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Poetics of the Gnostic Universe

*Narrative and Cosmology
in the
Apocryphon of John*

ZLATKO PLEŠE

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Poetics of the Gnostic Universe

Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies

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Poetics of the Gnostic Universe

Narrative and Cosmology in the
Apocryphon of John

by

Zlatko Pleše



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PREFACE

This book has been long in the making. I had originally conceived it as a search for philosophical doctrines which helped to inform the cosmological model of the *Apocryphon of John*, one of the most coherent and comprehensive narrations of the classic ‘Gnostic’ myth. The principal aim of the study was to assess the impact of Plato’s *Timaeus* on the *Apocryphon*’s thematics, composition, and style. From the outset I was conscious of the danger of disregarding other constitutive elements of the *Apocryphon*: the Mosaic account of creation in Genesis, Jewish Wisdom tradition, Hellenistic philosophy, magic, science, and, last but not least, the Johannine Gospel. Yet it took a while before I realized that, in order properly to assess the status and function of philosophy in the cosmological section of the Apocryphon, I needed to take into account the other voices and explain the interplay of all these discursive domains. The consequences of this methodological shift were already visible in my Yale doctoral dissertation, and I can only hope that this thoroughly rewritten version will make them even more transparent.

This monograph still argues that the *Timaeus* is the key text for understanding the ‘poetics’ of the ‘Gnostic’ universe. Plato’s account of cosmogony provided the author of the *Apocryphon of John* with the appropriate interpretive frame for his revisionist explanation of the Mosaic story of creation; with the narrative template for his orderly exposition of cosmogony; and with the best representational schema to account for his basic presuppositions, such as the distinction between essence and appearance, original and copy, idea and image, image and apparition. At the same time, however, the universe that emerges from the *Apocryphon*’s narrative is more complex and more dynamic than Plato’s. Platonic forms are no longer endowed with objective existence, but are relegated to the divine subjectivity; the structure of the universe is not only more elaborate and hierarchical, but is also pervaded with an immanent principle of eternal coherence; and finally, Plato’s celebrated distinction between forms, copies, and deceptive apparitions seems obliterated in favor of the ‘Deleuzian’ duality of the original model and its distant, illusory *simulacrum*. In short, Plato’s *Timaeus* appears here not only as a text to

read and scrutinize, but also as a phenomenon to rewrite. Such a subversive transformation is effected by the intercession of homologous ‘voices’ from all of the above listed discursive domains. The relationship established between these domains is not that of mechanical juxtaposition but of partial substitution. Modern scholars have characterized this hermeneutical technique as ‘intertextuality’, yet I continue to exploit its ancient name—reasoning by analogy, *sylogismos* or *rationatio legalis*, one of the four legal issues (*staseis*) in Hellenistic rhetorical classification.

The book is thus not intended as a work of ‘Quellenforschung,’ but rather as an essay in ‘Gnostic’ poetics. In spite of some significant divergences in wording and content between the four manuscript witnesses, I have looked at the *Apocryphon of John* as a unitary literary creation, in which the anonymous author makes creative use of various philosophical systems, religious traditions and rhetorical techniques of argumentation in order to articulate his original world-model. This model—perhaps best represented as a multiple-tiered fountain flowing with water that spurts from the single source at the top—is indicative of the author’s imaginative mind and ‘mannerist’ mentality. Both in style and in content, there is a tendency to excess. The universe of the *Apocryphon of John* is an anamorphic construction of high complexity, with tiers multiplied almost *praeter necessitatem*—aeons, luminaries, archangels, angels, authorities, archons, demons, humans. Its language is equally complex and intrinsically obscure, reflecting the author’s inclination to accumulate seemingly unrelated symbolic codes and disconnected ideas. The reliance on such ‘mannerist’ procedures discloses the strong conviction that truth must remain hidden from vulgar cobblers and, more importantly, that language can never adequately fill the inexpressible void of the spiritual plane.

My adjustment to the *Apocryphon*’s polyphony would have taken longer than it did without the timely intervention of many people. My interest in Gnosticism I owe first and foremost to my ‘Doktorvater’ from Yale’s Department of Religious Studies, Bentley Layton, my first instructor of Coptic, who introduced me to the field of Gnostic studies and allowed me to use his unpublished synopsis of the *Apocryphon*’s manuscripts. His critical remarks and analytical acumen have saved me from many mistakes, both in translation and in interpretation of the obscure passages in the *Apocryphon of John*. He has also offered an invaluable help in the last stages of manuscript prepa-

ration—the sign of his continuous interest and unwavering faith in my project.

My equally profound gratitude goes to my other advisor, Gordon Williams, without whom this book would have hardly ever been written. This is not a rhetorical exaggeration, but a mere fact. I am afraid that the full depth of my indebtedness cannot be conveyed in words, that I will miss the point if I make use of any of the stock phrases with which grateful disciples address their mentors. After traveling with me for such a long time through the rarified world of ‘Gnostic’ abstractions, after reading countless versions of my work and offering many exciting insights, he will know how to interpret my hesitance to speak.

It is a great pleasure also to acknowledge the substantial scholarly assistance and friendly advice that I have received from Stephen Emmel, the editor of the series *Nag Hammadi and Manichean Studies*. I am deeply grateful for his interest in my manuscript, and for never losing faith in its eventual completion.

In recent months, I have benefited from an unrelenting support of my colleague and friend Armin Lange. He has helped me immensely to expedite my work on final revision and has never stopped reminding me that humans simply cannot afford the luxury of perfectionism.

I am greatly indebted to John Dillon, Bart Ehrman, Wayne Meeks, and John Turner, who have read large sections of the earlier versions of my work and provided many useful comments and important suggestions. I am particularly grateful to Michael Waldstein, the co-editor of a recently published synopsis of the extant manuscript witnesses of the *Apocryphon of John*, for sharing with me a draft of his forthcoming monograph on this important ‘Gnostic’ text.

Many scholars have offered their friendly encouragement in the years following my departure from Yale: Monique Blanchard, David Johnson, and Michael O’Connor from the Department of Semitics at the Catholic University of America; my former and present colleagues in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of North Carolina—Chapel Hill: Yaakov Ariel, Carl Ernst, David Halperin, Peter Kaufman, Jodi Magness, Jim Sanford, Jack Sasson, and John van Seters; and so also Frederick Brenk, Aurelio Pérez Jiménez, Michel Roberge, Antigone Samellas, Cristiana Sogno, and Guy Stroumsa.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to all the teachers who have inspired, assisted, and encouraged me in pursuing my

interests throughout my time as a graduate student and lecturer at Yale: Ivo Banac, Victor Bers, George Goold[†], Ramsay McMullen, Vassily Rudich, and Edward Stankiewicz. My warmest thanks go to Heinrich von Staden, one of the readers of my doctoral dissertation, from whom I have received an invaluable assistance of various sorts, first as a student and teaching fellow in his classes on ancient science, medicine, and philosophy, and later in our numerous informal meetings. I am grateful also to my family and to my friends Marinko Šišak, Jay Williams, Greg Gross, Chris Roberts, and Jonathan Bernstein for their unconditional support.

The book is dedicated to the shades of my departed father Ivan, and to Silva—*ex qua, in qua, per quam omnia creavi*.

Chapel Hill, October 2004.

INTRODUCTION

The *Apocryphon of John* (*Ap. John*, or *Apocryphon*) provides one of the most coherent and comprehensive narrations of the revelatory account traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’. It is not preserved in Greek, the language in which it was originally written, but only in four Coptic manuscripts: in Nag Hammadi codex (NHC) II 1–32, NHC III 1–40, NHC IV 1–49, all copied sometime between about A.D. 350 and 450 and all simultaneously discovered in December 1945 in Upper Egypt, and in the codex *Berolinensis Gnosticus* (BG, P.Berol. inv. 8502) 19–77, a manuscript copied probably in the fifth century A.D. and acquired for the Berlin Museum in 1896 from the Achmim region in Upper Egypt. A fair number of unconscious scribal errors (e.g., *saut du même au même*, haplography) in the four witnesses leave no doubt that each was copied from a Coptic exemplar. The dialect of all four witnesses is Sahidic, with occasional features resembling Lycopolitan. Codices II and IV have a virtually identical text and are considered two witnesses of a separate redaction. This redaction yields material that is not found in codices III and BG and is therefore called the longer version. Codices III and BG contain two different copies of the shorter redaction. The divergences between these two copies are limited to orthography, grammar, and phraseology. The extent to which these divergences go back either to the variant readings in the Greek exemplar(s) or to developments within the Coptic transmission cannot be determined with certainty.

The author and place of composition of the *Apocryphon of John* are unknown. The work is a piece of pseudepigraphy, falsely attributed to John the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’ original disciples. The *terminus ante quem* of the original Greek composition is sometime around A.D. 400, the time when the Nag Hammadi codices were copied. The *terminus post quem* cannot be established with certainty. A similar account of cosmogony can be found in the doctrine of “a multitude of Gnostics named after Barbelo,” as summarized by Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 1.29) in about A.D. 180. Irenaeus’s compressed version differs, both in phraseology and in theological details, from the cosmological sections in all of *Apocryphon*’s versions. Whether the heresiologist had at his disposal a different Greek version of the *Apocryphon*

of *John* or some other “Gnostic document which was the apparent source of the first part of the main revelation discourse” in *Ap. John* (Wisse-Waldstein 1995, 1), we do not know.¹

Significant divergences between the longer version and the shorter versions have elicited conflicting interpretations about the stages in the evolution of the *Apocryphon of John*. The most obvious difference is that the longer version contains a lengthy account of Adam’s ‘melothesia’, excerpted from a certain *Book of Zoroaster*, and the concluding ‘Pronoia hymn’, reminiscent of the first-person Wisdom monologues in biblical literature. Less obvious, yet equally important distinctive features of the longer version are the prominent role assigned to Pronoia and the extensive use of the light-darkness imagery. The editors of the first complete synopsis of the four manuscript witnesses claim that “there is no reason to believe that the redactor of the longer version started with anything other than the form of [*Ap. John*] preserved in codices III and BG” (*ibid.*, 7). Common sense, however, has rarely been a reliable guide in such matters. The same holds true for the alleged “law of text-criticism, form-criticism and source-criticism that short forms tend to become longer” (Quispel 1966, 379). In the process of textual transmission of ancient texts, the evidence for addition and omission is evenly balanced, and length cannot in itself confirm or deny the priority of one version to another.²

¹ For a brief yet accurate description of the extant manuscript witnesses of the *Apocryphon of John* see Layton (1987) 26–27. The only published synopsis of the four manuscript witnesses, with “parallel” texts (e.g., Irenaeus) printed in appendices, is in Waldstein-Wisse 1995. For a description of the manuscript witnesses, orthography, and dialect cf. their “Introduction,” 1–8. The dialect and orthography of the other texts in NHC II is analyzed by Layton (1989) 1–36, significant for laying out the general principles of editing Nag Hammadi texts. Emmel (1978) collated old photographs of the Nag Hammadi codices containing the text of *Ap. John*. For the discovery and date of the Nag Hammadi Codices see Robinson (1978). An older edition with translation and commentary of the longer version in NHC II is by Giverson (1963), that of the shorter version in BG by Till-Schenke (1972). Interesting observations on *Berolinensis Gnosticus* can be found in Schenke (1990) and Tardieu-Dubois (1986). Funk (1995) provides the restoration of a few extant fragments from the first two leaves of NHC III. The best published commentary of *Ap. John* is Tardieu (1984).

² For the problem of editorial tendencies in the pre-canonical Synoptic tradition, see Sanders (1969). According to Royse (1979) 155, “The principle that the shorter reading is to be preferred . . . is an inadequate guide to the earliest period of the transmission of the NT text.” The opposite rule, namely that the longer reading is better and earlier, and the process is one of contraction, not of expansion, was forcefully defended by Clark (1914). An authoritative survey of causes of textual

For example, the absence of the ‘Pronoia hymn’ from the shorter versions of the *Apocryphon of John* has often been considered an example of abridgment, based on a series of sound observations about the structure and style of the relevant passages in codices BG and III: viz., confusing shifts from one narrative point of view to another, redundancies, and, most important, the presence of the opening and closing words of the ‘Pronoia hymn’.³ Other general criteria for the later date of the longer version, such as a tendency to make the material more detailed, logically consistent, and stylistically clearer, can be countered by an equally common tendency on the part of ancient copyists to trivialize, to simplify, and to eliminate the unfamiliar idea, wording or construction. Perhaps the most promising criterion is that of a consistent pattern of alterations, as formulated by Wilson (1968, 110): “If there are grounds for thinking that one version has been consistently modified to bring it into conformity with a particular theory, then we also have reason for considering that version to be later.” The longer version of the *Apocryphon of John* shows a consistent tendency to increase the role of Pronoia in the cosmological and soteriological parts of the narrative. Similar consistent modifications do not seem to exist in the shorter versions of *Apocryphon*.⁴

discrepancy in ancient manuscripts is West (1973). Observations and comments by Pasquali (1952) 187–465, on authorial interventions (the ‘second edition’) and emendations by scholars and scribes are still invaluable. Based on the criteria laid down by Hemonds (1941) for distinguishing between author’s variants and double recension (viz., authorial intention, stylistic agreements, contextual credibility), some disagreements between the longer and shorter versions of *Ap. John* in matters of content, doctrine and style could go, in theory, back to the author himself. For a clear exposition of hazards in the search for author’s variants, see Jachmann (1941) and Reeve (1969).

³ So Giversen (1963) *ad loc.*, Tardieu (1984) 42: “L’hymne final est cité par ses premiers et derniers mots,” and Onuki (1987) 93, 131–132.

⁴ The identification of the second principle Ennoia-Barbelo with Pronoia (‘Providence’) occurs several times in the shorter versions, too, on which see Onuki (1991) 109–119, esp. 115. In four instances, moreover, BG (28:4; 33:16; 47:6–7; 75:2–3) and III (8:5; 12:7; 21:10–11; 39:4) agree in referring to Pronoia against the parallel sections of II and IV, where the term is absent—a disagreement that must be explained by those considering Pronoia a trademark of the longer version. For Onuki (1987) 87–88, the agreement of BG 31:4 and II 6:22 (“the . . . Spirit and the perfect Pronoia”) against III 10:8 (“the . . . Spirit”) illustrates the process of a gradual emancipation of Pronoia, one which would eventually lead to the insertion of the ‘Pronoia-hymn’ in the version resembling that of II and IV. According to Waldstein (1995) and Barc-Painchaud (1999), the content of this hymn, viz., the triple manifestation of Pronoia, served as a measuring rod (Wilson’s “particular

However one defines the relationship between the different versions of the *Apocryphon of John*, it is clear that they all result from a textual activity that the ancient writers referred to as διασκευή, a revision involving modification in details. Galen, *In Hipp. De victu acutorum* (CMG V 9.1, p. 120.5–14), defines διασκευή as the editorial labor in which the author, his pupil, or some later redactor introduce minor changes into a text while keeping intact its ὑπόθεσις (‘subject’, ‘theme’, or ‘content’) and “most of its wording.”⁵ It is the search for this unchangeable aspect of the *Apocryphon of John*, its minimal ὑπόθεσις and its poetics that constitutes the heart of this study. In the ensuing sections, the emphasis is on analyzing the stable elements that remain unaffected in the process of textual transmission. These elements include: projection of different perspectives on tiers of narrative material; a fairy-tale structure of the plot; a considerable complexity of the world model based on two seemingly incompatible schemas of representations, *viz.*, formism and organicism; hypotactic arrangement of compatible cultural traditions; consistent application of analogy (*ratiocinatio legalis*) as the guiding hermeneutical principle; and the metaphorical fusion of seemingly unrelated domains—philosophical, religious, and biological—resulting in the characteristic loftiness of the *Apocryphon of John* and the enigmatic obscurity of its jargon. Viewed from this theoretical perspective, the aforementioned expansions in the longer version bear witness to the

theory”) against which the redactor of the extant longer version revised his *Vorlage*. Scholars have offered various explanations for the addition of the Pronoia-hymn and for the higher occurrence of Pronoia in the longer version: e.g., purging the highest deity of anthropomorphism (Giversen 1963); application of the principle of ‘continuous revelation’ to the ‘Sethian’ fourfold division of history, whereby Pronoia’s three manifestations occur in the three historical epochs following the age of Adam (Schenke 1974); an elaborate comment on the destiny of the ‘historical Sethians’, those residing with the fourth luminary Eleleth (Onuki 1987); intensification of the polemics against the Stoics who identified providence (*pronoia*) and fate (Onuki 1989, 1991); a decisive role assigned to the Savior (σύζυγος) in the history of salvation (Barc-Painchaud 1999).

⁵ Galen’s passage seems worth quoting in full. The Greek at CMG V 9.1, p. 120, 5–14 (cf. also XV 424, 5 K) is as follows: ἐπιδιεσκευάσθαι λέγεται βιβλίον ἐπὶ τῷ προτέρῳ γεγραμμένῳ τὸ δευτερον γραφέν, ὅταν τὴν ὑπόθεσιν ἔχον τὴν αὐτὴν καὶ τὰς πλείστας τῶν ῥήσεων τὰς αὐτάς, τινὰ μὲν ἀφηρημένα τῶν ἐκ τοῦ προτέρου συγγραμματος ἔχει, τινὰ δὲ προσκείμενα, τινὰ δὲ ὑπελλεγμένα. The examples of διασκευή adduced by Galen are Eupolis’s *Autolykus*, *Cnidian Sentences*, and the Hippocratic *Acute Diseases*. διασκευή is to be carefully distinguished from διάταξις (rearrangement) and διόρθωσις (emendation), on which see, e.g., Porphyry, *V. Plot.* 24.1–3, and Mansfeld (1994) 108–16.

integrative aspect of the *Apocryphon of John*—its tendency to assimilate compatible elements from various cultural traditions and present them as coordinate cases of the same universal message of salvation.

The *Apocryphon of John* is commonly regarded as an example of ‘Sethian’ Gnosticism, characterized by a distinct type of cosmography, a focus on Seth, the son of Adam, as a divine revealer and redeemer, an apocalyptic view of history, specific imagery, and a distinct cast of characters. Thirteen other texts from the Nag Hammadi corpus (*Apocryphon of John*, *Hypostasis of the Archons*, *Gospel of the Egyptians*, *Apocalypse of Adam*, *Melchizedek*, *Thought of Norea*, *Thunder—Perfect Mind*, *Trimorphic Protennoia*, *Zostrianus*, *Allogenes*, *Three Steles of Seth*, *Marsanes*) and the untitled text in the Bruce Codex are included under this heading. In this monograph I have tried to avoid this label, primarily because, in matters of doctrine, the *Apocryphon of John* sometimes stands closer to the texts not included in the list (*Exegesis on the Soul*, *On the Origin of the World*, various Valentinian cosmologies) than to those identified as distinctively ‘Sethian’ (*Allogenes*, *Zostrianos*).⁶

My analysis of the *Apocryphon of John* and my translation of individual sections from different redactions are based on the unpublished synopsis of the four extant manuscripts that Bentley Layton constructed “from collation of photographic facsimiles and from Till-Schenke’s critical edition of the Berlin manuscript” (Layton 1987, 26). When translating defective passages, I have regularly consulted the facsimile editions of Nag Hammadi manuscripts, the photographs of *Berolinensis Gnosticus*, and Stephen Emmel’s collation of the photographic record of the Nag Hammadi codices. My readings of defective passages in the manuscript witnesses of the *Apocryphon of John* are therefore purely conjectural. I have also made occasional use of the published synoptic edition by Michael Waldstein and Frederik Wisse (Waldstein-Wisse 1995).

⁶ On ‘Sethian Gnosticism’ see Schenke’s important article (1981) and the ensuing discussion thereon in Layton (1981) 2:588–616; cf. also a new monograph by Turner (2002).

CHAPTER ONE

NARRATIVE AND COMPOSITION

The Frame Narrative: Authorship and Narrative Voices

Ἰωάννη, ἕνα δεῖ παρ' ἐμοῦ ταῦτα ἀκοῦσαι·
ἐνὸς γὰρ χρήζω τοῦ μέλλοντος ἀκούειν (*Acts of John* 98)

In the extant manuscript witnesses of the *Apocryphon*, the title is placed in the colophon, as a conclusion to the text: the *Apocryphon of John*, in the shorter versions (BG and NHC III), and *Apocryphon according to John*, in the colophon of the two copies of the longer redaction (NHC II and IV). The departure from what appears to be a common practice among the copyists of Nag Hammadi codices occurred in NHC III, where the title occurs also in the beginning, and in NHC II, where an attempt has been made to clarify the meaning of the word 'apocryphon'.

The teaching [of the savior
and] the [revelation] of the mysteries
[which] are hidden in silence
[and which] he taught to John, [his] disciple. (NHC II 1:1-6)

The term *apocryphon* signifies here "that which is hidden" or "concealed"—some intimate secret shared only by the chosen few.¹ Secrecy ("mysteries . . . hidden in silence") and exclusiveness (John as a single privileged recipient) stand, however, in clear contrast to the familiarity of the *dramatis personae*, John and the Savior, and point to the revisionary character of the *Apocryphon of John*—to its dependence on the Gospel tradition which is, at the same time, viewed as incomplete, unsatisfactory, and therefore subject to revision. Thus, from its very beginning, the text exploits what the early Christian heresiologists viewed as a typical 'Gnostic' dichotomy. On the one

¹ On the range of meanings covered by the term 'apocryphon' and on the history of its usage in late antiquity and Middle Ages, see, e.g., Böttrich (1992) 58 ff., Hennecke-Schneemelcher (1968), and Santos Otero (1996).

hand, there are exoteric teachings—viz., sayings, parables, and miracles—of the earthly Jesus, such as are preserved in the Gospels, transitory images of some higher, hidden truth, conferred but never explained to the masses. On the other hand, there are esoteric, ‘apocryphal’ traditions, elucidating the figurative language of Scripture, revealed to some privileged few by the resurrected Savior, *Christus redivivus*.

For, even those who promulgate the contrary opinions about the Father assert that Scripture said nothing about their conceptions clearly and indisputably; they say that the Savior taught this not to all people, but only to some among the disciples who were able to grasp it (*dicentes in absconso haec eadem Salvatorem docuisse non omnes, sed aliquos discipulorum qui possunt capere*), understanding what was signified by him [i.e. by Jesus in the Gospels] through signs, riddles, and parables. (Iren. *Adv. haer.* 2.27.2)²

Similar passages from the ‘Gnostic’ literature, both from original works and from second-hand heresiological summaries, amount to an extensive dossier—bearing witness to the distinctively ‘Gnostic’ flavor of the opening lines of the *Apocryphon* and to their utterly conventional character. The savior as a heavenly messenger, the secrecy of his *paradosis*, the small number of privileged recipients (apostles or other companions of Jesus), the inspiration drawn from the Gospels and, simultaneously, revisionary emulation with the scriptural tradition, are commonplaces exploited, among many others, by the *Gospel of Mary* and the *Wisdom of Jesus Christ* (both in BG), by the Ophites and Basilides. The purpose of these commonplaces is always the same—to lend authority to the ‘Gnostic’ *paradosis* and to surround it with the aura of novelty and exclusiveness. The same, too, seems to be their ultimate source. It is in the Gospels, more precisely in Luke (24:13–53), that the pattern was clearly established: Christ appearing to some from among his followers (to the unidentified

² Cf. Clem. Al. *Exc. Theod.* 66: “The Savior taught the apostles, first in a figurative and mystical way (τυπικῶς καὶ μυστικῶς), then in parables and riddles (παραβολικῶς καὶ ἠνιγμένως), and thirdly, clearly and directly in private (σαφῶς καὶ γυμνῶς κατὰ μόνως).” See also *Quaest. Barth.* 1.1–2: “After the resurrection from the dead of our Lord Jesus Christ, Bartholomew came to the Lord and questioned him, saying, ‘[Lord,] reveal to me the mysteries of the heavens’. And Jesus replied saying to him, ‘If I put <not> off the body of the flesh, I shall not be able to tell them to you.’” The best discussion of various Gnostic speculations concerning the career of *Christus redivivus* is Orbe (1976) 2:489–534 and (1987) 2:851–81.

“two” on the first occasion, then to the same two and “the eleven assembled together with their companions”), in the interim period between resurrection and ascension, “explaining (διερμήνευσεν) to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets” (24:27), and “opening their minds to understand the scriptures” (διήνοιξεν αὐτῶν τὸν νοῦν τοῦ συνιέναι τὰς γραφάς 24:25).³

The text begins in a way reminiscent of a folktale’s “Once upon a time” opening, implying the distance in time between the events narrated and the composition of the text. The action, however, is not set in a dim mythological past but, more likely, in view of the previous discussion about the conventional form of the Gnostic *paradosis*, in the period between Christ’s resurrection and ascension. John’s reply to the Pharisee’s provocative question about the Savior’s fate—“Where he came from, there he has returned”—is not of great help for determining the prologue’s *tempus agendi*. The event is unlikely to have occurred after the Savior’s return to his Father, that is, after his ascension. This would run, first, not only against the common ‘Gnostic’ practice and the precedent set up by the Gospel narrative (Luke), but also against the ‘Gnostic’ trichotomy of the Savior’s essential components or “bodies”—(i) worldly body (κοσμικόν, *mundiale*), made of flesh and blood, which does not arise; (ii) animate (ψυχικόν, *animale*), which still bears the imprint (τύπος, εἶδωλον) of the Savior’s human form, and in which the Savior appeared to his followers upon his resurrection; and (iii) spiritual (πνευματικόν, *spiritalē*), which, after

³ The dossier is available in Orbe (1976) 2:518–21—comprehensive, but not complete. An often quoted testimony is that of Hippolytus on Basilides and his son Isidorus, who “claim that Matthew has related to them the secret sayings (λόγους ἀποκρύφους) he had heard from the Savior in the form a private instruction (διδαχθεῖς κατ’ ἰδίαν).” The Ophites, on their part, provided the “historical” background for their *paradosis* and set up the conditions necessary for receiving the Savior’s revelations: “After his resurrection, Jesus remained there for an additional eighteen months and, as the capacity of perception descended into him (*sensibilitate in eum descendente*), learned what is true (*quod liquidum est*) and taught it to the few from among his disciples (*paucos ex discipulis suis*), whom he considered capable of such great mysteries (*capaces tantorum mysteriorum*)” (Iren. *Adv. haer.* I.30,14). *Sensibilitas* which, according to the Ophites, entered Jesus upon his resurrection translates the Greek αἴσθησις—not sense-perception, but the capacity of perceiving spiritual reality, concealed from the earthly Jesus and mortal humans endowed with body and soul. For this term, see also Iren. 1.8.2 and *Great Pow.* NHC VI 36:1. For similar visions in the texts from Nag Hammadi Library see the list of relevant passages in Casadio (1992) 2:395–401; cf. also Filoramo (1974) 251–309.

its separation from the animate body, finally ascends to the Father (cf. Iren. 1.30.13). Second, the hypothesis confuses the point of view of an ‘omniscient’ author, the producer of the linguistic construction called the *Apocryphon of John*, with John’s perspective which, as his perplexity provoked by the Pharisee’s remarks clearly indicates, is at this point limited and, consequently, irrelevant for the ‘real’ dating of the frame story. To put it simply, John believes that his teacher ascended, but the token of his belief, the formulaic prophecy of Jesus to his disciples (John 7:33, 13:3, 16:5, 28), is soon proven insufficient to convince the Pharisee, let alone to prevent his own doubts and his growing distress. John does not know much about the Savior’s whereabouts after the resurrection. Hence, there arises the need, in John, for additional information, and his immediate request for a vision, construed in the form of the so-called ‘baptismal’ questions. Translated into historical terms, John’s request for vision may reflect the desire on the part of some readers of the Fourth Gospel to elucidate its obscure message and widen its limited perspective by writing a revisionary supplement—the *Apocryphon of John*.⁴

Back to the title, the second problem is that of the alleged authorship. Both the *incipit* and the *explicit* of the extant manuscripts attribute the text to John, the son of Zebedee. The ensuing frame story, however, complicates the meaning of this attribution by multiplying the points of view from which the action is narrated.

It happened on one of these days when John, the brother of James—these are the sons of Zebedee—came up. When he came up to the temple, a Pharisee named Arimanius encountered him and said to him, “Where is your teacher, the one whom you used to follow?” He said to him, “Where he came from, there he has returned.” The Pharisee said to him, “He has deceived you with deception, that Nazarene. [And he filled] your ears with lies. And he closed [your hearts?]. He turned you [away from] the traditions of your fathers.”

⁴ For the Fourth Gospel as the “closed system” of impenetrable metaphors lacking a comprehensive master narrative capable of explaining Jesus’ “empty revelation,” see Meeks (1972). The Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is the exclusive receiver and revealer of heavenly secrets—in contrast to the apocalyptic literature where the prophets and seers are able to receive otherworldly revelations by means of heavenly journeys—while his interlocutors are assigned the role of passive recipients asking maladroit questions. This role division is a trademark of the *erotapokriseis* genre, widespread in the Hellenistic and Roman ‘esoteric’ literature; cf. 4 Ezra 4:1–11, 20–21, and other examples listed by Meeks (1972) 53.

When I heard this, I turn[ed] away from the temple towards the mountain, into a desert place. And I was greatly distressed in myself saying,

“How indeed was the savior chosen (χειροτονεῖν)?

And why was he sent to the world by his father who sent him?

And who is his father?

And of what kind is that aeon (αιών) to which we shall go?

He said to us that this aeon is the type (τύπος) of that incorruptible aeon.

And he did not instruct us on that one, of what kind it is.” (BG 19:6–20:19; cf. NHC II 1:5–29)

The events presented in the prologue to John’s vision are first narrated from without, from the viewpoint of an extradiegetic, impersonal narrator. After several lines, the focus changes in an abrupt fashion, and the action is viewed from the standpoint of the character in the story, i.e. John, and is told in the first person. What has been at first given as the romanticized biography of a respected authority of the past turns suddenly into an autobiographical account of a troubled person in search of a salvific vision. It is John whose point of view as the first person orients, for a short while, the presentation of events in which he himself takes part. But as soon as the vision occurs, the focus changes again, and John, from being the hero who tells his own story, becomes a witness telling the story of the real hero, viz. the Savior, whose long first-person monologue will be only occasionally interrupted by John the seer, his interlocutor. John’s status in the text is, thus, subject to continuous change—first the character in the story (i.e., *He*) told by an anonymous narrator; then, a first-person narrator (i.e., *I*) present as a character in the story; and finally, the addressee (i.e., *You*) of the revelatory message transmitted by another first-person narrator (i.e., *I, the Savior*).

In brief, John is, successively, the object of an extradiegetic narration, the narrator as protagonist, and the narrator as witness. But the concluding lines of all extant manuscripts charge him with yet another set of roles:

II 30:11–32:10 (IV 46:22–49:28)

BG 75:10–77:7 (III 39:12–40:11)

Then I, the perfect forethought of the entirety,
I transformed myself into my seed
For, at first,
I existed traveling in every path of the travel.

Now, the blessed one, that is, the mother-father,
whose mercy is great,
it is in her seed that she takes form.
At first

(A long aretological self-proclamation follows . . .)

Behold, now I shall ascend to the perfect aeon.
I have completed all things for your ears.
And for my part, I have said all things to you (*sg.*),
so that you (*sg.*) might write them down
and give them secretly to your (*sg.*) spiritual fellows.
For this is the mystery of the immovable race.

And he, i.e., the Savior, gave these to him
so that he might write them down
and keep them safe.
And he said to him,
Cursed be anyone who sells these for a gift,
out of a desire for food, for drink, for clothing,
or for anything else of this kind.
And these were given to him secretly (*μυστήριον*).
And immediately, he vanished from before him.
And he came to his fellow disciples.
He related to them
what the Savior had said to him.
Jesus Christ. Amen.
The Apocryphon according to John.

I have come up to that perfect aeon.

And for my part, I say these to you (*sg.*),
so that you (*sg.*) may write them down
and give them secretly to your (*sg.*) spiritual fellows.
For this mystery belongs to the immovable race.
Now, the mother came before me once again.
Again, these are (the things) she did in the world:
she set right the seed.
I shall teach you (*pl.*) about what is going to happen.
Indeed, I gave these to you (*sg.*)
to write them down,
so that they might be kept safe.
Then he said to me,
Cursed be anyone who sells these for gifts,
for food, for drink, for garment,
or for anything else like this.
He gave to him this secret (*μυστήριον*).
Immediately, he vanished from before him.
And he came to his fellow disciples.
He began to tell them
what had been said to him by the Savior.

The Apocryphon of John.

First, the Savior, an *ego-narrator*, issues the order to John, his interlocutor (“you”) and, simultaneously, an *I as witness*, to “write down” his teachings and “give them in secrecy” to John’s “spiritual companions.” The recapitulatory end of the paragraph (“For this is the mystery of the immovable race”) may seem, to a modern sensibility, a perfect conclusion not only to the Savior’s monologue but also to the text itself. Instead, the shift in focus occurs, and, as in the opening lines, an impersonal narrator intervenes, with the result that, once again, the events seem to narrate themselves. We are again in the realm of historical fiction, where John, after the Savior’s sudden departure, “came to his fellow disciples,” and “related to them (II 32:4–5; “told him,” IV 49:25; “began to tell them,” BG 77:2–3; “began to speak with them,” III 40:8) what the Savior had said to him.” As in the prologue, John’s status changes from one paragraph to another. First, he is the Savior’s solitary interlocutor commissioned to write down the revelatory message. Then he turns into a quasi-historical character passing on “things” to his companions by “relating”—it is not clear whether reciting from memory or reading aloud—the message he had received from the Savior.

In the longer version, the presence of the Pronoia-aretalogy has caused a delay in resuming the initial romance-like situation.⁵ Here, the shift to the extra-diegetic impersonal narration is effected abruptly, and is signaled by the change of grammatical persons (*I-you* vs. *He-him*) in two subsequent sentences of virtually identical content (II 31:28–29: “And for my part I have said all things to you so that you might write them down and give them secretly”; *ibid.*, 31:32–33: “And he, i.e., the Savior, gave these to him so that he might write them down and keep them safe”). In the shorter versions, again, the Savior must first resume his first-person narration—hence the sentence “I shall teach you,” absent in the long redaction, and the decision to keep the Savior’s point of view where, in the longer version, the narration has already become impersonal. Notice, too, how the two shorter versions try to obtain the perfect circularity of the frame.

⁵ The absence of the Pronoia aretalogy in the two shorter versions (BG and NHC III) of *Ap. John* has elicited numerous comments and diverging hypotheses. Some scholars have considered it a later interpolation, some viewed it, again, as an essential part of the “original” document which the later redactor, responsible for the Vorlage of BG and NHC III, knew—in fact, he quoted its opening and concluding words (Tardieu 1984, 42)—but then, for some reason, “misunderstood and garbled” (Kragerud 1965). “Misunderstanding” is hardly a satisfactory explanation. Here, too, narratology may offer some useful suggestions. The hymn, presented in the longer version as an ego-proclamation, comes as a surprising finale of the Savior’s first-person narrative. It reveals the Savior’s full identity: he is, in fact, the modality of Barbelo–Pronoia, the first hypostasis emanated from the Father. The hymn, thus, redefines the status of the Savior as narrator. He is not an omniscient story-teller absent, as a character, from the action, but I as *protagonist*, the hero who recounts the history of his various epiphanies. Originally, the Savior is the first power (*dynamis*) of the Father, the first female principle, “a womb for the entirety,” and the cause of further processions, one that “makes a request” for more eons. Next, he is “the first human being”, a model according to which Ialdabaoth and his archons fashioned the “animate” Adam. Furthermore, he is a compassionate helper of the Gnostic race, its savior, trying to retrieve the power Ialdabaoth has stolen from Sophia, and, finally, the Holy Spirit that will restore the original perfection of the spiritual realm and annihilate Ialdabaoth’s world of illusory appearances. The shorter versions, on the other hand, fall short of identifying the two. They reject the ‘modalist’ view of the long redaction, in that they preserve the transcendence of Pronoia–Barbelo and keep her separate from the Savior—Christ. On the narrative plane, this is reflected (i) in the omission of all parts of the hymn that refer to Pronoia’s descent, and (ii) in preserving only those pieces which, with some textual adaptation—e.g., the change of grammatical subject (“I” in NHC II vs. “she” in BG) or verbal tense (“I,” i.e. Pronoia, “shall ascend” in NHC II, vs. “I,” i.e. the Savior, “have ascended” in BG)—confirm the distinct character and personality of Christ, the last in the long series of Pronoia’s agents.

They resume, in a reverse order, all changes in narrative focus that occurred in the opening sections, according to the principles of constructing a narrative with a frame. The initial sequence of narrators, viz., *Impersonal Narrator—John—Savior*, now moves in the opposite direction, from the Savior (“I shall teach you”) through John (“Then he said to me”) to the impersonal narrator (“He,” i.e., the Savior, “gave to him”; “He,” i.e., John, “began to say to them”). This does not happen in the long version, where John as a homodiegetic narrator (*I as protagonist*) is not reintroduced.⁶

Putting together both parts of the narrative frame (prologue and epilogue), we come to an impressive list of the roles John assumes in the *Apocryphon of John*. The changes in John’s narrative function are each time accompanied by the shift in the narrative perspective and by the alternation of genres. They signalize, too, the passage from one thematic block to another.

<i>John</i>	<i>Narrator</i>	<i>Genre</i>	<i>Theme</i>
character in the story	impersonal	romanticized biography	apocryphal history
protagonist witness	John Savior	autobiography reveatory monologue	visionary account cosmology
interlocutor	Savior/John	catechetical dialogue	history of humankind
character in the story	impersonal	romanticized biography	apocryphal history

⁶ The disagreement among the redactors over where to resume the impersonal narration shows that the change in the point of view (He-diegesis/I-narrative) is not a valid criterion either for subdividing the frame (cf. Kragerud 1965: “outer” frame story in the third person vs. “inner” frame in the first person) or for taking the shift in person as the marker of thematic division (i.e. lumping together John’s retreat to a desert place on the mountain with his subsequent visionary account and, consequently, separating the former from the introductory dialogue between the Pharisee and John), let alone as evidence for the secondary character of the third-person romanticized biography. More important than disagreement seems to me the fact that all redactors agreed upon the necessity of resuming the impersonal narration, irrespectively of when, and where, they actually did it. This is the sign, in my view, that the shift in focus was *originally* present in the Apocryphon, and not added to, or stitched together with, the originally autobiographical account at some later stage. And this seems to be the sign, too, of the author’s sophistication as a narrator—of his familiarity with the contemporary techniques of story-telling, such as are employed in ancient Greek romances (see *infra*).

How is one to account for *Apocryphon's* polyphony, the multiplication of narrative levels, and the diversity of genres? The majority of modern scholars have taken all of these as evidence of the text's composite character. Instead of an original author, they rather have talked about an original redactor who stitched together various, previously independent documents—not at once, though, but taking as his starting point a hypothetical *Grundschrift*, which would have been devoid of alternating voices (*I-narrative, He-diegesis, I-You interlocution*) and genre variety, focused on one or more particular themes (cosmology, anthropology, soteriology), and attributable to one particular religious tradition (Jewish according to many, Christian and/or Platonist according to very few, and even “Chaldaean” according to one scholar).⁷ Different levels of the text—genre and narrative technique, content, historical and social provenance—have been investigated in this type of *Quellenforschung*, but the essential presuppositions have never changed: for example, the diachronical perspective projected on tiers of the narrative material and the conviction that the *Apocryphon of John* is nothing but a *mélange* of other people's ideas. What one is left with, in most instances of this kind of analytical approach, is either (i) a hypothetical core document, and, along with it, additional source material hypothetically integrated in the *Grundschrift* at some later stage; or (ii) a number of independent shorter units to which other material was added.⁸ While this sort of archeological search for sources, cultural stimuli, and intellectual borrowings may be revealing, it tends to remove from view a more important question of what the *Apocryphon of John* was intending to convey in its own right. Furthermore, such a search shows little respect for the unity of a literary creation, let alone for the ancient view of the literary text as a unified living being. As Philo of Alexandria says in a warning issued to the ‘calumniators’ of the Jewish scripture,

⁷ Tardieu (1984), for example, proposes a Chaldaean apocalypse as the base to *Ap. John*.

