple in his vision, the disciples see the corrupt earthly Temple. This dichotomized vision falls right in line with a number of Jewish apocalyptic texts from the Second Temple Period. In these, a seer is granted a vision of the Heavenly Temple, which is then contrasted with the shockingly corrupt Temple on earth. Certainly there were disaffected Jews in the Second Temple Period who believed that the Jerusalem Temple had been hopelessly defiled; their perspective is reflected in Qumranic texts such as the *Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice* and the *Temple Scroll*. In the *Testament of Levi*—where, incidentally, we find our earliest Jewish reference to a seven-heavened cosmos—Levi tours the heavens including the heavenly Temple, where he receives the garments of a high priest. He then returns to the earthly Temple, which is profoundly corrupted. In one passage, he speaks of the corruption during the seventh jubilee (presumably corresponding to the Hellenistic Hasmonean priesthood):

There shall be such pollution as I am unable to declare in the presence of human beings, because only the ones who do these things understand such matters. Therefore they shall be in captivity and preyed upon; both their land and their substance shall be stolen. And in the fifth week they shall return to the land of their desolation, and shall restore anew the house of the Lord. In the seventh week there shall come priests: idolators, adulterers, money lovers, arrogant, lawless, voluptuaries, pederasts, those who practice bestiality.²⁵

(*Testament of Levi*, 17 [trans. Zervos, OTP, 2:794])

²⁴ Elaine Pagels and Karen King, *Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity* (New York: Viking, 2007), 44 ff.

²⁵ *Testament of Levi*, 17 (trans. Zervos, OTP, 2:794).

Interestingly, following this seventh jubilee, God places a new priest in the Temple at the 'completion' of the days (= aeons?). This priest, furthermore, is likened to a star: "And his star shall rise in heaven like a king ... This one will shine forth like the sun at his ascension" (*Test. Levi* 18). Receiving further sanctification from the celestial "Temple of Glory," this new priest will open the gates to Paradise, reinstate Adam, give Adam and Eve the fruit to eat, and conquer Belial—giving the new blessed race the ability to conquer all evil spirits. I see striking parallels here between *GosJud* and *Test. Levi*. The *GosJud* likewise speaks of a succession of wicked priests practicing unspeakable sins (40, 7 ff.) preceding the good priest who will take over at the 'completion' of the time of the twelve: "on the last day they [i.e., the twelve disciple/priests] will be put to shame" (40, 25–26).

The trope of the corruption of the earthly Temple is fairly standard fare in Jewish apocalyptic, and should not particularly shock us when we find it here. In the case of the Second Temple Period literature, condemnations of the earthly Temple were, of course, connected to the Hellenization of the priesthood and the influence of foreign (i.e., Greek) modes of behavior. The situation was no different in the second century, as sectarian Jews and 'Gnostics' looked upon the fate of the Temple and the influence of Roman or Graeco-Roman culture on an earlier set of ideals.

Upon reviewing the literature, however, I was struck by those Jewish apocalyptic texts that state unequivocally that even the Heavenly Temple was defiled. In *1 Enoch*, the seer Enoch has a Temple vision and finds that fornicating angels are defiling it. The sexual sins of the fallen angels in *1 Enoch's* ancient core, the *Book of the Watchers*, are associated with the sexual sins of Temple priests; in fact, the point is made that the fallen angels *are* the priests. But they are also stars (*1 Enoch* 75:3). The angels/priests/stars are also guilty of other transgressions, including murder. In *1 Enoch* 18:13–16, in fact, the star/priests are punished for their transgression.²⁶ Again, the points of contact with *GosJud* are striking: the point is made explicitly there that the Temple priests are the twelve disciples, but they are also star-angels: "those who say 'we are like angels'; they are the stars that bring everything to completion" (40, 16–18; cf. 41, 4–5).²⁷

Already in Second Temple Period or even earlier, then (*1 Enoch's* "Book of the Watchers" or first 36 chapters can be dated as early as the third century BCE), Jewish apocalyptic authors conflated Temple priests with

²⁶ Compare the *Ps-Clem. Hom.* 8. 12 ff.

²⁷ The sacrifice is received from a "minister of error" (ΠΛΑΙΔΙΚΟΝΟΣ ΝΤΕΠΛΑΝΗ) (40, 22–23); note we have here a virtual pun with a "planetary minister."

errant stars. I find this significant, because we find a clear equation of the activities of the defiled Temple with the error of the star-angels. In fact, the use of cosmic imagery to describe the Temple permeates a number of Jewish writings.²⁸ Both Philo and Josephus note the astrological symbolism of the Jerusalem Temple. Philo states in *De Specialibus Legibus* that the stars are the offerings made in the temple that is the cosmos, while the angels are the priests in this temple.²⁹ Philo speaks here of the Heavenly Temple (he was part of a class of writers who conceptualized the heavens as a Temple, as opposed to a Temple in the heavens, as in *GosJud*, *1 Enoch* and *TestLevi*). But the earthly Temple also employed cosmic imagery. In a significant passage in the *Jewish War*, Josephus describes the Temple's outer veil in place since the time of Herod: eighty feet high, it was wrought in blue and fine linen, in scarlet and purple, featuring an image of the cosmos (*Bellum* 5. 5. 5 sec. 212–214). Pictured on it “was a panorama of the entire heavens.”³⁰ Within the Temple itself, the twelve loaves of bread on the table represent the signs of the zodiac, and the seven branches of the menorah represent the seven planets.³¹

My point here is that the *GosJud*'s description of two celestial ‘houses’ ought to be placed within the context of Jewish writings on the nature of the Heavenly Temple. Nor is the move to ‘demonize’ the Temple and its priests the shocking innovation of *GosJud*'s author. To charge its priests with sexual sins was already commonplace, and to transpose the offenders from ‘priests’ to ‘disciples’ makes sense in a post-Second Temple Period world. Neither was it new to associate priests with errant or sinful angels or stars. Cosmic imagery for the Temple was common, and disaffected Jews had no difficulty with demonizing even a Heavenly Temple. Other texts such as *TestLevi*, like the *GosJud*, contrast a heavenly undefiled Temple with an earthly defiled one.

Visions of the Temple do not come from earthly dreams; they derive from Jewish mystical ascent traditions in which the seer is given access to the realities of the cosmos. Thus I see no reason not to think that both Judas and the other disciples actually ‘see’ their Temple visions in the heavens.

²⁸ Jonathan Klawans, *Purity, Sacrifice, and the Temple: Symbolism and Supersessionism in the Study of Ancient Judaism* (New York: Oxford, 2006), 12.

²⁹ Philo, *Spec. Leg.* 1. 66.

³⁰ D. Ulansey, “The Heavenly Veil Torn: Mark’s Cosmic Inclusio,” *JBL* 110/1 (1991): 123–125; See also André Pelletier, “La tradition synoptique du ‘voile déchiré’ à la lumière des réalités archéologiques,” *RSR* 46 (1958): 168–179.

³¹ Josephus, *Bellum*, 5. 218; cf. *Ant.* 3. 146, 182; cf. Philo. *Quaes. Ex.* 2. 78; *Her.* 221; *Vit. Mos.* 2. 102; cf. also Philo, *Special Laws* 1. 172.

While this idea troubles us less, I suspect, with Judas's vision of the Spiritual Temple, it works less well for the disciples' vision of the corrupt Temple. I argue here that the corrupt Temple, however, is also located in the heavens and is not meant to be the earthly Jerusalem Temple at all, but the demonic 'mirror' in the lower aeons of the inaccessible, incorrupt Temple beyond, where dwell the immortal generation. The *GosJud*'s choice to contrast a heavenly undefiled Temple in the upper realms with a heavenly defiled Temple in the lower realms is innovative but consistent with the author's worldview.

The clear literary debts I have detected here to Jewish apocalyptic traditions leads me to reject the idea that there stands behind the *GosJud* any coherent Ptolemaic cosmology. Significantly absent is the concept of the planets operating within their spheres; neither are the twelve aeons and their luminaries said to be located in any particular sphere. The word *heimarmene* is never used. Even if this material were in the *GosJud*'s missing passages, it would likely belong to the cosmological revelation section that stands distinct from the dialogical material in which Jesus reveals the nature of the errant stars to Judas. Again, I find that the employment of star language derives from Jewish sources, which often speak of stars but rarely bother to locate them consistently in a particular cosmos. Jewish texts show no consistency in this regard.