⁸ The classification of the main models of *Quellenforschung* is in Mansfeld (1998) 28–30. For various analytical approaches to *Ap. John* see, for example, Doresse (1960) 208–11; Schenke (1962) 63; Kasser (1964) 15; Wilson (1967) 512; Arai (1968–69) 301; Wisse (1992) 3: 900, and (1993) 159; Waldstein (1995) 99–112. See also Kragerud (1965) 15–38; Helmbold (1970) 173–79; Tardieu (1979–80) 347, and (1980–81) 454.

<But such people are like> those who judge and evaluate the whole by only one part, and not, on the contrary, the part by the whole. . . . The Legislation is, therefore, in some sense a unified living being (ζῶον ἐνώμενον), which one should view as a whole in all of its entirety (ὅλην δι' ὅλων) with open eyes, and examine all round the intention of the entire scripture (τὸ βούλημα τῆς συμπάσης γραφῆς) with a far-seeing precision, not cutting up its harmony or dissecting its unity (μὴ κατακόπτοντας τὴν ἁρμονίαν μηδὲ τὴν ἔνωσιν διαρτῶντας). For things deprived of their communion will appear to be of a different form and kind (ἕτερό μορφα γὰρ καὶ ἕτεροειδῆ φανεῖται τῆς κοινωνίας στερούμενα).” (Philo, *QG* 3.3 Petit)

Just like Galen’s previously quoted account of διασκευή, Philo’s warning is an important testimony to the common literary culture, shared by pagan *literati* as well as by Hellenized Jews, within which the *Apocryphon of John* was likely to originate. In this culture, a literary creation had the status of a ‘living creature’ (ζῶον) endowed with distinctive traits: e.g., subject (*hypothesis*), plot, narrative structure, and a distinct worldview. Like any organism, a literary work was considered prone to illnesses and injuries (errors, logical and narrative gaps, inadvertent omissions), but, as long as its integrity as a whole was never questioned, capable of surviving them all. Like any other organism, a literary text was also expected to undergo the phases of growing (redactional expansions) and shrinking (redactional abridgments). But take any of its vital parts (e.g., large thematic units, narrative structure), and it would never be what it used to be before. Once separated from one another, the parts of a previous whole, *membra disiecta* (source documents, *Grundschrift*, etc.) would turn to be “of a different kind” and “of a different form.” Putting these members together, combining bits and pieces, will not disclose much about the functioning of the previous whole because the original cohesion, a life-giving element (authorial intention), has been lost forever in dismemberment. *Collectio membrorum* does not restore Pentheus to life—just as the sources alone do not make up the *Apocryphon of John*.⁹

⁹ The image of a discourse as a living being is, of course, Platonic (*Phaedr.* 246c2–6). For its pre-Platonic sources (esp. Democritus’s analogy of elements with letters) see Brague (1985) 53–83, esp. 58–59. For the later elaborations of the analogy between λόγος and ζῶον or κόσμος cf. Hadot (1987) 121–28. The second analogy is particularly emphasized in the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, 15, 13–16 Westerink. The demiurgic character of the production of a discourse, and consequently of the universe, strongly emphasized by Plato and his followers, was rejected by Plotinus. According to Hadot (1987) 126, one of the reasons for this break with Plato’s tradition was Plotinus’s opposition to the Gnostic theory of a

Back to the frame story, even the most cautious critics, those who refrained from dissecting *Apocryphon's* 'living body', have been mostly in unison about its secondary character. The reasons adduced are, first, the recurrence of distinctively Christian features and references, conspicuously absent, so it was believed, from the rest of the Apocryphon; and, second, a sudden shift in the point of view from which the story is narrated (the *he diegesis* followed by the *I-narrative*), the sign of an inadequate harmonization, on the part of the Gnostic 'editor', of the core text with its new frame. As one critic put it a while ago, "Already at the first glance, one can easily determine that the Christ-form or the Christian *Gedankengut* surfaces mainly in the frame narrative, but very seldom in the actual secret teaching" (Arai 1968–1969, 303). Or, as another critic has more recently expressed it, "The apocalyptic frame . . . is part of a 'Christianizing' of the text's core material," allegedly of Jewish provenience, and later designated as "the originally non-Christian Ur-text" (Pearson 1993). Again, there is a great deal of confusion here involving both terminology and the real object of investigation—for example, the problem of what exactly makes a 'Gedankengut' distinctively Christian. When Christ, according to Luke, appeared to his disciples, in the revelation that seems to have served as the model for the Gnostic type of paradosis, he simply "interpreted the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets" (Luke 24:27). In other words, the resurrected Christ explained to his followers the significant prefigurative passages from the Jewish scripture. Christ's hermeneutical strategy, as described in Luke, is therefore not much different from the Savior's exegesis of *Genesis* and Wisdom literature in the 'core document', or 'Ur-text', of the *Apocryphon of John*.

In light of all that has been said above, I may now propose another hypothesis about the status, function, and meaning of the frame narrative in the *Apocryphon of John*.

- (i) An attitude similar to Philo's view of discourse as an organized whole characterizes the redactorial work on the *Apocryphon of*

sequential production, which he considered a misinterpretation of the *Timaeus's* passage (*Tim.* 39e; cf. Plot. *Enn.* II 9.6.14–28). For the whole problem, see in particular O'Meara (1980) 1: 365–78. Finally, for Philo's holistic approach to the Bible, a distant model for the modern structuralist exegesis of the Biblical text, see Cazeaux (1988) 67–109.

John. There are changes in style, in theological detail, in the length of particular sections, from one version to another, but never to the point of compromising the stability of the text—that is, a literary work recognizable by its specific set of themes, its particular subject and scope, and the hypotactic organization of its narrative. The frame of the *Apocryphon* is one of these stable elements that mark it as identifiable whole.

- (ii) Instead of discarding the frame as a later addition or explaining it as a generic device that unifies its source materials, I see it as a programmatic statement on the part of the anonymous Gnostic author—as the statement of intention (a complementary account to the Gospel of John), of self-determination (John vs. Pharisee), and of a literary affiliation (pseudo-historical romance, autobiographical account, *Offenbarungsliteratur*).
- (iii) As for the employment of different narrative techniques in the frame, I attribute the recurring changes in the point of view not to poor harmonization, but to a complex narrative strategy intended to create, on the one hand, the sense of an objective distance from the narrated events and, on the other, the illusion of identification with John, the model visionary. At first, the events narrate themselves, without the slightest intrusion of a subjective standpoint. Such a depersonalized narration lends to the whole *Apocryphon's* account an aura of 'historical' authenticity. The narrative focus moves, then, progressively closer to the individuality of the protagonists—first to John, who takes command of *diegesis*, and with whom, as a model hero, the reader (or listener) is expected to identify. By assuming John's point of view, the reader (or listener) becomes himself the recipient of the Savior's message. A final shift, this time to the Savior as the first-person narrator, increases the persuasiveness of his secret message, and creates a sense of intimacy in the reader (or listener).
- (iv) The presence of two first-person narrators (John and the Savior) in the frame, and the abrupt transition from one *I-narrator* to the other, creates uncertainties about the exact separation between the outer and inner frame, as well as between the frame and the inner narratives, giving a confusing impression of their mutual overflowing. The net result is the fusion of the two first-person voices, so that one becomes the double of the other. In this complex play of mirrors, the Savior's first-person revelatory

account reflects itself as John's personal autobiography. Two separate planes (divine and human) and two irreconcilable perspectives (universal and individual) are thus bound together in a single "I," following the rhetorical procedure typical for the discourse of mystic experience.¹⁰ The multiplication of the narrative voices within the frame creates only an apparent discontinuity. What remains the same from one level to another is that single "I" within which the divine author and the human narrator speak the same message of salvation.

This complex narrative strategy may indeed seem much too sophisticated for ancient techniques of story-telling. But similar narrative techniques can be found in ancient romances, not only in modern fiction,¹¹ and there seems to be no good reason why the author of *Apocryphon* should be denied the knowledge of what the ancient novelists regarded already as a genre convention. There is, for example, a close parallel with the narrative situation of *Apocryphon* in the opening paragraphs of Achilles Tatius's *Leucippe and Clitophon*. The romance also has two first-person narrators: the 'author' himself, in a short introduction, and Clitophon, a hero—protagonist, in the rest of the account. But these are not the only voices in the romance, as some modern scholars believed (Hägg 1971, Fusillo 1989). The introductory scene opens in the following way:

Sidon is a coastal city. The sea is Assyrian. The city is the Phoenicians' 'mother-city', and its people are the 'father' of the Thebans. There is a double harbor in the bay, wide within but with a narrow entrance so as to land-lock the sea by a gentle curve. Where the bay makes an inward turn toward the right, a second inlet has been channeled out for the water to run in. Thus there is formed a further harbor behind the first, so that in winter the ships can lie safely there, while in summer they can stay in the outer port toward the gulf entrance. On arriving here after a severe storm, I made my thank-offerings for the safe arrival to the goddess of the Phoenicians—Astarte the people of Sidon call her. As I was thus walking about the city . . . (1.1.1–2)

¹⁰ For the appropriation of scriptural verses as first-person utterances among the early Christian mystics, cf. Harl (1977) 23–25; for a more theoretical approach to the role of "I" in mystic traditions see, of course, Cerateau (1982).

¹¹ 4 Ezra, which shows many literary parallels with *Ap. John*, particularly in the organization of the frame-narrative and the selection of motifs therein, does not seem to have such a complex nesting of narrative perspectives. For 4 Ezra, cf., e.g., Metzger (1983), Klijn (1992), and Stone (1990); for 4 Ezra and *Ap. John* see Frankfurter (1996) 159–61.

A first-person narration by the ‘author’ comes after a short impersonal ecphrasis.¹² A scrupulous reader should hardly fail to notice the distinction made between the first-person narrator who escaped from a sea-storm (the anonymous narrator or the ‘implied author’) and the impersonal omniscient narrator (the ‘real author’) busying himself with Sidon’s topographical details and hinting thereby at the distance between his *tempus scribendi* and the story’s *tempus agendi*. The sequence of narrators is, thus, the same as in the *Apocryphon*: ‘real author’—‘implied author’ (first *I as protagonist*, then *I as witness*)—Clitophon (*I as protagonist*). In contrast with *Apocryphon*, however, Achilles Tatius’s romance never resumes the initial point of view, neither the impersonal one nor that of the ‘implied author’—as though the ‘real author’ never had in mind to write a perfect frame story. Should one, then, infer from all this that the introductory paragraphs of Leucippe and Clitophon are a later addition, a simple ‘generic device’, or the signature of a clumsy ‘editor’?¹³

Dramatis Personae

John’s Failed Inventio

The frame narrative has a Gospel savor: the same atmosphere, the same preoccupations and dilemmas, even the same spatial coordi-

¹² Molinié (1982) 49: “Un court paragraphe descriptif qui a l’air anonyme (c’est à dire qui semble écrit à la troisième personne).”

¹³ For the alternation of the points of view from which actions are narrated in ancient Greek romance see Hägg, (1971), esp. chapter 3, “Points of View,” 112–37, and Fusillo (1989), esp. the section entitled “Voci e visioni del racconto,” 111–78, based upon Genette’s classification of *diegesis* and narrative focusing. For Genette, besides his classical *Figures III* (1972), see also his polemical discussion on narrative situations, perspectives, voices, levels (*niveaux*), and ‘focalization’ in Genette (1983). For an authoritative survey of semiotic and narratological approaches to the literary text consult Segre (1985). In Chariton’s *Callirhoe*, the earliest extant novel, the narrative situation is reminiscent of the oral epic situation. Chariton opens the romance as a first-person omniscient narrator absent from the story he is going to narrate. His perspective is above the characters: extra- and hetero-diegetic, with zero focusing. Aside from the introduction, the first person is rarely used: the *diegesis* is impersonal, and the whole romance is told in the third person, without ‘authorial’ intrusions or comments. Like *Ap. John*, Xenophon’s *Ephesiaca* has a folk-tale ‘Once upon a time’ opening, hinting “at a distance that is psychologically relevant, even though it is not specified in temporal terms, between narrator/audience, on the one hand, and the narrative material, on the other” (Hägg 1971, 120). The narrator remains impersonal, extra- and hetero-diegetic, throughout the whole account. For Achilles Tatius see Hägg (1971) 124–37, and Fusillo (1989) 111–78.

nates: the Pharisees rebuking Jesus and his disciples for “turning away from the tradition of the elders” (Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:3); the disciples, with their hearts slow to believe (Luke 24:25), and prone to distress (John 14:1); “up there” (2:13; 11:55; 12:12, 20 etc.), Jerusalem with its temple, skeptical or openly hostile to Jesus (10:22–39, 11:45–57). At the opposite pole are the Mount of Olives, the place of prophecies (Matthew 26:30) and of the final ascension (Acts 1:6–12); the mountain in Galilee, the place of instruction (Matthew 5:1–7:27); and “a high mountain,” again in Galilee, often identified as Tabor, where the privileged few—Peter, John, and James—were granted the sight of Jesus’ transfiguration (Mark 9:2–13; Matthew 17:1–8; Luke 9:28–36).

A lack of precision is symptomatic in the *Apocryphon*’s frame narrative: not Jerusalem, but the elliptic “up”; the Mountain, with no further topographical specification; a Pharisee with an ominous, Persian name—“Arimanias”—that same name which the Zoroastrians assigned to the dark, evil principle. Clearly, the author decided to create an exemplary setting for his story, to turn names into symbols, history into paradigm.

Such a generalization has a double effect. First, it succeeds in transforming a pseudo-historical encounter of the Pharisee and John, the son of Zebedee, one of Jesus’ original apostles, into a cosmic conflict between the “children of light” (John 12:36), imprisoned in the midst of the material universe, and the powers of “darkness”—a polarity already exploited in the Johannine prologue. Second, it enables the author to widen his referential context, that is, to supplement the Gospel scenery with compatible features from other traditions, pagan and Jewish alike. The atmosphere of the *Apocryphon of John* is, thus, not distinctively Christian, but rather syncretistic: a Pharisee identified with the Zoroastrian evil principle; the Mountain upon which a heavenly creature—Yahweh or Christ, but also Hermes Trismegistos (CH XIII 1) or Adonai (PGM XII 92 ff.)—delivers his revelatory teaching;¹⁴ finally, John, whose distress and perplexity have

¹⁴ The motif of the revelation on a mountain is conventional both in the Old Testament (Moses on Sinai, “the mountain of God”) and in ancient Greek literature (Hesiod on Helicon, Minos on Ida). The Mountain of Transfiguration was identified as Tabor as early as the *Gospel of Hebrews* (Orig., *In Io.* 2.6). For revelatory discourses on a mountain, see n. 1 to the introductory section of the *Hermes Trismegistos’s Discourse to His Son Tat* (CH 13.1), in Nock-Festugière (1946) 2:200–203.

as much in common with Jesus' puzzled and saddened disciples from the Gospels as they have with Lucius' "uttermost extremes of tribulation" (Apul. *Metam.* 11.2), or with the astrologer Thessalos's "pain in the soul" that made him "wander around Egypt" in an anxious search of a redeeming vision (Thessalus, *De virt. plant.*, Prooem.10 Friedrich), or with "a great distress that has entered [Enoch's] heart," and which only the angelic revelation, and the promise of the heavenly journey, will eventually manage to quell (2 Enoch 1:3).

Once upon the Mountain, John formulates his perplexity in a series of questions. There is no outside addressee to whom these questions are directed. It looks as though the withdrawal to "a desert place" was an attempt to elaborate a proper reply to Arimanius's

For a further elaboration of the transfiguration scene in various apocryphal acts (*Acts Thom.* 143; *Acts Pet.* 20; *Acts John* 90–91), see Orbe (1976) 2: 96–141. A mountain can also serve as a repository place for tablets on which mysterious pronouncements were engraved. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.2.3, reports the story that Seth, the son of Adam, had left his esoteric message for posterity in the form of tablets on a high mountain. The same story occurs in the epilogue of *Gos. Eg.*, NHC III 68:2–3 = IV 80:16–17, and a similar one in the concluding section of the *Allogenes*, NHC XI 68:16–20: "And you will leave this book upon a mountain and you will adjure the guardian." In *Steles Seth*, NHC VII 118:10 ff., Dositheos the seer is charged with the discovery and disclosure of the tablets. For the Arabic legend of Hermes (Idris) who, "afraid that the science would perish in the Flood, built the temples [pyramids], that is, the mountain which is known as al-Birba, the temple of Akhmim," and "engraved there [the names of] all the crafts and craftsmen" cf. Ibn Abi Usaybi'a 1.16 ff., in Fodor (1970) 335–63. The motif occurs elsewhere in the Nag Hammadi codices: (i) *Gos. Phil.* NHC II 58:6–7, where Christ appeared to his disciples in glory upon the mountain; (ii) *Soph. Jes. Chr.* NHC III 90:14–91:14: the Savior appeared like a great angel of light to his twelve disciples and seven women on the mountain in Galilee called "Place of Harvest time and Joy"; (iii) *ibid.* 91:18–20, referring to the Savior's previous teaching on the mountain in Galilee called "of the Olives"; (iv) *Apoc. Paul*, NHC V 18:3–19:24: the little child, later identified as the holy spirit, summons Paul to "awake" his mind and realize that the mountain upon which he is standing is "the mountain of Jericho, so that [he] may know the hidden things in those visible"; (v) 1 *Apoc. Jas.* NHC V 30:18–31:2, where James, upon ascending to "the mountain called 'Gaugelan' with [other] disciples," all of them in distress because of the Savior's suffering, and after the crowd has dispersed, sees the Lord appear to him; (vi) *Apoc. Adam* NHC V 78:7–17, according to which an angel came from heaven, appeared to Jesus the child on a high mountain, and bid him to arise since god had glorified him; (vii) *ibid.* 85:3–11: a message of salvation has not been written as a book, but will be revealed to those saved by angelic beings, who are "situated atop a high mountain upon a rock of truth"; (viii) *Ep. Pet. Phil.* NHC VIII 133:8–19: the apostles went upon the Mount of Olives, "the place where they used to gather with the blessed Christ when he was in the body," and prayed until, suddenly, "a great light appeared so that the mountain shone from the sight of him who had appeared," i.e., the resurrected Christ.

invectives (“Where is your teacher?”). John behaves as a good rhetorician. He searches through his memory in order to retrieve ideas and arguments suitable for a persuasive reply. Memory stands here for the collections of Jesus’ sayings, discourses, and signs that John had stored and subsequently, along with narrative episodes, recorded in his Gospel. Memory also stands for a grid of empty forms, or ‘places’ (τόποι, *loci*) over which John will begin to pass his subject (ζήτημα, *quaestio*):

How indeed was the Savior elected?

Why was he sent into the world by his Father, who sent him?

Who is his Father?

Of what sort is that Aeon to which we shall go?

He said to us that this aeon has been modeled (τύπος) after that incorruptible Aeon.

Yet he did not instruct us about that one, of what kind it is. (BG 20:8–19; II 1:21–29)

In spite of being formulated *lege artis*, by ‘passing’ a subject through a grid of narrative topics (περιστάσεις) designed to guide an aspiring storyteller (person, action, place, time, manner, cause), John’s questions (*How? Why? Who? Of what sort? By what means?*) have failed to produce a plausible narrative.¹⁵ John’s memory is filled with Jesus’ impenetrable discourses from the Fourth Gospel¹⁶—the closed system of incongruous metaphors, contradictory claims, and impenetrable puns—which the confused disciple cannot translate into a narrative likely to rebuke the Pharisee. The only way to resolve this deadlock is another revelation from heaven, some master myth that would explain Jesus’ allusions to his heavenly origin and salvation promised to “his own.” One of the primary functions of the *Apocryphon*

¹⁵ For περιστάσεις, literally ‘circumstances’ or ‘circumstantial loci’, also known as the main elements of narrative—μόρια διηγήσεως, στοιχεῖα διηγήσεως—see an exhaustive list (τό τε πρόσωπον . . . καὶ τὸ πρᾶγμα τὸ πραχθὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ προσώπου, καὶ ὁ τόπος ἐν ᾧ ἡ πρᾶξις, καὶ ὁ χρόνος καθ’ ὃν ἡ πρᾶξις, καὶ ὁ τρόπος τῆς πράξεως, καὶ ἕκτον ἢ τούτων αἰτία) and discussion thereon in Theon’s *Progymnasmata* 78,16–79,19 P-B. The best discussion of the ‘topics’ and its development in ancient rhetoric is by Pernot (1986). For a tripartite division of ‘topics’ into a method, a grid of empty forms, and a storehouse of filled forms, see Barthes (1988) 64–72.

¹⁶ The list of seemingly relevant verses from the Fourth Gospel is in Tardieu (1984) 83–84.

of *John*, therefore, is to supply, in the form of a narrative (διήγημα), the interpretive key for the enigmatic content of the Fourth Gospel, and to make up for it communicative weakness and polemical shortcomings.¹⁷

Perplexity of a seer is one of the consecrated themes in the apocalyptic literature of the period, including the texts traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’. The theme implies the conviction that humans have no available means, nor intellectual capacity, to get beyond illusory appearances and reach the divine. On the psychological plane, this sense of separation provokes such feelings as alienation (*Gospel of Truth, Allogenes*), the sense of abandonment (*Apocryphon of John*), and even suicidal thoughts (*Zostrianos*). But even if the solution must come from without, in the form of some heavenly messenger, the initiative must come from a human agent—from the realization that the spontaneous brings nothing in return, and that salvation presupposes the acquisition of a proper mental disposition. As Plutarch has it, “If there is advice to give for listening to a teacher, one ought to . . . exercise discovery (εὔρησις, *inventio*) over the course of learning (ἀσκεῖν ἅμα τῇ μαθήσει τὴν εὔρησιν), so that we may acquire a mental disposition that is neither sophist-like nor fact-oriented but reflective and philosophical” (*De aud.* 17–18, 47C–48D). Translated into ‘Gnostic’ jargon, knowledge is unattainable without formulating the causes of distress and perplexity into a set of ‘existentialist’ questions:

It is not only a purifying water that sets one free,

but also the knowledge (γνώσις) of the following:

Who were we?

What have we become?

Where were we?

Whereunto were we cast?

Whereto are we heading?

¹⁷ For the empty “revelation form” of the Johannine Gospel cf. Meeks (1972) 68: “Yet the Fourth Gospel never provides us with the myth which explains how some men could be from below and others from above. . . . Thus we have in a Johannine literature a thoroughly dualistic picture. . . . Yet that picture is never rationalized by a comprehensive myth, as in Gnosticism, or by a theory of predestination, as later in the western catholic tradition.”

Wherefrom are we purified?

What is generation?

What is regeneration? (Clem. Al., *Exc. Theod.* 78.2)¹⁸

John's Vision: Form and Content

From a form-analytical perspective, all three segments of John's action—distress, failed *inventio*, increased perplexity—are conventional signals of a forthcoming revelatory vision. They belong to a set of controllable, or 'inter-specific,' elements in the *Offenbarungsliteratur* of the Hellenistic and Roman period, irrespective of their specific provenience (Jewish, pagan, Christian). They occur, too, even in an identical order, elsewhere in the Nag Hammadi Library, as shown in the following synopsis of the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ* (BG 3 and NHC III 4):

Ap. John (BG 20:4–19)

When I heard these (i.e. Arimanius's invectives),
I turned away from the temple to the mountain,
into a desert place.
And I was distressed (λυπεῖν) with myself saying:
How indeed was the savior chosen?
And why was he sent to the world by his father?
... And who is his father?
And of what kind is that eon to which we shall go?
And he did not instruct us about that one . . .

Suddenly, while I was thinking this . . .

Soph. Jes. Chr. (BG 77:9–78:11)

After Jesus Christ had risen from the dead,
and when his twelve disciples and seven women
... came to Galilee onto the mountain
called "Harvest and Joy,"
perplexed (ἀπορεῖν)
about the reality (ὑπόστασις) of the entirety,
and the plan (οἰκονομία),
and the holy providence (πρόνοια),
and the power (ἀρετή) of the authorities (ἐξουσία),
about all things the Savior accomplished among
them as mysteries (μυστήριον) of the holy plan,
then . . .

All stages of John's ensuing vision follow the common pattern of Hellenistic revelatory accounts. They consist of a series of stable elements characteristic of both pagan and Jewish *Visionsstil*. Stability denotes here not only the presence of the same elements but also their relatively fixed order within the sequence. There is, of course,

¹⁸ The passage is discussed in Boehlig (1994) 24–27. See also Simonetti (1993) 524, n. 404, for useful references. One reference, *Teach. Silv.* NHC VII 92:10–18, is particularly worth quoting, in that it shows, again, that salvation cannot be achieved without passing a problem through a grid of 'logical *topoi*' (i.e., genus, property, accident, species, difference, division, etc): "But before everything else (e.g., supplications, observing Christ's commands), know your generation and know yourself: From what οὐσία are you? From what γένος are you? From what φυλή?"

no uniform sequence of actions in preserved visions. The order can be changed, as in the case of the *Letter of Peter to Philip* (NHC VIII 2), where the apostles express their concerns in the form of questions *directly* to the Savior, but only *upon* his appearance (*Ep. Pet. Phil.* NHC VIII 133:13–135:4), and not *before*, as in the above quoted sections from the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Sophia of Jesus Christ*. Furthermore, there is no extant visionary account in which all ‘inter-specific’ elements are present. With these remarks, relevant for the morphological analysis of any literary text, I may now turn to a partition of John’s vision into its distinctive formal elements. For each element, I will provide an abbreviated definition and quote the relevant portion of the text, followed by a brief discussion of textual problems and characteristic motifs and themes. The parallel texts of various redactions are quoted only where they significantly differ in wording or content. Otherwise, a less defective text will be given. Numerous lacunas are not restored, except in the cases where the proposed conjectures simultaneously satisfy the following five criteria: (i) paleographical, i.e. restoration neither too long nor too short for a lacuna; (ii) grammatical; (iii) internal cross-reference; (iv) parallel reading in the other versions; (v) conventionality of the motif (a word or a phrase) proposed as a conjecture.

Opening Formula

Suddenly, as I was thinking these things . . . (BG 20:19; cf. NHC II 1:30)

The Coptic participial conversion probably stands for the Greek genitive absolute as recorded in the *Acts of John* 89 Junod-Kaestli, ἐννοῦντός μου ταῦτα. In this case, too, the immediately preceding section portrays the narrator’s perplexity formulated into a question, viz., ὡς διαπορεῖν με ἐν ἑμαυτῷ καὶ λέγειν· τί ἐστὶν τοῦτο μοι; (ibid.). A similar formula opens the visionary account in the Hermetic *Poimandres* (CH 1.1), Ἐννοίας μοί ποτε γενομένης, which is a mere adaptation of Xenophon’s opening in the *Cyropaedia* (1.1.1): Ἐννοια ποθ’ ἡμῖν ἐγένετο ὅσαι δημοκρατίαι κατελύθησαν. In Roman literature, Cicero used the same beginning-marker, also in the participial form, in *De Oratore* (1.1.1: *Cogitanti mihi saepe numero et memoria vetera repetenti . . .*). And it is with this same wording that the ‘Ciceronian’ Minucius Felix starts his dialogue *Octavius*, apparently in order to disclose, right from the

beginning, his literary affiliation (1.1: *Cogitanti mihi et cum animo meo Octavii boni . . . memoriam recensenti . . .*). Similarly Apuleius, who prefaces his free translation of the pseudo-Aristotelian *Περὶ κόσμου* with the following opening: *Consideranti mihi et diligentius intuenti . . .* (Apul. *De mundo*, Praef. 258).¹⁹

Cosmic Semeia Followed by the Seer's Reaction

The heavens opened,
and the whole creation shone with light
that [is below] heaven.
And the [whole] universe [moved]. (BG 20:20–21:2; cf. II 1:30–33)

The three cosmic σημεῖα announcing the Savior's arrival have so many parallels in the Intertestamental, Christian, and pagan *Offenbarungsliteratur* that the lacunas may be restored with great certainty. Van Unnik (1964) 269–280 provides an exhaustive list of parallels.

For my part, I was afraid [and] . . . (BG 21:2–3; cf. II 2:1)

The intrusion of the protagonist's point of view does not appear to be a common feature in similar visionary accounts of the period. The reference to a psychological state of the seer usually occurs in the revealer's 'Formula of Exhortation'—for example, *μὴ φοβοῦ, θάρσει, θαρρήσεις*. As it stands, the intrusion appears to serve different purposes. First, it is a division-marker, separating one distinctive element of the *Visionsstil* from the other. Second, it increases the vividness of narration and gives it the mark of authenticity. Third, it continues to exploit the motif of a seer's perplexity and carries it over to its full realization in the next section, when the visual revelation finally occurs. Fourth, it brings in a considerable tension in the reader or listener awaiting a solution to the riddle of John's vision.

¹⁹ For other imitations of Cicero's opening formula see Fausch (1966) 15–16. Genitive absolute is a typical opening-marker in Epictetus's *Dissertationes* (e.g., 1.11, 2.14, 3.22), on which see Billerbeck (1978) 41–42.

Description of a Vision Followed by the Seer's Reaction (Dilemma)

NHC II 2:1-9

BG 20:3-13

... I] saw in the light [... standing] by me.
When I [saw] [...] being like a great (old) man.

And lo, a child [appeared to] me.
But [...] the likeness (εἰηε) being an old man
[in whom there was] light.

And he [change]d his appearance (CΗΔΤ)
being like a servant.

[I gazed] into it.
I did not [understand] this wonder,

They were not [...] in front of me.
And there was a [...] [with] many forms (μορφή)
in the [light].
And the [...] appeared through one another.

as if [there was] a [...] (f.)
with many forms (μορφή)
[in the] light,
its (f.) forms (μορφή)
[appearing] through each [other],
[nor] (did I understand)
[...] if it (f.) was one [...]
[...] consisted of three faces (20).

[And] the [appearance] (CΗΔΤ)
consisted of three forms (μορφή).

The passage in both versions is defective to the extent that a full reconstruction remains conjectural. Yet the essential content of John's vision seems clear. The revealer, still unidentified, appears (εἰηε BG, CΗΔΤ and εἰηε in II) to John in multiple forms (ΜΟΡΦΗ in both manuscripts) which, in the end, turn out to be only "three forms" (as in II) or "faces" (20, as in BG, standing apparently for ΜΟΡΦΗ). What is also clear, in spite of lacunas in both versions, is that the longer version in II, by not mentioning John's "wonder," fails to create the same dramatic effect as BG. The multiform appearance intensifies the seer's perplexity which, in so far as one can infer from the fragmentary text of BG, focuses on the problem of the unity of what appears as a set of simultaneous transformations ("its forms appearing through one another").²⁰

Another particularity of BG is that, in contrast to the longer version, it seems to identify only two out of the required three forms

²⁰ The Coptic 20 translates both Gr. μορφή (form, Lat. *forma*; in Platonist philosophy, an outward shape opposed to *ιδέα*, and sometimes equated with *εἰκών* as in CH I 12-15; in LXX, often synonymous with *ὁμοίωμα*, *σχῆμα* and *εἶδος*) and *πρόσωπον* (face, figure, outward appearance, or person, Lat. *facies*, *adspectus faciei*, *persona*). These two terms do not always seem to mean the same in the 'Gnostic' jargon, as Irenaeus suggests in his report on Mark the Valentinian in *Adv. haer.* 1.14.1: *καὶ εἶναι τούτους μορφὰς ἃς ὁ κύριος ἀγγέλους εἶρηκε, τὰς διηλεκῶς βλέπουσας τὸ πρόσωπον τοῦ πατρὸς*. For the Son as his Father's *πρόσωπον*, the identification based on Ps 23:6, cf. Clem. Al. *Exc. Theod.* 10.5 and 23.4-5.

of the Savior's appearance. Since the left side of the page's written area containing the relevant passage is irretrievably lost due to physical damage, one can assume that the mystery of the third "form" lies hidden somewhere in this defective part of the text. And since lacunas are measurable, attempts have been made to reconstruct the missing portions of the passage. In two such attempts (Schmidt, Schenke), the identity of a third "person" was restored, but in a surprising fashion. We would expect this form to be "a servant" as in NHC II. What was proposed instead is "a woman" (ΟΥCΖΗΕ) with three forms, a separate appearance occurring after the Savior's self-revelation in different ages of man (youth–old man in BG, youth–servant–old man in II).

And lo, a child [appeared to] me. But [when I saw] that the likeness (ΕΙΗΕ) [in which there] was a light was an old man, [I gazed] into it. I did not [understand] this wonder, (which gave the impression) that [there was a woman] (ΕΩΧΕ-ΟΥΗ-ΟΥCΖΗΕ) with many forms (Ε-ΗΔΩΕ-ΗΕCΜΟΡΦΗ) [in the] light. Her forms (ΗΕCΜΟΡΦΗ) [appeared] through one another. (I thought), if she is one, [how] can she consist of three faces (ΖΟ)? (BG 20:3–13 Till-Schenke 1972, 82–83)

The same conjecture is next proposed for filling the lacuna in II 2:6–7: "And there was a [woman] with many forms in the [light]."

In the first complete synoptic edition of all four manuscript witnesses of the *Apocryphon of John*, recently published by Wisse and Waldstein (1995), the above restoration is rejected because most of the proposed readings appear too long for the available line-spaces. Yet the key point of the conjecture, viz. "a woman" in three forms, can be saved by replacing Shenke's ΕΩΧΕ-ΟΥΗ-ΟΥCΖΗΕ with the simple delocutive nominal sentence (ΕΩΧΕ-ΟΥCΖΗΕ ΤΕ). Still, there remains the problem of its contextual plausibility. The surrounding lines do not offer significant support for this conjecture. In fact, only two intra-textual elements corroborate Schenke's hypothesis. First, the lacuna requires a grammatically feminine noun. Second, the forms in which the Savior appears to John in BG—a youth, an old man, and, as it was claimed, a trimorphic "woman"—can be interpreted as perceptible manifestations of the Savior's ensuing self-proclamation as the Father, the Mother, and the Son. Taken together, these two points make the conjecture intriguing. The degree of its plausibility, for it cannot be certain, now depends solely on extra-textual factors—first, on comparing the conjecture with the parallel section in the longer version; and second, on finding at least one

compelling parallel from cognate contemporary texts. This parallel, in order to be compelling, should meet at least three criteria besides the philological one: (i) similar wording; (ii) similar content, viz., a similar trimorphic appearance; (iii) similar meaning, viz., a clear connection between the trimorphic appearance and the revealer's real (trinitarian) identity. But all that a 'religionsgeschichtlich' comparison by Schenke and his followers (Werner 1977) could offer was a complicated and nowhere confirmed conflation of the solar cult—viz., Aion–Helios (a child in the morning and an old man in the evening, as in BG) or the Egyptian Horus (a child at the sunrise, a young man at the zenith, an old man at the sunset as in II)—with the “polymorphy” of the Hellenistic Selene–Isis (Till-Schenke 1972, 83).²¹ Back to the first mentioned extra-textual factor, viz., the comparison with the parallel section in the longer version, the relevant part of II 2,6, as confirmed by the photographic record, should read as $\text{NE}\Theta\text{OY}\text{N}\text{O}[\text{Y}\text{E}] \text{NE}$, “there was a likeness,” and not as $\text{NE}\Theta\text{OY}\text{N}\text{O}[\text{Y}\text{C}\text{Z}\text{I}] \text{NE}$ “there was a woman.”²²

More recently, Wisse and Waldstein (1995) proposed a new conjectural restoration, based on the paleographical evidence and the synoptic comparison with the corresponding passage in NHC II:

²¹ For the solar ‘modalism’ in Egyptian religion, see Hammerschmidt (1957) 238–42, and Junod (1982) 41–42. Junod, too, proposes the Egyptian origin of Christ's polymorphy in both the *Acts of John* and the *Apocryphon of John*: “Deux textes qui pourraient trouver leur origine en Égypte” (42). Still according to Junod, “L'apparition polymorphe dans l'Apocryphon, (qu'elle soit bimorphe ou trimorphe, le premier cas semblant être le plus probable puisqu'il a la caution du Papyrus de Berlin et qu'il constitue une lectio difficilior), semble être une manifestation assez banale de l'éternité et de la sollicitude divines” (43). Stroumsa (1992), again, argues in favor of the Jewish origin of the *Apocryphon's* vision, and sees in Christ's trimorphy the conflation of two separate Jewish traditions—that of God's Biblical appearance as young (Cant 5:11: “His locks are wavy, black as a raven”) and old (Dan 7:9: “The hair of his head was like pure wool”) and that of Metatron—servant ($\text{Q}\Delta\lambda$ in *Ap. John*). In order further to confuse an already overly complicated ‘religionsgeschichtlich’ problem, one could add to the list of possible sources the motif of a gray-haired child, or *puer-senex*, exploited in various apocalyptic (both Jewish and Christian) and monastic texts; cf. Caquot (1974) 161–72. Junod was not first to claim that the Savior's polymorphy in *Ap. John* should be explained as the symbol of eternity. According to Quispel (1978) 5, E. Peterson mentioned in 1949 “to at least one of his friends . . . the relation of the [Encratite] concept of Aion to the description of Christ in the *Apocryphon*.” A threefold appearance in NHC II would therefore correspond to “the Aion in which past, present, and future coexist.” The absence of the third form in BG is accounted for by the manuscript's inferiority: “The Berlin text, which does not mention the child [sic], contains a gap and is inferior here” (4).

²² See Emmel (1978) 199, *ad loc.*

NHC II 2:1-9

[And behold, I] saw
in [the light
a child who stood] by me.
While I looked [at it, it became]
like an old man.

And he [changed his] likeness (CMAΤ) (again),
becoming like a servant.

There [was not a plurality] before me,
but there was a [likeness (ΕΙΜΕ)]
with multiple forms (ΜΟΡΦΗ)
in the [light,]
and [the semblances (CMAΤ)]
appeared through each other,
[and] the [likeness (CMAΤ)]
had three forms (ΜΟΡΦΗ).

BG 20:3-13

And behold,
a child appeared to me,
and [it changed] (its) likeness (ΕΙΜΕ)
into an old man
[while] light [existed] in him.

[As I looked] at it (him),
I did not [understand] this wonder,

whether there was [a likeness (ΙΔΕΑ)]
with multiple forms (ΜΟΡΦΗ)
[because of the] light
—since its (f.) forms (ΜΟΡΦΗ)
[appeared] through each [other—]
[or] whether it was one [likeness (ΙΔΕΑ)]
[because] it had three faces (ΖΟ).

Clearly, the editors did not view the absence of a third “person” in BG as problematic. Comparison with the parallel lines in NHC II may suggest a mechanical omission, an oversight on the part of the redactor, or copyist, of BG (Quispel 1978, 4). Alternatively, the absence may represent a sudden shift from the ‘youth—old man’ duality, a symbol of eternity, to a threefold image, “probably a reference to Jesus’ role as revealer” (Waldstein 1995, 87).