4. *Some Conclusions*

The language of the stars and the ostensible astral fatalism of the *GosJud* appears to derive from earlier Jewish apocalyptic ways of thinking about the stars as a) associated with the angels; and b) connected somehow with the functioning of the corrupt Heavenly Temple. Judas and the disciples are identical to the stars; perhaps we might say that they stand in some syzygetic relationship to them. When, then, Jesus laughs at the error of the stars, he laughs at the witlessness of the disciples. And when Jesus points out that Judas and the disciples all have stars that lead them astray, this should not be taken as a general, Greek theory of sidereal causality that governs all people. Rather, it is the most scathing indictment of Judaism, the early Jesus movement, and the Christianity that grows from a tradition the author of the *GosJud* could only see as wholly corrupt.

Although the *Gospel of Judas* does not use the term *heimarmene*, it should be noted that it still utilizes the discourse of enslavement to fate—but here, fate is connected with individual destinies or, better, individual identities.

The disciples are star-bound, their actions and futures indelibly connected to their astral-body syzygies. If Jonas were convinced that there existed a characteristic Gnostic 'cosmic pessimism,' he would have found his most convincing example in this text. Unlike all our other surviving second-century Gnostic texts, the *GosJud* alone offers no salvation, no providential intervention, and no way out. Judas, appointed to become the 'thirteenth' *daimōn*, may or may not have escaped an ineluctable system; not enough of the document remains for us to be sure. Jesus alone stands outside it, but he does not do so as one who speaks to the hopes and beliefs of the reader.

Within this bleak cosmology, sidereal enslavement still functions as an etic, rather than emic, discourse. The sense of the document is not that 'we,' as the designated early Christian audience, are all enslaved. Rather, the discourse of enslavement serves as part of the author's potent arsenal against other Christians and the forms of praxis which he clearly finds repellent. One polemical tactic is to characterize Jesus's disciples as adulterers and murderers; another, related attack is to attribute their 'errant' behavior to the 'errant' stars. The author alone sees with clear, unwavering vision into a swirling, shining, demonically-administered cosmos.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSIONS, AND A NEW WAY FORWARD

In his *Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, the Christian writer Methodius (260–312 CE) addressed the ‘problem of fate’ against the *mathematikē* or astrologers, the learned pagans of his day:

For of all evils, the greatest which is implanted in many is that which refers the causes of sins to the motions of the stars, and says that our life is guided by the necessities of fate, as those say who study the stars, with much insolence.
(*Banquet of the Ten Virgins*, 13–16)

Methodius devotes his next three chapters to stock refutations of *heimarmene*, ending each argument with the triumphant litany, “therefore there is no fate.” Methodius’s contemporary, Arnobius (ca. 297–303 CE) makes a similar vague charge against imaginary pagan interlocutors:

For the whole company of the learned will straightway swoop upon us, who, asserting and proving that whatever happens, happens according to the decrees of Fate, snatch out of our hands that opinion, and assert that we are putting our trust in vain beliefs. (*Seven Books Against the Heathen*, 7. 10)

He then proceeds to employ the same arguments as Methodius: if *heimarmene* existed, one would have to deny both the omnipotence and goodness of God; the individual would not act out of free will, and the entire cosmic economy of salvation would fail to make sense.

These two treatises by third-century Christians ably demonstrate that there was a world of difference between the worldviews of second-century Christians and those of Christians only a century later. Nowhere are these differences more apparent than in the discourses concerning the nature and scope of *heimarmene*. In the second century, as we have seen, the rhetoric of ‘enslavement to fate’ appeared in a wide variety of Christian and non-Christian sources. Far from unusual, this language seems to have been characteristic of religious polemic of the second century in general. It is never used to refer to the author’s own group, but refers exclusively to those who stand in direct opposition to that group, though that opposition may be broadly construed as ‘the world’ or ‘others.’ ‘Enslaved to fate,’ as we have seen, may also characterize the spiritual state of those before their inclusion into a new religious community.

By contrast, at the heart of third-century debates on the nature of *heimarmene* lay the question, not of cosmology, but of ethics—specifically, moral responsibility; as the author of the *Clementine Recognitions* observes, “some Greeks have brought in fate ... contrary to which no one can do or suffer anything ... when someone believes that it is not possible to do anything or suffer anything contrary to fate, it is easy to be ready to sin” (*Clem.Rec.* 12. 3–4).

By the fourth century, any discussion of *heimarmene* was purely formulaic. Christian authors continued to employ the systematic refutations against astrology offered up centuries earlier by the Skeptic philosopher Carneades (214–128 B.C.E).¹ I can offer here only a few examples from the large corpus of Christian *de Fato* treatises. In the second half of the fourth century, the Latin author Ambrosiaster included in his *Quaestiones Veteris et Novi Testamenti* a section entitled *de Fato*, directed primarily against astrology. His treatise was soon followed by Nicetas of Remesiana’s *Instructio ad competentes*, addressed to candidates for baptism, which devoted an entire book to the uselessness of a horoscope for understanding one’s destiny.² In the 360s, Diodore of Tarsus, an opponent of the emperor Julian, composed numerous treatises against fate, including *Contra astronomos et astrologos et fatum*; *De sphaera et septem zonis et contrario astrorum motu*; *De Hipparchi sphaera*; *Contra Aristotelem, de corpore coelesti*; and *Quomodo sol sit calidus, contra eos qui coelum animal esse dicunt*. All these works have now been lost, with the exception of Diodorus’s first treatise on fate, which was partially preserved by Photius; containing eight books, it defended the faith in God and Divine Providence against the belief in fate and the unlimited power of the stars. Thirty years later, Nemesius of Emesa polemicized against fatalism in his treatise *On the Nature of Man*. In the following chapters, Nemesius defended the Christian doctrine of divine *pronoia*. Again, it must be said that the arguments deployed against fatalism are standard refutations that learned Christians appeared to have learned by rote, from Greek, then Roman, sources. Key, however, is the idea (newly adopted from

¹ These Christian sources have been assembled by Otto Riedinger, *Die frühchristliche Kirche gegen der Astrologie* (Innsbruck: Wagner, 1956), and Emmanuel Amand de Medieta, *Fatalisme et liberté dans l’antiquité grecque* (Louvain: University of Louvain, 1940). For a more balanced survey including more recently discovered Christian sources, see Tim Hegedus, *Attitudes to Astrology in Early Christianity: A Study Based on Selected Sources* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2000).

² Nicetas of Remesiana, *Instructio ad competentes*, Bk 4: *Adversus genealogiam* or *genethlogiam* (“Against the use of a horoscope”). The treatise is now lost.

Stoicism) that humans could exercise God-given free choice against astral determinism.

In the late fourth century, Gregory of Nyssa composed a treatise *Against Fate* (ca. 382 CE), in which he challenged a pagan opponent who held that life—including conversion to Christianity—was determined by the constellations at nativity.³ Gregory drew his refutations from Bardaisan of Edessa's second-century *Book of the Laws of Countries*. In his other works, he strove to convince his interlocutors that the operative principle of the cosmos was *pronoia*, not *heimarmene* or *ananke*:

“[I]t is foolish ... for you to fret and complain of the chain of *ananke* in the fixed sequence of life's realities. You do not know the goal toward which each single *oikonomia* of the universe is moving.”

(*On the Resurrection of the Soul*, PG XLVI, 105)

Gregory urged his congregation to abandon the idea that there existed “some sort of power of *ananke* from above” and to realize that moral decisions were up to their own nature and free choice (*On the Life of Moses* 2).

Augustine devoted a considerable portion of the fifth book of his *City of God* (ca. 415 CE) to his refutations of astrological fatalism. Like his contemporaries, he strongly objected to the dissolution of ethics that he felt would necessarily accompany a system of fatalism. “What judgment, then,” he wrote, “is left to God concerning the deeds of men, who is Lord both of the stars and of men, when to these deeds a celestial necessity is attributed?” (*Civ.Dei* 5, 1). Like his Catholic predecessors, Augustine adopted Carneades' traditional refutations against astrological fatalism: twins, he noted, although born with identical nativities, did not experience identical fates. He combined with the traditional philosophical refutations arguments and examples drawn from scripture: the case of Jacob and Esau, for instance, proved that twins could have different natures and destinies. He concluded,

[W]hilst it is not altogether absurd to say that certain sidereal influences have some power to cause differences in bodies alone—as, for instance, we see that the seasons of the year come round by the approaching and receding of the sun, and that certain kinds of things are increased in size or diminished by the waxings and wanings of the moon, such as sea-urchins, oysters, and the wonderful tides of the ocean—it does not follow that the wills of men are to be made subject to the position of the stars. (*Civ.Dei* 5, 6)

³ Gregory of Nyssa, *Contra Fatum*. For studies, see J.A. McDonough, *The Treatise of Gregory of Nyssa contra fatum* (Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, Harvard University, 1952), 145–174; J. Gaith, *La conception de la liberté chez Grégoire de Nysse*, Études de Philosophie Médiévale 43 (Paris: Vrin, 1953).