In most cases, the conjectures proposed by Wisse and Waldstein are possible, if not certain.²³ Particularly attractive is their proposal to take the two clauses following “I did not understand this wonder” in the shorter version (BG 21:7-8: ΜΠΙ-[ΕΙΜΕ Ε-Π]ΙΩΠΗΡΕ) as the alternants (21:9,12 ΕΩΧΕ- . . . [ΟΥΛ]Ε ΕΩΧΕ- . . .) of John’s dilemma (21:15: Ο Π-ΖΗΤ CMAΥ). John’s alternative proposition is syntactically arranged in two coordinated suppositions, each followed by the appropriate ratio (“because of the light” and “because it had three faces”) in a *statim*-type of succession. The lacuna in the first supposition is apparently restored by comparison with the corresponding text in NHC II. It is filled with a combinative adverb ρρᾶῖ and the preposition π-, a variant of a fixed expression ρρᾶῖ ρπ- denoting a specific spatial orientation (‘in,’ ‘within’). The fact that the editors gave it a

²³ See, however, their restoration of II 2:5, “There [was not a plurality] before me,” ΠΗΔΥ[ΟΗΖΑΖΑΗΗ]ΠΑΠΤΟΕΒΟΛ, which is as contextually ‘compelling’ as, say, “There [was not a unity] before me,” ΠΗΔΥ[ΟΗΟΥΑΔΑΗΗ]ΠΑΠΤΟΕΒΟΛ.

causal meaning (“because of”) is indicative of their concern for the *parallelismus membrorum*. Just as the second supposition is followed, according to the conjecture, by the causal $\chi\epsilon$ - (“because”), so the first alternant, too, must have an immediately ensuing causal phrase (“because of the light”), further explained by a parenthetical clause (“its forms appeared through each other”). Besides the problematic assignment of the causal meaning to $\rho\pi\alpha\acute{\iota} \rho\bar{\nu}$ -, it is not clear what meaning is to be assigned to John’s dilemma. According to the proposed reconstruction, John seems unable to assert whether multiformity is an optical illusion created by the supernatural light or there is a single appearance because its forms are not manifold but only three. A less confusing interpretation of John’s perplexity, one that is in tune with the parallel passage in the longer version, is that he cannot assess whether the appearance is multiform or trimorphous. Perhaps the message John tries to deliver is that he does not know whether he hallucinates as he watches how multiple forms in the light “appeared through each other,” or he *really* sees one, i.e. “true” appearance ($\bar{\nu}$ - $\mu\eta\epsilon$ in NHC III 2:19, as reconstructed by Funk 1995) with three forms, or faces, in the light.

Instead of further confusing an already vexed issue, I have given above a non-committal reconstruction—one in which both of the discussed conjectures can easily fit. For this reason, I have left some of the lacunas in the BG passage unrestored. In very few instances, I have adopted minor restorations by the most recent editors, provided that they do not run counter, but philologically improve, the proposed solutions. Sometimes, again, I have suggested alternative readings, all of them dealing exclusively with morpho-syntactical features of the passage.

Yet even such a defective text, as has already been argued, reveals the core of John’s perplexity. The plurality of outward forms (“three faces”) raises the question of the revealer’s unity (“one”)—not an uncommon reaction among early Christian writers facing the riddle of divine polymorphy. The Christ who appears in multiple forms ($\pi\omicron\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\mu\omicron\rho\phi\omicron\varsigma$) to his disciples was a widely used motif in the early Christian literature, and the meaning of his polymorphy, its $\beta\omicron\upsilon\lambda\eta\mu\alpha$, was a controversial subject among the first theologians. For some, multiformity had more to do with different spiritual capacities of recipients than with Christ’s real nature. For others, it proved that Christ was, in fact, without any form and above all determinations. For some, again, polymorphy was the visible expression of Christ’s

multiple potencies, virtues, or perfections (ἐπίνοιαι), in contrast with the unity, simplicity, and ineffability of the transcendent Father. For others, it was the symbol of Christ's paradoxical status, of his being one with and, at the same time, different from the other members of the divine triad. Due to lacunas in the text of BG, John's position in regard to this issue remains somewhat ambiguous. The unity of the Savior he refers to, does he see it as underlying, occasioning, or transcending the plurality of forms? It is perhaps from within this wider context—that is, by resorting to the representative texts from the ancient debate about the βούλημα of Christ's multiform appearances—that we may cast more light on the sense of John's vision.

In no ancient Christian text is the motif of Christ's polymorphy so thoroughly explored and given so great a dramatic value as in the *Acts of John*, 87–105 Kaestli-Junod. Probably during his first stay at Ephesus, John finds his fellow Christians perplexed (ἠπόρουν) about the meaning of Christ's appearance to Drusiana: "The Lord," she said, "appeared to me in the tomb like John and as a young man" (ὡς νεανίσκος 87). In order to dispel their doubts and strengthen their faith, John evokes the period of Christ's earthly career to which he himself bore witness. The teacher's actions were unpredictable, his speech elusive, the ways in which he used to appear to his followers dumbfounding. Not even he and his brother (James) could have agreed on what they had seen: "a child" (τὸ παιδίον) standing on the shore or "a handsome man" (ἄνδρα εὖμορφον); a man, "rather bald but with a thick flowing beard" or "a youth (νεανίσκος) with the beard just beginning." Often Christ would appear to John as "a small man with no good looks" (μικρὸς ἄνθρωπος . . . δύσμορφος), often again as immense, "as wholly looking up to heaven" (88–89). This general sense of confusion reached its dramatic peak during the second transfiguration scene "upon the mountain" (90), where Jesus took John, Peter, and James. John quietly drew near Christ while he was praying and stood looking at his hinder parts. What he saw was "not like a man at all" (ἄνθρωπον δὲ οὐδὲ ὅλως), "his head stretched up to heaven." Afraid, John cried out. "And he [i.e., Christ], turning about, appeared as a small man (μικρὸν ἄνθρωπον), caught hold of my beard and pulled it." This painful lesson may seem a perfect climax to the episode. But, as soon as he returned to James and Peter, John had to face yet another wonder: "The old man who spoke with the Lord on the mountain-top," John asked his companions,

“who was he?” Only at this point John finally “understood [Christ’s] abundant grace, and his unity with multiple faces (πολυπρόσωπον ἐνότητᾱ), and his wisdom that constantly looks after us.” But what, in fact, did John understand? What kind of unity did he discern among Christ’s multiple appearances? The reader has to reach the end of John’s diegesis to the Ephesians, his brief peroratio (104), to find the answer.

You therefore should also be persuaded, beloved,
 that it is not a man that I exhort you to worship,
 but God unchangeable (θεὸν ἀμετάτρεπτον),
 God who cannot be dominated (θεὸν ἀκράτητον),
 God higher (θεὸν . . . ἀνώτερον) than all authority and all power,
 older and mightier than all angels, all creatures,
 those spoken <or those conceived>,
 and all of the aeons in their entirety.
 If then you remain faithful to him,
 and if you build yourself in him,
 you shall possess your soul indestructible.

The solution John proposes to Christ’s polymorphy is the rejection of all forms. The changeability of appearances proves that Christ is, in his essence, unchangeable. By revealing himself to John and other companions in dimorphic appearances—great and small, a grown man and a child, young and old, with his breast now “smooth and soft” now “hard like rock” (89)—Christ shows that he is, in fact, neither of the opposites. Pairing contrary terms produces the paradoxical effect (ἀδόνατον), signifying that Christ is neither of these mutually exclusive extremes. Ultimately, such a paradoxical dichotomy leads to negation of all forms and all predications. That same method is employed in the ensuing *Tanzhymnus*, where the singing (and dancing) Christ describes himself in antithetical terms (94–96): “I will be saved, and I will save. . . . I wish to flee, and I wish to remain. . . . I have no place, and I have places.” The goal of this confusing self-predication is, again, the refusal of both opposites, and the affirmation of Christ’s unchangeability, superiority, and absolute transcendence.²⁴

²⁴ The *Acts of John* would thus enjoy the privileged status of one from among “few” ancient texts which “would have considered the *via negativa* and the assertion of antithetical paradox to be interchangeable” (Layton 1986, 42). The phenomenon seems not so rare. Paradoxical omnipredication (*via oppositionis*) is a common method of apophatic theology, largely employed by ancient philosophers and the-

The *Acts of John* does not clarify whether Christ's multiformity is a factual event or a mere fiction. Origen, on his part, had no doubts about this: Christ–Logos actualizes and discloses innumerable powers hidden in the transcendent Father. A number of forms he assumes are nothing but the outward manifestations of these potencies or perfections (ἐπίνοιαι). Under what guise he may choose to appear depends, ultimately, on the individual disposition (ἕξις) of a recipient. Angels, for example, will see him as an angel, ordinary humans as a human being, most often in the guise of a humble servant (Orig. *In Matth.* 100: *unicuique apparebat secundum quod fuerat dignus*; *C. Cels.* 4.16: ἀνάλογον τῇ ἕξει τοῦ εισαγομένου). The transfiguration on Tabor (Mt 17:1ff.) is a paradigmatic case, signifying the progress in knowledge, from the familiarity with the fleshly Logos, reserved for those who remained “below” (κάτω), to the acquaintance with the “principal form” (*C. Cels.* 4.15: προηγουμένην μορφήν), that of the Logos–Wisdom, revealed only to the privileged few “upon the high mountain” (4.16). In between, numerous other appearances take place (*In Matth.* 100). Although being ‘one’ in essence (Logos, the only-begotten son of God), Christ is, thus, “manifold” in his virtues and properties that

ologians, from Plato (in the first hypothesis about ‘One’ in *Parm.* 137c–142a) and many Middle Platonists (e.g., Alcinous and Celsus) to various branches of the Neopythagorean movement (Whittaker 1969, 77–86), the ‘Gnostics’ (cf., e.g., Monoimos’s description of the Monad in *Hipp. Ref.* 7.12.5 and, for more references, Orbe 1958, 14–15) and Neoplatonists (e.g., Proclus, *Theol. Plat.* 2.10).

Antithetical predications do not necessarily lead to a total denial; they may also lead to a full affirmation. The outcome of *via oppositionis* largely depends on whether the established relation is that of *contrariety* or *contradiction*. The latter case (X is *p* and *non-p*, X is *p* and is not *p*) is the violation of the principle of contradiction whereby two contradictory statements cannot both be true. That is, two contradictory terms, when simultaneously predicated of the same subject, by necessity exclude or eliminate each other, to the effect that the subject ultimately remains deprived of both. In the former case (X is *p* and X is *q*, where *p* and *q* are mutually exclusive, yet not jointly exhaustive, terms within the same genus, i.e. black and white, father and mother, hot and cold, male and female, etc.), two positive extremes of opposition are simultaneously predicated of the same subject, to the effect that the subject encompasses both of them as well as their intermediates—that is, the whole genus. From these two distinct applications of *via oppositionis* arises the distinction, typically Neopythagorean but later also adopted by various ‘Gnostics’ and Neoplatonists, between the First One, a supreme principle transcending all plurality and refusing all predicates, and the Second One, which combines in itself the opposing (contrary) characteristics (One–Dyad, one–many, male–female, etc.). The *Acts of John* pays no heed to such sophisticated distinctions between the two kinds of opposition (cf. Arist. *Cat.* 10), but uses indiscriminately both contrary and contradictory predicates to prove Christ’s transcending unity.

can be mentally (epinoetically) discerned (*C. Cels.* 2.64: ὁ Ἰησοῦς εἰς ὧν πλείονα τῆ ἐπινοία ἦν).²⁵

Origen may seem far too sophisticated a thinker for the theological preoccupations of the second-century author of the *Apocryphon of John*. Yet similar views about the hierarchical array of Christ's appearances, reflecting a varying intellectual potential of the seers as well as different potencies of the revealer, appear in Hippolytus's account of the Docetists (*Ref.* 8.10.3–11) and in the Valentinian *Gospel of Philip*:

Jesus tricked everyone. For he did not appear as he was, but in such a way that they could see him. And he appeared to all of them. He [appeared] to [the] great as someone great. He appeared [to] the small as someone small. He [appeared to the] angels as an angel, and to human beings as a human being. For this reason, he hid his 'logos' from everyone. Some saw him and thought they were seeing their own selves. But when he appeared to his disciples in glory upon the mountain, he was not small. He made himself great. Or, rather, he made the disciples great so that they might be able to see that he was great. (*Gos. Phil.* NHC II 57:28–58:10)

The most intriguing aspect of this saying is not Jesus' adaptability to spiritual dispositions of a seer, but the 'Origenist' distinction drawn between Jesus' elusive appearances to those from 'below'—humans and angels—and his transfiguration upon the mountain, when he appeared to the privileged few in his true form (greatness). Multiformity is the way in which Jesus manifested his divine nature in this world. His appearance in the 'principal form' (προηγούμενη μορφή) was confined to a single occasion in his earthly career—a mere prefiguration of Jesus' revelations to chosen disciples, those capable of grasping his mysteries, during the eighteen months following his resurrection. According to Irenaeus's report on the system of the 'Ophites',

This body [i.e., of the resurrected Jesus] they call animate (animale, ψυχικόν) and spiritual (spiritale, πνευματικόν), because he left behind the worldly [i.e. fleshly] elements in the world. . . . After the resurrection, he tarried yet for eighteen months. When [spiritual] perception (*sensibilitas*, αἴσθησις) came down upon him, he learned what the truth was. He taught these things to those few disciples who he knew were capable of grasping such great mysteries. (*Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.30.13–14)

²⁵ For Origen's views of Christ's polymorphy, cf. Crouzel (1961), Eichinger (1969), and Rius-Camps (1970) 282–96.

Several texts traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’ allude to the transparency of Jesus’ revelations during his ‘glorious’ life (*vita gloriosa*), clearly exploiting the same dichotomy as Origen and the *Gospel of Philip*. The main characteristic of Jesus’ earthly career is a confusing multiplicity—not only of his outward appearances but also of the meanings hidden in his parables, sermons, and signs. The event of resurrection brings resolution to this confusing play of double entendre. In the next eighteen months, the resurrected Savior will uncover his true form and reveal his mysterious teaching in a clear, simple, and open fashion.

Yet consider: nothing within the account of the truth is truly difficult. At any rate . . . he came forward for the sake of explanation, to leave nothing obscure, rather to reveal in simple terms (ἀπλῶς) everything about coming into being. (*Treat. Res.* NHC I 45:3–9)

The Lord said to me [i.e., James], “. . . I first spoke with you parabolically, and you did not understand (voεῖν). Now I am speaking with you openly, and you still do not [spiritually] perceive (αἰσθάνεσθαι). Nevertheless, for me you served as a parable in parables, and as that which is open (φανερὸς) in the [words] that are open. (*Ap. Jas.* NHC I 7:1–11)

The Savior taught the apostles, first in a figurative and mystical way (τυπικῶς καὶ μυστικῶς), then in parables and riddles (παραβολικῶς καὶ ἡνιγμένως), and thirdly, clearly and directly in private (σαφῶς καὶ γυμνῶς κατὰ μόνας). (*Clem. Al., Exc. Theod.* 66)

Back to the *Apocryphon of John*, the evidence listed in this section indicates that the Savior’s mysterious appearance to John, rather than simply diagnosing the seer’s spiritual weakness, carries some more positive content. Situated in the post-resurrection period, when Jesus taught “clearly and directly in private,” the Savior’s manifestation in three different “faces” or forms appearing “through each other” conveys the mystery of the divine nature which can be condensed in a simple formula: God may be seen either under a threefold or under a single aspect.²⁶ The Savior’s visual revelation serves thus as a

²⁶ This mystery of the divine nature, the absolute Unity revealing itself to a spiritual visionary as a triad of powers, was elucidated already in Philo of Alexandria’s exegetical observations on God’s revelation to Abraham “by the oaks of Mambre” (Gen 18:1–15). The language and imagery of Philo is strikingly similar to the content of John’s vision. Cf. QG 4.2 Marcus: “What is the meaning of the words, ‘He saw and, behold, three men were standing over him’? Most natural things to those who are able to see does (Scripture) present, namely that *it is reasonable for one to be*

figurative preamble to his ensuing self-portrayal as a trinity-in-unity: “I am the Father, I am the Mother, and I am the Son.”

The *Fourteenth Act of Philip* (Ms. Xenophontos 32, fols. 83v–88v = *Acts Phil.* 14 Bovon-Bouvier-Amsler) follows the adventures of Philip, Mariamne (Marianne, Mariamme, i.e., Mary Magdalene), and Bartholomew following their arrival to Ophiorymus, identified in the title of the *Thirteenth Act* with Hierapolis in Phrygia, whose inhabitants “worshipped snakes and the Viper since times immemorial” (*Acts Phil.* 14.4). Philip has just completed his prayer to Christ, “the eye of him who cannot be contemplated, the face of the invisible, the glory of the untouchable, the ordering of the infinity, and the path of the unfathomable” (*ibid.* 13.5). It turns out that Stachys, a well-to-do Hierapolitan, sitting at the window of his nearby house, listened to the prayer. Stachys next prostrates himself before Philip and begins to tell the story of his life. A former priest of the Viper and serpents, he used to prosecute the Christians until, forty years ago, he lost his sight. Three days ago, Stachys continues, he had a strange dream—a voice urged him to go the city’s gate to meet his healer. Upon coming there, he lifted his eyes and saw the appearance of a handsome young man with three forms or faces (14.4: εἶδον ὁμοιότητα νεανίσκου τινὸς ὠραίου ἔχοντος τρία πρόσωπα). The first had the shape (μορφή) of a beardless youth carrying a jar; the one in the middle, of a woman (γυνή, παρθένος) clad in a glorious garment, a torch in her hand; and the third was of an older man.

three and for three to be one, for they were one by a higher principle. But when counted with the chief powers, the creative and kingly, *He makes the appearance of three to the human mind.* For this cannot be so keen of sight that it can see Him who is above the powers that belong to Him, namely God, distinct from anything else. For so soon as one sets eyes upon God, *there also appear, together with His Being, the ministering powers, so that in place of one He makes the appearance of a triad.* . . . As I said earlier, He cannot be seen in His oneness without something else, the chief powers that exist at once with Him, namely the creative, which is called God, and the kingly, which is called Lord. . . . And having become an eye, [the virtuous man] begins to see the sovereign, holy and divine vision in such a way that *the single appearance appears as a triad, and the triad as a unity.* . . . With a single turning of the eyes the mind apprehends a double appearance; the one was of God coming with His two highest powers, *by which He is served,* namely the creative . . . and the kingly; and the other was that of the strange men . . . most perfect of body according to human nature and of venerable holiness. *And being struck by either appearance, he was drawn toward seeing, now by one, now by the other. And he was not able to see just which of them was likely to be the true one;* cf. also *ibid.*, 4.30, *Mut.* 19–26, and Umemoto (1991) 207–256.

Philip's reply is a long prayer of thanksgiving to Christ, at the end of which he provides the explanation of Stachys's vision (14.5):

In your beneficent providence (πρόνοια), you have planted a paradise for us,
 You the Perfect Man (ὁ τέλειος ἄνθρωπος),
 the Perfect One who came from heaven,
 whose name is ineffable;
 the right hand bringing salvation (ἡ δεξιὰ ἡ σωτήριος),
 whose name our impure lips cannot pronounce;
 You the Great Spirit (το μέγα πνεῦμα)
 who are the highest in your aeons of light;
 You the Father,
 who keep yourself in secret,
 who are with us in three perfect forms (ἐν τρισὶ μορφαῖς τελείαις),
 the images of the invisible,
 and who are blessed for ever.

As a whole, the *Acts of Philip* is probably of Encratite origin. Yet in spite of the late date of its composition (fourth century A.D.), it abounds in Gnostic, or Gnosticizing, motifs and themes. The above passages clearly illustrate the point. The rapprochement of Philip, Mariamne, and Bartholomew is a distinctively 'Gnostic' feature (cf. *Soph. Jes. Chr.* 79:18–80:3; 86:6–8; 89:20–90:3, and 98:7–13),²⁷ and so are "the aeons of light," Christ as the image of the invisible, and the perfect man with an ineffable name. Even more significant in this respect is the content of Stachys's vision and Philip's exegesis thereof. In the vision, the female figure is conjoined with two male forms which, taken together, represent the divine triad of a 'Gnostic' type (Father—Mother—Son; the Valentinian *Bythos—Ennoia—Nous*). In Philip's prayer, again, Christ is identified with "the Great Spirit," and "the Father"—a sort of modalism that blurs clear-cut distinctions between the three separate persons within the divine trinity.

Stachys's vision of Christ under three forms or "faces" (πρόσωπα), one of them a virgin woman (παρθένος, γυνή), which Philip subsequently explains as the visual expression of the divine triad, brings us back to Schenke's conjectural restoration of the BG passage. The 'Gnostic' flavor of the episode from the *Fourteenth Act of Philip* corroborates Schenke's hypothesis of the Savior's threefold appearance

²⁷ For the pairing of Philip and Mary Magdalene see also *Pist. Soph.* 72,5–73,8.

to John as an old man, a youth, and a woman— an enigma which the revealer will later relate to his threefold identity as the Father, the Mother, and the Son.²⁸

Offenbarungsrede

The mysterious visual revelation is followed by an equally mysterious revelatory account—an example of what E. Norden (1913, 188–90) called “ein soteriologische Redetypus,” and H. Becker (1956, 14–59) “eine gnostische Offenbarungsrede.” Its paradigmatic form is recorded by Celsus who, as we learn from Origen (*Contra Cels.* 7.9), blamed the Christians for holding in contempt famous oracles of the Greeks and for adopting instead the revelations of Oriental pseudo-prophets (οἱ περὶ Φοινίκην τε καὶ Παλαιστίνην). These prophecies consist of a limited number of fixed elements: a revealer’s self-identification (ὄνομα, δυνάμεις, ἔργα or πράξεις) in the *Ego-Eimi* style (“It is I who am . . .”); an appeal (*parainesis*) to conversion (‘alarm call’), and a promise of salvation or retribution. In the Savior’s revelation to John, the promise of salvation, where salvation corresponds to communicating a secret knowledge of reality, is incorporated in a statement of intention beginning with a ‘Botenselbstberich’ (ἴκω δέ). Finally, the Savior’s revelatory account opens with a short exhortation formula—“Do not be afraid,” μὴ φοβοῦ . . . ἐγώ εἰμι, or θάρσει . . . ἐγώ εἰμι—also typical for visionary accounts of both pagan and Judeo-Christian provenience. The Savior’s *Offenbarungsrede* has the outline as follows: (i) Exhortation Formula; (ii) Ego-Proclamation (‘Selbstprädikation’); (iii) Statement of Intention; (iv) Parainesis (‘Alarm Call’).

(i) Exhortation Formula

[He said to me], John, [why do] you have doubts.
Then (he said), [Do not be afraid!]
Surely (γάρ) you are not alien to [this appearance]?
Do not be [faint-hearted!] (BG 21:14–18; cf. II 2:9–12)

²⁸ For the *Acts of Philip* see now the new edition by Bovon-Bouvier-Amsler (1999) vols. 1–2, as well as the earlier article by Bovon (1988) 4431–4527. The manuscript Xenophontos 32 contains “la presque totalité des *Actes de Philippe*” (4434), and by far exceeds all manuscripts M. Bonnet used while preparing his critical edition (Bonnet 1903, 1–90). It provides exciting new material including so far unknown *Acts Phil.* 11 (end) and 12–15. First mentioned by S. Lambros in his *Catalogue of the Greek Manuscripts on Mount Athos*, Cambridge (1895) 1:64, the MS. was photographed by Bovon during his visit to Athos in 1974.

The whole section is an elaboration of the conventional μή φοβοῦ formula, immediately followed by the first-person aretalogy (Rev 1:17; cf. Mark 6:50 and Luke 24:36: ἐγώ εἰμι, μή φοβεῖσθε). The affirmative variant θαρσεῖτε, θαρρήσεις, θάρσησον occurs in ‘passwords’ from ancient mystery cults and pagan visionary accounts—for example, in the *Eriphaneia A* from the temple at Lindos: ἐπιστάσα καθ’ ὕπνον παρεκάλει θαρσεῖν, Blinkenberg 1915, 36—and was also used in the Second-Temple Judaism, but, as noted by K. Berger (1984) 1316–17, only in texts originally written in Greek.²⁹ With the same question, “Why do you have doubts” (τί διστάζεις), Christ begins his revelatory account in the *Epistle of the Apostles* (pp. 222, 300 Schmidt).

(ii) Ego-Proclamation (Selbstprädikation)

It is I who am with you (pl.) always.

It is I who am [the father].

It is I who am the mother.

It is I who am [the son].

It is I who always exist:

the undefiled [and the un]mixed. (BG 21:18–22:1; cf. II 2:12–15)

The scholarly literature on the revelatory “Ich-Stil” self-proclamation (or the first-person aretalogy) is immense.³⁰ There is a plethora of pagan parallels, from magical papyri to aretalogies of Isis, Sarapis, and more obscure local deities, that one could include in this ever-growing corpus.³¹

(iii) Statement of Intention

[Now I have come] to teach you:

[what is] that which exists;

and what is that [which has come to] be;

and what is that which [must come to] be,

so that you might . . .

the things invisible [and the things] visible,

and to [. . .] concerning the perfect [man]. (BG 22:2–9; cf. NHC II 2:16–20)

²⁹ For additional references, see Berger (1976) 433–434, nn. 23–25.

³⁰ For a concise survey of the most relevant titles, the reader may now consult Poirier (1995) 101, n. 236.

³¹ For the Isiac and other pagan ‘ego-proclamations’, and for the ‘aretalogical’ genre in general, see Berger (1984) 1218–1231, with an extensive bibliography, 1218–19.

Viewed as an act of literary communication, the Savior's self-revelation is an example of a first-person 'Botenselbstberich' ("Now I have come to teach you," the ἤκω-formula), whose formal elements are analyzed by Bühner (1977). The role of a messenger, according to Bühner's analysis of various Jewish, and particularly of Rabbinic sources, is twofold. The messenger may figure as the mouthpiece of a more powerful sender, but he/she may also be a disguised divinity, whose recognition provides the solution for the riddle of a seer's vision. Gnostic visions, as already pointed out by Casadio (1988) 2:396, can be similarly divided into those in which "the otherworldly mediator is [. . .] as a rule an angel, the so-called *angelus interpretis*," and those in which the messenger is "Jesus Christ the Savior (in general after the Resurrection)."³²

(iv) Parainesis (Appeal to the Audience; 'Alarm Call')

Now, then, lift up your [face] and listen,
and [receive what I] will say to you today,
[so that] you may in turn proclaim these
to your spiritual fellows,
those who are [from] the immovable race
[of the] perfect human being;
and [. . .] to understand. (BG 22:10–17; cf. II 2:20–26)

Two points in the Savior's self-introductory address deserve a more detailed treatment. First, there is the Savior's intriguing identification as Father–Mother–Son in the "Ego-proclamation" section (ii), to which I will turn in the next chapter when analyzing the 'procession' (προβολή) of the subordinate levels of reality from a single supreme principle in the *Apocryphon of John*. The second intriguing passage, important for understanding the structure of the Savior's ensuing monologue, is that part of the 'statement of intention' (iii) which, according to some critics, represents a standard prophetic formula: "Now I have come to teach you what exists and what has come to be and what must come to be."

³² For an attempt to apply Bühner's scheme to Gnostic self-proclamations, and for the interesting results derived from such an application, it is worth reading the literary analysis of the *Thunder, Perfect Intellect* (NHC VI 2) in Poirier's edition (1995) of the treatise.

The Revelatory Monologue: Narrative Structure, Plot, Voices

‘Dispositio’: *What Is—What Has Come to Be—What Will Come to Pass*

After a brief self-proclamation in *Ich-Stil*, the Savior introduces the ἦκω-formula to explain the purpose of his appearance to John. He “has come” to teach his former disciple about “that which is, that which has come to be, and that which will come to pass,” so that John may acquire the knowledge of “things invisible and visible.” Furthermore, he promises to instruct John about “the perfect man.”

A common scholarly wisdom is that the formula *what is, what has come to be, what will come to pass* expresses “the whole of history in its three aspects of past, present and future” (Van Unnik 1963, 89). The formula has numerous parallels in Jewish, Christian, and pagan circles. It describes “the office and privilege of a prophet,” and reveals “a certain aspect of ‘prophecy’ which has been overlooked so far.” For, as the formula supposedly makes clear, “It was the privilege of the prophets, granted by divine inspiration, to have an insight into this mystery [i.e., of history in its totality] which they alone could declare, not in part, but as a whole.” The very fact that the Savior resorts to this standard formula in the *Apocryphon of John* betrays thus, in this view, the author’s intention that his book be “considered as a prophetic revelation.” In conclusion, “It seems as though the author wants to stand in a certain apocalyptic tradition, although the contents of the book [i.e., *Ap. John*] are *toto caelo* different from apocalyptic traditions” (93–94).

Van Unnik acknowledges that the formula was often exploited as a simple rhetorical *figura* or a poetic intensification, with no obvious religious connotations, standing simply as the *verbum proprium* for ‘everything’. He also acknowledges, but does not consider as important, the fact that the formula was often placed in the mouth of gods—as often in fact, judging from the list of examples, as it was uttered by prophets. Isis, for example, and the Eleusinian Aion, both refer to themselves as being “what has come to be, is, and will be,” symbolizing the totality of existence and their absolute transcendence. It is, therefore, equally plausible that the author of the *Apocryphon of John* wished his book to be a divine proclamation of the same style as, for example, Isis’ revelation to Lucius in Apuleius’s *Metamorphoses*, and not as a prophetic statement “standing in the tradition of Jewish apocalyptic” (87).

Comparing the Savior's use of the formula with the usual sequence of its elements, Van Unnik points to an "interesting" discrepancy. Instead of "past, present, future," the order adopted in the *Apocryphon of John* is "present, past, future." The survey of examples shows that such an inverted order was, after all, not that uncommon. There was, in fact, "not a special word-order: past, present, future"—often "the elements change their places, although the future tense usually stands at the end. The cause of these changes may be due to outward circumstances, such as the necessities of the poetical meter, but does not seem to be essential" (93).

Metrical constraints indeed caused the reversal of order, from Homer onward (*Iliad*, 1.70), to the extent that even the future tense could change its 'usual' terminal position (Ovid, *Metam.* 1.517–518). In prose, however, the order tends to be fixed, with the formula presenting three dimensions of time in (chrono)logical succession. It seems as though not only the concepts of past, present, and future, but also the natural sequence in which they unfold, were constitutive of the formula—unless some important "outward circumstances" were introduced that made the change in this natural order unavoidable. What are these "outward circumstances"?

Among numerous examples, Van Unnik also quotes the passage from Plato's *Timaeus*:

When the father who had begotten [the world] saw it set in motion and alive, a shrine brought into being for the everlasting gods, he rejoiced and, well pleased, he took thought to make it yet more like its model (τὸ παράδειγμα). So as that pattern is an ever existing living being (ζῶον αἰδίων ὄν), he sought to make this universe (τόδε τὸ πᾶν) also like it, so far as might be, in that respect. Now the nature of that living being was eternal (αἰώνιος), and this [nature] it was impossible to confer in full completeness on the generated thing (τῷ γεννητῷ). But he took thought to make, as it were, a moving likeness of eternity (εἰκό . . . κινητὸν τινα αἰῶνος). And, at the same time that he ordered the heaven, he made, of eternity that abides in unity, an everlasting likeness moving according to number (μένοντος αἰῶνος . . . κατ' ἀριθμὸν ἰούσαν αἰώνιον εἰκόνα)—that to which we have given the name of time (χρόνον). For there were no days and nights, months and years, before the heaven came into being. But he [i.e. the demiurge] planned that they should now come to be at the same time that the heaven was framed. All these are parts of time (ταῦτα δὲ πάντα μέρη χρόνου), and 'was' and 'shall be' are forms of time that have come to be (καὶ τὸ τ' ἦν τὸ τ' ἔσται χρόνου γεγονότα εἴδη), which we are wrong to transfer inadvertently to eternal being (ἃ δὲ φέροντες λανθάνομεν ἐπὶ τὴν αἰδίων οὐσίαν οὐκ ὀρθῶς).

We say that it [i.e. eternal Being] was and is and shall be (ὡς ἦν ἔστιν τε καὶ ἔσται). But *is* alone really belongs to it and describes it truly; was and shall be are properly used of becoming which proceeds in time (περὶ τὴν ἐν χρόνῳ γένεσιν ἰούσαν). For they are motions, while that which is for ever in the same state immovably (τὸ δ' αἰεὶ κατὰ ταῦτά ἔχον ἀκινήτως) cannot be becoming older and younger by lapse of time, nor can it ever become so. Neither can it now have been, nor will it be in the future. And in general nothing belongs to it of all that Becoming attaches to the moving things of sense; but these have come into being as forms of time, which imitates eternity and revolves according to number (χρόνου ταῦτα αἰῶνα μιμουμένου καὶ κατ' ἀριθμὸν κυκλουμένου γέγονεν εἶδη). (Plato, *Tim.* 37c6–38a8)

Van Unnik has noticed, quite rightly, that Plato criticizes here the meaning usually attributed to the threefold formula “because the notion of time cannot be applied to eternity” (92). Yet Plato does not only criticize the common opinion (“We say that eternal Being was and is and shall be”). He also proposes the correct way of interpreting the formula. That is, he rearranges the formula according to the order of *ontological priority*. Thus, instead of distinguishing between the three dimensions of physical time, the traditional formula, in its Platonic reinterpretation, expresses the dichotomy of Being and Becoming, as already set forth in the opening sections of the *Timaeus* (27d–28a).

<i>Tim.</i> 27d–28a		<i>Tim.</i> 37e–38a
Being	=	“What Is”
Becoming	=	“What Was”
		“What Will Come to Be”

In his account of cosmogony, Plato follows the very same rule formulated by Socrates in the *Phaedrus* (264c2–6). Just as, in general, the organization of a literary work must be similar to the structure of a living being, so the discourse of cosmogony in the *Timaeus* must resemble the image of the universe. The task set before Plato is, thus, to re-enact, in the form of a narrative, the demiurge’s fabrication of the visible universe—that is, to represent, to the degree in which it is possible, the order of the cosmogonic process. And indeed, before engaging in a more detailed analysis of the factors of becoming (*Tim.* 48e2–3: ἡ δ' οὖν αὐθις ἀρχὴ περὶ τοῦ παντὸς ἔστω μειζόνως τῆς πρόσθεν διηρημένη), Plato describes in detail the hierarchical arrangement of the universe.

- (i) God: Intellect, Father and Maker (*Tim.* 28c–30c)
- (ii) The Eternal Model (30c–31a)
- (iii) World-Body (31b–34a)
- (iv) World-Soul (34a–37c)
- (v) Time, Planets, Fixed Stars (37c–40d)
- (vi) Human Souls and Laws of Destiny (40d–42d)
- (vii) Humans Souls in Body (*ibid.* 42d–47e)

Whether this hierarchical order is to be taken diachronically, in the sense of one level of reality being generated from another, or synchronically, as a structural differentiation of contingents from their principles, has been a matter of controversy throughout the history of Platonism, from Plato's first successors in the Old Academy to his modern commentators. The latter interpretation has been more popular, partly because of the occasional discrepancy in the narrative of the *Timaeus* between the time of the narrated story and the time of the narration. Plato clearly imposed limits on the human capacity of faithfully mimicking the diachronical sequence of cosmogonic events—in one instance (*Tim.* 34b–c) he even admits that the world soul, “although it comes later” in the narrative, must be in fact viewed as “prior” to the world body, and explains this inversion by the unfortunate fact that “there is, in us, too much of the casual and random, which shows itself in our speech.” The ‘natural’ order of presentation also seems subverted in 37c–40d, where the effect (‘time’) occurs before its cause, i.e. the planets. Another vexed issue among the followers of Plato was defining the order and kind of priority in which God, or intellect (νοῦς), stands to the realm of forms or ideas.³³ Still, the logical, ontological, and diachronical priority of Being over Becoming is carefully preserved throughout the *Timaeus*. As Plato says, “*was* and *shall be* are forms of time that have *come to be*,” and we should be careful not to “transfer them inadvertently to *eternal Being*” (37e4–5). The proper order of the ‘Drei-Zeiten-Formel’

³³ The issue became even more complex by bringing some other texts of Plato into discussion—for example, *Soph.* 248a–249d, where, in contrast to the *Timaeus*, the intellect (νοῦς) is firmly positioned in Being. The problem of the composition of the *Timaeus* and of Plato's reasons for subverting the ‘logical’ order of presentation still awaits a comprehensive analysis, literary and philosophical alike. Along with many a useful remark on individual passages in the modern commentaries on the *Timaeus*, esp. Taylor (1928), Cornford (1937), Brisson (1995) and (1999), and Marcel (1995), the following articles are also worth consulting: Gadamer (1980) 156–93; Hadot (1983) 113–33; Derrida (1987) 265–93, and (1995) 9–43; Donini (1988) 5–52; Brague (1986) 53–83.

is, thus, not what was, is, and will be, but *what is, was, and will be*. For Plato and his followers in antiquity, this is the natural order in a hierarchically organized reality and the natural order of exposition in the plausible cosmological account (εἰκῶς μῦθος or λόγος).

We seem now to be in the position of explaining the “interesting” discrepancy in the Savior’s use of the ancient formula of prophecy as given in the *Apocryphon of John*. When the Savior announces to John that he is about to teach him “what is, has come to be, and will come to happen,” he behaves like a Platonist, one for whom Being, or “what is,” must come before Becoming, or “what was and will be,” both in the order of reality and in the properly constructed cosmological narrative. The Savior’s prophetic formula is thus, in fact, both the proposition of the subject matter (*propositio*) and the enumeration of the points (*partitio*) to be covered in his ensuing monologue. In developing his subject, the Savior will respect the logical order of exposition. He will first discuss that which comes first in reality—Plato’s everlasting Living Being, or “that which exists”—and only later “what has come to be” and “what will come to pass,” which stands for Plato’s realm of Becoming. Graphically,

- I. Part One: *What Is (The Realm of Being)*
 - A. Agnostos Theos
 - B. Procession of Aeons and the Organization of the Spiritual Realm (Fullness)
- II. Part Two: *What Has Come to Be (The Realm of Becoming, Part One)*
 - A. Cosmogony (1): Sophia’s Fault and Miscarriage
 - B. Cosmogony (2): Ialdabaoth’s Fabrication of the World
 - C. Cosmogony (3): Sophia’s Repentance
 - D. Anthropogony: Creation of Adam and Eve
 - E. Biblical History and the Conflict of the Two Spirits
- III. Part Three: *What Will Come to Pass (The Realm of Becoming, Part Two)*
 - A. Soteriology
 - B. Destruction of Ialdabaoth’s World and the Restoration of the Original Fullness

Plot: The Logic of the Savior’s Narrative

At the level of an overall organization of the narrative, the three thematic units of the *Apocryphon of John* constitute the three moments in a typical folktale sequential structure: *Initial Order—Violation—Restoration of the Initial Order*. Each of these three generic units consists of a series of individual episodes, each characterized in turn by

a specific chain of actions. The logic according to which the events in each episode unfold is a complicated game of giving or not-giving, and taking or not taking. Thus, in the first part (I.B), the effusion of aeons from the first principle proceeds as a sequence of identical actions: *requesting the gift—granting—taking*. For example,

Barbelo requested from him [i.e., the Invisible Spirit]
to grant her Foreknowledge.
When he had consented,
Foreknowledge came forth
and stood firm [. . .] glorifying the Invisible One, *etc.* (BG 28:4–11)

In the second part (II.A), this monotonous rhythm of reciprocal giving and taking comes to an abrupt end. First, an agent (Sophia) requests a gift that is immediately denied, but continues to act alone as though the permission was given (*requesting the permission—not giving—taking what was not given*). Next, in yet another violation of the prescribed pattern (II.B), a new personage, the real villain of the story (Ialdabaoth), steals that which he has neither requested nor been granted (*not requesting—not giving—taking what is not given*, i.e., *stealing*). The rest of the second part, following the fulfillment of Sophia's repentance (II.C), or her request for help (*requesting—giving—taking what is given*), consists of the repeated attempts (II.D–E) on the part of various agents (Sophia and her helpers), none of them fully successful, to take back what has been previously stolen (*requesting—not giving—gradually taking away*, i.e., *stealing*). Finally, in the third section (III.B), the theft is recovered and the initial situation restored.

The congruence between the *Apocryphon's* thematic division, the organization of its plot, and the logic according to which its narrative unfolds, may be presented in the following fashion:

<i>Thematic Composition</i>	<i>Plot</i>	<i>Narrative Logic</i>
I. "What Is"	i. <i>Initial Order</i>	
A. Agnostos Theos		Searching for the "Self"
B. Pleroma		Asking–Granting–Taking
II. "What Has Come to Be"	ii. <i>Violation</i>	
A. Sophia's Fault		Asking–Not Giving–Taking
B. Ialdabaoth's Demiurgy		Not Giving–Stealing
C. Sophia's Repentance		Asking–Giving–Taking
D. Anthropogony	iiia. <i>Partial Recovery</i>	Not Giving–Partly Recovering
E. Biblical History	[same]	Not Giving–Partly Recovering
III. "What Will Come to Pass"		
A. The Destiny of Souls		
B. Final <i>diakrisis/synteleia</i>	iiib. <i>Initial Order Restored</i>	Not Giving–Fully Restoring

The Savior’s partition of the subject, which he outlined in his Platonizing revision of the “prophetic” formula, is simple, clear, and, most importantly, faithfully maintained throughout his monologue. For this reason, the ensuing chapters and sections of this monograph will follow the order of presentation as laid out by the Savior himself, concentrating mostly on the first two parts of his monologue—more specifically, on those sections of the revelation which primarily deal with the construction and arrangement of the universe (I.A–B and II.A–C).

The hierarchical arrangement of reality into Being (i.e. God and his eternal paradigm) and Becoming (i.e. the visible world and its elementary constituents) does not seem to be the only feature borrowed from the *Timaeus*. A synoptic comparison between the thematic structure of the *Apocryphon of John* and the first section of the cosmogonic account in the *Timaeus* reveals a similar order of presentation:

<i>Apocryphon of John</i>	<i>Timaeus</i>
I. <i>What Is</i>	
A. ‘Agnostos Theos’	God—πατήρ καὶ ποιητής (28c–30c)
B. Pleroma	Eternal Model, τὸ παντελὲς ζῶον, containing τὰ νοητὰ πάντα (30c–31b)
II. <i>What Has Come to Be</i>	
A. Sophia’s Fault	World-Soul and Its Double Orientation (35a–37c)
B. Ialdabaoth’s Fabrication of the Universe	The Demiurge Fabricates
(a) Fiery Realm	(a) World-Body (31a–34b)
(b) Twelve Signs of Zodiac	(b) Heavenly Gods = Stars
(c) Seven Planets	(c) Planets
(d) Other Chronocrators	(d) Time (37c–40d)
C. Sophia’s Adventures	
(a) Disorderly Movement = Repentance	Soul in Body: Disorderly Motion (42a–44d)
(b) Sophia Rescued to the Ninth Heaven	Soul Returns to Heaven (42b–c)
D. Anthropogony	
(a) Creation of the Seven Parts of Adam’s Animate Body	Composition of Human Souls (41d–e) and of Seven Parts of the Human Frame (73b–76e)
(b) Adam Relegated to the Material Realm	Implanting of Souls into Bodies (44d–45b)
(c) Paradise, Eve, Snake, and the Subsequent History of Humankind	
III. <i>What Will Come to Pass</i>	
A. The Destiny of Souls	The Laws of Destiny (41d–42d)
B. Final Diakrisis/Synteleia	δι’ ἐμοῦ γενομένα ἅλυστα ἐμοῦ γε μὴ ἐθέλοντος (41a)

The above comparison suggests that the Savior, in shaping his cosmological account, decided to follow the first part of the *Timaeus*'s cosmogonic account exactly as it unfolds. That is, he appears to have taken the *Timaeus*'s linear exposition (*diegesis*) as though it reflects the actual order in which the cosmogonic events took place. This assimilation of the 'narrative time', or the order of presentation, with the 'real time', or the rhythm in which things actually happened, was not uncommon among the ancient readers of the *Timaeus*. The partisans of such a 'literal' reading (Plutarch, Atticus, Iuncus, and, according to Proclus, "many others," *In Tim.* 1.276,31–277,1 Diehl), were not discouraged by Plato's own warnings that his *diegesis* does not always follow the order of events. The simple fact that, in such places, he found it important to warn the reader about his departure from the actual chronology could only strengthen the illusion that, whenever a similar warning was not issued, things were told in the order in which they occurred. The advocates of a non-chronological reading of the *Timaeus* considered this a dangerous misreading. In their view, Plato in his account simply sets in motion an eternal structure. The chronological order of exposition is consequently attributed to constraints imposed by the linearity of language—the linearity which rules out the possibility of pronouncing two different things, or statements, at one and the same time. When, on some occasions, Plato warns that some parts of his account are not given in a chronological sequence, he wants to say that chronology does not matter—that the world was not created in time, and that *genesis* means no more than its ontological dependence as a contingent on its principles. This is certainly a more sophisticated solution. And yet, as Paul Valéry said, people prefer to apply, to everything they perceive as composite or sequential, that same chronological thread upon which they string their individual lives. Many literalist readers of the *Timaeus*, including the Gnostics, seem to have simply chosen this more "natural" way.

La croyance au temps comme agent et fil conducteur est fondée sur le mécanisme de la mémoire et sur celui du discours combinés. Le type du récit, de l'histoire, de la fable contée, du dévidement d'événements et d'impressions par celui qui sait où il va, qui possède ce qui va advenir, s'impose à l'esprit. (P. Valéry, *Tel Quel* 2, Paris 1943, 272)

What is peculiar about the Savior's 'natural' reading of the *Timaeus* is that, in the end, it manages to produce a story only vaguely sim-

ilar to its model account. The above table has shown some striking correspondences in the order of exposition between the first part of the *Timaeus* and the Savior's diegesis. Yet upon taking a closer look at the parallel units in the two texts, similarities begin to fade and differences to rise. These are not only superficial differences, such as various names given to 'dramatis personae' in each account. Moreover, the Savior's 'Unknown God' turns out to be an inexact replica of Plato's "maker and father." Furthermore, the Pleroma is not structured in the same fashion as the eternal model of the *Timaeus*. And, unlike Plato's world-soul, Sophia does not lead "ceaseless and intelligent life for all time" (*Tim.* 36e). The life she leads resembles, instead, the vicissitudes of the individual "immortal soul" which, upon being "sown" on Earth (42d), found itself "confined within the strong river of the body," and "was moving and being moved in a violent fashion" (43a) for some time before "regaining the calm" (*ibid.* 44a-b).

Two different standards appear to have been applied in the *Apocryphon's* use of the *Timaeus*. At the large scale, or the plane of an overall organization, the Savior's revelatory account follows Plato's narrative. At the smaller scale, however, or the level of individual episodes, the author of the *Apocryphon of John* introduces into Plato's cosmological model a series of adjustments, assimilations, and bold distinctions that many ancient commentators of Plato's cosmogony would have viewed, and in fact did view (e.g., Plotinus) as illicit manipulations. In this respect, the *Apocryphon* comes close to the works by those Gnostics who had so much infuriated Plotinus for "falsifying Plato's manner of representing the fabrication of the universe" (*Enn.* II 9.6). This corrective work, as will be seen in the forthcoming sections, had a twofold purpose: first, to straighten the 'ambiguities' left in the *Timaeus's* presentation concerning the actual order of cosmogonic events; and second, to set firm boundaries between various levels of reality that Plato, in his "playfulness" (παιδιᾶ, *Tim.* 59c-d), often tended to confuse.

(i) According to the Savior's revelatory account in the *Apocryphon of John*, the god described in the *Timaeus* as a rational regulating principle that informs reality with a specific finality after the pattern of ideal forms (28c-30c), must be viewed as distinct from the divine craftsman who fabricates the world-body, heavenly gods, and time (31a-34b; 37c-40d). The gap separating these two agents of creation, which the Savior calls the Father of the Entirety and Ialdabaoth the Demiurge—is filled with the Pleromatic Realm, the correlate of

the *Timaeus*'s eternal model of ideas. In the *Apocryphon of John*, the Father and the Demiurge differ both in the manner in which they create and in the kind of material at their disposal. The Demiurge fabricates the visible world out of corporeal stuff (ύλη, elements) by some vague reference to the outside model. The Father, in contrast, generates his progeny, the Pleromatic Realm, out of his own substance and passes on to the progeny a portion of his substance and vitality.

(ii) In the *Timaeus*, Plato states that it is “hard to find the maker and father of this universe” (*Tim.* 28c). Later in the narrative, he adds that “the maker looked” at the eternal model of forms while creating the world (29a). In view of (i), the most obvious solution for the author of the *Apocryphon* would be to identify the maker with Ialdabaoth the Demiurge. Instead, he seems to have taken the copula in Plato's phrase τὸν ποιητὴν . . . καὶ πατέρα as exegetical—“the Maker, namely the Father.” Thus, in the shorter version of *Apocryphon*, the supreme principle is endowed with the capacity to ‘make’ (εἶπε), but not to ‘fabricate’ in a demiurgic fashion (τὰμιο).

And the invisible spirit wanted to make (εἶπε) something; and his will became a deed; it was shown forth; it stood firm together with Intellect and the Light, glorifying him. And Word followed after Will; for it is by the Word that Christ, the divine Self-Originate, fabricated (τὰμιο) all things. (BG 31:11–18)

(iii) The eternal model of forms is called in the *Timaeus* a “perfect living being,” and this may be why the *Apocryphon of John* considers the Spiritual Realm and its constituents, or Aeons, as the Father's progeny. Plato, in addition, calls this eternal realm intelligible, that is, the object of God's thought. As stated in the *Timaeus* (39e 8–10),

Whatsoever forms intellect (νοῦς) beholds (καθορᾷ) in the living being that truly is (τῷ ὃ ἐστὶν ζῶον) in their kinds and numbers, such and so many he planned (discursively conceived, διειροήθη) that this world also should receive.

Yet these forms, the Savior argues, are not just the objects of God's thought. The entirety of eternal forms, which the *Apocryphon of John* calls the Pleroma, cannot exist outside of the divine Intellect (νοῦς). Platonic forms, or Aeons in the Savior's jargon, are therefore not only God's thought-content but also the products of God's activity as Intellect (νοῦς). No longer endowed with an independent existence, they are now relegated to the realm of God's subjectivity.

(iv) Following the Savior's argument in (iii), the Pleroma must be thought of as God's progeny—that is, not only the content but also the product of his intellectual activity. Yet somewhat surprisingly, the Savior does not assert that God the Father is the same as Intellect. The latter, in fact, he associates with the Son, also called the Self-Originate (*Autogenes*) and Christ. But how can forms, or Aeons, simultaneously figure as the progeny of both the Father and Intellect, His offspring? To solve this puzzle, the Savior introduces a non-Platonic distinction between *ennoiai* (conceptions) and their *ennoēmata* (concepts). The Father, a pure act of thinking, is capable of generating only vague and “subjective” conceptions (e.g. the generic thought of man, god, goodness, etc.). Only through their further articulation on the part of Intellect can the Father's conceptions become self-subsistent entities (ὑποστάσεις) or concepts—the chain of predicates rendering a fully articulated definition of God. In the *Apocryphon of John*, the externalization of God's predicative content is symbolically represented as the gradual ‘procession’ (πρόοδος) of Aeons, the sum total of his inner dispositions.

(v) The world-soul which, as the *Timaeus* has it, God created by blending the forms of sameness, difference, and existence (35a, 37a), so as to have it partake of both being (i.e., ideas or forms) and becoming (i.e., perceptible things), is assimilated by the Savior with “the immortal [human] soul,” one which appears later in the *Timaeus* as “confined within the flowing and ebbing tide of the body” (43a). Because of this identification, the world-soul of the *Apocryphon of John*, Sophia, cannot lead the “ceaseless and intelligent life for all time” characteristic of the Platonic world-soul (36e). Reduced to the rank and fate of the individual human soul, Sophia falls into matter, is “moving and being moved in a violent fashion” (43a), and only eventually “returns once more to the form of [its] first and best condition” (42d). Three stages can thus be distinguished in the life of this ‘Gnostic’ world-soul, to which the Savior gives the Biblical name of Sophia:

- Stage One: The “intelligent life” (36e) within the superior realm
- Stage Two: The fall into a fluctuating bodily substrate followed by a disorderly movement (42d–44d)
- Stage Three: “Regaining the calm” (44b), returning to the original condition.

In the Savior's narrative, these stages correspond to the three episodes in the life of Sophia:

Act One: Sophia appears as the last aeon of her Father's Pleroma
 Act Two: Sophia turns away from her consort and falls into matter
 Act Three: Upon repenting, Sophia rises to the "ninth heaven" and eventually returns to the Pleroma

(vi) In the sentence from the *Timaeus* quoted above (iii), the Savior distinguishes between "the living being that truly is" (viz., the Pleroma), the intellect (νοῦς) that "beholds" it, and the discursive planner (διενοήθη). In the *Apocryphon*, this third entity is Sophia. She exercises her διάνοια, or the discerning capacity characteristic of the rational soul, and organizes the material substrate by separating its elements. Her activity is, therefore, demiurgic, but not in the same sense as that of the Demiurge proper, Ialdabaoth, who fabricates heavenly bodies and time. In contrast to Sophia, Ialdabaoth is without knowledge and discursive capacity—he is portrayed as "dim," "jealous," "arrogant," and "stupefied in his ἄνοια"—and "does not see the incorruptible" while creating the visible world. Two characteristic functions of Plato's Demiurge—separating elements, then shaping, out of them, the world-body—are thus divided in the *Apocryphon of John* between Sophia and Ialdabaoth. The former separates, the latter fabricates. The former sees the model, the latter can only imagine it by exercising the image-making capacity (φαντασία) of his irrational soul. The former acts in the latter (ἐνεργεῖν) and provides him with the impulse to create. The former is the preliminary cause of the world's creation (τὸ ἀφ' οὗ, τὸ ἐξ οὗ), the latter is its instrumental cause (τὸ δι' οὗ).

(vii) In his account of the framing of Adam's animate body, the Savior follows, both in the order of presentation and in wording, the *Timaeus's* analysis of the main parts of the human frame (73b–76e). This may suggest that the Savior was, in fact, familiar with the whole of the *Timaeus*. If that was indeed the case, what did he do with the second part of Plato's account of cosmogony (48e–69a)? The main intention of that whole section was to provide "a fuller classification than one made before" (48e) and to analyze the same cosmogonic events as in the first part, but more thoroughly and from the opposite quarter—that is, from 'below', starting from the lowest level of reality. The analytical flavor of the whole section was probably the reason why the Savior, interested primarily in *mythopoeia*, paid little attention to it. Yet he did not overlook those sections dealing with the third genus of reality, "the receptacle of becoming" (48e–53c). The visible world, which is an image of the intelligible living being,

must, insofar as being an image, “come to be in something else” (52c). This “principle-in-which” (τὸ ἐν ᾧ), one that receives impressions taken from intelligible forms (*figurae impressae*) and turns them into their outward representations or images (*imagines expressae*), Plato in the *Timaeus* compares with the “mother” (50d2–3: προσεικάζουσα πρέπει τὸ μὲν δεχόμενον μητρὶ), suggesting that the world’s becoming abides by the laws of biological reproduction. Plato, however, proposes only one such female principle. The Savior, in turn, claims that, in a hierarchical reality, there must be a separate female, or ‘hyletic’, principle for each level—at least one for the Pleromatic Realm, and the other for the visible world fabricated by Ialdabaoth. According to this sort of analogous reasoning, Plato’s “receptacle of becoming” must have a correlate in the eternal living being. Translated in the Savior’s jargon in the *Apocryphon*, Sophia, who plays the role of a feminine principle, the receptacle (“that in which”) of becoming, must thus have a paradigmatic counterpart in the Pleromatic realm. This is Ennoia–Barbelo, called in the longer version “the womb of the entirety” (II 5:5).

(viii) According to Plato’s own instruction in the *Timaeus*, the world-soul is to be taken as “prior in birth and excellence to the world-body,” although, in the order of narrative presentation, the world-body happens to come first (34b–c). The same inversion of the chronological order of events occurs in the narrative sequence dealing with the creation of time, the seven planets, and the fixed stars (37c–40d). The Savior rearranges the Platonic sequence in order to re-establish its logical and ‘chronological’ order.

The Savior’s solutions do not strike one as particularly original. For almost each of these corrective interventions into Plato’s account of creation in the *Timaeus*, there are many parallels in the philosophical literature of the period. To trace these interventions back to their hypothetical stimuli, I take each of the points above in the identical sequence.

(i) The conceptual distinction between the Father and the Demiurge is the Middle Platonist legacy. Plutarch has dedicated one of his *ζητήματα* to that issue (*Quaest. Plat.* 2). He does not separate them into two distinct entities, but he outlines the arguments that will, eventually, lead some later interpreters of the *Timaeus* to that conclusion. In the first place, the father differs from the maker (for Plutarch, this is just a more generic name for the demiurge) as birth differs from coming to be: “In the case of a maker, . . . his work

when done is separated from him, whereas the principle or force belonging to the parent is blended in the progeny and sustains (συνέχει) its nature, which is a fragment and part (ἀπόσπασμα καὶ μορίον) of the procreator” (2.1, 1001A–B). Second, the father differs from the demiurge as the world-soul differs from the world-body: the latter “God did not beget, but, matter having submitted itself to him, he formed and fitted it together. . . . The soul, however, when it has partaken of intelligence and reason . . . is not merely a work but also a part of god (2.2, 1001C: οὐκ ἔργον ἐστὶ τοῦ θεοῦ μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ μέρος) and has come to be not by him but both away from him as source and out of him as substance (οὐδὲ ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐξ αὐτοῦ γέγονεν).” A clear ontological distinction between the two is later drawn by Numenius of Apamea (*flor.* ca. A.D. 150): “For it is not necessary for the First One to fabricate; in fact, the First God ought to be considered the Father of the Demiurge God” (frag. 12 Des Places: καὶ γὰρ οὔτε δημιουργεῖν ἐστι χρέων τὸν πρῶτον καὶ τοῦ δημιουργοῦντος δὲ θεοῦ χρῆ εἶναι νομίζεσθαι πατέρα πρῶτον θεόν).

(ii) Taking Plato’s “father and maker” as one and the same God while distinguishing between the Father who ‘makes’ (ποιεῖν, εἰρεῖ) and the Demiurge who ‘fabricates’ (δημιουργεῖν, τειμιό) was not a common way of interpreting Plato’s famous saying (*Tim.* 28c). Ancient commentators on the *Timaeus* preferred not to introduce any ontological distinction between the maker and the demiurge. They either took these two terms as synonymous or, as seen in Plutarch’s passage quoted in (i), contrasted them semantically as *genus* vs. *species*.³⁴ One author who seems to have made an important philosophical point by distinguishing between ποιεῖν and δημιουργεῖν, that is, by attributing these verbs to the two distinct principles, was Numenius of Apamea. In the above quoted fragment from the dialogue *On the Good* (frag. 12 Des Places), he claims that the first God is inactive (ἀργόν), and that he can be described as active only in the sense of taking advantage of, or ‘using’ (πρόσχησις), the creative capacity of the second God. It is thus possible to say that the father “makes” as his son, the demiurge, “fabricates,” provided that “making” denotes the father’s categorical and ontological superiority to his son, and not a type of activity inherent to his nature (εἰ μὲν οὖν περὶ τοῦ

³⁴ See also Max. Tyr. *Orat.* 2.10 Koniaris (ὁ μὲν γὰρ θεὸς, ὁ τῶν ὄντων πατὴρ καὶ δημιουργός), Philo *Opif.* 7, and Justin, *2 Apol.* 10.6.

δημιουργικοῦ ζητοῖμεν, φάσκοντες δεῖν τὸν πρότερον ὑπάρξαντα οὕτως ἂν ποιεῖν ἔχειν διαφερόντως, εἰκοῦν ἢ πρόσδοδος αὕτη γεγυνοῦν ἂν εἴη τοῦ λόγου· εἰ δὲ περὶ τοῦ δημιουργοῦ μὴ ἔστιν λόγος, ζητοῦμεν δὲ περὶ τοῦ πρώτου; ἀφοσιοῦμαί τε τὰ λεχθέντα καὶ ἔστω μὲν ἐκεῖνα ἄρρητα).³⁵ Several passages from the *Corpus Hermeticum* betray a similar kind of reasoning: ποιεῖν is a less marked and a more generic term (*genus*) than δημιουργεῖν (*species*), and so it suits best the highest genus in reality.³⁶

(iii) By placing Plato's eternal model in the divine Intellect, or the Self-Originate, the Savior adopts the Middle Platonist dogma that "form is considered in relation to God, his thinking" (Alcinous, *Didasc.* 9.163.14–15 Whittaker: ἔστι δὲ ἡ ἰδέα ὡς μὲν πρὸς θεὸν νόησις αὐτοῦ). The origins of this dogma are still disputed, and will remain so,

³⁵ In another interesting fragment (frag. 17 Des Places), Numenius agrees with Plato's saying that everyone is capable of knowing the Demiurge—in fact, Plato himself gave a detailed account of the divine craftsman and his activity. On the other hand, Numenius continues, the First Intellect, "which is called αὐτοῦν (Being 'par excellence'), is completely unknown to mankind. For that reason, [Plato] declared what one could state as follows: 'O men, what you consider as Intellect is not the first, but there is another Intellect prior to it, older and more divine.'" As noticed by Baltes (1979) 264, Numenius here provides his own reading of *Tim.* 28c. In Numenius's interpretation, Plato regarded the Demiurge as accessible to all men, but the First Intellect, whom he named in the *Timaeus* as "the maker and father," as impossible to find and know. On the other hand, as Baltes himself has noticed, Proclus (*In Tim.* 1.303, 27–304, 7 Diehl = frag. 21 Des Places) says that Numenius proclaimed "three Gods, calling the first 'Father', the second 'Maker' and the third 'Creation'." Whatever the cause of discrepancy—second-hand testimonia or Numenius's own incoherence—this is certainly not the only subject on which Numenius's opinion displays traces of inconsistency. Compare, for example, the ongoing debate about the identity of Numenius's Third God, who may stand for the universe, for the World-Soul, for the rational Soul, for Intellect in its downward motion to the realm of matter, and, most likely, for all of the above. For Numenius's doctrines, see esp. Krämer (1964) 63–92, Baltes (1979) 241–70, and Frede (1987) 1034–75.

³⁶ Evidence from the *Hermetica* can be found in Mahé (1986) 3–53, whose attempt to derive some clear-cut semantic distinctions from the collection notorious for its lack of doctrinal unity is praiseworthy, yet by necessity conjectural. Still, his semantic comparison of the use of ποιεῖν and δημιουργεῖν deserves serious consideration, in that it seems congruent with Numenius's and the Savior's practice (*ibid.*, 15): "ποιεῖν ('faire') est donc sémantiquement moins marqué que δημιουργεῖν ('fabriquer'). Il fait office de terme générique, incluant δημιουργεῖν comme une de ses espèces. C'est ce qu'on peut déduire, par exemple, de CH 9.5, où 'Dieu fabricant de toutes choses, en les fabricant, fait toutes choses semblable à lui' (θεὸς πάντων δημιουργός, δημιουργῶν πάντα ποιεῖ μὲν αὐτῷ ὅμοια). Δημιουργεῖν apparaît ici comme une modalité particulière du ποιεῖν, ainsi qu'en CH 16.9: 'comme (Dieu) agit sur les grands corps en les fabriquant' (καθ' ἕνα καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν μεγάλων σωμάτων ποιεῖ δημιουργῶν)."

ranging from Antiochus of Ascalon's identification of Plato's forms with the Stoic 'common notions' (Cic. *Or.* 8: *ideai . . . ratione et intelligentia contineri*) to the Old Academic definition of the soul as τόπος εἰδῶν, which Aristotle later applied only to the soul's intellectual part (*An.* 3.4.429a27–28: πλὴν ὅτι οὔτε ὅλη ἀλλ' ἡ νοητικῆ).

(iv) Separation of the Father and Intellect in the *Apocryphon* probably draws on Neopythagorean speculations about the first two hypotheses in Plato's *Parmenides*, and on their positing the first principle not only above Being (cf. Plato, *Rep.* 6.509b6–9: ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) but also above Intellect. The question already provoked disputes in the Old Academy,³⁷ but only became a commonplace theme with the rise of 'Pseudopythagorica' in the first century B.C., when philosophical matters became intertwined with religious concerns and the borders between theology and philosophy got increasingly blurred. The logic behind the Savior's move reflects theological tendencies of the period. If God is the same as Intellect, then, according to a commonly accepted principle of συγγένεια ('like knows like'), he should be attainable by the human intellect. Yet already Plato claimed that the knowledge of the divine surpasses human intellectual capacities and belongs only to gods (*Symp.* 204a). Meditation (*ab infra*) reduces the distance, but, in order to attain the principle that refuses all determinations, one needs an outside intervention (*ab extra*)—that is, a mediation on the part of a divine messenger who, in a hierarchically organized reality, stands closer than humankind does to the transcendent deity. The Savior's *dubitatio* is indicative of this insurmountable gap:

What shall I say to you about him, the incomprehensible One? So far as I am able to conceive (voeiv) him, this is the image of the light. Indeed, who will ever conceive (voeiv) him? (BG 26:1–5).

The solution to this expression of doubt comes a few lines later:

For no one from among us has been acquainted with that which belongs to the immeasurable One except for him who has dwelled in him. It is he who said these things to us. (*ibid.* 26:11–15)³⁸

³⁷ Cf. Speusippus in Aet. *Plac.* 1.7.20 (*Dox. Gr.* 303 Diels) and Aristotle's *Περὶ εὐχῆς*, frag. 49 Ross = Simpl. *In Cael.* 218.20 Karsten: ὁ ἄριστοτέλης . . . εἰπὼν ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἢ νοῦς ἐστὶν ἢ ἐπέκεινά τι τοῦ νοῦ.

³⁸ The opinion whereby the first principle transcends intellect (νοῦς) was not pop-

The distinction between conceptions, *ennoiai*, and their objects or concepts, *ennoēmata*, is, of course, Stoic—just as the ‘vitalism’ of the Pleroma, with its manifold emanations and derivations, seems to have as much in common with Plato’s view of the intelligible Being in which life, soul, and intelligence reside along with ideas (*Soph.* 248a–249d), as it has with the Stoic view of the outward movement of the divine *pneuma* “producing quantities and qualities” (Nemesius, *Nat. hom.* 70.6–71.4), and with their theory of concept-formation.

(v) Identification of Plato’s world-soul with the individual “immortal soul” of the *Timaeus*, the latter of which moves in a disorderly way in the fluctuating corporeal substrate, seems to owe a great deal to a cross-referential, synchronic reading of the Platonic corpus—more precisely, to the identification of a notorious “all soul” (ψυχὴ πᾶσα) from the *Phaedrus* (245c5, 246b7) with the universal soul, and not, as often suggested, with “every soul.” Hermias, the Neoplatonist commentator (*In Phaedr.* 102.10 ff. Couvreur), traces this identification back to Posidonius “the Stoic.”³⁹

(vi) The triad Living Being (the Pleroma and its Father)—Intellect (Self-Originate)—Discursive Planner (Sophia, the rational World-Soul) is derived from the above quoted passage in the *Timaeus* (39e), and appears an almost exact replica of Numenius’s exegesis, as recorded in Proclus (*In Tim.* 3.103.28–32 Diehl; Numenius, frag. 22 Des Places):

ular among the Middle Platonists. They preferred the following formula: *God is Intellect and therefore intelligible* (νοητός); cf. Plutarch, Alcinoüs, Maximus of Tyre, and Numenius. Apuleius, *De Plat.* 2.1.220, remains ambiguous: *prima bona esse deum summum mentemque illam quam voeiv idem vocat*. Neopythagorean authors were in fact divided over the issue, but the majority defended the absolute transcendence of the first principle (Archytas, Perictios, Crito, Timaeus Locrus, Brotinus). Some, again, decided to remain non-committal: Onatas and Timaeus Locrus, for example. For the list of relevant passages from the ‘Pseudopythagorica’, see Moraux (1984) 2:639, n. 175; Lilla (1982–1987) 242–48; Centrone (1990) 155–57. Both opinions also occur in the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Philo identifies God with Intellect—see again Lilla (1982–1987) 230hr ff.—but probably under the influence of his Neopythagorean sources, also claims that “God is prior to Intellect” (*LA* 2.46). As shown above, the ‘Gnostics’ viewed the intellect as derivative, i.e. as proceeding from the first principle, on which see Irenaeus’s criticism of the Valentines, *Adv. haer.* 2.13.1, discussed infra, chap. 2, pp. 94–104).

³⁹ For an ‘orthodox’ Platonist who proposed the same solution as, allegedly, Posidonius, see Alcin. *Didasc.* 25.178, 18 ff. Whittaker. Plotinus had dedicated one of his early essays to the confutation of such a “tragic view” of the world-soul in *Enn.* IV 8.2 ff. For other ‘testimonia’ cf. Moreschini (1993) 191–205.

Numenius ranks his First God with (Plato's) "living being" and says that he conceives (νοεῖν) only by using (ἐν προσχρήσει) the Second; this Second God he ranks with Intellect (νοῦς) and (says that) this one fabricates (δημιουργεῖν) by using the Third; this Third God, again, he ranks with the Discursive Planner (τὸν διανοοῦμενον).

As for the relation between Ialdabaoth and Sophia, it probably draws on the Middle Platonist distinction between the appetitive part of the precosmic soul, lacking intelligence and coextensive with matter, as is the case with Plutarch's disorderly soul inherent in matter and with Numenius's *anima silvae* or *silva animata*, and the "mettlesome" part of the soul which "is not purely affective but frequently has a mental image of what is fair" (Plut. *Quaest. Plat.* 9.1, 1008C–D), and which, upon acquiring part of the divine intellect and "growing rational" (Plut. *De an. procr.* 24, 1024F), begins the ceaseless life of the rational world-soul. As Plutarch has it, "For soul without intelligence (ἄνοος ψυχῆ) and amorphous body were always coexistent with each other. . . . But when the soul had partaken of intellect and concord and, grown rational through consonance, had become a cause of change for matter. . . . This is the way in which the body of the universe got generated by the soul" (*Quaest. Plat.* 4, 1003A).

What all of the above passages seem to suggest is the hierarchical sequence in which each principle acts by using (ἐν προσχρήσει) one that immediately ensues:

<i>Plato Pythagoricus</i>	<i>Apocryphon of John</i>
First God (the Living Being)	Father and the First Ten Aeons
Intellect (and his Thoughts)	Self-Originate and his Twelve Aeons
Rational World-Soul	Sophia
Irrational Soul	Ialdabaoth
Matter	Darkness/Ignorance

A strikingly similar sequence can also be found in Porphyry's account of the cosmology of the first-century A.D. 'Pythagorean' Moderatus of Gades. Just like Numenius and the Savior in the *Apocryphon of John*, Moderatus managed to find, too, the triad of gods in the famous passage from the *Timaeus* (39e). The starting point for this sort of exegesis might have been Plato's *Second Epistle* (312e).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Baltes (1979) 264–65, writes as follows: "Die Dreigötterlehre des Numenios stammt nicht aus dem *Timaios*. . . . Ausgangspunkt für die Lehre war wahrscheinlich der im mittlere Platonismus hochgeschätzte 2. *platonische Brief* (312e)." Numenius's

(vii) The postulate that each level of reality must have a separate ‘material’ principle is as old as Speusippus’s and Xenocrates’ theories of the derivation of a multi-layered reality from the two supreme principles, the One and Multiplicity or the Indefinite Dyad, allegedly propounded already by Plato in his later years. Thus, in Book M of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle criticizes Plato’s followers, and most notably Speusippus, for “generating magnitudes from the point . . . which is not one, but like the one, and another material principle which is like Multiplicity, but not Multiplicity,” and for positing “one [matter] for the line, another for the plane, and another for the solid” (*Metaph.* 13.1085a31–b4 = frags. 83–84 Isnardi Parente).⁴¹ However

manipulation of isolated passages from the *Timaeus* (28c3–5, 29e1–3, 39e7ff, 41c–e, 42d) is, in Baltes’ view, the sign of Numenius’s lack of interest in the dialogue as a whole. “Dieser interessiert so wenig, dass sogar der naheliegende Sinn der einzelnen Stelle [of course, a naheliegende Sinn as seen by Baltes] verdreht werden kann. Von daher ist es unvorstellbar, dass Numenius den ganzen Timaios interpretiert hat; seine Dreigötterlehre . . . wäre ihm dabei ein ständiges Hindernis gewesen.” For an alleged Pythagorean authorship of the *Second Epistle*, see Saffrey–Westerkink (1974) 2:xx–xliii.

⁴¹ Xenocrates distinguishes three degrees of density (πυκνόν) within the material substrate, claiming that each of them, in combination with one of Plato’s elementary bodies of the *Timaeus* (53d ff.), produces a different layer of the visible universe. Thus, “the stars and the sun are composed of fire and the first density, the moon of the second density and air . . . and the earth of water and the third kind of density” (Plut. *De facie* 24,944A). In chapter four of Iamblichus’s *De communi mathematica scientia* (DCMS 4.15, 5–18, 13 Festa = frags. 72 and 88 Isnardi-Parente), commonly held to contain traces of Speusippus’s metaphysical theory, the very existence of a multi-layered reality is said to imply a different pair of different principles for each level. For if the whole reality had derived from the same pair of simple and undifferentiated first principles—that is, if “the idea of the One [had acted upon] one and only one indefinite matter and receptacle” (16, 19–21)—their union would have produced only one level, that of mathematical numbers. For this reason, it is necessary to hypothesize a series of “differentiations” (μίαν τὴν ἅπαντος πλήθους τε καὶ μεγέθους αἰτίαν πρώτην, διαφορὰς δὲ πολλὰς ἐν αὐτῇ παρεχομένην 17, 1–3) within the single continuous material principle (described as “fluid and pliable,” ὑγρᾶ τινι παντάπασιν καὶ εὐπλαδεῖ ὕλῃ, in 15, 12–13) which, at each subsequent level, acquires a higher degree of density or “thickness” (τὴν παχύτητα τῆς ὕλης 17, 6). In the realm of mathematical numbers, for example, the ‘hyletic’ principle is said to be responsible for their being “continuous, contaminated and thicker” (τὸ συνεχές καὶ τὸ συμμεμολυσμένον μᾶλλον τῶν ἀριθμῶν καὶ παχύτερον 17, 20–21) The ensuing level of geometrical magnitudes proceeds from the union of the point and yet another ‘degree’ of matter, viz., “spatial extension” (διάστασις τόπων 17, 16), which Speusippus, according to Aristotle (*Meta.* 14.1092a17–20), identified with physical space (τόπος), alluding, in all likelihood, to the ‘Receptacle’ of Plato’s *Timaeus*. A thorough analysis of Speusippus’s and Xenocrates’ fragments can be found in Isnardi Parente (1980, 1982) and in the recent monograph by Dillon (2003); see also the influential book by Krämer (1967) and a series of studies by Halfwassen

much the particular mechanics of deriving a series of hierarchically organized levels of reality from a pair of simple first principles might vary in the doctrines of Speusippus and Xenocrates or, later on, in the metaphysical systems of the ‘Neopythagoreans’, ‘Gnostics’, or Plotinus and his followers, all of these derivational models postulated ‘analogy’ (ἀναλογία) or ‘equivalence’ (ὁμοιότης) as their basic organizing principle. In the *Apocryphon of John*, too, each level of reality—intelligible (the Pleroma), animate (the ‘liminal’ realm of Sophia, the Gnostic ‘world-soul’), and corporeal (the visible world controlled by Ialdabaoth and his ‘authorities’)—derives from a pair of opposite principles. The first ten Aeons of the Pleroma derive from the Father and his consort Barbelo; the twelve additional Aeons from the ‘union’ of the Self-Originate Intellect with Foreknowledge; and the visible world from Ialdabaoth and the corporeal substrate. To understand the logic of this derivative process, it is important to notice that, once the first level is produced out of the union of the two supreme principles, its most active constituent unites in its turn with another material principle and produces the next level of being. The principle of analogy is violated only in the case of Sophia, the material principle of the animate level, who assumes, in the absence of her male “consort”, the inappropriate role of active cause. Sophia’s violation results in ‘miscarriage’—it introduces a gap in the rational constitution of reality, leading to an increasing disorder in the system and, eventually, to entropy and stagnation.⁴²

(1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1997, 1999). For the problem of ‘matter’ in Plato, Platonism, and Aristotle, see the authoritative study by Happ (1971).

⁴² For ‘similarity’ (ὁμοιότης) as the link between different levels of being in Speusippus’s cosmology, cf. also Arist. *Top.* 1.18.108b23 ff. = frag. 85 Isnardi Parente: ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ ἐν τοῖς πολλῶν διεστῶσι χρήσιμος πρὸς τοὺς ὀρισμοὺς ἢ τοῦ ὁμοίου θεωρία, οἶον ὅτι ταῦτὸν γαλήνη μὲν ἐν θαλάσσει, νηνεμία δ’ ἐν ἀέρι (ἐκάτερον γὰρ ἡσυχία), καὶ ὅτι στιγμή ἐν γραμμῇ καὶ μονὰς ἐν ἀριθμῶ· ἐκάτερον γὰρ ἀρχή. See also Stenzel (1929) 1645 ff., who studies Speusippus’s usage of the term and its mathematical and analogical applications. For analogy and its different applications (proportion, transposition, juxtaposition) in Plato, cf. Robinson (1953) 202–22; for Middle Platonist applications of analogy to various aspects of reality, cosmology included, see the selection of relevant texts and excellent commentaries thereon in Dörrie-Baltes (1996) 100–109, 360–76. A three-level universe and the interference of circularity and verticality in its organization are distinctive features of Platonist world-hypothesis. Plato had himself postulated in the *Timaeus* an intermediate level between the two incompatible extremes, intelligible and sensible—i.e., the world-soul—following the rule that opposites, insofar as being mutually exclusive, require intercession by some

(viii) Finally, the Savior's attempt to restore the logical and chronological order in Plato's narrative of creation is not without precedents. In this case, too, the Savior might have simply adjusted the narrative structure of the *Timaeus* to the order in which various Hellenistic and Middle Platonist doxographical compilations arranged Plato's "physical tenets" (φυσικὰ δόξα).⁴³

harmonizing element: e.g., mathematical mean, a common substrate, or an intermediary entity or substance possessing the characteristics of both opposites. Xenocrates proposed a similar division into "three forms of being," viz., the sensible (αἰσθητή), the intelligible (νοητή), and that which is composite of two and operable (δοχαστη, Sext. Emp. *Adv. Math.* 7.147 ff. = frag. 83 Isnardi Parente). Even the five-level model conceived by Speusippus presupposes Plato's triadic division into intelligible objects (Speusippus's numbers and geometrical), soul, and the lowest level of physical things (the "fourths and fifths . . . combined from the lowest [i.e., corporeal] elements" according to Iamb., *DCMS* 4.18, 9–12 Festa, possibly referring to Plato's distinction between sensible objects and their transitory images or apparitions in *Soph.* 266b–c, or to the distinction between animate and inanimate beings, as suggested by Dillon (2003) 53–54, or to that between physical beings and artifacts). The same triadic division applies by analogy to all other domains—cognitive, psychological, and even political. The available 'Gnostic' texts, including the heresiological testimonies thereon, also operate within the same model, distinguishing between the intelligible realm, the heavenly sphere, and the sublunary world, to which correspond three respective substances (spirit, soul, flesh), three forms of cognition (intellection, opinion, sense perception), the triad of powers presiding over each realm and substance (God and his Intellect, Sophia and the Ignorant Demiurge, Satan or the Counterfeit Spirit), and three classes of human beings (spiritual, animate, fleshly).