The very regularity and conformity of these late antique discussions and *de Fato* treatises signals, to me, the end of serious debate; the refutation of *heimarmene* became part of a repertoire of stock arguments against a pagan philosophy which no one appears to have embraced with any earnestness.

1. *An Old Paradigm ...*

In the first chapter of this study, I challenged an earlier generation of scholars who found at the heart of the 'late antique *Zeitgeist*' a profound sense of alienation. Within the field of Gnosticism or Gnostic Studies, the chief proponent of this perspective was the philosopher Hans Jonas, who found in 'gnosticism' the profound cosmic disaffection that characterized some modern philosophical worldviews, particularly existentialism and nihilism. Jonas owed his interpretation not only to those philosophers such as Heidegger and Husserl who had been his chief intellectual influences, but also to the 'spirit of the age' in the 1930s and 1940s that found in the second century CE clear proof of an Age of Anxiety.

This sense of spiritual dis-ease, scholars held, provoked individuals of the second and third centuries to view the cosmos or cosmic powers as inherently evil. E.R. Dodds, in *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety*, considered the idea of fate as a primary 'opposing principle' to be a prominent and distinctive theme within late antique literature.⁴ E.R. Dodds attributed the concept of fate or *heimarmene* to 'Oriental' influences, or (more specifically) to the popularity of astrology in the High Empire. Dodds concurred with his colleagues Franz Cumont, Arthur Darby Nock, and André-Jean Festugière: individuals of the second century felt ruled by "an unchangeable Fate written in the stars."⁵ Their depiction of the religious climate of the second century has remained virtually axiomatic in modern scholarship, but this book has been an attempt to unseat the old paradigm with one based on an examination of new sources such as those now available to us from Nag Hammadi.

It has been my aim in this study to investigate the language employed by some second-century Christians when they raised the subject of astral or planetary fatalism in religious discourse. I chose to focus upon second-century debates because it was in that period that we find Christian thinkers

⁴ E.R. Dodds, *Pagans and Christians*, 13.

⁵ A.D. Nock, *Conversion*, 100.

struggling to establish their theologies in the face of deeply rooted Roman values, religious perspectives, and philosophies. These Christians, thoroughly cognizant with Graeco-Roman *paideia*, strove to reconcile the theologies and cosmologies of Jewish and New Testamental texts with philosophical ideals that formed part of the conceptual *koine* of the Roman Empire. The process, however, created substantial problems that needed to be addressed.

Unlike Christians of the third or fourth centuries, Christians of the second century were not inclined to abandon entirely pagan cosmological concepts such as *heimarmene*. Instead, they sought to resolve Christian soteriology with these concepts. This resulted, ultimately, in what might at first appear to be a paradox: Christians adopted a theological position which refuted astral fatalism, but which did not refute it wholesale; individuals could speak of having been released from fate's influence. The Christians on whom I have focused in this study did not deny the efficacy of *heimarmene*, at least for a portion of the population.

Against Jonas, Nock, and Festugière, I have found to be entirely absent from our extant sources any language which might suggest that second-century Christians felt alienated, disempowered, or oppressed by cosmic beings or forces. I can suggest three explanations for the misperception of an earlier generation of scholars: (1) scholars have tended to rely on scholarly consensus or an academic 'line of transmission' for their interpretation of primary sources, rather than to confront the sources from fresh perspectives; (2) certain scholars have tended to use sources inaccurately, or to draw inferences from ambiguous source materials; (3) many scholars have approached source materials from a particular, biased hermeneutical framework, such as the implicitly supercessionist interpretation that astrology "lay like a nightmare upon the soul," to quote Paul Wendland, before it was necessarily corrected by the advent of Christian 'rationalism.'⁶ The implications of my discovery support the relatively recent work of scholars of Gnosticism such as Michael Williams, who suggests we abandon Jonas's characterization of Gnosticism as world-abnegating.⁷

It must be said, however, that we can indeed find evidence that certain Christians in the second century ascribed to what Cumont had termed 'cosmic pessimism.' An example would be, most clearly, the *Gospel of Judas*.

⁶ Paul Wendland, "Hellenistic Ideas of Salvation in Light of Ancient Anthropology," *AJT* 17 (1913): 345.