⁴³ My table follows the order of Plato's physical tenets as given by Alcinoüs, the Middle Platonist epitomizer, in his *Didaskalikos*, chs. xii–xxvi Whittaker, on whom see also Dillon (1993). The headings are borrowed from the hypothetical *Vetustorum Placitorum Tabula* in Diels (1879), where the order of the last two sections is reversed (*V. De Anima*; *VI. De Corpore*). Festugière (1971) 375–380, upon comparing the *partitio* in various Hellenistic and Roman 'placita', concludes that the individual headings in Diels' tabular presentation sometimes change places, in particular V and VI, and that III and IV figure only in the Peripatetic elaborations of Plato's tenets: "Cette répartition des matières doit remonter, on l'a vu, à Théophraste. Mais l'origine première en est incontestablement le *Timée*" (376). The plan of the *Vetusta Placita*, as Festugière points out, is not identical with the layout of the *Timaeus*. Ancient doxographers arranged Plato's likely account according to individual subjects—that is, they had to regroup, under a single heading, what Plato had repeatedly discussed, in each of the three sections of his long monologue, from different standpoints (cf. *Tim.* 47e–48b; 69a–d). Diels, *op. cit.*, argued that the tradition of doxography began with a topic-oriented treatise in sixteen books composed by Aristotle's pupil Theophrastus (*Physikai doksai* or *Physikôn doksai*). According to Mansfeld (1998) 22, this was "a systematic collection of the problematic tenets of the physicists (and of some doctors) according to genera and species, [where Theophrastus] applied the method of diairesis, and availed himself of the question-types and the arrangement according to categories."

- I. De Principiis
 - 1. Matter
 - 2. Ideas
 - 3. God
- II. De Mundo
 - 1. Causes: Model–Demiurge–Matter
 - 2. Elements
 - 3. World-Soul
 - 4. Stars and Planets
 - 5. Other Gods
- III. [De Sublimibus]
- IV. De Terrestribus
 - 1. Earth–Aether–Air
 - 2. Animals
- V. De Corpore
 - 1. Structure of the Human Body
 - 2. Senses
 - 3. Physiology
 - 4. Aetiology of Diseases
- VI. De Anima
 - 1. Human Soul: Its Nature and Its Parts (or Faculties)
 - 2. Immortality of the Rational Soul
 - 3. Mortality of the Souls Deprived of Reason
 - 4. Transmigration
 - 5. Laws of Destiny

Can one, then, be sure that the author of the *Apocryphon of John* consulted the *Timaeus* at all? It has been preferable to believe that he did not, and that the Plato with whom he grew familiar had already been filtered through a long tradition of school interpretations—in short, the ‘Plato’ of Alcinous’s manual, the Neopythagorean and Stoicizing ‘Plato’, but never Plato himself. Such a hypothesis results, on the one hand, from derogatory assessments of ‘Gnostic’ writings promoted by the historians of a post-Hellenistic philosophy—“Platonism run wild” (Nock), “*Proletarierplatonismus*” (Theiler), the “underworld” of Platonism (Dillon). On the other hand, the hypothesis is a logical consequence of the widespread ‘doxographical’ approach to the philosophical and sub-philosophical texts of the Imperial period, characterized by a complete disregard for their literary aspect. Instead of being first considered as narratives, these texts are immediately divided into their constituent thematic units, then into stock sayings (*doksai*, *dogmata*) and individual concepts that are, in the end, measured against their hypothetical sources (*placita*, *compendia*, anthologies, manuals, εἰσαγωγαί, etc.).

The ‘doxographical’ hypothesis can be countered on several grounds. One is that the reading of authoritative texts was part of a student’s curriculum in philosophical schools. Another is that, in the early centuries of the Empire, Plato’s *Timaeus* enjoyed the status of a sacred narrative (ἱερὸς λόγος, παλαιὸς λόγος) which, for all of its symbolic imagery, its references to alien traditions (the Egyptian lore), and its intertwining of cosmology with soteriological concerns, was more likely to exert influence on the authors of new revelatory accounts (e.g. the collections of *Gnostica*, *Hermetica*, *Pseudopythagorica*, or *Oracula Chaldaica*) than dry classifications of Plato’s ‘physical tenets’ available in school manuals.

Another argument against the hypothetical doxographical source can be extracted from Plutarch’s creative use of Plato’s philosophical myths. In three of his dialogues, Plutarch outlines his eschatological views in the form of mythical accounts. On each occasion, he not only follows Plato’s rules of myth-making—that is, its conformity to the normative discourse of philosophical argument—but also looks at Plato’s eschatological myths as literary models. The myth of Thespesios in *On Delays in Divine Punishment* (*De sera num.* 22,563B–23,568F), for example, is a rival version of Plato’s myth of Er in the final book of the *Republic*. The myth of Sulla in *On the Face of the Moon* (*De facie* 26,940F–30,945D) is a miniature copy of the *Timaeus*. Finally, the vision granted to Timarchus during his consultation of Trophonius’s oracle at Lebadea, and recorded in *On the Daemon of Socrates* (*De genio Socr.* 21,589F–22,592E) draws both on Socrates’ ‘myth’ from the *Phaedo* and, just as in *De sera num.*, on the story of Er the Pamphylian. It is within this Platonic frame that Plutarch then incorporates a non-Platonic imagery, creating his own vision of the world, demonology, divine providence, and the destiny of human souls. The results, in all three cases, are new literary creations, bearing only a vague resemblance to their original sources of inspiration—so vague, in fact, that the emperor Julian later viewed them as valuable exemplars of the original myth-making, in contrast to a common practice of adjusting ancient myths in rhetorical exercises (Julian, *Adv. Heracl.* 226d–227a Rochefort). Still, the starting point of Plutarch’s myth-making was the mythical accounts of his venerable teacher, and not the summaries of Plato’s opinions about immortality, soul, providence, or fate. In Plutarch’s case, and I would argue in the case of the *Apocryphon of John*, too, emulation of literary tradition, considered as a phenomenon not to read but to rewrite,

implies the appropriation of predecessors' themes, literary techniques, and genre conventions.⁴⁴

In the final reckoning, the formula that best explains the status and function of the *Timaeus* in the *Apocryphon of John* is that of a 'hypotext'—a text not simply to read and adopt, but to emulate and rewrite. On the one hand, Plato's creation myth from the *Timaeus* plays the role of a master text, providing both the narrative outline and the main themes for the Savior's revelatory monologue. On the other hand, various aspects of Plato's cosmological model are subjected to a significant revision, one that seems very much in accordance with contemporaneous reinterpretations (Stoicizing, Aristotelianizing, and Pythagoreanizing) of the *Timaeus*. It is precisely this revisionary attitude that Plotinus criticizes when referring to the Gnostic "falsifications" of Plato:

In general, some of these people's doctrines have been taken from Plato, but others, all new accounts they have brought in (καινοτομοῦσιν) to establish a philosophy of their own, are things they have found outside the truth. . . . And in general they falsify Plato's manner of presenting the fabrication of the universe, and a great deal else, and degrade the man's opinions as if they had understood the intelligible nature, but he and other blessed philosophers had not. (Plot. *Enn.* II 9.6)

⁴⁴ The earliest reference to imitation as artistic emulation of predecessors occurs in Theognis 370: "None of the unskilled will be able to emulate (*mimēsthai*) me. For mimesis as a "swerve away" from earlier models, see Bloom (1973). Plutarch's complex attitude to *mūthos* was the subject of a detailed study by Vernière (1977). The author investigates in detail "the doctrinal content" of Plutarch's eschatological myths, and assesses the extent to which they depend on Plato's model narratives (*ibid.* 57–267, esp. 95–101). Betz (1983) examines Timarchus's vision in *De genio Socr.*, whose narrative organization betrays numerous similarities with that of *Ap. John*. The vision Timarchus received from Trophonius is narrated in the third person, by a narrator, Simmias, who is absent as a character from the story, but analyses its events from within, that is, from Timarchus's point of view. Interestingly enough, although Simmias assumes Timarchus's perspective, he never allows Timarchus to speak as the first-person narrator, not even when directly addressed by Trophonius ("Timarchus, what do you have me explain?" And he said, "Everything, for what is here that is not marvelous?"). It looks as though Simmias wanted to prevent the listener's identification with Timarchus's experiences, implying thereby that the story he was telling (*mūthos*) is to be taken cautiously—that is to say, as a plausible *mūthos*, and not as an abiding *lógos*. The exchange between Trophonius and Timarchus contains an interesting variant of Van Unnik's "prophetic formula" (*πάντα*). As in *Ap. John*, Trophonius's revelatory account is preceded by a visual revelation and, once it begins, is occasionally interrupted by Timarchus's requests for further clarifications of what he sees (*erotapokriseis*).

Dissonant Voices, Consonant Models: Plato, Moses, and Dame Wisdom

Yet neither Plato nor Platonism, in all of its variants, can explain the whole of the Savior's revelation—otherwise, Plotinus would not so repeatedly insist on the novelty (καινοτομεῖν) of the Gnostic jargon and ideas. As soon as the Savior turns from the diegesis of “what exists” to the narration of “what has come to be” he starts acting in the manner of the resurrected Christ from Luke's gospel—“opening [his disciples'] minds to understand the scriptures” (24:45) and “explaining (διερμύνευσεν) to them the passages throughout the scriptures that were about himself, starting with Moses and going through all the prophets” (24:27).

The whole second part of the *Apocryphon of John* (“What Has Come to Be”) is, in fact, a reinterpretation of Moses' account of creation and of the early history of humankind in the opening chapters of Genesis (*Gen* 1–7), from “the beginning” (1:1, ἐν ἀρχῇ) to the story of Noah and the flood (6:5–7:9). The Savior's hermeneutical stance is polemical and revisionary. What he contests is not the facticity of events recorded by Moses, but the perspective from which they are told—that is, the authority of Moses as a reliable witness and narrator of these events: “Do not suppose that it means . . . as Moses said . . .,” “It is not as you have heard that Moses wrote . . . but rather . . .” (II 13:19–21 and BG 45:8–10; II 22:22–24, III 29:4–6 and BG 58:16–18; II 23:3–4, III 29:21–23, and BG 59:17–18; II 29:6–7, III 37:22–23, and BG 73:4–5).

Moses is the prophet of an ignorant and jealous god—of Ialdabaoth–Saklas, the Biblical Yahweh, who fabricated the visible world. Moses is blind like his master, and blind like all creation, imprisoned in body and “cast into deep sleep” of forgetfulness, so that “the deity above [him] may not be recognized” (II 28:27–9). Moses' perspective is limited, confined to the visible world. He lacks proper knowledge since he does not see this world as an imperfect replica of the invisible realm. Nor does he see the liminal zone between the two realms, the temporary dwelling place of Sophia, from which she has been occasionally sending her messengers, down to Ialdabaoth's realm of darkness, to retrieve the light that had been stolen from her. What Moses perceives, on these occasions, is the material disguise in which Sophia's “helpers” (Epinoina, the Spirit of Life, παραλήμπτωρες, and finally the Savior, Sophia's consort) appear—their visible images in the form of Eve, an eagle upon the Tree of

Knowledge, or Noah's ark, whose hidden, non-literal meaning he is unable to uncover.

The second part of the Savior's paradosis is an exercise in hermeneutics, in which a proper interpretative framework—one already construed in the first section ("What Exists")—is applied to the Mosaic account of creation. Along with changing the referent, for the context is no longer Jesus' teachings from the Fourth Gospel but the *Book of Genesis*, the Savior also changes his expository mode. So far he has addressed John, his "beloved pupil," in an *ex cathedra* style, revealing what "no one has been acquainted with . . . except for the one that has dwelled with him" (BG 26:11–14). Now he begins to operate from within coordinates familiar to John, the ones that Arimanius, in the frame narrative, called "the traditions (*paradoseis*) of the fathers" (BG 20:2–3; III 1:14–15; II 1:17). While, in the first part, the communication was all one-way (a revelatory monologue), John now enjoys the opportunity of comparing what he is hearing with that which he was previously told about the "traditions of the Fathers," and even of giving his feedback (a revelatory dialogue, *erotapokriseis*). The Savior, in his turn, is prepared to engage in a dialogue because he does not want to impose a dogmatic solution—not Moses, but his version of Plato's cosmological model—on his ignorant interlocutor. What he wants to demonstrate is that his interpretative model has already been alluded to in the "traditions of the fathers." For this reason, he assumes John's limited perspective and takes the Jewish Scripture (*scriptum*, 'that which is written') as the premise from which his model (*non scriptum*, 'that which is not written') may be inferred as a logical conclusion. In short, he resorts to the rhetorical theory or issue (στάσις, *status, constitution*) and reasons by analogy (*ratiocinatio legalis, syllogismos*; Cicero, *Inv.* 2.142: *ex scripto non scriptum aliquid inducere per ratiocinationem*).

The interpretation of Moses' saying from the very beginning of *Genesis*—"the spirit of god moved upon (ἐπιφερε, ἐπιφέρεσθαι) the waters" (Gen 1:2b)—is a good case study of the Savior's interpretive strategy. First, he takes Moses' verse (*scriptum*) as the initial premise (*propositio*). Next, he juxtaposes a compatible statement from Wisdom Literature, that is, Sophia's oracular verdict (*scriptum*) of what really happened "in the beginning," as a supporting reason (*ratio*): "I walked around—περιεπάτησα—in the depth of the abyss" (Sir 24:5). The conclusion (*complexio*) is the Savior's philosophical version of the Mosaic verse (*non scriptum in Scriptura*): "Sophia (Wisdom) moved to and fro

in the darkness of her ignorance, and in the darkness of matter.” The divergences between the coordinated scriptural premises and the proposed conclusion are obvious: neither Moses nor Ben Sira had made the slightest allusion to repentance or ignorance, clearly borrowed from some other texts and traditions (Plato, Stoicism, etc.) to corroborate the supporting reason (*rationis confirmatio*) introduced by the Savior.⁴⁵ As for the conclusion the Savior has inferred from the premises, he may argue for its validity on the ground that it meets all criteria of the *genus ratiocinativum*. It is reasoned by analogy (*a simili tractare*) and therefore compatible, both in content and in structure, with its premises (*scripta*).⁴⁶

<i>Moses</i> :	The Spirit of God moved (ἐπιφέρεσθαι) upon the waters. (Gen 1:2b)	<u>Propositio</u>
<i>Wisdom</i> :	I [Sophia] walked around (περιπατεῖν) in the depth of the Abyss. (Sir 24:5)	<u>Ratio</u>
<i>Plato</i> :	The soul moves in a disorderly fashion when falling into matter. Repentance is a passion, i.e. the soul’s disorderly motion.	<u>Rationis</u> <u>confirmatio</u>
<i>Savior</i> :	Sophia [the World-Soul] moved to and fro in the darkness of matter Sophia [the fallen soul] repented (μετάνοεῖν) in the darkness of her ignorance ⁴⁷	<u>Complexio</u>

A never-ending debate on Jewish vs. non-Jewish origin of the *Apocryphon* may be presented, in the light of what has just been said, as the disagreement over how to explain the Savior’s motives in choosing Wisdom Literature as his supporting reason (*ratio*). Those who consider the *Apocryphon of John* “an organic development within

⁴⁵ Legal reasoning or *sylogismos*, one of the four kinds of ‘issue’ (στάσις), is the form of rhetorical argument known as *epicheireme*—an elaboration of a simple syllogism comprising a premise, a supporting reason, and a conclusion inferred from the combination of the two. The full form of *epicheireme* consists of five parts: besides the three essential parts, the *ratio* may be corroborated by additional arguments (*rationis confirmatio*), and the latter, in their turn, further enriched (*exornatio*). All these divisions and their further elaborations are discussed in the rhetorical manuals under the heading *inventio* (εὕρεσις), from Cicero to Hermogenes, and can be traced back to some Hellenistic source, most likely Hermagoras. See, e.g., Matthes (1958), Heath (1997) 89–119, and Braet (2004).

⁴⁶ The use of *in scriptis controversiae* by early Christian theologians is described by Hadot (1957) 209–20. The author discusses only Latin material. The Gnostics could have learned such debate techniques in schools or in rhetorical manuals, but also from Alexandrian textual exegetes. For Philo’s education and the place he assigns to rhetoric in his exegesis of the *Pentateuch*, see Alexandre (1999). The impact of Hellenistic rhetoric on Rabbinic methods of exegesis is discussed by Daube (1949) 239–64.

⁴⁷ To illustrate reasoning by analogy (*a simili*) in theological *controversiae*, I quote Hadot’s example, taken from Marius Victorinus’s debate with the Homoeans: ὁμοούσιον *lectum negatis? Sed si aliqua similia, vel similiter denominata lecta sunt, iure pari et istud denominatum accipere debemus* (Mar. Vict. *Adv. Ar.* 2.7.13–15).

Judaism” (e.g., Pearson 1984, 464) believe that the Savior used Jewish scriptures (*scripta*) as normative text. In this view, the Savior’s model is derived from Moses’ account of creation by reference to Sapiential texts and their philosophical interpretation, such as preserved in Aristoboulos or Philo of Alexandria, then elaborated by the intrusion of Christian features and updated by contemporary (second-century) philosophical doctrines.

This, however, is not the Savior’s procedure in the *Apocryphon*. He starts from Jesus’—actually his own—sayings in the Johannine Gospel and elaborates out of them a complex, essentially Platonist, model of the universe, demonstrating a complete disregard for “traditions of the Fathers.” This model is next applied to Hellenistic Jewish scripture in order to be proven superior to Moses’ account of creation, yet still partly compatible with the Wisdom oracles. In this sort of interpretation of the *Apocryphon*’s hermeneutical strategy, the Savior’s *ratiocinatio* has a purely propedeutic function. The purpose of his revelation to John is to explain his Platonizing Christian model in terms and images familiar to the seer, and thereby indicate that his message, though originally coined of a non-Jewish material, may still be acceptable to Hellenized Jews—provided they read their scriptures selectively.

According to the first hypothesis, the *Apocryphon of John* is nothing but rewritten (Jewish) scripture. According to the second, the *Apocryphon of John* is the Platonizing version of the Fourth Gospel, made compatible with the Septuagint to reach the Hellenized Jewish audience. If the former, then the *Apocryphon* is an example of Hellenistic Judaism with philosophical sensibilities and mystical tendencies, later deemed acceptable, and for that reason modified, by the Christians. If the latter, then the Savior’s revelatory account, for all of its syncretistic flavor and universal aspirations, represents a Christianized version of Platonist ‘Orientalism’, best exemplified in the work of the philosopher Numenius, a Greek-speaking Syrian from Apamea.

Probably because of his ‘Oriental’ origin, Numenius had a vivid interest in non-Greek cultures—an interest that went beyond nostalgic antiquarianism and ultimately ended in the denunciation of the *Favoritfolk* doctrine. For Numenius, appropriation of ‘barbarian philosophy’ was part of the hermeneutical program of elucidating obscurities in the corpus of Plato, his venerable teacher. When a cross-referential, synchronic reading of the Plato’s works fails to

uncover the intent (διάνουα) behind Plato's words (ῥητόν), a true Platonist, faithful to his hermeneutical task, must

go beyond (ἀναχωρήσασθαι) [Plato's own words] and conjoin them with the teachings of Pythagoras, and then appeal to peoples of good reputation, bringing in comparison (προσφερόμενον) their rites, beliefs, and institutions in so far as they chime with Plato (συντελουμένας Πλάτωνι ὁμολογουμένως), those, that is, such as the Brachmanes and Jews and Magoi and Egyptians have laid down. (Numenius, frag. 1a Des Places)

The final step in Numenius's program—bringing in comparison with Plato the rites and beliefs of foreign traditions—reflects the same exegetical technique as in the *Apocryphon of John*. This is yet another instance of the rhetorical reasoning by analogy (*sylogismos*) discussed on the previous pages—the reasoning in which an obscure text is elucidated by application of a seemingly unrelated, yet analogous, statement. To illustrate Numenius's creative use of 'Oriental' analogues in the elucidation of Plato, I quote the passage where, as in the *Apocryphon of John*, the Mosaic verse from *Genesis* 1:2 is used as one of the coordinated premises. The only difference is that, this time, "the spirit of god's moving upon the waters" is not the initial premise (*propositio*) but the supporting reason (*ratio*). The passage comes from Porphyry's *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, where it is said that

Some Pythagorean philosophers believed that souls are attracted to the water because of the divine spirit dwelling in it (τῷ ὕδατι θεοπνῶ ὄντι), as Numenius says, adding that this is the reason why the prophet [Moses] had stated that "the spirit of god moved upon the waters." (Numenius, frag. 30 Des Places)

Numenius next adduces two other analogues, one from Egyptian religion and the other from Heraclitus. The phrase "the water in which the divine spirit is dwelling" proves, however, that the primary impetus for this extraordinary explanation of the reason for the soul's descent came from reading the Septuagint. Numenius's reasoning by analogy unfolds somewhat as follows: Plato has already established that the individual souls fall from their perfect state down into creation. Why they descend is a matter of controversy because Plato was *deliberately* obscure regarding this issue. In order to elucidate this ambiguity, one must bring forward those foreign doctrines of the soul that "chime" with Plato. Moses, among others, states that "the spirit of God moved upon the waters" (Gen 1:2b). The conclusion

inferred from the premises is that souls fall into the cycle of generation because the divine spirit dwelling in the waters—that is to say, in the flowing and ebbing tide of matter⁴⁸—attracts them to do so.⁴⁹

What makes Numenius so attractive a point of comparison with the *Apocryphon of John* is the simple fact that both search for analogous structures and intertextual relations in an almost identical group of culturally heterogeneous texts (Greek, Jewish, Egyptian, Zoroastrian, Christian). Both of them, too, consider analogy an important method of discovery. The point at which they diverge is their interpretation of these textual and cultural intersections. Numenius's juxtaposition of Plato, Pythagoras, and 'barbarian philosophy' leads him to an important discovery that they are all, in the end, coordinate cases of the same universal wisdom—a set of contiguous positions that cannot be viewed in terms of progress and degradation, or ranked according to their relative superiority to one another. God, who is the pure active Intellect, disseminates his intellectual power among all men, irrespective of their race and origin (frag. 14 Des Places). This intellectual kinship between God and humankind, as well as between men of different origins and languages, precludes any attempt at assigning a higher value to one intellectual tradition (e.g., Judaism) over another (e.g., Platonism). This is, of course, not the case with the *Apocryphon of John*, where Moses and the Platonizing Christ are

⁴⁸ Identification of the "waters" of Genesis with the material substrate to creation is effected by reference to their common ever-flowing quality, the sign of their disorderly, immeasurable, and infinite nature. Cf. Numenius, frag. 3 Des Places, where matter is portrayed as a "violent and unstable current"; frag. 11 Des Places, where matter is qualified as "having appetitive and ever-flowing character"; and frag. 18, in which matter is compared to "the sea," probably an allusion to Plato's "boundless ocean of dissemblance" in *Politicus* 272e–273a. For ancient controversies regarding the possible causes of the soul's descent into matter and creation see Petersen (1959) 248, Dillon (1981) 1:357–64, and Moerschini (1992) 191–204.

⁴⁹ Whether Moses' verse helped to inform Numenius's explanation of the descent of souls or simply served as an additional piece of evidence confirming the theory he had already conjectured in debates with his fellow Platonists and Neopythagoreans, has been a debated issue. The issue sounds very much like the problem of the Jewish origin of *Ap. John*, and the question that E. R. Dodds (1957) 6–8, posed about Numenius and his Jewish background appears quite relevant for the 'Gnostic' text, too: "The crucial question is whether Numenius had any doctrines to which analogues existed in the oriental world but not in the tradition of Greek thought. The negative condition is as important as the positive one: without it, the existence of oriental analogues cannot establish, though it may confirm, the hypothesis of direct oriental influence."

two dissonant voices, only occasionally made compatible through the intercession of the individual passages from the Septuagint—passages where Dame Wisdom (Sophia), speaking in person (*Proverbs*, *Sirach*, *Wisdom of Solomon*) or through the prophets (e.g., Isaiah), hints at the existence of the parallel reality that neither Moses nor his blind master Ialdabaoth can see. In this way, Sophia's oracles provide the link between Moses' material imagery and the Savior's "true account" (ἀληθῆς λόγος). No longer purely 'material and not yet fully 'spiritual', Sophia's prophecies make use of a language in which equivocal symbols are combined with philosophical concepts—just as, in the world conceived by the *Apocryphon of John*, Sophia dwells in the liminal zone (the realm of the world-soul, *Regio Medietatis*) as the mediator between the 'spiritual' realm and its distant 'material' image.

<i>Levels of Reality</i>	<i>Sources</i>	<i>Voices</i>
Pleroma	Gospel of John, Philosophy	<i>Christus Platonizans</i>
<i>Regio Medietatis</i>	Wisdom Literature	Sophia
Ialdabaoth's Realm	Genesis	Moses

The following chapters are essentially an elaboration on the points raised in the previous paragraphs. The forthcoming chapter analyzes the Savior's account of the spiritual realm or the Pleroma ("What Exists"). Next, I will examine in greater detail the Savior's polemic with Moses and, more important, the kind of reasoning (*ratiocinatio*) by which he sets out to prove that his new model of the universe (*non scriptum*) may be deduced from certain parts of Jewish scriptures (*ex scripto non scriptum deducere*). A modern and more fashionable name for this complex textual strategy is—intertextuality.

CHAPTER TWO

THE REALM OF BEING

Agnostos Theos

Praising Oneness: A Literary Analysis

Following the outline proposed in his introductory statement, the Savior opens his revelatory monologue with what comes first in reality. At the top of the ontological scheme he places a solitary first principle which, as he says to John, “no one has been acquainted with . . . except for him who has dwelled in it” (BG 26:11–15). The Unknown God (*agnostos theos*) cannot be reasoned from his consequent effects by means of reductional analysis or analogical translation. The proper way of describing him is the discourse of praise (*epainos*), in which the positive language of eminence (*via eminentiae*), interspersed with the equivocal metaphors borrowed from the Fourth Gospel (light, spirit, water, pure thinking), alternates with a series of negative determinations (*via negationis*, *via oppositionis*).

Rules for praising a god had been long established. Before saying of what sort of things he or she is the cause, one has to state what that god, or goddess, is like. On the other hand, form and style of praise may vary, prose discourses of praise being equally acceptable as metrical hymns. In Philo’s words,

We should never tire of composing encomiastic accounts or poems (λόγους ἐγκωμιαστικούς . . . ποιήματα συντιθέντες), so that, whether with or without music (καὶ ἔμμελῶς καὶ χωρὶς μέλους), and whichever of its characteristic functions the voice may assume, be it speech or song (καθ’ ἑκατέραν φωνῆς ιδέαν, ἢ τὸ λέγειν καὶ τὸ ᾄδειν ἀποκεκλήρωται), high honor may be given both to the Maker of the world and to the world: “the former,” as one has said (Plato *Tim.* 29a), “the best of causes, the latter the most perfect of things that have become.” (Philo *Plant.* 131)

Philo’s reference to the *Timaeus* is important. It shows that some sections of Plato’s cosmogony were considered a material suitable for honoring God and his creation (λόγος ἐγκωμιαστικός). More systematic treatments of the laudatory genre, such as the list of rules for prais-

ing gods by Alexander, son of Numenius (*flor.* ca. A.D. 150), indicate that the *Timaeus* was, in fact, proposed as a model of how to praise a god—not only in matters of form (prose) and style (grandeur), but also in matters of content. Menander Rhetor went even as far as to call Plato’s account of creation “a hymn on universe,” and classified it among the “scientific hymns” characteristic for their elevated style approaching “the heights of dithyramb” (336.24–337.32 Russell-Wilson).¹ In their interpretation of the *Timaeus* as a sublime celebration of the divine, the experts on epideictic rhetoric might have been encouraged by Plato’s own statement from the *Phaedrus*, that “the relevant high-mindedness (τὸ ὑψηλόνοον) and effectiveness of all sciences of importance” seem to “come from the addition of rhetorical amplification and lofty talk about nature (ἄδολεσχίας καὶ μετεωρολογίας φύσεως περί)” (269e4–270a3).² Writing about the universe and its creation, Plato composed the most sublime hymn to the creator. Philosophy in its highest form is thus nothing but an act of worship, and the ideal philosopher an expert in epideictic oratory.³

The list of topics obligatory for hymn-writing is handily available in the extract from Alexander’s lost tract on rhetorical subjects (ῥητορικὰ ἀφορμαί). Before one engages in praising individual gods, their origin and age, the universality of their worship, their powers,

¹ Philo distinguishes between two ways of praising God—viz., prose encomia and sung hymns and prayers. Rhetorical manuals of the period generally agree that we praise gods in hymns but make encomia of men. The criteria for distinguishing between hymn and encomium vary from one author to another, as is clearly seen in a brief discussion by Alexander, son of Numenius, *Rhetores Graeci* III 2.8, 4.15 Spengel. This terminological fluidity—visible for example in the aretalogy from Maronaea, edited by Grandjean (1975), vv. 5, 8, 12, 14, 21, where the praise of Isis is described as encomium and not as hymn—is indicative of the inability to draw boundaries between the topics appropriate for encomia and those characteristic of hymns. For a thorough discussion of terminology and the related issues, cf. Pernot (1993) 117–127 and 216–218.

² The passage from the *Phaedrus* is placed in Socrates’ mouth and, for various reasons listed by Rowe (1986) 204–205, must be taken as ironic. Both ἄδολεσχία and μετεωρολογία should therefore be rendered in a pejorative sense as “babbling and empty talk.” Hadot (1983) 127, n. 78, suggests that these two terms deserve, perhaps, a “nobler” translation, being the sources of “the relevant high-mindedness.”

³ For the Neoplatonist appropriation and development of the long-standing tradition of interpreting some Plato’s dialogues as hymns, see a thorough discussion by van den Berg (2001) 13–34. Proclus, for example, viewed the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* as a “theological hymn by means of negations to the One” (*In Parm.* 7.1191, 34–35).

deeds, skills, inventions, and places of their cult, one has to turn at first to the *Timaeus* and contrive a “philosophical discourse” (φιλόσοφος λόγος) of the first God, one from whom all other gods originated.⁴

The philosophical discourse (ὁ μὲν φιλόσοφος λόγος) on divinity asserts that God exists “non-generated and indestructible” for all time (ὅτι ὁ θεὸς ἀγέννητόν ἐστι καὶ ἀνώλεθρον αἰεὶ ὢν *Tim.* 52a2); but Plato also appears to admit a kind of discourse where gods are said to have come into existence by the agency of the first God (ὅτι γεγόνασι θεοὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ πρώτου θεοῦ, cf. *Tim.* 41a–d), thereby approving of the ordinary discourse (ὥστε καὶ τὸν κοινὸν λόγον ἐνδέχασθαι). For it is from the former [i.e. philosophical] discourse that the path eventually proceeds to the generated gods. We therefore must make use of both of these established accounts, arguing, in accordance with Plato, that knowledge of the totality belongs to god, whereas, out of human discourses, one is more philosophical and the other more commonplace (τῶν δ’ ἀνθρωπίνων λόγων ὁ μὲν σοφώτερος ὁ δὲ κοινότερος). So we first must lay down the more philosophical, because it concerns the nature of god in general, and only secondly, that of the many. (Alex. Num. in *Rhet. Graec.* III 4, 16–28 Spengel).

The Savior’s praise of the Unknown God seems to follow the same basic pattern. Before describing the first God’s deeds and accomplishments (the generation of the Pleromatic realm), he states what divinity itself is like regarding its nature (φύσις) and power (δύναμις). He does so in a highly rhetorical style, following the rules of epideictic oratory. In its form, his discourse of the first God is a type of “encomiastic” account (λόγος ἐγκωμιαστικός) to which Philo alluded in *De plantatione*. In its content, this is a philosophical account (λόγος φιλόσοφος) of a kind described by Alexander, positing Plato’s “praise of God” in the *Timaeus* as its distant model.

That which becomes, we say, must necessarily become by the agency of some cause (ὑπ’ αἰτίου τινός). The maker and the father of the universe it is a hard task to find (τὸν μὲν ποιητὴν καὶ πατέρα τοῦδε τοῦ παντός

⁴ For the rhetor Alexander, son of the ‘sophist’ Numenius (the latter’s *floruit* was around the time of Hadrian), see Brzoska (1894) 1456–59, Schwab (1916), Russell-Wilson (1981) xxix–xxv, and Pernot (1993) 68–71, esp. n. 72, 118–20, 216–38. On Alexander’s definitions of praise (*epainos*), hymn, and encomium, and on the history of these ‘genres’ of epideictic oratory, consult Russell-Wilson (1981) xiv–xxv. A good survey of teaching procedures associated with epideictic rhetoric is Russell (1998) 17–50. For the magisterial treatment of the rhetoric of praise in antiquity see Pernot (1993), esp. 216–38, containing a thorough discussion of the rhetorical structure and standard topics of god-praising (“l’éloge des dieux”).

εὔρεῖν τε ἔργον), and having found him it is impossible to declare him to all. (*Tim.* 28c2–5)

Now if this world is good and its fabricator is good (ὁ τε δημιουργὸς ἀγαθός), clearly he looked to the eternal. . . . Indeed, the world is the best of things that have become, and he is the best of causes (ὁ δ' ἄριστος τῶν αἰτίων). (29a2–6)

He was good; and in the good no envy in any matter can ever arise (ἀγαθὸς ἦν· ἀγαθῷ δὲ οὐδεὶς περὶ οὐδενὸς οὐδέποτε γίγνεται φθόνος). Being thus without envy, he wanted that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself. (29e1–4)

This being so, we must agree that there is, first, the unchanging kind (τὸ κατὰ ταῦτὰ εἶδος ἔχον), non-generated and indestructible (ἀγέννητον καὶ ἀνώλεθρον), which neither (οὔτε) receives anything else into itself from elsewhere nor (οὔτε) itself enters into anything elsewhere, invisible and otherwise imperceptible (ἀόρατον καὶ ἄλλως ἀναίσθητον); that, in fact, which intellection (νόησις) has as its object. (52a1–5)

The passages from the *Timaeus* served only as a foil for more elaborate speculations about the nature of the first God. Combined with compatible sections from other works of Plato (*Parmenides*, *Seventh Letter*, *Republic*, *Sophist*, *Philebus*), these statements were divided into separate groups, in accordance with different intellectual operations (*viae*) by which they had been informed—that is, the Platonic analysis (ἐπὶ τὰς ἀρχάς), further divided into the categorical (*homonymy*, *analogy*) and dimensional (*aphaeresis*, *via reductionis*) subspecies, as well as various techniques of concept-formation proposed by the Stoics (cf. D.L. 7.53 καθ' ὁμοιότητα, κατ' ἀναλογίαν, κατὰ μετάθεσιν, κατὰ σύνθεσιν, κατ' ἐναντίωσιν, κατὰ μετάβασιν, κατὰ στέρησιν). Along with this repertoire of fixed techniques of how to conceive, and praise, the first God, the authors of philosophical discourses of praise (Philo of Alexandria, Alcinous, Celsus, Maximus of Tyre, and various 'Gnostic' authors) had also at their disposal an equally established set of linguistic devices and descriptive stereotypes—e.g., *alpha privativum/negativum*, the negative coordination οὔτε . . . οὔτε, superlatives,⁵ and an array of prefixes (ἀυτο-, προ-, ὑπερ-, παν- along with the suffix -της)—all capable of conveying the ontological primacy (*eminentia*) of God. Other conventional features of the genre include the exalted tone of presentation, *parallelismus membrorum*, some rudimentary rhythm, and the

⁵ For the extensive use of superlative forms in the *Timaeus*, the main constitutive element of Plato's (hymnal) language of excellence, see Runia (1992).

accumulation of epithets *ad nauseam*.⁶ As noted by Pierre Hadot (1968, 457), the length of such compositions would rarely surpass “twenty to thirty lines of a modern edition.”

The Savior’s discourse on the first principle makes use of all such stereotypes. It is replete with rhetorical figures (*alliteratio*, *anaphora*, *homoioteleuton*, *antithesis*, *accumulatio*, *enumeratio*); it has a clear progression and climax of theme (priamel), and is arranged into a set of parallel cola and commata. All these features give it a certain rhythmical lilt, one which will become instantly visible from the ensuing colometric presentation. This does not mean that the Savior’s account is a piece of poetry. Nor is my division thereof into distinct thematic units intended as an arrangement of verses into strophes or stanzas—although the passages printed in italics do indeed sound like refrains separating one theme from another.

The Savior’s Praise of the First Principle (BG 22:17–26:14; cf. II 2:26–4:19).

He said to me,

(i) The [Monad],
since it is Monarchy
and [nothing] presides over it,
is the God and the Father of the entirety,
the holy one,
the invisible that is above the entirety,
which exists in its incorruptibility,
[existing in] the pure light,
into which no eye-light is able to gaze.

It is Spirit.

(ii) It is not fitting to think of it as god,
or that it is of that kind.
For it is superior to a god.
It is a principle over which nothing presides.
For nothing is prior to it,
nor does it need any of them.
It has no need of life
given that it is eternal.
It does not need anything
because it cannot be perfected:
for it has not been defective
so as to be perfected.
Rather, it is always utterly perfect.

Light is it.

⁶ Bibliography on the philosophical methods of conceiving and describing divinity is immense. For the Middle Platonist tradition, Festugière (1954) 79–140 is still worth reading. For Gnostic speculations on the *Agnostos Theos*, the best discussion is by Orbe (1958) 3–38. Hadot (1968) 279–80, 457–61, analyzes the genre of philosophical encomium: “ce genre littéraire et assez répandu à partir du Moyen-Platonisme. On en retrouve la trace chez Albinus, Apulée, Numénius et les *Oracles chaldaïques*, dans le gnosticisme et l’hermétisme, chez Plotin, surtout dans les premiers traités, enfin chez Porphyre, auquel il faut probablement rapporter également les développements de ce genre, que l’on trouve chez Macrobe et chez Calcidius, et qui restent proches de la doctrine de Numenius” (ibid. 457–58). A comprehensive list of the Middle Platonist and ‘Neopythagorean’ passages dealing with ‘negative theology’ can be found in Lilla (1982–1987) 211–79. For the Middle Platonist background of the Savior’s praise, see van den Broek (1982) 57–72, Mansfeld (1988) 92–117, esp. 116–17, and Dillon (1999) 69–79.

(iii) It is unlimited,
 for nothing is prior to it
 so as to bestow limit upon it.
 The indiscernible one,
 for nothing is prior to it
 so as to discern it.
 The immeasurable one,
 for no one else has measured it
 as if being prior to it.
 The invisible one,
 for no one has seen it.
 The eternal one,
 which always exists.
 The ineffable one,
 since no one has attained it
 so as to speak of it.
 The unnamable one,
 since there is no one prior to it
 so as to give a name to it.
*This is the immeasurable light,
 the holy and undefiled purity:
 the ineffable one,
 perfect, incorruptible.*

(iv) It is neither perfection nor blessedness.
 It is not divinity,
 but something far superior to these.
 Neither is it unlimited nor has it been limited;
 rather, it is something superior to these.
 It is not corporeal, it is not incorporeal.
 It is not great, it is not small.
 It is not quantifiable, for it is not a creature.
 < It is not qualifiable.> (cf. III 5:14)
 Nor can anyone conceive it.
 It is not at all something that exists;
 rather, it is something superior to these

—not as though it were superior,
 but as being its own self.
 It is not in an aeon (eternity) that it partakes.
 No time belongs to it.
 For whoever partakes in an aeon (eternity),
 there are others that have prepared (it) for him.
 And there is no time that has limited it,
 since it does not receive from another
 who sets limits.

*And it is without need.
 There is nothing at all prior to it.
 It searches for its own self
 in the fullness of the light.
 It shall contemplate the pure light,
 the immeasurable greatness.*

(v) The eternal one, bestowing eternity;
 the light, bestowing light;
 the life, bestowing life;
 the blessed one, bestowing blessedness;
 the acquaintance, bestowing acquaintance;
 the always good one,
 bestowing good and doing good—
 not as if possessing, but rather as bestowing.
 The mercy, bestowing mercy;
 the grace, bestowing grace.

The immeasurable light.

(vi) What shall I say to you about it,
 the incomprehensible one?
 This is the image of the light,
 in so far as I am able to conceive.
 For who will ever conceive it?
 In so far as I can speak to you,
 its aeon is incorruptible,
 at rest, reposing in silence.
 The one that is prior to the entirety
 is yet the head of every aeon—
 given that there exists anything else beside him.

(vii) For no one of us has known
 what belongs to the immeasurable one
 except for him who dwelt in it.
 It is he who told us these things.

The Savior's philosophical discourse of praise consists of three sections. In the opening section (*Propositio*, i–ii), he first (i) describes the first principle in more 'positive' terms (*Monad*, *Monarchy*, *Father*, *Holy Spirit*, *Pure Light*, *Eternity*, *Self-sufficiency*, *Perfection*), then (ii) emphasizes its absolute transcendence ("superior to gods," "a principle over which nothing presides," "prior to all").

Occasionally, John will be reminded of these ‘positive’ attributes and determinations (set in *italics*) throughout the second, argumentative part (*Argumentatio*, iii–v). These short, refrain-like statements serve a double purpose. On the one hand, they sustain the unity of the Savior’s speech. On the other, they signal the change in the Savior’s argumentative technique. They appear whenever he introduces a new way of proving the absolute priority of the first principle (iii. *via negationis*, iv. *via oppositionis*, v. *via eminentiae*).

Moving on to the argumentative section (*Argumentatio*), the purpose of *via negationis* (iii) is to show the inferiority of created beings, including humankind (“nothing is prior to him, nothing has seen him,” etc.). *Via oppositionis* (iv) is the most suitable way of negation: it does not simply refuse single determinations (e.g., *God is not x*), but denies opposed pairs of qualities and, in this way, transcends the genus which such contradictory terms jointly exhaust (e.g., *God is neither x nor non-x*, but something superior to it). Finally, the third method (v) argues for the causal priority of god. The first principle is not good for it would then participate in the form of Goodness and thereby turn as inferior to it. Rather, the first principle is good insofar as bestowing goodness on its creation.

The final section (*Peroratio* or *Conclusio*, vi–vii) opens with *dubitatio* (vi): “What shall I say to you about him, the incomprehensible one? . . . For who will ever conceive him?”⁷ At this point, the Savior admits his inability to coin the language suitable for describing God’s transcendence. Finally, there comes the climax (vii) of the whole discourse of praise. All arguments accumulated in the preceding sections (iii–v) serve, in fact, as a foil for the grand finale, the saying from the Johannine prologue: “No one has ever seen God; it is the only-begotten son [*var.* God], who dwells at the Father’s bosom, who has interpreted him” (John 1:18; cf. Matthew 11:27). The Savior’s encomium is, in fact, a philosophical elaboration of the mystery revealed in the Fourth Gospel. The first principle cannot be attained by intellection. It can only be made known by the mediation of him “who has dwelled in it.”

⁷ Cf., e.g., the development of Menander’s Σμινθιακός, a prose hymn addressed to Apollo, 437.5–446.13 Russell-Wilson, and esp. 445.25–28, where the penultimate section repeats the embarrassment and hesitation from the opening section: “O Sminthian, and Pythian, from you my speech began, to you it shall return. By what names shall I address you?”

The rhetorical structure of the Savior's speech can be outlined as follows:

- I. PROPOSITIO: Nature of the First Principle
 - i. *Kataphasis* (Spirit, Light, Father, Monad)
 - ii. Transcendence (Absolute Priority, Perfection, Self-Sufficiency)
- II. ARGUMENTATIO: Ways of Proving Its Transcendence
 - iii. *Via Negationis*
 - iv. *Via Oppositionis*
 - v. Other-Related Causality
- III. PERORATIO: God Attainable through Revelation, not by Intellection
 - vi. *Dubitatio*
 - vii. Climax (John 1:18; cf. Matthew 11:27)⁸

The outline gives the argumentative aspect of the Savior's discourse. What it fails to convey is an equally important organizing principle—that of the *contrast* between the 'strophes' developing the 'apophatic' argument and the short refrain-like (*italicized*) sections reiterating the positive, 'kataphatic', portrayal of the first principle from the initial section (i). Clearly, this formal contrast reflects a much more significant antinomy, one between the two possible ways of attaining the transcendent reality: philosophical, which relies on discursive knowledge and intuitive intellection (*noêsis*), and religious, which depends on the otherworldly revelation and prefers the language of equivocal symbols and obscure metaphors. On the psychological plane, the contrastive principle of organization generates the sense of deadlock that only the ensuing climax (vii) will be able to resolve with its 'cathartic' quote from the Fourth Gospel. This internal movement of contrary ideas that, while developing in opposite directions, strive to meet at a single climactic point, this rondeau-like game of mutual interposition, separation, and convergence, provides the Savior's discourse with the affective content and raises its rhetorical 'prosaism' to a higher aesthetic level, that of an emotionally charged sermon.⁹

⁸ Cf. also John 3:13, 6:40, 6:44, 6:46, 7:28, 8:19, 14:6, 17:26.

⁹ Vygotsky (1971) provides the best analysis of this transformation of 'prosaism' of verbal material into a work of art through antinomies and the "movement of opposite feelings." Another good example for this contrastive organization of material in ancient Christian poetry is the poetic work of Romanos the Melod, as analyzed, superbly, by Averintsev (1977) 210–20. The same tension between the contrastive and argumentative principles of literary composition occurs in the *Gospel of Truth*, one of the most rhetorically powerful Valentinian texts. As stated by Layton

The God without Qualities

The self never grasps its impressions and utterances singly, but always in context, in real or imagined, similar or dissimilar, harmony with something else; and so everything that has a name leans on everything else in regular rows, as a link in large and incalculable unities, on relying on another and all penetrated by a common tension. But for that reason," he suddenly went on, differently, "if for some reason these associations fail and none of them addresses the internal series of orders, one is immediately left again to face an indescribable and inhuman creation, indeed a disavowed and formless one". (Robert Musil, *The Man without Qualities*, transl. B. Pike, 1185)

The Savior does not seem to innovate much in his discourse of praise. He follows the formal rules of the *logos philosophos*, and makes use of already formalized content elements, vocabulary, and techniques of argumentation. This formalization results from a long process of expansions, adaptations, and elaborations of various passages from Plato's works—the process in which the Middle Platonist systematizations played a particularly important role. Even a superficial comparison of the discourse with the portrayals of the first God by Alcinous, Apuleius, or Celsus reveals striking similarities, both in the formal presentation of arguments and in matters of content. For this reason, it has repeatedly been argued that, in his praise of the first God, the Savior behaves as a typical Platonist of the period, and that, in this particular passage, he makes an extensive use of Middle Platonist textbooks.¹⁰ Yet a closer look at one such extant compendium

(1987) 251, "the rhetoric of GTr is not linear but atmospheric, just as its cosmology is not linear but concentric . . . Ideas and images are developed slowly by repeating key points with minor changes." Layton's insight seems to correspond to what Vygotsky (1971) described as the "movement of opposite feelings," as well as to the contrastive principle of organization of the Savior's discourse of praise in *Ap. John*. The movement of the *Gospel of Truth* is rondeau-like, in that its main theme—i.e., Christ, in all variety of its roles, from savior, teacher, revealer, mediator, and shepherd to that of his Father's fragrance and name—is inserted as a 'refrain' following *each* argumentative section (creation, existence within the Father, predestination of the elect, the arrival of the Book, disappearance of the material world, a sense of alienation as the source of *gnosis*, duties of the elect, repentance and restoration, the Father's paradise, final repose in the Father). As in the Savior's praise of *Ap. John*, only the argumentative sections of *Gos. Truth* can be analyzed according to the schematic rules and regulations of ancient oratory.

¹⁰ Most recently Dillon (1999) 74: "I am inclined to regard the Gnostic [account of the first principle] as derivative from Platonism."

of Plato's doctrines, the *Didaskalikos* of Alcinous, discloses some significant divergences.¹¹

Alcinous dedicates a whole chapter of his handbook to the problem of the Platonic 'first God' (*Did.* 10.164.7–166.14 Whittaker). Along with matter and ideas, Plato is said to have proposed a third independent *arkhê* and considered it, at least so Alcinous infers from the famous passage in the *Timaeus* (*Tim* 28c), as "all but ineffable" (164.8: μικροῦ δεῖ καὶ ἄρρητον). Upon providing two proofs of its existence (164.9–27), Alcinous defines its ontological status and its relation to the subordinate levels of reality (*viz.*, the demiurgic intellect and the soul). This supreme principle is identified with the Aristotelian first cause (*Metaph.* 12.7–9.1072a19–1075a10): an unmoved (ἀκίνητος) mover, the final cause of all creation (ὡς τὸ ὀρεκτὸν κινεῖ τὴν ὄρεξιν), and the first intellect (ὁ πρῶτος νοῦς) "everlastingly engaged in thinking of itself and its own thoughts" (ἑαυτὸν ἄν οὖν καὶ τὰ ἑαυτοῦ νοήματα ἀεὶ νοοῖν). Next there comes the list of typical positive epithets predicated of this supreme God (*Did.* 10.164.31 ff.). The new section opens with the key statement, adapted from Plato's *Seventh Letter* 341c5 and the *Phaedrus* 247c7–8, that God is "ineffable and graspable only by the intellect" (165.5 ἄρρητος δ' ἐστὶ καὶ νῶ μόνῳ ληπτός). The remaining part of this section elaborates on the meaning of "ineffable"—God refuses all predicates, including such universal categories as quantity or quality (*via oppositionis*: "neither bad nor good" . . . "not endowed with quality . . . nor unqualified"). The next two sections (165.16–34) clarify the second part of the key statement made above (165.5), namely that "God is graspable only by the intellect." Indeed, God is intelligible, and he can be grasped in three ways, all prescribed by Plato. These three ways are dimensional reduction (κατ' ἀφαίρεσιν), analogy (κατὰ ἀναλογίαν), and analysis according to "pre-eminence" (κατὰ τὴν ἐν τῷ τιμίῳ ὑπεροχὴν). Each

¹¹ For the bibliographical survey of the scholarly work on Alcinous (Albinus), see Mazzarelli (1980) 108–44, and, more recently, Dillon (1993) 212–16. Important comments on Alcinous's metaphysics are made by Krämer (1964) 101–14. The best edition is the new Budé, by Whittaker (1990). Whittaker was able to consult an unpublished edition prepared in the 1930s by R. E. Witt, the author of an important monograph on Albinus and the developments within Middle Platonism (Witt 1937). See also Dillon (1999) 69–79. The following are the scholarly works I refer to in my ensuing argument: Freudenthal (1879), Wolfson (1952) 115–30, Festugière (1954) 92–140, Invernizzi (1976), and Mansfeld (1988) 92–117.

method is illustrated with well known examples from the Platonic tradition: *aphaeresis* (reduction) with the abstraction from a solid body to a mathematical point, the procedure borrowed from the Old Academic *στοιχεῖον*-metaphysics; *analogia* with the sun-simile from Plato's *Republic* (6.508b–509b); and *hyperochê* with the ascent to the Form of Beauty in *Symposium* (210a6–d4). This last example, interestingly enough, Alcinous has already used in one of his previous chapters (5.157.11 ff.) to illustrate the first type of *analysis*, that is, “an ascent (*anodos*) from sense-objects to the primary intelligibles.” The chapter draws to a conclusion (10.165.34–166.14) with a set of arguments against corporealistic notions of God.

There is a problem, visible even in this sketchy summary of Alcinous's theology, which has long puzzled the learned. If the first God is “ineffable,” then why does Alcinous, right before engaging in a thorough demonstration of this claim, attach to him a set of positive attributes? The passage (10.164.31–165.4) seems worth quoting at length:

Indeed, the first God is eternal (αἰδιος), ineffable (ἄρρητος), self-perfect, that is, non-deficient (αὐτοτελὴς τουτέστιν ἀπροσδεής), ever-perfect, that is, always perfect (ἀειτελὴς τουτέστιν ἀεὶ τέλειος), and all-perfect, that is, perfect in all respects (παντελὴς τουτέστι πάντη τέλειος); divinity (θειότης), essentiality (οὐσιότης), truth (ἀλήθεια), commensurability (συμμετρία), and good (ἀγαθόν). I am not listing these terms by separating them from one another, but as though one single thing is conceived by all of them. He is the Good (ἀγαθόν) because he benefits all things according to their capacities, being the cause of all good (παντὸς ἀγαθοῦ αἴτιος ὢν). He is the Beautiful (καλόν) because he is perfect and commensurable by his own nature (αὐτὸς τῇ αὐτοῦ φύσει τέλειον ἐστὶ καὶ σύμμετρον). He is Truth (ἀλήθεια) because he exists as the source of all truth (πάσης ἀληθείας ἀρχὴ ὑπάρχει), as the sun is of all light. And he is Father (πατήρ) through being the cause of all things (τῷ αἴτιος εἶναι πάντων) and ordering the heavenly Intellect and the world-soul according to himself and his own thoughts.

The puzzle has been resolved in various ways. According to the most common opinion (Freudenthal 1879, Wolfson 1952, Festugière 1954, Invernizzi 1976), positive attributes do not describe God's essence but his causal priority—for example, God is good not essentially, but causally, insofar as bestowing good. The fact that Alcinous makes such a distinction only for three out of eleven positive epithets he attaches to the first principle (viz., Good, Truth, Father) has not troubled the advocates of this theory. They have argued that the

remaining epithets, too, demonstrate God's relation to his creation. But this does not always seem to be the case. Alcinous calls God "the Beautiful" not because he is bestowing beauty but "because he is perfect and commensurable by his own nature." And he does not say that the first principle is God insofar as creating gods, or Essence in the sense of bestowing essence, or Perfection on account of causing perfection in all of his creation. Instead, he applies to the first principle such terms as Divinity, Essentiality, and All-, Ever-, or Self-Perfection, which rather allude to God's absolute transcendence (above gods, essence, perfection, or any other substantial form and accidental predicates) than to his causal primacy.

A more ingenious solution has been proposed by Mansfeld (1988), who reads Alcinous's list of God's attributes, both positive (164.31–165.4) and negative (165.5–16) in connection with the immediately following section discussing the three ways of conceiving God (165.16–34). These ways, or modes (*viae*), Mansfeld argues, are introduced by Alcinous to justify the previous blend of positive and negative attributes, and are arranged in the order of importance. According to the first and most abstract mode (*via negationis*), all opposed pairs of qualities must be withheld from the first principle (e.g., "neither qualified nor unqualified"). According to the second (*via analogiae*) mode, all notions that express "other-directed causal" relations (Good, Truth, Father), can be attributed to God. Following the third mode (*via eminentiae*), "the positive among polar attributes" is predicated of God "in the most eminent way." The argument that Alcinous could use to defend his peculiar blend of attributes was that he was just employing "the alternative modes of cognition, compatible albeit of unequal value" (Mansfeld 1998, 110). In short, he simply refined Eudorus of Alexandria's (first century B.C.) presentation of the monistic and dualistic Pythagorean doctrines (One vs. Monad and Dyad) as alternative ways of "contemplating the same realities" (100).¹²

This is not the place to discuss the complicated doxographical genealogy of Alcinous's mixture, let alone Mansfeld's interpretation of Eudorus's fragment. What I would like to tackle briefly is the supposition upon which Mansfeld builds his analysis of Alcinous's

¹² cf. Eudorus frag. 3 Mazzarelli (= Simpl. *In Phys.* 181, 10–12 Diels) κατὰ τὸν ἀνωτάτῳ λόγον φατέον τοὺς Πυθαγορικοὺς τὸ ἐν ἀρχῇ τῶν πάντων λέγειν, κατὰ δὲ τὸν δεύτερον λόγον δύο ἀρχὰς τῶν ἀποτελουμένων εἶναι.

theology—namely, that Alcinous introduces the three ways of cognition (*aphairesis*, *analogia*, *hyperochê*) to justify his blending of positive and negative attributes of God in the previous passages.

When Alcinous denies all attributes to his “ineffable” first God (10.165.5–16), he simply applies, in Mansfeld’s view, the first and the highest, cognitive mode: *aphairesis*. But the geometrical example Alcinous chose to illustrate this mode—an abstraction from a solid body to a mathematical point—has hardly anything to do with the negative method (οὔτε . . . οὔτε . . .) exploited in the “ineffability” section. This negative method (*via oppositionis*) has not much to do with *aphaeresis* (reduction). It simply shows that the first principle is not susceptible to definition (by genus, species, and differentia), and cannot be attained by discursive reasoning—in short, that God is ineffable (ἄρρητος). Alcinous’s illustration of *aphairesis* (*via subtractionis*, *reductionis*, *abstractionis*) demonstrates, in contrast, that God is graspable by intellect (νοητός) through a kind of abstraction legitimately used in mathematics. This method leads up not to the denial of all predicates (ἀπόφασις) but to the subtraction of less dignified characteristics (ἀφαίρεσις, viz., from body to plane, from plane to line, and from line to point). As Alcinous states later in the chapter (165.34), we can prove by a gradual dimensional subtraction that God is partless (ἀμερής) in the sense of being the primary (πρότερον) part (μέρος) out of which (τὸ ἐξ οὗ) things having part (ἕλα) are composed:

God is partless (ἀμερής) because there is nothing prior to him. For the part, and that out of which (a thing is composed), exists prior to that of which it is a part. Indeed, plane is prior to body, and line is prior to plane. (Alcin. *Didask.* 10.165.34–37)

Alcinous’s description of the second mode (*analogia*) fits best in Mansfeld’s hypothesis. The method is illustrated by the famous sun-simile from Plato’s *Republic* (6.508b9–c2). Just as the sun is not itself sight, but provides vision to sight and visibility to objects, so the first Intellect (πρῶτος νοῦς) is not intellection (νόησις) itself, but bestows the intelligizing capacity (τὸ νοεῖν) on the soul and intelligibility (τὸ νοεῖσθαι) on its objects. This may indeed seem a justification of Alcinous’ earlier use of such positive appellatives as Good, Father, or Truth for the first God—for instance, that he is the Good (ἀγαθόν) in the sense of being the cause of all good. In other words, God may be intuitively grasped (νοητός) by all sorts of analogous translation. Yet all these analogies are not to be confused with God’s essence, which is ineffable (ἄρρητος).

The third mode (*hyperochê*), again according to Mansfeld, justifies Alcinoüs's use of the vocabulary of pre-eminence (Divinity, Essentiality, epithets ending in *-teles*). The method was already outlined in Chapter Five of the *Didaskalikos*, but under a different heading—that is, not as *hyperochê*, but as the first of the three kinds of *analysis*, “an ascent from sense-objects to the primary intelligibles” (5.157.11–12). Alcinoüs exploits the same illustration for *both* methods—that of the ascent to the Beautiful as described by Diotima in the *Symposium* (210a6–d4). As he writes in his explanation of *hyperochê* (10.165.27–34), upon contemplating beauty in bodies, then in soul, then in laws and customs, we must turn to

“the great sea of beauty” (Plato *Symp.* 210d4), after which one gains an intuition of the Good itself and the final “object of love” (204c4) and “striving” (Plato *Phil.* 20d8; cf. Arist. *Metaph.* 12.7.1072a26; *Phys.* 1.9.192a17 ff.), like a light appearing and, as it were, shining out to the soul (Plato *Ep. vii* 341c–d) which ascends in this way.

Now if Alcinoüs had indeed used such categorical analysis—the abstraction from beautiful sensible particulars to the intelligible form of beauty—as the model for the positive predication, he would probably have called his first principle “the Beautiful Itself,” as he did in his previous reference to Diotima’s discourse on Beauty (5.157.21 τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο καλόν), or the Good Itself, the Substance Itself, the God Himself. Instead, he attributes to the first principle such abstract epithets as Divinity (θειότης) and Essentiality (οὐσιότης), implying, as it were, that the supreme principle transcends even the level of universal forms (*beyond* God, *beyond* Being) and so cannot be reached by the sort of comparison characteristic of the third mode (10.165.34–35: “eminence in honor,” διὰ τὴν ἐν τιμίῳ ὑπεροχῆν). Alcinoüs’s abstract nouns seem therefore neither recommended nor “justified” by the third method of cognition. They do not express the positive idea “in the most eminent way” (Mansfeld 1988, 110). Rather, they are positive expressions of a negative idea¹³—*not* Being or Essence, and not

¹³ For superiority beyond comparison as a negative idea, it is worth quoting Theophrastus’s passage from the *Metaphysics* (1.5.5a5–7) μέχρι μὲν δὴ τούτων οἶον ἄρτιος ὁ λόγος, ἀρχὴν τε ποιῶν μίαν πάντων καὶ τὴν ἐνέργειαν καὶ τὴν οὐσίαν ἀποδιδούς, ἔτι δὲ μὴ διαιρετὸν μηδὲ ποσόν τι λέγων ἀλλ’ ἀπλῶς ἐξαιρίων εἰς κρείττω τινὰ μερίδα καὶ θειοτέραν. οὕτω γὰρ μᾶλλον ἀποδοτέον ἢ τὸ διαιρετὸν καὶ μεριστὸν ἀφαιρετέον· ἅμα γὰρ ἐν ὑψηλοτέρῳ τε καὶ ἀληθινοτέρῳ λόγῳ τοῖς λέγουσιν ἢ ἀπόφασιν.

comparable with Being and Essence, but something *beyond* Being and Essence, i.e., Essentiality)—just as, in Alcinous’s own glossing, the term “self-perfect” (αὐτοτελής) is nothing but a positive correlate of “non-deficient” (ἀπροσδεής).¹⁴

In view of all this, I take the central part of Alcinous’s account of the first God (*Did.* 10.164.31–165.34) as an elaboration of his key assertion that “God is ineffable and graspable only by intellect” (165.5 ἄρρητος δ’ ἐστὶ καὶ νῶ μόνῳ ληπτός). The first member of the statement is explained in the surrounding paragraphs (164.31–165.15): God transcends discursive reasoning and refuses univocal definitions (*omnis determinatio negatio*). ‘Positive epithets’, even when applied to God, say nothing about his essence, but simply emphasize God’s absolute transcendence and ontological priority. For example, God is not essentially good but only bestows good, is not Being but beyond Being (οὐσιότης), and is Self-Perfect in the sense of being non-deficient, etc.¹⁵ The methods by which Alcinous proves God’s ineffability include a simple negation (by means of ἄλφα ἀποφατικόν), a simultaneous negation of contradictory terms (*via oppositionis*), the argument from other-directed causality (not X, but causing x), and the argument from superiority beyond comparison (not x, and not even X, but *X-ness*).

¹⁴ That attributes ending in *-telês* may denote the lack of any need, self-sufficiency, or non-deficiency, can be confirmed by a series of passages ranging from Plato (*Tim.* 33d2–3, 34b7–8) and Plutarch (*San. tuenda* 122E) to Apuleius (*De Plat.* 1.5.190) and Calcidius (*In Tim.* 204.8–9 *cum ipse sit plenae perfectionis et nullius societatis indiguus*), all quoted in Dillon (1993) 104. To this list we may further add the passage from the Savior’s praise of the first God: “He needs nothing; for he cannot be perfected as if he were defective so as to be perfected. Rather, he is always utterly perfect” (*Ap. John* BG 23:11–14). For the meaning of οὐσιότης, a term rarely found in the pre-Neoplatonist texts, I quote the following important passage from a Hermetic tractate (12.22): εἶτε δὲ ὕλην εἶτε σῶμα εἶτε οὐσίαν φῆς, ἴσθι καὶ ταύτας αὐτάς ἐνεργείας τοῦ θεοῦ, καὶ ὕλης ἐνεργείαν τὴν ἰλότητα, καὶ τῶν σωματῶν <τὴν> σωματότητα, καὶ τῆς οὐσίας τὴν οὐσιότητα· καὶ τοῦτο ἐστὶν ὁ θεός, τὸ πᾶν). The sense of οὐσιότης is that of God’s activity *prior* to any *positively defined and predicable* essence (οὐσία). The word was later discussed by Marius Victorinus, *Adv. Ar.* 3.7.9–17 Hadot: *Id est existentia vel subsistentia vel, si alitius, metu quodam, propter nota nomina* (i.e., logical categories) *conscendas dicasque vel existentialitatem vel substantialitatem vel essentialitatem id est ὑπαρκτότητα, οὐσιότητα, ὄντοτητα. Omnibus his, hoc esse quod dico, manens in se, suo a se motu, virificans potentia sua qua cuncta virificantur et potentificantur, plena, absoluta, super omnes perfectiones, omnimodis est divina perfectio. Hic est deus, supra νοῦν, supra veritatem, omnipotens potentia et idcirco non forma.*

¹⁵ For the non-essential way of applying epithets to the first principle, see Dillon (1999) 72–75.

The last two sections of the central part of Alcinous's argumentation (165.16–34) demonstrate the second part of his key statement in 165.5—namely that God, albeit ineffable and not susceptible to any definition, is still graspable by intellection (νόησις). As recently suggested, Alcinous “seems here to be making creative use of Aristotelian principles . . . culminating in the conclusion of [*Posterior Analytics*] 2.19, that there can be no ‘scientific knowledge’ (*epistēmē*) of first principles, only intuitive knowledge (*noûs*), and applying them to God” (Dillon 1993, 107). Intuition of God, Alcinous says, is attainable by various types of reductive translation—dimensional (*aphairesis*), analogical (*analogia*), or categorical (*hyperochē*, ἐπὶ τὰ πρῶτα νοητὰ ἄνοδος). None of them leads to firm knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). All simply entail an intuitive insight indicating only *that* God is, but not *what* he is.

In other words, Alcinous appears to have resorted to two separate kinds of methodological procedure, one for each part of his supposition that God is (i) “ineffable” and (ii) “graspable only by the intellect” (165.5):

	“Ineffable” (ἄρητος)	“Graspable only by Intellect” (νοητός)
<i>General Method</i>	Negation	Reduction
<i>Specific Methods</i>	<i>Via Oppositionis</i>	
	<i>Via Negationis</i>	<i>Apharesis</i> (Dimensional Reduction)
	Other-Related Causality	<i>Analogia</i> (Analogical Translation)
	Incompatibility of Power	<i>Hyperochē</i> (Categorical Analysis)

For each part of his two-member supposition, Alcinous seems to have relied on different sources. The modes of conceiving God are the legacy of Plato (*analogia*, *hyperochē*) and the Old Academy (Speusippus's στοιχείον—metaphysics). By accepting God's intelligibility, Alcinous also asserts the consequent that God, in so far as intelligible, must be the same as the intellect (*Phaedr.* 247c; *Tim.* 28a). In this way, he brings Aristotle's divine νοῦς, the unmoved mover from the *Metaphysics* Lambda, into his account of the first principle. In his negative description of God, Alcinous makes use of Plato's language (*Tim.* 28c, *Phil.* 65a) as well as of his negative method (*Parm.* 137c–142a). When he emphasizes God's absolute transcendence, he seems to have drawn on some Neopythagorean sources. Thus, the triad of epithets ending in *-telês* has already been used to denote the first principle (the Monad) by ‘Neopythagorean’ authors as well as by Philo of

Alexandria.¹⁶ Abstract terms ending in *-otês* have a ‘Neopythagorean’ flavor, too, and appear in those authors who were in contact with the Pythagorean ‘current’ of Alexandrian Platonism (first century B.C.–first century A.D.).¹⁷ The idea that God bestows upon others the characteristics that he himself cannot possess goes all the way back to Speusippus (see below, pp. 107–11). Most of these sources emphasize God’s absolute transcendence—his superiority to the intellect and his unknowability. Alcinous’s adoption of this idea stands in contradiction to the other part of his supposition, namely that God is intelligible. Clearly, he was not always successful in harmonizing these ultimately incompatible alternatives.¹⁸

Mansfeld, of course, did not fail to notice that the Savior’s discourse of praise contains a “blend of positive and negative theology” (Mansfeld 1988, 116) that is similar to Alcinous’s account. Indeed, all but two of Alcinous’s epithets (“commensurability” and “beauty”) occur in the Savior’s speech. The same, too, are the techniques of proving God’s ineffability: *via negationis* (BG 23:15 ff.: “unlimited . . . indiscernible . . . immeasurable,” etc.), *via oppositionis* (24:9 ff.: “neither perfection nor blessedness, . . . neither unlimited nor limited,” etc.), and withholding from God the characteristics bestowed by him upon others (25:18–21: “the always good One, the One that bestows good, and does good—not as though possessing, but rather as bestowing”). Yet conspicuously missing from the Savior’s litany are the three modes of conceiving God and their accompanying examples. Mansfeld finds nothing unusual in this absence. In his opinion, the *Apocryphon*

¹⁶ Philo seems to have been the first author to describe God as “ineffable”; cf. Wolfson 1952, 115–130. Philo was also Alcinous’s predecessor in simultaneously denying the pair “qualified–unqualified” (*LA* 3.206).

¹⁷ The term θε(ι)ότης, for example, occurs in the *Wisdom of Solomon* 18:9, in Paul (Rom 1:20), in Plutarch (*Quaest. conv.* 6,665A), whose teacher was the ‘Neopythagorean’ philosopher Ammonius of Alexandria, and in the Hermetic Corpus (9.1; 11.11; 12.1; 13.1, 7; frag. 24.3). As for οὐσιότης, which was widely used among Neoplatonists, it occurs already in the Hermetic Corpus (12.1, 22; frag. 16.1; frag. 21.1) and in Jamblichus’s account of the anonymous “Egyptians” whose doctrines bear a striking resemblance to the cosmology of the Pythagorean Moderatus of Gades (first century A.D.).

¹⁸ Early in chap. 10, for example, Alcinous says that God is the first intellect “everlastingly engaged in conceiving itself and its own thoughts” (*Did.* 10.164.29–31). Later in the text (165.24–26), he asserts that God, still called the first intellect, “is not the intellection itself,” but that it only “provides intellection to the soul.”

could have simply lifted the formula for blending positive and negative attributes “from the standard Middle Platonist literature” (Mansfeld 1998, 117), “taking for granted” the modes of cognition which Alcinous “was more conscientious in informing us about” (111). But the concluding sections of the Savior’s praise (vi–vii: *Peroratio* or *Conclusio*) clearly indicate that the omission was intentional. God, as the Savior discloses to John, is “incomprehensible” (BG 26:2), and “no one of us has been acquainted with that which belongs to the immeasurable one” (26:11–12). Discursive reasoning (λόγος) is inadequate to designate the transcendent principle which rejects all univocal predicates—hence the need for negative theology. Intellection (νόησις), likewise, is also incapable of attaining the principle that is superior to intellect, even when conducting a comparison starting from the principiates (*analogia*, *aphairesis*, *hyperochê*)—hence the need for an otherworldly revelation as a solution for the inadequacies inherent in all three modes of intellection.

The second part of Mansfeld’s formula—withholding at first all attributes from God, then applying to him, as a second-best option, the positive among polar attributes in the open-ended Pythagorean *systoicheia*—appears unacceptable to the Savior. Such positive appellations would effectively blur the distinction between the first God and Barbelo; between the first One that transcends opposites and the second One that encompasses them all; between the creative potential of the Absolute and its self-actualization; between God’s initial indetermination (‘something’) and the first realization of his predicative content (*Ennoia*, ‘conception’). As we shall see in the following section, the Savior makes use of positive language; but this is not the language of univocal predications characteristic of the secondary level of reality, where God appears as the sum total (πλήρωμα) of his inner dispositions.

Kataphasis

Formation of the Spiritual Realm

Esprit. Attente pure, Éternel suspens, menace de tout ce que je désire. Épée qui peut jaillir d’un nuage, combien je ressens l’*imminence!* Une idée inconnue est encore dans le pli et le souci de mon front. Je suis encore distinct de toute pensée; également éloigné de tous les mots, de toutes les formes qui sont en moi. Mon oeil fixé reflète un objet sans vie; mon oreille n’entend point ce qu’elle entend. O ma présence

sans visage, quel regard que ton regard sans choses et sans personne, quelle puissance que cette puissance indéfinissable comme la puissance qui est dans l'air avant l'orage! Je ne sais ce qui se prépare. Je suis amour et soif, et point de nom. Car il n'y a point d'homme dans l'homme, et point de *moi* dans le *moi*. Mais il y aura un acte sans être, un effet sans cause, un accident qui est ma substance. L'événement qui n'a de figure ni de durée, attaque toute figure et toute durée. Il fait visible les invisibles et rend invisibles les visibles. Il consume ce qui l'attire, il illumine ce qu'il brise . . . Me voici, je suis prêt. Frappe. Me voici, l'œil secret fixé sur le point aveugle de mon attente . . . C'est là qu'un événement essentiel quelquefois éclate et me crée. (Paul Valéry, *Tel Quel* II, 103)

The first God is not an *ousia* to accept definitions; nor is it an intellect to be grasped by intellectual abstraction. To prove this point, the Savior introduced three different methods in the argumentative section of his praise. The purpose of *via negationis* (iii) was to show the inferiority of the human condition (“nothing is prior to it,” “nothing has seen it,” “nothing existed prior to it so as to give a name to it”). *Via oppositionis* (iv) provided the proper method of negation. This method does not simply refuse single determinations (God is *not x*)—indeed, Plato had already warned (*Soph.* 251a–259) that simple negative statements might be ambiguous (God is *different from x*, but also God is *deprived of x*)—but denies the opposite pairs of qualities and, in this way, transcends the genus which these contrary terms jointly exhaust (God is *neither x nor non-x*, but something *superior to it*). The third method (v), finally, argued for the causal priority of God. The first God is *not* good, for that would make him partake in, and therefore be subordinate to, Goodness. Rather, the unknown God is good only insofar as bestowing it on his creation.¹⁹

Yet ‘positive’ terms are scattered throughout the Savior’s discourse of praise. They occur already in the *propositio*, and are regularly

¹⁹ For the distinction between negation (*ἀπουσία*) and privation (*ἀφαίρεσις*), see the representative collection of passages from Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, and Choeroboscus in van Raalte (1993) 155–68. The best discussion of “negative theology” among the ‘Gnostics’ is Orbe (1958) 1:3–38. For the *via oppositionis*, see *ibid.*, 14: “Para abordar el Absoluto, unidad indiferenciada, se han de superar las antinomias, distinciones y límites. La experiencia justifica tal método. Subiendo de las especies al género y de los generos al supremo predicamento, las diferencias quedan eliminadas en la unidad del *genero supremo indeferenciado* ‘a fortiori’ en el Uno.” As already mentioned, Philo of Alexandria was among the first to describe God as

repeated in all of the refrain-like sections, marking a strong contrast with argumentative sections and their negative mode. These terms do not yield a definition of God as an individual essence (*ousia*). Rather, they describe the first principle as an indeterminate substance (Spirit or Light), as the only source of creation (Oneness, Father), an unreflected preconsciousness, a pure gaze, a free expansion of thinking—in short, an absolute creative potential, the abyss of pure freedom, the Schellingian *Sehnsucht*.

The Monad . . . Monarchy . . . the Father of the Entirety, the Holy Spirit . . .
 Dwelling in the pure light . . . the Spirit . . . always utterly perfect . . .
 This is the immeasurable light, the holy and undefiled purity . . .
 He *searches for his own self* in the fullness of the light. . . .
 He *shall conceive the unmixed light*, the immeasurable greatness. . . . (BG
 22:17–25:13)

John has grown familiar with most of these terms while listening to his earthly teacher. Jesus spoke of his remote Father as a spring of “living water” (John 4:10), “spirit” (4:24), “life” (5:26; 6:57), and “light” (1 John 1:5). But other positive terms like Oneness, Monarchy, and a self-relational language (e.g., “searching for,” “conceiving,” or “looking at,” one’s own self) did not belong to Jesus’ repertoire. The Savior must have borrowed them from elsewhere—from the sources which also proposed the idea of God’s absolute transcendence, yet in a more systematic, more philosophical fashion. The Oneness (ΜΗΤ-ΟΥΔ), for example, is probably the Coptic translation of the

ἄρρητος, ἀκατανόμαστος, ἀκατάληπτος, ἀπερίγραφος, ἀπερινόητος. He was also familiar with the *via oppositionis*, whose method owes a great deal to Plato’s discussion of ‘a one beyond being’ in the first hypothesis of the second part of the *Parmenides* (137c–142a); see, e.g., *LA* 3.206 τίς ἂν ἰσχύσαι ἢ ὅτι ἀσώματον ἢ ὅτι σῶμα ἢ ὅτι ποιὸν ἢ ὅτι ἄποιον τὸ αἴτιον εἰπεῖν ἢ συνόλως περὶ οὐσίας ἢ ποιότητος ἢ σχέσεως ἢ κινήσεως αὐτοῦ βεβαίως ἀποφίνασθαι; cf. Dillon (1975) 5–6, and (1993) 108. In spite of its late date, Proclus’s “order of negations” in *Theol. plat.* 2.5, pp. 38, 18 ff. W-S, seems worthy of comparison with the ‘modes’ (iii–v) employed by the Savior: αἱ μὲν γὰρ ἀποφάσεις τριπλῆν, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκοῦσι, ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν ἰδιότητα προτείνουσι· καὶ ποτὲ μὲν ἀρχοιδέστεραι τῶν καταφάσεων οὔσαι, γεννητικαὶ καὶ τελειωτικαὶ τῆς ἀπογεννήσεως αὐτῶν ὑφραστήκασιν· ποτὲ δὲ τὴν σύστοιχον ταῖς καταφάσεσιν ἐκκληρώσαντο τάξιν καὶ οὐδὲν μᾶλλον ἢ κατάφασιν τῆς ἀποφάσεως σεμνοτέρα· ποτὲ δὲ αὐτὰ καταδεεστέρην ἔλαχον φύσιν τῶν καταφάσεων καὶ οὐδὲν ἄλλ’ ἢ στερήσεις εἰσὶν ἐκείνων.

Greek term *μονάς*, the name some Pythagoreans used to denote their transcendent first principle.²⁰ As for self-relational language, however, it is much easier to find later beneficiaries of it (e.g., Plotinus, *Enn.* VI 8) than to pinpoint its sources.

The most likely source for the Savior's self-relational vocabulary seems to be Aristotle—more specifically, his definition of God, or the unmoved mover, as “the intellect thinking of itself by participation in that which is being thought” (Arist. *Metaph.* 12.7.1072b19–20: αὐτὸν δὲ νοεῖ ὁ νοῦς κατὰ μετάληψιν τοῦ νοητοῦ; 1074b33–5: αὐτὸν ἄρα νοεῖ, εἴπερ ἐστὶ τὸ κράτιστον, καὶ ἔστιν ἡ νόησις νοήσεως νόησις). The same idea, and the same kind of language, was also in vogue among the ‘scholastic’ Platonists of the Imperial period. Alcinous, for example, equates the prime mover with the active intellect from Aristotle's *On the Soul*, and defines the transcendent God as “everlastingly engaged in thinking of itself and its own thoughts,” the latter being nothing but the Platonic ideas (*Did.* 10.164.29–31 ἐαυτὸν ἄν οὖν καὶ τὰ ἐαυτοῦ νοήματα ἀεὶ νοοίη, καὶ αὐτὴ ἡ ἐνέργεια αὐτοῦ ἰδέα ὑπάρχει). He even evokes the Aristotelian analogy of the active intellect to light—“and there is an intellect which of this kind by becoming all things, and there is another which is so by producing all things, as a sort of disposition (ἔξις) such as light does; for in a way light too makes colors in potentiality into actual colors” (*De an.* 3.5.430a14–17)—in order to explain how the first God operates as the cause of intellection in the soul.