⁷ Michael Allen Williams, *Rethinking Gnosticism: Arguments for Dismantling a Dubious Category* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Such pessimism, however, was hardly confined to ‘gnostic’ groups. Against Jonas, I have noted here that the tendency to see the cosmos as inherently oppressive was as characteristic of a Christian such as Justin Martyr as it was of a more ‘gnostic’ Christian such as Theodotus. The language employed by proto-orthodox Christians to discuss the nature and scope of *heimarmene* differed in no significant manner from that which we find in so-called ‘Gnostic’ treatises. All Christians, whatever their theological disposition, depended upon the same combination of sources to compose their cosmologies; they drew upon contemporary Middle Platonism to articulate their understandings of *heimarmene* and *pronoia*. At issue in early Christian circles remained the precise jurisdiction of each. Like their Middle Platonist contemporaries, a range of Christian authors did not solve the problem of evil by positing an essentially evil cosmos. Instead, they confined malevolent planetary or astral influences both spatially and temporally. Hermetic writers did precisely the same thing.

Unlike most Hermetists, however, those Christian authors of the second century who considered that *heimarmene* existed also believed that its influence had been compromised through the advent of a savior. This conviction I trace back to Pauline theology. Although this savior, Jesus Christ, had theoretically ‘vanquished’ *heimarmene*, many Christians retained the notion that it remained efficacious for that portion of the human population which had not yet committed themselves to Christ. As the Valentinian teacher Theodotus stated explicitly, fate indeed exists—but only for others, not for baptized Christians.

Indeed, part of the nature of salvation, within second-century sources, was the recognition that destiny had already been vanquished for the community with which the author identified. Certain Christians believed that they, as a group, had been released or redeemed, but that the behavior of others outside this group effectively demonstrated how thoroughly they persisted in a state of enslavement. At no point, however, even within so-called ‘gnostic’ sources such as *Orig.Wld* or *ApJn*, or even in the unusual *Gospel of Judas* (which is difficult to situate within an early Christian community, even a Sethian one), do we find the rhetoric of ‘enslavement to fate’ within the context of individuals or communities which considered *themselves* enslaved. My findings here expand on a passing observation made by Simone Pétrement, in her study *Le dieu séparé*:

Les gnostiques ne disent pas qu’il leur faut être libérés du Destin; pour eux le Destin est déjà vaincu. Ils ne cherchent pas la délivrance, ils la connaissent déjà. Pour eux, elle a déjà été apportée par le Sauveur. On n’a regardé le Des-

tin comme une puissance inférieure et pouvant être vaincue, que lorsqu'il est apparu comme vaincu en fait par un autre pouvoir.⁸

Heimarmene had already been vanquished; at least for a portion of the population; all others outside this group, however, persisted in a state of enslavement.

2. ... And a New Paradigm

I have noted here that the rhetoric of fate was common in second-century Christian sources, not as 'enslavement to fate,' but in a rather different rhetorical form as 'escape from fate.' Previously, scholars had interpreted this preoccupation with fate as an argument *ex silentio* for fate's ostensibly oppressive influence: since individuals employed language which characterized *heimarmene* as an oppressive force from which their religious group could offer release, it logically followed that individuals must have suffered a marked perception of enslavement prior to their participation in, or conversion to, a particular religious group. I suggest that the language of an enslaving fate formed part of a distinctive rhetoric of conversion, by which members of a group defined themselves in relation to a perceived 'Other.' At the heart of this rhetorical stance, we find implicit a new sense of identity: "I did not see before that I was powerless and ignorant, enslaved to the dictates of fate," as well as an implicit devaluation of those outside a particular religious group: "I see that I am free, but that others still exist in a condition of enslavement."

In keeping with my hypothesis that the rhetoric of 'enslavement to fate' existed as part of insider-outsider discourse in second-century texts, I noted that we first find the language of 'escape from *heimarmene*' most prominent not within Graeco-Roman philosophical texts, but from the corpus of Hermetic writings. This collection of religious literature drew its theoretical justifications from contemporary philosophy. Many Hermetists expressed the conviction that they had transcended the influence of *heimarmene* through a recognition and re-acquaintance with the innate *Nous*. This idea is, loosely speaking, Stoic—but the Hermetists were not so much Stoics as they borrowed freely from Roman Stoicism to put together a new religious worldview. What is clear, however, is that those who composed and circulated these texts considered that, unlike the rest of the uncivilized rabble, they

⁸ Simone Pétrement, *Le Dieu Séparé*, 109.

themselves possessed *Nous*, and had therefore transcended *heimarmene*'s reach.