The first intellect is not the power of intellection (νόησις) itself, but provides intellection (τὸ νοεῖν) to the soul and intelligibility (τὸ νοεῖσθαι) to intelligible objects (τοῖς νοητοῖς), illuminating the truth contained in them. (*Did.* 10.165.24–26)

This notion of the self-thinking active principle that is, in addition, made analogous to light, seems quite close to the Savior's oracles in the *Apocryphon of John*, both in his discourse of praise and in the immediately ensuing section, where he states that divinity conceives (νοεῖν) itself in its own light. Yet nowhere in the hymnal passage has a reference been made to God's thinking his own thoughts. Furthermore, the Savior does not say that his first God is the same as

²⁰ See, e.g., Alexander Polyhistor in D.L. 7.25, ‘Pythagoras’ in ps.-Justin *Coh.* 19, and οἱ ἀπὸ Πυθαγόρου in *Anon. Phot.* Thesleff 237, 18 ff.

intellect (νοῦς). Intellect will be disclosed, or brought into existence, much later, as a “coactor” to the Self-Originate (αὐτογενής, αὐτογένητος), the only begotten offspring of the Father of the Entirety and His first Conception, Ennoia–Barbelo (BG 31:5–6; II 6:33–34).

There is something paradoxical in the idea that the first principle is capable of thinking (νοεῖν) and forming a vague conception (ἔννοια) of its own self, and yet is not itself an intellect (νοῦς). Irenaeus, was outraged by a similar argument proposed by the Valentinians (*Adv. haer.* 2.13.1):

Even the first series of their emanations is to be rejected; for they claim that from the Deep (*Bythos*) and its Conception (*Ennoia*) both Intellect (*Nus*) and Truth were emitted, which is clearly a contradiction. Indeed, the intellect (*nus*) is that which is primal and supreme and, as it were, the principle and source of all mental activity, while conception (*ennoia*) proceeds from it, being any kind of (intellectual) motion concerning whatsoever (intelligible) object.²¹

The same sequence of mental process is set out in the *Apocryphon of John*. The first principle, dwelling in its transcendent solitude, “searches (αἰτεῖν) for its own self” (BG 25:10) or “gazes (ἑωρῆ) at itself in his light” (II 3:36). Although not the same as intellect, it “conceives (νοεῖν) itself, or looks (δωρῆ) at itself (II 4:5), in its own surrounding light” (BG 26:15–16)—the pure gaze finding enjoyment in contemplating its undefined being, a self-contented Will that wills *nothing*. This primordial state of pure potentiality and absolute solitude can best be understood if contrasted with the ensuing section of the *Apocryphon*, where God begins to exercise the positive will, the Will which wants *something*, and initiates the procession of aeons.

II 3:36–5:2 = IV 5:23–7:8

BG 25:9–27:15 and III 6:2–7:19

For it gazes (ἑωρῆ ἡ̅ϗ̅) at its [own self]
[in its] light.

[For] the [...] is great (μέγεθος).
[- - -] is immeasurable [purity].

...

It searches (αἰτεῖν) for its own self
in the fullness of the light.

It shall conceive (νοεῖν)
the unmixed light (ἀκέραιον),
the immeasurable greatness.

...

²¹ For Irenaeus’s layout of the proper sequence of mental process cf. 2.13.1–2; see an excellent discussion in Orbe (1958) 1:363–85 (“Las actividades mentales en la procesión del Logos”).

For it looks at (ζωωπτ ε-) it[self
[in its] light [which] surrounds [it],
[that is, the fountain of] the living water.

And it [provides all] the [aeons.]

[And] in every way it gazes (ειωρη ησα-)
[at its image],
[by seeing (ηδγ)] it in [the fountain (πηγή)
of the spirit (πνεύμα)],
exercising will (ογωωε) in its watery [light]
[which is in the] fountain (πηγή)
of the [pure luminous] water
[that] surrounds it.
And [. . .] actual
and she was disclosed,
[namely she who had appeared] before him,
[in the radiance of] his light.
This is [the first . . . that] came to be before all,
[which was shown forth from]his thinking
(ηεεγε),
that is [. . .]
her light [. . .] light, the perfect power,
which is the image (εικών) of the invisible virginal
(παρθενικόν) spirit (πνεύμα) who is perfect;
[. . .] power, the glory of Barbelo,
the perfect glory among the aeons (αιών),
the glory of the manifestation.

It conceives (νοεῖν) its own self
in its own (ἴδιον) light which surrounds it,
that is, the fountain (πηγή) of the living water,
the light full of purity.
The fountain (πηγή) of the spirit (πνεύμα) streamed
from the living water of the light.
And it was supplying (χορηγεῖν)
all aeons (αἰών) and worlds (κόσμος).
In every way it conceive[d] (νοεῖν)
its own image (εικών),
by seeing (ηδγ) it

in the pure (καθαρόν) luminous water
that surrounds it.
And its conception (ἔννοια) became actual
and she was shown forth.
She stood firm in his presence,
in the brilliance (λαμπηδόν) of the light,
that is, the power that precedes the entirety,
(and) which was shown forth;
the perfect fore-thought (πρόνοια) of the entirety;

the light, the likeness (εἰηε) of the light,
the image of the invisible one;

that is, the perfect (τελεία) power, Barbelo,
the perfect aeon (αἰών) of the glory.

The Savior distinguishes between the two separate stages in the life of the first God. First, the Absolute is presented as a pure gaze “conceiving,” or “looking at,” its own self. Then, it recognizes, or “sees,” itself as an object (image, εικών) and, as a result, forms the first notion (πρόνοια) or conception (ἔννοια) of the ‘self’.²² The medium

²² The Savior seems to follow here the Aristotelian distinction between ὄψις, the faculty of sight, and ὄρασις, the exercise of this faculty (*De an.* 3.2.426a13–14 ὄρασις γὰρ λέγεται ἡ τῆς ὄψεως ἐνέργεια; 428a6–7 αἴσθησις μὲν γὰρ ἦτοι δύναμις καὶ ἐνέργεια, οἷον ὄψις καὶ ὄρασις). The same distinction plays a prominent role in Plotinus’s treatment of Intellect. Just as the faculty of vision becomes actualized (ὄψις ἢ κατ’ ἐνέργειαν V 1.5.18) as a “vision which sees” (ὄρασις ὀρώσα *ibid.*) only when confronted and stimulated by its object, so is Intellect, before being shaped by the forms and becoming οὐσία, an undefined potentiality, which Plotinus describes as ἀόριστος ὄψις (V 4.2.6) and as ἔφρασις μόνον καὶ ἀτύπωτος ὄψις. Cf. Atkinson (1983) 118–22.

in which this process takes place is God's unlimited substance—the pure light with mirror-like characteristics. All this sounds strikingly similar to the Lacanian *stade du miroir* in the gradual process of ego-formation. An even more 'Lacanian' version can be read in the *Sophia Jesu Christi*:

The Lord of All, it is not 'Father' that it is called, but rather Fore-Father (προπάτωρ). For it is the Father of the beginning (ἀρχή) for those that will be shown; yet, in fact, it is the Fore-Father without beginning (ἄναρχος). Seeing (ἰδῶν) its own self within itself as in a mirror (ἐἰς ἑαυτόν; *P.Oxy.* 1081.43 εἰσόπτρῳ), it is shown forth resembling itself. And its image revealed itself as the Fore-Father, as a divine Father, and as its face-to-face (ἀντωπός), for it stands before the face of the Preexistent Unbegotten Father. It is of equal time (ἰσόχρονος) with the Light that is before it, but it is not equal to it in power. (*Soph. Jes. Chr.* BG 90:15–91:13; cf. NHC III 98:22–99:13; *P.Oxy.* 1081r, 36–50 Barry)

The text delivers, more clearly than the *Apocryphon of John*, Plato's axiom of the inferiority of the image in relation to its model. The image of the first God is of equal time (ἰσόχρονος) with its model because, in the spiritual realm, there is no "before" and no "after" but only a *synchronic* unfolding of contingents (*principiata*) from their principle (*principium*). But this image is not of equal power (ἰσοδύναμος) because it is "a transient apparition" of its paradigmatic source (*Tim.* 52c3 ἐτέρου δέ τινος ἀεὶ φέρεται φάντασμα), and because, in contrast to its model, its coming into being requires "something else in which" (52c4 ἐν ἐτέρῳ προσήκει τινὶ γενέσθαι) it may appear. But, transient as it is, the image may disappear as easily as it came to be—it "clings somehow to existence (οὐσίας ἀμοσγέπως ἀντεχομένην) on pain of being nothing all" (52c4–5). The moment God's image becomes actual denotes the passage from "some sort of existence" (*Soph.* 240b ὄν πως) to the subsistence (ὑπόστασις) of a "perfect aeon."

Plato's theory of the image accounts for the ontological inferiority of God's first emanation. What it does not explain, however, is the process by which God formed this image-like notion of himself. Priority assigned to perception, to "seeing one's one image," as an essential prerequisite for concept-formation, points to a Stoic influence.²³

²³ Man cannot think or contemplate without images which, in their turn, presuppose sense-perception. The rule figures prominently in the second and third book

According to the epistemological model of the ‘orthodox’ Stoics, human conceptions (ἔννοιαι) are founded on impressions (φαντασῖαι, τυπώσεις) coming from external objects: “When a man is born,” one doxographical source informs us (Aet. *Plac.* 4.11.1–4), “he has the commanding part of the soul (τὸ ἡγεμονικὸν μέρος τῆς ψυχῆς) like a chart well-wrought for writing upon.” First impressions to be inscribed on this “chart” are sensory ones (“through the senses”). The accumulation of impressions that are of the same kind (ὁμοειδεῖς) leads eventually, i.e., by the end of our first seven years, to the formation of vague preconceptions (προλήψεις, or the “natural” conceptions, the subgroup of ἔννοιαι). The primal notion of god, for example, which is common to all men, is “received in addition (i.e., by accumulation) from the beauty of perceived phenomena” (1.6.2 ἔσχον δὲ ἔννοιαν τούτου πρῶτον μὲν ἀπὸ τοῦ κάλλους τῶν ἐμφαινομένων προσλαμβάνοντες). In contrast to experience (ἐμπειρία), which is the storage-place of multiple sensory data, *ennoia* is their rational interpretation, their first generalization. Since it cannot be formed without impressions, the Stoics referred to it as “a kind of impression” (Plut. *De comm. not.* 45, 1084F–1085A φαντασία γάρ τις ἢ ἔννοιά ἐστι, φαντασία δὲ τύπωσις ἐν ψυχῇ). But since it also presupposes generalization (conceptualization) out of the data accumulated in experience, the Stoics defined it, too, as “a kind of stored thinking” (1085A τὰς ἐννοίας <ἐν>αποκειμένας τινὰς ὀριζόμενοι νοήσεις).

Once formed, these “natural” conceptions—natural inasmuch as they arise through our experience of the outside world—are vague, “imperfect,” and so require a further articulation. As Epictetus puts it (*Diss.* 2.17.10–11),

Who among us does not speak of good and evil, of advantageous and disadvantageous? Indeed, who among us does not have a preconception (πρόληψιν) of each of them? But do we have it differentiated and perfect (ἀρ’ οὖν διηρθρωμένην καὶ τελείαν)? This you must show. How? Apply it in an appropriate fashion to particular essences (ἐφάρμοσον αὐτὴν καλῶς ταῖς ἐπὶ μέρους οὐσίαις).

of Aristotle’s *De Anima*, on which see, e.g., D. Frede (1992). This rule does not apply to a divine intellect, as clearly postulated by Alcinous (10.164.14–18): “Even when they set out to conceive of the intelligible, human beings still retain sense-perceptions in their imagination, to the extent of conceiving along with it often a notion of size, shape, or color; for that reason, they cannot conceive of the intelligible in a pure fashion, but the gods are free from sense-perception, and therefore apprehend them in a pure and uncontaminated mode.”

Differentiation or articulation (διάρθρωσις) to which Epictetus refers is just another name for definition (ὄρος), or, as Chrysippus had it, “a presentation of a peculiar characteristic” (D.L. 7.60 ἰδίου ἀπόδοσις)—the process whereby a generic conception becomes the logical subject, *definiendum*, in a propositional judgment. In other words, our notion (*ennoia*) of good, evil, advantageous, god, man, etc., becomes, in the act of definition (*horos ennoêmatikos*), a universal concept (*ennoêma*)—the universal man, god, good, etc.—susceptible to predication.²⁴ This notion, still according to Epictetus (*Diss.* 2.17.7), must be made “perfect” (τελείαν) through differentiation and subsequent application.

But it is not possible to apply natural conceptions (ἐφαρμόζειν τὰς προλήψεις) to corresponding essences without differentiating them and considering in particular what kind of an essence ought to be subjected to each of them.

The same operation is also referred to by Epictetus as the “filling out” of conceptions with other, non-essential characteristics—that is, with their accidental differentiations (‘dispositions’, διαθέσεις) resulting from particular applications and specific circumstances. This gradual specification of primal vague conceptions leads eventually to the constitution of scientific knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). The primal notion of good and evil turns thus into a complex ethical system of virtues and passions; the notion of god into theology; and the conception of what is healthy and harmful into medicine. Science (*epistêmê*), in short, is an *ennoia* turned into a system of individual qualifications or “dispositions.”²⁵

The stages of this cognitive process are laid out in Lucullus’s exposition of the epistemological theory of Antiochus of Ascalon (Cicero *Lucullus* 30 Schäublin):

For the intellect itself (*mens*), which is the source of the senses, and even itself a sense, has a natural power that it directs (*intendit*) to the things by which it is moved. And so, some visual impressions (*visa*) it seizes on so as to use them at once, others as it were it stores (*recon-*

²⁴ For the distinction *ennoia/ennoêma*, see, e.g., Elorduy (1944) and (1972), and Sedley (1985) 87–92.

²⁵ Cf. e.g., Sext. Emp. *Math.* 7.38 ἐπιστήμη καθεστηκυῖα συστηματικὴ τε καὶ πλειόνων ἄθροισμα. The problem of formation, definition, and articulation of natural conceptions into systematic knowledge is discussed by Goldschmidt (1969) 159–69 and Lévy (1992) 301–31 (“De la prénotion à la sagesse”).

dit; cf. above, ἐναποκειῖσθαι), these being the source of memory. The rest, again, it constructs by means of resemblances, and from these are formed the conceptions of things which the Greeks now call *ennoiai* and now *prolēpseis*. With the addition of reason (*ratio*) and logical proof and an innumerable multitude of things, there comes cognition (*perceptio*, κατάληψις) of all these things, and this same reason, having been perfected (*perfecta*; cf. above, τέλειος) by these stages (*his gradibus*), finally arrives at wisdom (*sapientia*).

Although a Platonist, Antiochus seems to agree with the Stoics that mental constructs stem from the elaboration of previously ‘impinged’ sense-data. Originally, the intellect is a divine substance, *pneuma*, in its highest degree of tension, the substrate capable of receiving external impressions. In Philo’s words (*Deus* 42), it is “a vast and all-receiving storehouse (μέγιστον . . . ταμείον καὶ πανδεχές) in which all that comes through sight or hearing and other sense-organs is placed and treasured,” and which, “like wax, receives the impress (κηρῶ δὲ εὐοικίς ὁ νοῦς τὸ ἐκμαγαίον δεξάμενος) and retains it with acuity” (43). Sense-impressions activate intelligizing capacity (νόησις) by means of which they get transformed into generic conceptions (προλήψεις or φυσικαὶ ἔννοιαι). This first conceptualization yields a grasp of a thing but not its full predicative content, its definition (ὄρος, διάρθρωσις). Definition, in its turn, requires the formal subject, and it is the task of abstract thinking (διάνοια) to stabilize a generic conception (*ennoia*) into a mental construct, a “figment of thought” called *ennoēma* (D.L. 7.60 ἐννόημα δὲ ἐστὶ φάντασμα διανοίας). In order to be further articulated, this mental construct, or concept, activates the reasoning faculty (λόγος), whose function is to classify the concept (*ennoēma*) by *genus* and *differentia* (ιδίως ποιόν) and to divide it into a set of individual, accidental characteristics. This set of obtained definitions constitutes scientific knowledge (*epistēmê*), the validity of which must be checked by application (ἐφαρμόζειν) to everyday situations and particular phenomena. At this point, the reasoning faculty is supposed to have reached the state of perfection (*perfectus*, τέλειος). That is, it has exhausted all ways of analyzing its *definiendum*, and has come in possession of stable and systematic knowledge thereof. As Antiochus says, it has “arrived at wisdom” (*sapientia*, σοφία).

The set of various dispositions gradually acquired by the intellect (a *pneuma* disposed in a certain way), as well as of their corresponding effects, can be presented as follows:

Dispositions	Effects
<i>aisthêsis</i>	<i>phantasia</i>
<i>noêsis</i>	<i>ennoia</i>
<i>dianoia</i>	<i>ennoêma</i>
<i>logos</i>	<i>horos</i>
<i>sophia</i>	<i>epistêmê</i>

Among the terms listed in the right column, *ennoêma* holds a special status. It does not denote a cognitive activity but a universal concept reached by abstraction from sensible data. This is the same reductionist process (*aphairesis*) by means of which the Platonists used to attain an understanding of eternal forms. *Ennoêmata* thus figure as the Stoic correlate to the Platonist forms or ideas. They differ from the latter, however, in one important aspect. According to one doxographical source, “the Stoic philosophers say that ideas are non-existent (ἀνυπάρκτους), and that what we *participate in* is the concepts” (Stob. *Ecl.* 1,137.1 ff. Wachsmuth). What the Stoics say, in fact, is that Plato’s universals are pure mental abstractions to which nothing in reality corresponds. Our participation in universals is, therefore, not ontological but logical—not that of contingents partaking in their ontologically independent principles, but that of individual specimens in their common *species*. Concepts are the formal subjects of all definitions, conceived by abstract thinking (διάνοια). They are a necessary tool of logical analysis, and not the eternal patterns which, as is the case with Plato’s ideas, come first in reality.

Later, however, some serious attempts were made to mitigate this disagreement about the status of universals. Antiochus of Ascalon, for his part, held that “Stoicism should be considered an emendation of the Old Academy rather than a new school of thought” (Cic. *Luc.* 43).²⁶ What is more, he believed that “the Stoics agreed with the Peripatetics in substance and disputed only in terminology” (Cic. *ND* 1.16). Thus, in the case of universals, he identified Plato’s ideas with *cogitatae species* (Cic. *Or.* 8 ff.), which probably correspond to the Stoic *ennoêmata* (rather than *katalêpseis*, as suggested by Dillon 1977, 93),

²⁶ A useful survey of Antiochus’s doctrines can be found in Dillon (1977) 52–106; see also Barnes (1989) 5–96, Lévy (1992), and, more recently, Görler (1994) 717–989, and Fladerer (1996).

but did not relegate them to the realm of simple “figments of thought.” On the other hand, partly in view of Aristotle’s objections to transcendence of Plato’s forms, he denied to these forms a causally independent status and defined them as the objects of “intellection and reason” (*ratione et intellegentia contineri*). The concept of “reason” (*ratio*), again, seems to belong to Stoic legacy, as well as the claim that sense-perception is a necessary prerequisite for concept-formation (cf. Cic. *Luc.* 30, quoted above). Finally, Antiochus accepted the Stoic position that the mind should be considered as corporeal—the contrary claim would render it incapable of either acting or being acted upon, so that neither perception nor ensuing conceptualization could ever take place. In his own words, “the intellect is not some empty immaterial something . . . but is itself a certain kind of body” (Cic. *Fin.* 4.36).

Antiochus also agreed with the Stoic claim that the universe is a corporeal continuum where the same principles are at work both in the whole and in each of its parts.²⁷ Did he, then, assign to the cosmic intellect the same set of cognitive dispositions which he applied to the individual mind? The evidence at our disposal suggests that he identified God with Aristotle’s divine intellect, everlastingly engaged in a kind of thinking which does not require any sensible images—that is, with “perfect intelligence and wisdom” (Cic. *Luc.* 28 *mentem et sapientiam perfectam*). To do otherwise would entail a twofold assumption, about a pre-conceptual and non-rational stage in the life of God, and about a state of precosmic chaos in the world which Antiochus conceived as an eternal and indestructible rational being. Analogies with human psychology can be drawn, but only to the extent they do not challenge God’s everlasting perfection. For Antiochus, as later for Alcinous²⁸ and Irenaeus, God involves the absolute contemporaneity of its entire predicative content.

The above mentioned Valentinians did not respect these limits. As Irenaeus angrily objected, they introduced in their discourse of God the distinctions and “movements” that belong to the inner life of a developing human being. But God cannot be reduced to a set of mental activities characteristic of the human mind (*Adv. haer.* 2.13.3):

²⁷ Cf. Cicero, *Luc.* 28 Schäublin *partis autem esse mundi omnia, quae insint in eo, quae natura sentiente teneantur, in qua ratio perfecta insit, quae sit eadem sempiterna.*

²⁸ See n. 20 above, with the crucial quotation from Alcinous (10.164.14–18).

Those who say that Conception was emitted from God, and Intellect (*Nus*) from Conception (*Ennoea*), and then from all these Reason (*Logos*), should first be refuted for their improper use of emissions (cf. 2.13.2); second, on the ground that they, in fact, describe states, passions, and intentions of the human mind (*sensus*), and know nothing about God. . . . Had they known the scriptures and had been taught by the truth, they would know that God is not like men (Num 23:19), and that his conceptions are not like men's thoughts (Isa 55:8–9). For the Father of all is at a great remove from human mental states and passions, and is simple, not compounded and without different members, entirely alike and equal to himself, for he is all intellect (*mens*), all spirit, and all intellection (*sensuabilitas*), all conception (*ennoia*) and all reason (*ratio*), all hearing and all seeing, all light and entirely the source of all good things, as religious and pious people befittingly speak of him.

For Irenaeus, the only legitimate analogy that can be applied to God is that of a self-thinking intellect—fully determined, in possession of all qualities, with a stable character (*diathesis*) “unsusceptible to intensification and relaxation” (Simpl. *In Cat.* 237.25 ff.). As he replies to the Valentinians, God is a perfect “intellect comprising all things” (*Adv. haer.* 2.13.4 *sensus enim capax omnium*) and a fully developed, articulated ‘self’ (2.13.3). For Irenaeus’s opponents, on the other hand, God is at first potential intellect, potential reason, and potential wisdom. All of these faculties will be actualized gradually, just as they gradually emerge in the developing human, triggered by their respective objects—the faculty of sense-perception (*aesthesis*) by sensible objects, the faculty of imagination by the images of sensible objects, the faculty of intellection, or intuitive thinking, by their vague conceptions, and the faculty of discursive thinking by the mental constructs called concepts. The rule adopted by the Valentinians is that the *object* defines the faculty and its activity. Perception of the sense cannot occur without there being perceptible objects. The same applies to the intellect, which cannot think without having the images, or vague notions (*ennoiai*), of these perceptible objects. This is why Ennoia (Conception) “emits” Nus (Intellect), and is both logically and ontologically prior to it.²⁹

²⁹ The rule is clearly laid out by Aristotle; cf. e.g., *De an.* 2.4.415a16–20: “But if we must say what each of them is, e.g., what is the faculty of thought or of perception or of nutrition, we must first say what thinking and perceiving are; for activities and actions are logically prior faculties”; 2.5.417a2–9: “There is a prob-

The Savior's account of the effusion of aeons from the first principle in the *Apocryphon of John* commits the same kind of anthropomorphic fallacy: it applies human mental states and affections to the inner life of God, and it follows the rule according to which the object defines the faculty. The first principle in the *Apocryphon of John* also cannot conceptualize before receiving information from the 'senses'. That is, it first must "see" (ἰδᾶν) its own reflection (image) in a mirror-like substrate so as to attain the first notion (*ennoia*) of the 'self'. At the next stage, it will turn into a reflecting subject (*nous*, Autogenes) and think of itself as a separate object (*idea*, *ennoëma*). Next, by engaging in discursive reasoning (*logos*), it will analyze this separate 'self' (*definiendum*) down to its individual dispositions (twelve aeons) and acquire, as a result, the systematic knowledge (*sophia*) of the 'self'.

Each of the above stages ascribes a different meaning to the notion of 'self'. In the order of appearance, God's 'self' is at first a sensible image, then a vague notion, then a hypostasized *definiendum*, and finally the object of systematic knowledge.

Turning finally to the Savior's self-relational vocabulary, what sense, then, does it make to apply it to the stage when God was just a pure, indefinite, and immeasurable substance (viz., light, spirit, living water), and when there was no outward impressor to be perceived, recognized, or objectified? Two solutions are possible. According to the first, the 'self' here is the object of God's striving, something which God does not yet have, but, as the shorter versions of the *Apocryphon* say, "searches for" (αἰτεῖν). That same conative meaning must be consequently ascribed to all other verbs governing the direct reflexive pronoun. Thus, the first principle does not simply "gaze" or "look" at itself, but "gazes" or "looks" *expectantly* at its own 'self'. And when, a few lines later, the Savior says that God "conceives its own self in its own light" (BG 26:15–16; III 7:2–4), this statement should be taken proleptically, as anticipating the next stage of God's

lem why there is no perception of the senses themselves, and why they produce no perception without there being any external objects . . . It is clear that the faculty of sense-perception does not exist in actuality but only in potentiality; for this reason, the perception does not occur, just as the fuel does not burn of and in itself without something that can make it burn; otherwise it would burn itself and would need no actually existing fire"; *ibid.* 6, 418a7–25; cf. *EN* 1139a8–11.

self-realization, when it will perceive and conceptualize its image. This is why, in the description of this stage, the text of the shorter version (BG 25:11–12; III 6:4–5) uses the non-contingent future tense: “He *shall* conceive the unmixed light.”

Another solution is that, in this case, too, the Savior follows the Stoic epistemological model and equates the initial pre-conceptual stage of the first God with the stage of a non-reflected self-awareness (συναίσθησις, cf. Hierocl. 1.51–57 Arnim): the sense of internal coherence (ἔξις) that any living being experiences upon its birth. While the function of *aisthêsis* is to perceive external objects, συναίσθησις denotes the preceding phase of involution, the primal awareness of one’s own constitution (σύστασις). In Seneca’s words, this is the same experience that an infant has of its own *natura* (*Ep.* 121.11–12):

Nature is easier to grasp intuitively than to explain. The infant does not know what constitution is, but is conscious of its own constitution; and does not know what a living being is, but feels of itself as of an animal. Moreover, that very own constitution of its own, it only understands confusedly, slightly, and dimly.³⁰

At the cosmological level, this is the very unity which the Stoic god experiences whenever the conflagration takes place. “The god of the Stoics,” as one source states, “has then the whole substance as his commanding-faculty” (Orig. *C. Cels.* 4.14 ὅτε μὲν ἡγεμονικὸν ἔχει τὴν ὅλην οὐσίαν). All distinctions that characterize the cosmogonic process are here annulled—god becomes inseparable from matter, the active cause indistinguishable from the passive. God is the “intelligent and eternal pneuma” (Alex. Aphrod. *Mixt.* 11.225.2–3)—(i) the *pneuma* which, at this unitary stage, has no outward medium to pervade it and extend through it; (ii) the *intelligence* (νοῦς) which, by lacking information from the senses and having nothing external to interpret and conceptualize, is “all dedicated to its own thoughts” (Sen. *Epist.* 9.16 *adquiescit sibi cogitationibus suis traditus*); (iii) and the sensory faculty of *sight* which, not yet confronted by any outside object, “pours forth the rays of light” (Aet. *Plac.* 4.15.2 ἐκ γὰρ τῆς ὀράσεως προχεῖσθαί τινα εἰς αὐτὸ ἀλύγην) to illuminate this perfect, non-differentiated unity.

³⁰ *Facilius natura intellegitur quam enarratur. Itaque infans ille, quid sit constitutio non novit, constitutionem suam novit; et quid sit animal nescit, animal esse se sentit. Praeterea ipsam constitutionem suam crasse intellegit et summatim et obscure.* For this letter by Seneca, one of the clearest expositions of the Stoic theory of *oikeiôsis*, see Lévy (1992) 403–7.

The God without qualities and the God who combines in himself all qualities are not, as suggested by Mansfeld, “compatible alternatives.” In the first case, God refuses all predications (*via oppositionis*). In the second, God comprises all opposites (*coincidentia oppositorum*). If these two ways of understanding God were indeed compatible, then Irenaeus would not have been so outraged by Valentinian speculations. Irenaeus rejects the idea of God’s changeability, of a gradual development of his cognitive capacities. In his interpretation, God is perfect intelligence, perfect reason, perfect mind, and perfect knowledge. Like a wise man, God is endowed with impregnable consistency and stability of thoughts. For the Valentinians, again, and for the *Apocryphon of John*, too, the unity of the first principle recalled the image of an infant—that same sense of a pre-conscious integrity (*incolumitas*) which Augustine recalled in the nostalgic reminiscence of his own infancy (*Conf.* 1.20):

For at that time I existed; I lived and had self-awareness (*sentiebam*) and took care of my self-preservation (*incolumitas*), a vestige of that most profound unity whence I derived my existence.³¹

³¹ For the importance of the Stoic theories of the supreme genus (τὸ), self-preservation (οἰκείωσις), ‘tenor’ (ἔξις), and various cognitive dispositions of intellect for the formation of Neoplatonist metaphysics, see Hadot (1967) 1:225 ff. Platonizing variants of the Stoic classification of genera, as well as the problem of the Stoic supreme genus, are discussed in Brunschwig (1989) 19–127. The self-relational language was popular among the Neoplatonists, eager to yield some more positive idea of their transcendent One. Compound nouns with the συν-prefix were extensively used by Plotinus, e.g., self-awareness, self-coherence, self-knowledge, self-consciousness (συναίσθησις, σύνεσις, συνουσία), often in combination with the paradoxical predication and the *via eminentiae*: “comprehension without comprehension,” “thinking that conceptualizes nothing” ([Porph.] *In Parm.* frag. 2,16–17 μένειν δ’ ἐν ἀκαταλήπτῳ καταλήψει καὶ μηδὲν ἐννοῦση νοήσει), “prenotion” (προέννοια), “super-intellection” (ὑπερνόησις Plot. *Emm.* VI 8.16.32). Plotinus was fully aware of the ambiguity of the notion of ‘self’ in its application to the solitary and non-reflecting principle. For this reason, whenever using self-relational expressions, he adds the “as if” proviso: it is not that the first God, or the One, sees or thinks itself, but it is “as if it were looking toward itself” (*ibid.* 16.18–19 οἷον πρὸς αὐτὸν βλέπει). In order to suit the first principle, the language of self-relation must be used in a hypothetical sense—asymptotically, and by analogy with the first ensuing principiate (i.e., intellect, νοῦς, in which the subject-object distinction is first articulated)—proving, again, that there is no appropriate way to define the Absolute in a univocal way. In modern Plotinian scholarship, the self-relational predication of the first principle has been a favorite subject. The ambiguity inherent in the notion of ‘self’, it has been argued, can be reduced, if not annulled, by a set of further specifications: for example, that the One’s ‘self’ is “a floating ego—consciousness to be distinguished from the full range of human personality” (Dodds 1960, 1–7); cf. also Schroeder

The Language of Procession in the Apocryphon of John

The praise of the Unknown God in the *Apocryphon of John* has a polemical flavor. As shown in the previous section, its arguments are best understood if located in the context of an ongoing philosophical controversy within contemporary Platonism as to how one should (i) define the Absolute, (ii) describe the mechanics of deriving a multi-layered reality from its original source, and (iii) conceive the appropriate discursive mode capable of conveying both (i) and (ii). For Irenaeus, the Absolute, which is identified with Intellect, involves the contemporaneity and concatenation of its entire content. For his Valentinian opponents, as well as for the author of the *Apocryphon of John*, the Absolute is ‘apophatic’—the abyss of pure freedom rejecting all determination, a self-contented Will which wants nothing, and a pure Nothingness rejoicing in its own indefiniteness. In the former case, the ontological problem of the transition from the One to a determinate plurality is merged in the logical problem of deducing the plurality of concrete particulars from the selfsame universal. In the latter, logical necessity gives way to the vitalist notion of *Lebensprozess* and the stages of God’s development. Each alternative, moreover, articulates its appropriate discursive mode. The former conceives the Absolute, or Intellect, in the mode of dialectical deduction which renders its inner articulation, viz., intelligible forms. The latter, in contrast, resorts to a mythical narrative that goes beyond the immanent self-deployment of the divine Intellect to reach the pre-symbolic stage of the pure potentiality of the first principle and its primordial freedom from any kind of determination.

These two responses to the metaphysical problematic of the transcendent Absolute have a long prehistory and can be traced all the way back to the Old Academy and the metaphysical systems developed by Plato’s first successors, Speusippus and Xenocrates. Irenaeus’s position ultimately derives from Xenocrates’ identification of the first

(1987) 677–99. The ongoing debate on the proper translation of *συναίσθησις* proves even more confusing. Henry (1960) 387, in his discussion with H. Schwyzer, finds it more reasonable to “attribuer à l’Un des termes désignant la conscience que des termes désignant la connaissance.” But Meijer (1992) 46, n. 161, in his analytical commentary on the *Enneads* VI 9, disagrees: “I would rather say that neither ‘Selbstbewusstsein’ nor ‘Selbsterkenntnis’ are ascribed to the One except for ‘Selbsterkenntnis’ as self-perception in 7 [V 4].”

principle, the Monad, with an Intellect (*nous*), possibly conceived in response to criticisms by Aristotle. This Intellect acts, and produces, as it understands itself and logically deduces its predicative content as the form-numbers. According to the testimony of the fourth-century B.C. rhetorician Alcimus, Xenocrates had posited that “each Form is an eternal thought susceptible to change” (D.L. 3.13), laying the ground for the Middle Platonist doctrine that the forms or ideas are the products of God’s internal design, of the divine subjectivity. The way in which God conceptualizes and externalizes his inner content is effected by dialectic—a “divine method” which, following Plato’s description thereof in the *Philebus* 16c–18d, consists of a two-way movement of collection and division establishing the “exact number of every plurality between the unlimited and the one,” between the unity of a form and its multiplication in the sensible world. This view of God as an accomplished dialectician who ‘divides’ himself into subgenera, species, and subspecies, and who articulates forms in himself and subsequently realizes them in the corporeal substrate, will be taken over and further developed by a considerable number of Middle Platonist (Antiochus, Plutarch, Alcinous, Apuleius) and early Christian theologians (Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Augustine). The distant echoes of this theory can be discerned in Spinoza’s identification of knower, knowledge, and known, and in the Hegelian logical necessity of the self-deployment of the absolute Subjectivity.³²

The other position, clearly preferred by both the Valentinian opponents of Irenaeus and the *Apocryphon of John*, stems from the ontological interpretation of Plato’s contradictory deductions about ‘One’ in his dialogue *Parmenides*, popular in the Neopythagorean circles of the Hellenistic and Imperial periods (Pseudo-Brotinus, Alexander Polyhistor, Eudorus of Alexandria, Moderatus of Gades, Nicomachus of Gerasa, Theon of Smyrna) and later developed by Plotinus, yet first formulated, in all likelihood, in the Old Academy by Speusippus. In the second part of the *Parmenides* (135d–166c), where Plato applies

³² The necessity of God’s deduction of his own predicative content is explained by Deleuze (1992) 102–3, in his analysis of Spinoza’s formal distinction between the unity of substance and the plurality of attributes in God: “That God should necessarily produce things tells us also how he produces. Understanding himself as a substance composed of an infinity of attributes, existing as a substance composed of an infinity of attributes, God acts as he understands and as he exists, this then in these attributes that express at once his essence and existence.”

his deductive method to infer both the affirmative and negative consequences of a simple hypothesis about the being of ‘one’—“if there is a one”—, the first two deductions distinguish between a ‘one’ beyond ‘being’ that negates any kind of plurality (137c–142a), and a ‘one-that-is’, which, insofar as partaking of ‘being’, becomes (i) a duality of ‘unity’ and ‘being’, capable of generating numbers, and (ii) a whole consisting of parts, that is, of its ‘being’ and its ‘unity’ (142b–155e).³³ Transferred to the ontological level, these two movements—denying and affirming, respectively, the same set of properties to the ‘one’—lay the logical foundation for the distinction between the transcendent One above Being and refusing all predication, and the derivative One coordinate with Being and encompassing all sorts of predicates.³⁴ The ‘apophatic’ view of the Absolute is deduced from the negative results established for the ‘one’ in the first movement, summarized in the following two postulates: first, that unity is not identical with anything but unity and thus cannot be many; and second, that every attempt at determination amounts, in fact, to negation.³⁵ The Absolute, therefore, cannot be identified, as Xenocrates, Aristotle, and the ‘orthodox’ Middle Platonists had done, with the primal Intellect and the forms as its positive thought-content, for these intelligible entities require a source that is prior to and inde-

³³ Bibliography of modern works on the *Parmenides* is immense; see, for example, Robinson (1953) 223–280, Allen (1997), and Brisson (1999).

³⁴ For the ontological interpretation of the *Parmenides*, considered a trademark of Neoplatonism, and for its Old Academic and ‘Neopythagorean’ predecessors, see the magisterial treatment by Dodds (1928) 129–42 and, more recently, Morrow-Dillon (1987) xxix–xxxiv, Allen (1997) 218–224, Brisson (1999) 285–291, as well as a number of contributions by Halfwassen (1992a, 1992b, 1993, 1999), esp. (1993) 339–373. Eudorus of Alexandria is particularly interesting in this respect, interpreting Plato’s distinction between a ‘one beyond being’ and a ‘one-that-is’ as the articulation of the two highest metaphysical levels: that of the One, the “principle of all” (πάντων ἀρχήν), and two “secondary elementary principles” (ἀρχὰς δευτέρας καὶ στοιχειώδεις) of existent things, the Monad and the Dyad (Simp. *In Arist. Phys.* 181, 7 ff. = frags. 3–5 Mazzarelli). Halfwassen (1997) 20, points to an important distinction drawn by Eudorus between the first One as a transcendent ἀρχή and the subsequent pair of the Monad (also called the One) and the Dyad as στοιχεῖα constitutive of and immanent in reality.

³⁵ According to Allen (1997) 220–1, the principle that determination is negation, “the faithful attendant of monism and its incongruous counterpart, negative theology,” is older than Plotinus, for it was criticized already by Aristotle in *Post. An.* 2.97a6–19. Aristotle’s target seems to be Speusippus. If this is so, “the foundations of Neoplatonism lie . . . in the Early Academy, in the first generation of Plato’s epigony.”

pendent of them. And since Plato himself had claimed that to ‘be’ is to be a form accessible to the intellect, this implies that the Absolute, insofar as independent of and prior to all forms, must be both unintelligible and beyond Being.