If I am right in my hypothesis that there is a connection between the construction of an insider-outsider discourse, the rhetoric of 'enslavement to fate' deployed strategically against outsiders, and the experience of social marginalization, two other pieces of evidence fall nicely into place. First, we find the discourse of an enslaving fate persisting, even growing, within relatively late pagan sources, including the fourth-century *Commentary on the Letter Omega* by Zosimus of Panopolis, and Iamblichus's late-third-century treatise, *De Mysteriis*. It appears that pagans of the late third and fourth century, when reduced to a beleaguered minority, adopted the polemical rhetoric of an enslaving fate from earlier Christian sources to refer to Christian 'Others.' Second, as Christians grew in number and the degree of dissonance between Christian and non-Christian communities receded, the rhetoric of 'enslavement to fate' diminishes; by the time Christianity becomes the official religion of Empire in 380 CE—and forever after this—discussions of *heimarmene* exist only as repetitive, formulaic assertions that "fate no longer exists" or, "the pagan philosophers are incorrect when they say that fate exists." No longer is the discourse of 'enslavement to fate' deployed as a rhetorical weapon against outsiders.

My observations in this study accord well with the work of certain modern anthropologists and sociologists. The anthropologist Mary Douglas, in her study *Natural Symbols*, has observed that within communities with clearly marked membership but a confusion of internal roles—those which she would classify as "high group, low grid"—the significance of 'inside' versus 'outside' takes on "cosmic proportions."⁹ She finds a "metaphysical dualism" in small bounded communities such as Christians would have been in the second century.¹⁰ These communities, she asserts, produce a "witchcraft taxonomy," in which demon-worship is a *taxon* designed to establish distance between 'us' and 'them.' Of the authors I have considered in this book, we may note that Athenagoras, Tatian, and the authors of both *Orig.Wld* and *ApJn* considered *heimarmene* to be an instrument of demons, and astrology to be a form of *latreia* or service to these demons. Both Tatian and the author of *Orig.Wld* state explicitly that those who are subject to *heimarmene* worship demons. We may well term 'enslavement to fate' another *taxon* which

⁹ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols: Explorations in Cosmology* (New York: Pantheon, 1982), 117.

¹⁰ Douglas, *Natural Symbols*, 119.

separates insiders from outsiders, but one closely related to the charge of 'demon worship.' Jonathan Z. Smith, in an article on perceptions of demonic powers in antiquity, described demon-worship as "a term of estrangement applied to others [which] represents a reduction of their religiosity to the category of the false but *not* to the category of the impotent."¹¹ Similarly, we may note that our second-century authors never refuted the power of *heimarmene*—they simply devised a theology in which its power was deflected from them and bound instead those outside their own religious community.

An earlier generation of scholars found behind the exhilarated testimonials of people who believed that they had been released from *heimarmene* ostensible 'proof' that individuals suffered before their conversion from a sense of enslavement or oppression. I have suggested in this study, rather, that we might understand the inverse psychological manifestation of 'freedom from fate' not as a sense of oppression, but rather as the failure to recognize that one is bound. In other words, the convert could not perceive her or his pre-conversion state as oppression, because the very nature of the enslavement was to keep the uninitiated or unenlightened as blissfully unaware as grazing cattle ignorant that they are being raised as meat. Thus the convert understood the pre-conversion state *only retroactively* as ignorance. 'Enslavement,' after all, characterizes the existence of someone wholly subsumed to a system: seen from the perspective of one outside that system, a consequence of that enslavement is the failure to recognize that one is bound. The author of the *ApJn*'s long recension explains the consequences of *heimarmene*: "thus all the people came to be in a state of great distraction." The sociologist Rodney Stark describes a similar reaction on the part of converts in modern America: "although all converts were quick to describe how their spiritual lives had been empty and desolate prior to their conversion," he notes, "many claimed that they had not been particularly interested in religion before."¹² Those in antiquity who employed the rhetoric of 'enslavement to fate' reserved their greatest contempt for those who lived without cognizance of their spiritual possibilities, mere mindless "marchers in the train of fate," in the words of Zosimus of Panopolis.

The polemical characterization of a perceived Other as 'enslaved to fate' appears to have connections with the psychological mechanisms of

¹¹ Jonathan Z. Smith, "Toward Interpreting Demonic Power in Late Antiquity," *ANRW* 16/1:427.

¹² Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 16.

conversion in the second century. We find the language of enslavement occurring within the context of discussions concerning either the effects of conversion, or of baptism, or both. By ‘conversion,’ I mean a deep cognitive experience that radically alters an individual’s worldview. The positive implication of this conversion is a perception of freedom, particularly freedom from sin. My definition of ‘conversion’ here does not differ significantly from that offered by E.R. Dodds, who noted that conversion in the Roman Empire carried with it “the conviction that the slate has been wiped clean and the magical disappearance—at least for the time being—of the desire to sin.”¹³ A negative ramification of this conversion would be the tendency of an individual to devalue those involved in his or her past experience, considering them to labor in a state of ignorance and enslavement—the inverse of the knowledge and freedom that form the heart of a transformed perception of the cosmos.

For most of the Christian authors I have considered in this study, either conversion or baptism appears to have affected or altered their cosmological conceptions. I suggest that since conversion to Christianity in the second century constituted an ‘act of deviance’ in which new converts may have suddenly faced a high degree of social stigma, there may have been a greater tendency for converts to re-evaluate (and hence devalue) the forces which they believed influenced the behavior of those outside their religious community.¹⁴

On the other hand, I do not wish to develop monolithic definitions of conversion in the second century. For one, it is difficult to infer from our limited range of sources what people of antiquity might have *felt* about the cosmos. To posit such a theory I would open myself to the same criticism which I leveled at scholars such as Cumont and Nock, who applied psychological principles to late antique religious texts. I can conclude only that the rhetoric of ‘enslavement to fate’ occurs within a limited number of sources in antiquity, all of which derive (to the best of our knowledge) from the Roman Empire in the second century.

Inasmuch as we can understand how this rhetoric may have been affected by an individual’s experience of conversion, it is important to note that conversion to Christianity in the Roman Empire likely meant different things to different people. I have raised here some observations and hypotheses

¹³ E.R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 77.

¹⁴ For conversion as ‘deviance,’ see Stark, *Rise of Christianity*, 17.

that illuminate one aspect of what conversion might have meant to highly-educated Roman Christian males of the second century, who articulated their particular experiences with the vocabulary they drew from their education in philosophy and rhetoric. It is hardly surprising that these men express remarkably similar interpretations of *heimarmene* and its scope.

On the fringes of the Roman Empire where non-Roman cultural influences prevailed, other Christians would likely have offered different interpretations of fate than those on which I have focused here. Bardaisan of Edessa's second-century treatise on destiny, *The Book of the Law of Countries*, provides a useful comperandum to the testimonies of Justin, Theodotus, and Tatian on fate and necessity. Unlike his contemporaries to the east, Bardaisan discussed *heimarmene* within the context of ethics and philosophy rather than of religion and rhetoric; although he believed that humans stood outside the sphere of *heimarmene*'s influence, he employed markedly different language and logic to express his perspectives. Compared with contemporary treatises from the heart of the Empire, Bardaisan's interpretation of fate appears aberrant. On the other hand, the *Book of the Law of the Countries* would have a richer *Nachleben* in later Christian interpretations of *heimarmene* than any of the formulations of Theodotus and Tatian.

Ultimately, however, it is not necessary to posit a connection between conversion and cosmology to explain the rhetoric of fate in second-century sources. I wished to raise questions concerning how inclusion in a Christian community during the second century might have affected conceptual cosmological shifts. Christians lived, if not necessarily under the direct threat of persecution, as disaffected sectarian groups. Their numbers were small; according to recent estimates, there may have been as few as seven thousand Christians in Rome when Theodotus and Tatian were active at the end of the second century, out of a total population of over seven hundred thousand.¹⁵

As Christians increased in number, the dissonance between early Christian communities and the Roman Empire gradually faded. I believe that it is not coincidental that by the late third century, we cannot find any Christian testimonials that *heimarmene* held anyone in its sway. If anything, it existed only as a perverse, potentially immoral 'hiccup' in Stoic (or astrological) logic—a dangerous idea which needed to be addressed, but which required

¹⁵ Robert M. Grant, *Early Christianity and Society: Seven Studies* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1977), 6. More cautious is Peter Lampe, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries*, trans. Michael Steinhauser (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), 142–143: "One can only speculate about the number of Roman Christians. It is hardly possible to say more than that their number constantly increased."

merely the relatively soft ammunition of stock arguments drawn from earlier pagan treatises, repeated over and over again with tedious regularity. But the world looked different to second-century Christians, as they faced the full weight of the Roman Empire's intellectual legacies and hegemonic power. For these few, they were no doubt comforted by their conviction that those who stood outside Christ's providential power labored in a state of ignorance, enslaved to fate, under a pitiless sky.

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