The principal problem facing the metaphysical interpretation of Plato’s *Parmenides* and, for that matter, all monistic systems that postulate a simple first principle, the absolute One, devoid of all qualities and prior even to ‘being’, is how to account for the passage from this One beyond Being to the ‘existing One’ capable of generating a finite multitude of subordinate entities. This passage cannot be deduced dialectically since we are no longer dealing, as in the case of Xenocrates and his followers, with a necessary act of self-understanding on the part of God identified with an Intellect. Instead, it can only be explained by resorting to analogies and metaphors borrowed from such diverse domains as physics, geometry, biology, arithmetic, human psychology, or sexual reproduction—that is, by the very same device for which Hegel criticized Plotinus, the best known ancient representative of radical monism:

But out of the First all proceeds, owing to the One’s revealing itself; that is the connection with creation and all production. But the Absolute cannot be conceived as creative, if it is determinate as an abstract, and is not rather comprehended as the One which has energy in itself. This transition to the Second is thus not made by Plotinus philosophically or dialectically, but the necessity of it is expressed in representations and images. Thus he says (*Enn.* III 8.10) . . . , “The one absolute Good is a source which has no other source, but is the principle for all streams, so that it is never exhausted by these, but as source remains at rest in itself,” and thus contains these streams as such in itself; so that they, “flowing out in one direction and another, have yet not flowed away, but know beforehand whence and whither they will flow”. (G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Haldane-Simson, slightly modified, 1894, 2:415–16)

The metaphysical problematic of the One beyond Being and beyond intellection cannot thus be resolved by intellectual argument or logical methods of proof. What is required instead is a series of analogies capable of supplying an intuitive insight into the paradox of the transcendent principle which, while remaining in itself unchanged and totally simple, creates the finite plurality of actually existing entities. Two kinds of analogy can provide this insight. The first kind imagines the One as “unlimited in power” (Plot. *Enn.* VI 9.6 τῷ ἀπεριλήπτῳ τῆς δυνάμεως), whose “superabundance” (VI 2.1 ὑπερλήρης)

and “the excess of creative potential” (ὑπερβολὴ τῆς δυνάμεως) implies the presence of latent plurality and its eventual actualization (i.e., irradiation, pouring forth, extension, generation).³⁶ The metaphors used to convey these two moments in the life of the Absolute, viz., its infinite potency and the necessary realization thereof, are those of the spring and its stream of water, of the radiant sun and its rays of light, of the seed and the living being, of the root and its tree, and of the circle with its center. Illustrations of this sort abound in Plotinus (cf., e.g., *Enn.* III 8), and earlier in late Hellenistic ‘Neopythagorean’ circles, but the majority of them already occur in some of Plato’s most poetic passages. Thus, Plotinus’s representation of the

³⁶ Plotinus’s claim that the One is “of unlimited power” (VI 9.6) is just one among competing ancient interpretations of Plato’s deduction in the *Parmenides* 137d, that “the One is unlimited if it has neither beginning nor end.” A detailed discussion of this problem, including the descriptions of principal interpretations, is available in Proclus, *In Parm.* 6.1118.7–1124.37 Cousin, transl. Morrow-Dillon (1987) 459–66. Plotinus seems to have shaped his view in response to Speusippus’s position that the One is unlimited “on account of its smallness” (διὰ μικρότητα Anon. *In Parm.* 1.25 ff. Hadot), on which see Proclus, *ibid.*, 1118.10–19: “Some declare the One to be termed unlimited in this sense, that it is non-traversable (ἀδιαξίτητον) and is the limit of everything else; for the term ‘unlimited’ has two senses, the one as being incomprehensible (ἄληπτον) and unencompassable (ἀπερίγητον), the other as being the limit of all things and not having any other limit . . .” In VI 9.6, Plotinus criticizes the view of the absolute One construed by analogy with mathematics and its reductive method, as an absolute minimum: “The oneness of the One is greater than that of [arithmetical] monad and [geometrical] point; for these the soul abstracts extension and numerical quantity and rests upon the very minutest possible (τὸ μικρότατον), ending in the indivisible but still in something that began as divisible and is always in something other than itself. The One, however, is neither in any other nor in the divisible; nor is its divisibility that of extreme minuteness; for it is greatest of all not in size but in power, and so is sizeless by its very power” (transl. McKenna, p. 542, slightly modified). The method of arriving at the first principle by analogy with the mathematical analysis of numbers and magnitudes into their ‘atomic’ minima (i.e., monad and point) can be traced back to Speusippus; cf. Iambl. *DCMS* 4.17.12–16 Festa: τὸ γὰρ ἀπλούστατον πανταχοῦ στοιχείον εἶναι . . . ὡς ἐν ἀριθμοῖς μονάδα κατὰ τὸ ἐν, οὕτως στιγμὴν ἐν γραμμαῖς τιθέναι. For Speusippus, in short, the One is unlimited in the sense of being a numerically and quantitatively immeasurable minimum—an absolutely simple ‘element’ (στοιχείον cf. Arist. *Metaph.* 13.9.1085b21–34) comparable to the “seed” (σπέρμα) comprising the potencies of all things (ibid. 12.10.1072b30 ff.; 14.5.1092a11–17). In Plotinus’s view, this identification of the One with the primal *stoicheion*, as well as the choice of the seed-metaphor, undermines its absolute transcendence: “For that which is prior to these [principiates] is their principle, not as immanent in them; for that from away which (ἀφ’ οὗ) something comes cannot be immanent, but only that from which (ἐξ οὗ) it grows, or consists” (*Enn.* V 3.11). For Speusippus’s theory of the ‘unlimited’ One, see the important contribution by Halfwassen (1992b) 43–73.

absolute transcendence in terms of superabundance (ὑπερπλήρες) and overflow (ὑπερρεῖν V 2.1) results from the juxtaposition and blending of Plato's argument in the *Parmenides* about the One as unlimited (137d7–8 ἄπειρον ἄρα τὸ ἓν, εἰ μήτε ἀρχὴν μήτε τελευτὴν ἔχει) with the famous assertion in the *Republic* that the primary idea of Goodness is not the same as being, but even beyond being, “surpassing it in dignity and power” (6.509b9–10 ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας πρεσβεία καὶ δυνάμει ὑπερέχοντος). Another pair of ‘root metaphors’ important for representing the derivation of reality from the infinite One, that of the radiant sun and the circle with its center, is nothing but a refinement of Plato's sun-simile from the *Republic* (6.508b–509b). Finally, even the comparison of the first principle with a source that has no source outside itself, which Hegel adduced to demonstrate the non-discursive character of Plotinian thought, can be traced all the way back to Plato's identification of the first principle of movement with “source” (πηγή) in the *Phaedrus* (245c).³⁷

The second group of analogies tends to emphasize the dualism of opposite drives in the Absolute, picturing the passage from its initial unity and indetermination to plurality and finitude as a temporary resolution of the inner tension between the two antagonistic drives, of self-preservation and self-differentiation, of rejecting any specification and formulating a determinate predicative content. The analogies are chosen from two discursive domains: the Stoic theory of the self-transforming God identified with the vitalizing breath or *pneuma*, and contemporaneous epistemological theories of cognitive process and concept-formation, discussed in detail in the previous section of this chapter (pp. 91–106).

The choice of *pneuma*-analogy seems particularly suitable here. This dynamic and corporeal continuum which, according to the Stoics, is the divine principle constituting and pervading all reality, comprises in itself two simultaneous yet opposite movements of contraction and expansion, the former producing “unity and substance” and the second “quantities and qualities” (Nemesius, *Nat. hom.* 70.6–71.4).³⁸

³⁷ The development and morphology of these analogies are discussed in Krämer (1967) 339 ff. and, more recently, in Beierwaltes (1985) and Halfwassen (1992a) 126–130.

³⁸ Nemesius's passage runs as follows: “If they should say, as the Stoics do, that there exists in bodies a kind of tensile movement which moves simultaneously inwards

In the inward movement of contraction, this divine ‘breath’ stabilizes itself as a substance of all things, whereas, in the opposite movement of expansion, it externalizes itself in a series of qualitatively distinct modes—divine intelligence, or mind, in rational entities, soul in animals, physique in plants, and tenor in inanimate objects—and thereby loses the firm ground of its initial stability. Reality is the result of a temporary balance in the tension between these two antagonistic drives, a fragile equilibrium which, “at set periods of time,” goes amok and collapses back to the stage prior to any distinction between ‘substance’ and ‘qualities’, when “god [will] consume all substance into himself” (D.L. 7.137) and enjoy its absolute indifference and indeterminateness, “all dedicated to its own thoughts” (Sen. *Epist.* 9.16).

A similar scenario can be construed, as we have already seen in Irenaeus’s polemic with the Valentinians, by resorting to analogies from Stoic epistemology.³⁹ God’s primordial state of absolute indeterminateness and unlimited potentiality, of a willing which wants nothing, corresponds to the stage of non-reflected self-awareness and internal coherence that man experiences in infancy, prior to becoming a rational subject (S), and prior to ‘putting on’ a set of defining characteristics or predicates (P). God undergoes an analogous set of self-transformations: like any human being, he disengages himself from his initial indifference, then posits himself as a subject (S) capable of formulating his own characteristics (P), and generates reality as his symbolic representation. Yet God’s infinite potential can never

and outwards, the outward movement producing quantities and qualities and the inward one unity and substance, we must ask them (since every movement issues from some power), what this power is and in what substance it consists” (trans. Long-Sedley 1987, 283). According to Long-Sedley (*ibid.* 288–89), Nemesius asserts that the simultaneous movement of *pneuma* in opposite directions provides “internal coherence for *individual* bodies.” What, in fact, Nemesius says here is that all bodies, including *pneuma*—for the latter, too, the Stoics considered a body—possess a kind of tensile movement. This again means that *pneuma* must undergo the same process of inner differentiation as all other bodies—i.e., that in its inward movement it acquires “unity and substance,” whereas, in the opposite movement outwards, it passes over into its various qualitative modes. Otherwise, the two basic propositions of the Stoic world-hypothesis—that of a stage prior to the world-order, when god, or *pneuma* in its most refined state, “has the whole substance as his commanding faculty” (Orig. *C. Cels.* 4.14), and the Stoic theory of the periodical destruction and reconstitution of the universe—would be hardly tenable.

³⁹ Cf. *supra*, pp. 98–106.

be adequately expressed in a finite multitude of predicates, so that every attempt at establishing the stable relationship between God *qua* subject and his predicative content ends in ‘miscarriage’—that is, in revealing the dark residue in God which resists symbolic representation. Reality is therefore, as in the case of the *pneuma*-analogy, viewed as inherently fragile, the result of God’s abortive desire to comprehend his incomprehensible nature. No wonder, then, that the Valentinian opponents of Irenaeus were particularly fond of this analogy—for, in their view, the world is precisely the result of a divine miscarriage, an ἔκτρωμα.⁴⁰

Most of the aforementioned analogies play a prominent role in the *Apocryphon*’s discourse of procession. The gradual unfolding of reality from the transcendent first principle is expressed here, too, in the images of overflow, efflux, irradiation, concept-formation, and natural reproduction. None of these analogies, however, is fully developed in any single redaction of the Savior’s monologue. Rather, as we shall soon be able to demonstrate, individual elements of one analogy are fused with the elements of another. *The primary task of a commentator is to reconstruct these original analogies and to supply all terms left out in the process of their ‘condensation’ into hardly penetrable metaphors.*

We have already seen how, in the Savior’s praise of the transcendent God, the apophatic language occasionally gets interspersed with more positive qualifications. Albeit “ineffable” and “unintelligible,” God is

⁴⁰ The presence of that dark residue in the Absolute, of that irrational exception refusing rational idealization, entails the opposite movement of contraction in which the Absolute withdraws into itself and annihilates the world as its imperfect symbolic expression. In contrast to the Stoic *pneuma*-analogy, here the reconstitution of world-order does not take place. Plotinus will oppose to this conception his view of a universe without beginning or end in time, grounded in the metaphors of a never-ending and necessary irradiation or overflow of the Absolute’s “superabundance” (*Enn.* V 2.1 τὸ ὑπερπλήρες αὐτοῦ πεποίηκεν ἄλλο). Plotinus’s universe is a spiritual continuum extending, in a decreasing order of power and dignity, from the One above being to ‘dark’ matter, where the latter is the everlasting consequence of a necessary degradation, and not just a temporary outcome of God’s aborted attempt at self-clarification. In Plotinus’s system, matter can never be cut off from the superior principles to which it owes its existence in the first place: “Nothing is separated or cut off from that which is before it” (V 2.2), or, as Plotinus formulates it in his treatise *Against the Gnostics* (*Enn.* II 9.3), “Matter will [forever] be illuminated.” In the view of his ‘Gnostic’ opponents, matter symbolizes the irreparable defect in the system, which will eventually destroy the whole edifice of the rational world-order.

portrayed as “Monarchy,” “the Father of the Entirety,” “the perfect invisible virginal spirit,” “the immeasurable light,” the holy and undefiled purity,” “the pure luminous water,” a free expansion of thinking that has nothing external to reflect on, a pure gaze not yet confronted by any object, and a self-contented will which wants nothing. These images provide the starting point for the Savior’s narrative of ‘procession’, articulated as a series of middle steps in a downward movement towards the opposite pole.⁴¹

(i) By analogy with the natural reproductive pattern, the transcendent Absolute eventually disengages itself from its blissful indifference and becomes the Father of Entirety mating with his first emanation, the female consort Ennoia–Barbelo, described in the longer redaction of the *Apocryphon* as “the Womb” (μήτρα) of the Entirety” (NHC II 5:5). In this way, God assumes the role of an active male cause that contributes both the form and the source of movement for a new individual nature—a perfect male offspring, the “only-begotten Self-Originate,” or Christ, endowed with individual characteristics of his Father. The subsequent production of other natural beings, or aeons, in the Father’s spiritual kingdom results from the analogous ‘mating’, this time of the Self-Originate Christ and his ‘coactors’ (Intellect, Logos, Will) with the individual feminine aeons of Barbelo.⁴² At the next stage, another feminine figure, Sophia,

⁴¹ One of the most ingenuous modern descriptions of this process is available in Klee (1961) 5–16: “Everything (the world) is of a dynamic nature; static problems make their appearance only at certain parts of the universe, in ‘edifices’, on the crust of the various cosmic bodies. . . . What first interests us in the scale of tone values is the abundance of tonalities between the two poles. Rising from the bottom towards the source of light, we feel an increase of unparalleled intensity and breadth between the poles. Below, dark subterranean rumbling, in between, the half shade of under water, and above, the hiss of brightest brightness. On the scale the middle steps may be distinguished by weight or critical evaluation. The practical task is this: to fix them in the scale by mixing them or glazing them.”

⁴² See NHC II 6:33–7:34 for allusions to the process of sexual reproduction: “And he [the divine Self-Originate] made a request that he be given a coactor, namely Intellect [νοῦς *m.*]. . . . And while the invisible Spirit was consenting, Intellect was disclosed and stood at rest with Christ [the divine Self-Originate] glorifying it [the Spirit] and Barbelo. And all these came into being in Silence [σιγή *f.*] and Thinking [ἔννοια *f.*, i.e., in the silent thinking of Ennoia–Barbelo]. And he wished to make something by the Word [λόγος *m.*] or the invisible Spirit. . . . And Word followed after Will [θέλημα, a grammatically neuter noun assigned to an efficient, male cause]; for by the Word, Christ, the divine Self-Originate, fabricated the entirety. But Eternal Life [ζωὴ αἰώνιος *f.*] is with his Will, and Intellect with

the last of the twelve aeons fabricated the Self-Originate, commits an illicit act. In the manner of Aristotle's 'unruly matter' (*GA* 4.3.767b 9–30), she tries to conceive in spite of “not being mastered” (769b13 τῆς δ' ὕλης οὐ κρατουμένης) by the form coming from the male consort. This futile attempt at parthenogenesis results in a miscarriage, or the discharge of dark matter (that is, her ‘menstrual fluid’), the only thing that Sophia can contribute to generation. The outcome, in this case, is an ugly, dark, and deformed product—the future ruler of the visible world, Ialdabaoth.⁴³ As for Sophia, she will repent

Foreknowledge [πρόγνωσις *f.*]. . . . Indeed, from [ἀπό?] the Light that is Christ and out of [ἐκ?] Incorruptibility [ἀφθαρσία *f.*], through the gift of the Spirit, the four luminaries from the divine Self-Originate gazed out. . . .” Cf. Irenaeus’s report on a very similar procession of aeons in *Adv. haer.* 1.29.1: “They say that this Light [similar to the Majesty of the Father] is Christ, who in turn asked that Intellect be given him as a coactor, whereupon Intellect came forth. Furthermore, Father emitted Will and Word. Then there came to be the *conjugal couples* of Conception (Ennoia) and Word, of Incorruptibility and Christ. Likewise, Eternal Life was added to Will, and Mind to Foreknowledge.” The same principle of sexual reproduction governs the mechanics of procession in the ‘Valentinian’ systems, too; cf. Clem. Alex., *Exc. Theod.* 32.1: “In the Pleroma, since there is a unity, each of the aeons has its own pleroma, which is a conjugal couple (συζυγία). What proceeds from a couple, they say, are pleromas, whereas what proceeds from one are images.”

⁴³ The Aristotelian theory of ‘unruly matter’, clearly laid out in Aristotle’s tract *On the Generation of Animals* 4.3, might have provided a theoretical basis for the Savior’s account of Sophia’s miscarriage in the *Apocryphon of John*. In Aristotle’s theory of reproduction, ‘deformity’ (ἀναπηρία) is a term that encompasses every defect in offspring from, in a downward order, a more regular type (“the female”) to less frequent (“human beings” bearing no similarity with their biological parents) and, finally, such exceptional cases as monstrosity (τέρας). Deformity thus denotes any departure from ‘natural’ pattern of biological reproduction, which is the creation of a male offspring endowed with the individual characteristics of his father. The formation of a female offspring is “the first beginning of this deviation” (*GA* 4.3.767b6–8), occurring whenever the male factor, or seed, which provides the form and the source of movement (formal and efficient cause), fails to gain a full mastery (κρατεῖν) over the female contributing factor, the menstrual fluid (material cause). This gradual relapsing process may next lead to the removal (λύεσθαι) of all individual characteristics (τὸ καθ’ ἕκαστον, τόδε τι, or primary substance) of both the father and the mother, to the point where “all that remains is just a human being” (768b12–13 τὸ κοινόν, εἶδος, or secondary substance *qua* species). “Sometimes,” as Aristotle argues, “what remains is that which is most general, and this is the animal” (769b14 τὸ καθόλου μάλιστα, γένος, or secondary substance *qua* genus). This “sometimes” stands for those situations “when the movements [arising from the seed, the carrier of the father’s gender specifications and his individual characteristics] relapse and matter [that comes from the female] does not get mastered” (769b12–13 τέλος γὰρ τῶν μὲν κινήσεων λυομένων, τῆς δ’ ὕλης οὐ κρατουμένης). At this stage, when the offspring fails to preserve even its determination as a species, the reproductive process loses its whole purpose, i.e., the continuation of a particular species, and Nature gives way to the blind, purposeless force of matter. The

of her mischief and, by the intervention of her would-be consort, the Holy Spirit,⁴⁴ eventually rise up to the “Ninth Heaven,” the liminal zone between the Pleromatic world and the realm of Ialdabaoth, which represents the intermediate level of the World-Soul in the three-level universe of the *Apocryphon of John*. Finally, the lowest level of the edifice, or the visible world, comes into being out of the union of the two contrary principles, with Ialdabaoth mating with his own ‘madness’ ἀπόνοια. What we have here, in short, is a rather dualistic scenario, where each subsequent level of a multiple-tiered universe, with the exception of Sophia’s animate realm, derives from the two opposite yet complementary principles which, in their turn, are the products of an analogous conjugal couple at a higher level. The logic of this derivative process, stemming from the transcendent

only trace of Nature’s original design which did not yield to material constraints is the “most general” characteristic of monstrosity—its being an “animal” (ζῷον). For that “in virtue of which an animal is animal” is “sentient soul” (2.3.736b2 τὴν αἰσθητικὴν [ψυχὴν] καθ’ ἣν ζῷον), and that is still something which only the male, by virtue of his seed, is capable of supplying. “Thus, if the male is the factor that produces the sentient soul in cases where male and female are separate, it is impossible for the female alone to generate from itself an animal, because the faculty just mentioned is the essence of what is meant by the male” (2.5.741a13–18). But then Aristotle the biologist raises the puzzle of birds laying wind-eggs, which “proves that, up to a point, the female is able to generate. Yet there is a puzzle here too: In what sense are we to say that these eggs are alive? We cannot say that they are alive in the same sense as fertile eggs, for in that case an actual living being would hatch out of them; nor are they on a par with wood or stone, because these eggs go bad just as fertile ones do, and this seems to indicate that they, in some way, partake of life. Hence it is clear that potentially they possess some sort of soul. What sort, then? The lowest, it must be, and this is nutritive Soul; for this is what exists alike in all animals and plants” (741a19–26). Back to Sophia’s mischief in the *Apocryphon of John*, her spontaneous attempt at giving birth without male consort and the resulting expulsion of a misshapen fetus appears a figurative version of Aristotle’s account of parthenogenesis; likewise, Sophia’s ensuing act of giving some of her light to Ialdabaoth or, alternatively, Ialdabaoth’s theft of his mother’s light, may represent the acquisition of the sentient soul (αἰσθητικὴ ψυχή)—for, once in possession of the divine light, Ialdabaoth acquires the image-making capacity, φαντασία, which, according to Aristotle, is ‘parasitic’ on sense-perception: “Since imagination (φαντασία) is thought to be a kind of movement and not to occur apart from sense-perception (αἴσθησις) but only in things which perceive and with respect to those things of which there is a perception, . . . this movement cannot exist apart from sense-perception or in things which do not perceive” (*De an.* 3.3.428b10–15). See *infra*, pp. 144–48.

⁴⁴ The “Holy Spirit,” or simply “Spirit,” *pneuma* (II 14:5–9; III 21:5–11; BG 47:1–5), which will eventually “come from the holy aeons” and heal Sophia and her seed from their deficiency, so that “the whole Pleroma may become holy and without lack” (II 25:12–13, III 32:16–19, BG 64:6–9; cf. BG 60:12–14 and III 30:10–12).

One and its primordial self-division into male and female can be presented as follows:

<i>Principles (Causes)</i>	<i>Levels of Reality (Effects)</i>	
Transcendent One		
Father and Barbelo	→ First Ten Aeons with Christ the Self-Originate	
Christ and Incorruptibility	→ Twelve Additional Aeons with Sophia	INTELLIGIBLE REALM
Sophia alone	→ Ialdabaoth	ANIMATE REALM
Consort and Sophia	→ Sophia in the “Ninth Heaven”	
Ialdabaoth and Madness	→ Visible World	CORPOREAL REALM

(ii) Based on the Savior’s comparison of the transcendent One with an absolute monarch—“The Monad . . . a Monarchy over which nothing presides” (BG 22:17–19; II 2:27)—the spiritual realm, or the Pleroma, resembles an idealized version of Hellenistic monarchy, as described in the standard works of late Hellenistic and imperial political philosophy.⁴⁵ The supreme king is portrayed as ruling through

⁴⁵ Strato of Lampsachus, the head of the Peripatetic school since 287/6 B.C. to his death in 269/8, is said to have written one such treatise. Further information about the content of a typical kingship treatise is provided by pseudo-Aristeas’ *Letter to Philocrates*, probably written in mid-second century B.C. The idea of the king as god’s representative on earth is a commonplace in Stoic and Platonist literature, partly based on Plato’s designation of monarchy as the best form of government in the *Politicus*. The most influential among the kingship treatises of the imperial period were produced in ‘Neopythagorean’ circles in the first centuries B.C. and A.D., some of them preserved in substantial fragments—e.g., the three essays *On Kingship* attributed to Diotogenes, Ecphantus, and Sthenidas, edited by Thesleff (1965) 71–75, 79–84, and 187–88. The analogy of king and god is fully exploited by Diotogenes: “As god is related to the world, so is the king to the city; and just as the city is to the world, so is the king to god. . . . The king, his rule unaccountable, and himself a living law (νόμος ἔμψυχος), is as god among men” (Thesleff 72). The analogy is often employed in theological and cosmological speculations as a heuristic tool clarifying the relationship between god, subordinate divine beings, the world, and mankind; cf., e.g., the *Eleventh Oration* by Maximus of Tyre (ca. A.D. 125–185): “Think of a great empire and a mighty kingdom, in which all bow willingly (σὺμπάντων νενευκόντων ἐκόντων) to one soul, that of the best and most revered of kings. The boundary (ὄρος) of this empire is . . . the heavens above and earth below: the heavens like the circuit of an impenetrable wall, completely enclosing the universe and shielding all within itself; the earth like a watch-house (φρουράν cf. Plat. *Phaed.* 62b) and a prison for sinful bodies (δεσμούς ἀλιτρῶν σωμάτων cf. *ibid.* 67d, 82e, 83c). The Great King himself sits motionless (ἀτρεμοῦντα) like the law, bestowing on his subjects the security that resides in him. As his partners in

a limited number of functionaries, or “aeons,” each appointed to the rank of “attendant” (παριστάσθαι, παρεστάναι) following the petition (αἰτεῖν) by a superordinate courtier and the king’s “nodding” approval (κατανεύειν).⁴⁶ At the next stage, a portion of royal power is transferred to the sovereign’s son (Christ, the Self-Originate) who, acting as a vice-regent, sets out to create his own court hierarchy. The monarchic constitution of the Pleromatic realm is built upon two complementary premises: that a monarch and his viceroy govern by reason and that their subjects submit to this rational rule voluntarily. Sophia’s disobedience poses a challenge to the rule of law, whereupon both she and her imperfect product, Ialdabaoth, are “cast out,” or declared outlaws. Ialdabaoth’s foundation of his own kingdom represents a degeneration of the ideal monarchic constitution into

power, he has a whole host of visible and invisible deities, some gathered close round the vestibule of his throne-room, like a king’s viziers and close relatives, sharing his table and his hearth, others subordinate to these, and yet others further subordinate to them. Here is a succession, a hierarchy for you to behold, from God above to the earth below” (*Diss.* 11.12 ed. trans. Trapp). Similar passages, replete with Platonic motifs and numerous allusions to the Demiurge’s discourse to the inferior gods from the *Timaeus* (41a–d), also abound in the works of Philo of Alexandria, for example in *Decal.* 60–61 and *Spec.* 1.13–15: “Moses’ opinion was that the universe was generated and is like the greatest city, having magistrates and subjects; for magistrates, all the heavenly bodies, planets and fixed stars; for subjects, such beings as exist below the moon in the air, or on the earth.” Philo uses the same analogy to explain the inner structure of the desert tabernacle and its ten curtains, as described in Exod 26:1: “The structure which includes the whole of wisdom (σοφία) has obtained the perfect number, ten, and wisdom is the court and royal palace of the all-ruler and the sole absolute king. And this is a dwelling accessible only to the intellect, whereas the world is sense-perceptible, since he weaves the curtains from such materials as are symbolical of the four elements: for they are wrought of fine linen [a symbol of earth], of dark blue [air], of purple [water], and of scarlet [fire].” For Philo’s employment of political imagery in his theological discourse, see Umemoto (1991) 207–56; Platonist and Pythagorean political treatises are discussed by Centrone (2000) 559–84; for Hellenistic theories, cf. Hahn (2000) 457–76.

⁴⁶ As already shown in Chapter One, pp. 47–49, the progression of aeons in the Pleromatic realm follows the rhythm of reciprocal giving and taking: *requesting the gift-granting-taking*. This sequence of actions is interrupted when Sophia’s request for a gift, i.e. her union with a consort, is denied, so that she continues to act alone (*requesting the gift-not giving-taking what was not given*). The last act in this three-member sequence, viz., “nodding in consent” (κατανεύειν), plays an important role in Plotinus’s metaphysics, denoting a “downward inclination” or “decline” in the scale of being—for example, the soul’s decline into matter (cf., e.g., *Enn.* I 8.4 and Sleeman-Pollet 1980, 676). The ‘decentralization’ of God’s absolute power in the *Apocryphon of John* is therefore a negative process—it increases the risk of egotistic assertion of autonomy among the subordinate subjects (Sophia) and eventually results in apostasy (Ialdabaoth).

tyranny and all of its concomitant characteristics: self-aggrandizement, arrogance, jealousy, and disorder. The royal power in the *Apocryphon of John* is thus divided among the three separate rulers, in an obvious reference to a curious account of the Second Platonic Letter (312e–313a) about the three “kings” ruling, in descending order, over the respective levels of reality.⁴⁷ The “unbegotten Father,” who stands for the Platonic ‘First King’, reigns along with his

⁴⁷ The relevant section of the Second Platonic Letter runs as follows (312d–313a): “According to his report, you [i.e. Dionysius] say that you have not had an adequate demonstration concerning the nature of the first [principle]. Now, I must state it to you in riddles, so that in case something happens to the tablet ‘in folds of ocean or of earth’, he who reads may not understand. In relation to [or: ‘about’, ‘around’ *περὶ*] the King of All, all things exist, and for his sake they all are, and of all fair things he is the cause; and related to [about, around] the Second are the secondaries; and related to [about, around] the Third the tertiaries. About these, then, the human soul strives to gain knowledge of what sort they are, looking to the things with which it has some affinity; yet none of them is adequate. But as to the king and the things I mentioned, they are nothing like this. Thereupon the soul inquires, ‘But what are they like?’ This very question, O son of Dionysius and Doris, or rather the travail (*ὀδύνη*) that this question occasions in the soul, is the cause of all evils, and if that be not eradicated from a man, he shall never really attain the truth.” Tarrant (1993) 170–73, relates this letter to Rhodes, where Posidonius taught and where “Thrasylus met Tiberius,” and considers the latter “responsible for including it (or its esoteric part) within the *Corpus Platonicum*” as an oblique version of Plato’s deductions about the One in the *Parmenides*. In spite of the enigmatic language of ‘kingship’, the central themes of the passage are Platonist commonplaces: (i) the hierarchical structure of reality; (ii) the soul’s affinity with the higher realm; (iii) the soul’s desire to apply a discursive reasoning to that which cannot be grasped in a rational fashion, a “travail” that results in (iv) its ‘fall’ and in generating evil. All these themes play an important role in the metaphysical system of the *Apocryphon of John*, where Sophia performs a similar set of actions as the soul in the Second Letter: striving for knowledge–travail–generation of evil–fall. For the history of Middle Platonist, early Christian, and Neoplatonist usages of this esoteric text, cf. Dörrie (1970) 217–35 and Saffrey-Westerink (1974) xx–lix. From the aesthetical point of view, the passage can be viewed as a further refinement of the analogy of king and god, highlighting a gradual subordination of vertical hierarchy, as formulated by Philo or Dio of Prusa (cf. *supra*, n. 46), to a circular organization of space, with the first principle occupying the central position rather than the highest post in the pyramidal structure. Plotinus (*Enn.* V 1.8.1), for example, interprets the recurrent use of the proposition *περὶ* in the Second Letter in terms of spatial organization, as the relation between the geometric center, occupied by the ‘King of All’ (“all things exist around the King of All”), and the concentric spheres ranged around the center and governed by the ‘Second’ and the ‘Third’ (“around the Second are the secondaries and around the Third the tertiaries”). For other instances of Plotinus’s reading of the Second Letter in terms of metaphysical progression (e.g., VI 7.42, V 5.3, II 9.9), and for his refinements of the analogy by resorting to the visual aspects of contemporaneous imperial processions (Elagabalus, Gallienus), cf. Doerrie (1970) 231–32, and nn. 20–21.

consort Barbelo over the “androgynous quintet of aeons” (BG 29:14–17; II 6:8–10). His son, Christ the Self-Originate, or divine Intellect, who corresponds to the Platonic “Second King concerned with the second things,” was appointed to rule over the “entirety,” i.e., the intelligible realm of the twelve additional aeons, and to him the Father “subordinated all authority and truth that was in him” (NHC II 7:23–27; BG 32:13–18). As for Ialdabaoth, the product of Sophia’s lawless desire, who corresponds to the Platonic ‘Third King’ and bears a vague resemblance to Plato’s divine craftsman, he is described as the “chief ruler” who “fabricated for himself an aeon burning with a luminous fire, in which he still exists” (BG 38:14–39:4; II 10:19–25) along with his authorities and powers.⁴⁸

What unites the other set of analogies developed in the *Apocryphon of John* is the starting hypothesis of the first principle as an infinite, indeterminate, and continuous substance: “the immeasurable light,” “the pure luminous water,” “the perfect virginal spirit.” Transition from indetermination to the determinate is thus explained in ‘continuist’ terms, borrowed from Stoic physics, as a series of alterations within an infinite substance that naturally contracts and expands in

⁴⁸ According to Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.37.5–6, a similar interpretation of the riddle of the three ‘kings’ in the Second Platonic Letter was offered by Valentinus: the latter identified Plato’s ‘King of All’ with “the Father, viz., the Abyss and Silence, of all aeons,” the ‘Second’ with the intellect reigning over “the totality of aeons inside the boundary [of the spiritual realm],” i.e., the realm of intelligible forms, and the ‘Third’ with the ruler of “the whole structure outside of the Pleroma,” i.e., the visible world. Cf. *Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.11.1: “He [Valentinus] conceived two boundaries: one, between the Abyss and the Pleroma, separates the generated aeons from the ungenerated Father, and the other separates the Pleroma from their Mother [Achamoth].” For these two boundaries, Valentinus and his followers found a scriptural support in the obscure reference to the two curtains (*καταπετάσματα*) dividing the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries in Heb 9:3, an allusion to Exod 25:9.40 and 26:30, where God revealed to Moses the heavenly model of the earthly tabernacle. In fact, Heb 9:3 mentions only “the second curtain” (*τὸ δεύτερον καταπέτασμα*) separating the first tent, called the “Holy Place” (“Ἅγια), from the second, the “Holy of Holies” (“Ἅγια Ἁγίων). Philo’s description of the desert tabernacle from Exod 25:1 ff. (*Mos.* 2.101) might have helped Valentinus to supply the missing terms in Heb: “In the space between (*ἐν τῷ μεθωρίῳ*) between the four and the five pillars, which may properly be called the vestibule of the temple (*πρόναον*), and is shut off by two woven screens (*δυσὶν ὑφάσματι*), the inner called the curtain (*καταπέτασμα*) and the outer the covering (*κάλυμμα*), he [Moses] set the remaining three of the aforementioned equipments. For the Valentinian usage of the temple-analogy, see, e.g., *Clem. Al. Exc. Theod.* 38.1–2 and *Gos. Phil.* 68 and 105 (NHC II 69:14–70:4, 84:14–85:20), and an excellent discussion in Orbe (1976) 2:353–93.

volume, and whose infinitely divisible parts, later in the process, blend with and pervade the opposite, passive element.

(iii) God is initially a pure and immeasurable light capable of limitless extension and infinite division—the pure gaze whose rays of vision, in accordance with ancient optical theory, are assimilated with rays of light.⁴⁹ God irradiates light without suffering diminution, yet these rays of light, as they spread outwards, lack the subtlety and intensity (“purity”) of the original source. God’s first emanation, whose name is Barbelo, is the “likeness of the light” (BG 27:12) and the offspring of her subsequent union with God, viz., Christ the Self-Originate, is a “luminous spark” (σπινθήρ III 9:13–14; cf. BG 30:1–2, II 6:13).⁵⁰ This portion of light is then further divided among the “four great luminaries” (φωστῆρες), each presiding over three aeons. As the process reaches Sophia, the lowest aeon in the spiritual realm, the light-substance has lost so much of its brightness that Sophia “grows dark.” The remaining light then blends with darkness, gets condensed, and turns into fire—the realm of the ignorant demiurge called Ialdabaoth.⁵¹ The differentiation of various levels of reality in

⁴⁹ The idea that the source of vision lies in the eyes of the beholder and the rays of light emanating from there is, of course, Platonic; cf. *Timaeus* 45b–46c and Cornford (1937) 151–56. For appropriation of this optical theory by later Platonists, from Posidonius to Plotinus, cf. Witt (1930) 198–207, and Alliez-Feher (1989) 58: “The One and its series of hypostases [in Plotinus’s metaphysics] can thus be seen both as a contemplating eye and as a source of radiant light.” For ancient theories of optics see, above all, Simon (1988).

⁵⁰ See Tardieu (1975) 225–55.

⁵¹ Cf. II 11:10–15, for the application of the Stoic theory of total blending to the creation of Ialdabaoth fiery realm. The outcome of the blending of light and darkness depends on which of the two gains control, or becomes active in the process: if light, then darkness is shining; if darkness, then light is dimmed. The ‘Sethian’ Gnostics conceived the insertion of the divine spark of light into darkness in terms of total blending, too; and they even advised their followers to read “the account of blending and mixture” (τῷ περὶ κράσεως καὶ μίξεως λόγῳ)—the subject in which “many a writer had taken an interest, and especially Andronicus the Peripatetic” (Hipp. Ref. 5.21.1). The Stoic doctrine of total blending (κράσις) did not only served as an explanatory model for various ‘Gnostic’ accounts of cosmogony—it also provided a ‘scientific’ background for the doctrines of the final *diakrisis*, viz., the separation of the divine element from Ialdabaoth’s realm of darkness. As the ‘Sethians’ explained, “Blending . . . implies separation. . . . For each of the blended elements is eventually separated and apportioned to its proper region” (5.21.5–6). See a thorough discussion of the problem in Orbe (1958) 1:219–31. For the Stoic theory of blending, cf. Todd (1976).

the *Apocryphon of John* is, in short, an articulation of the movement from light to dark in measurable ‘shades’—the process of elemental change described in the Stoic categories of condensation and compression:

[The Stoics] say that the luminous and tenuous part of the ether by reason of its subtlety became sky and the part which was condensed or compressed became stars, and that of these the most sluggish and turbid is the moon. (Plut. *De facie* 15, 928C–D Cherniss.)⁵²

(iv) God is the pure virginal spirit, or *pneuma*, in its most refined state. As it begins to expand, or move outwards,⁵³ this dynamic continuum undergoes a series of modifications in the degree of tension (τόνος) and density, and becomes, in the order of increased slackness, Intellect (Christ the Self-Originate and the spiritual realm), Soul (Sophia and her ‘ninth sphere’), and Physique endowed with imagination and irrational impulse (Ialdabaoth and the visible world over which he rules).⁵⁴ The hierarchical world-model of the *Apocryphon of John* is, in short, an articulation of the movement, from tensility (εὐτονία) to slackness (ἀτονία), of the divine ‘breath’ permeating all levels of reality. As Chrysippus phrased it in his work *On the Passions*, “just as ‘tensions’ in the body are called soft and firm with regard to its sinewy character, so too the ‘tone’ in the soul is called tensility and slackness” (Galen, *PHP* 4.6.5, trans. De Lacy).⁵⁵ Whereas the

⁵² For the Stoic theory of elemental change and the continuist conception of infinite divisibility of matter as its necessary presupposition, cf. Hahn (1985) 39–56, Long-Sedley (1987) 297–304, and White (2003) 124–52. For a gradual condensation, or degradation, of the pure and refined ‘divine’ substance in various ‘Gnostic’ cosmologies (e.g. Basilides’ doctrine of a threefold Sonship in Hippol. *Elench.* 7.22.7–8, with “one part composed of light particles, another coarse, and a third in need of purification”), as well as for a brief yet representative survey of philosophical stimuli (e.g., Chrysippus’s distinction of three kinds of fire based on the theory of the opposite processes of rarefaction and condensation or of expansion and contraction), cf. Orbe (1956) 110–16.

⁵³ Cf. *supra*, pp. 112–13.

⁵⁴ Philo Alex., *LA* 2.22–23 (SVF 2.458): “The intellect, when as yet unclothed and not bound up with the body . . . has many powers: the tenor kind, the physical, the psychic, the rational, the intellectual, and countless others, varying both in species and genus. Tenor is common to inanimate stones and blocks of wood, of which the bones in us, which resemble stones, also partake. Physique extends to plants, and in us there things resembling plants, such as nails and hair. Physique is, in fact, tenor in actual motion. Soul, again, is physique which has acquired presentation and impulse. This is shared also by irrational animals.”

⁵⁵ The incomplete list of ancient sources discussing the ‘tension’ (τόνος) in the soul can be found in Matelli (1999) 64–67 and n. 34. Cf., e.g., Philo Alex., *Ios.*

spiritual realm is characterized by firmness, vigor, and tensility, Sophia, who typifies the level of the rational soul, acts in a way that abandons, or rejects, “correct judgments because the tension of the soul . . . does not persist to the end to carry out fully the commands of reason, . . . revealing a certain weakness and slackness” (4.6.3, 12) and yielding to a violent “to-and-fro” movement of passions (II 13:13–27; BG 44:19–45:19).⁵⁶ Ialdabaoth, Sophia’s ugly miscarriage,

61: “. . . the political crowd is solely occupied in choosing what charms and pleases their ears, by means of which the tensions of the intellectual faculty are slackened and the sinews of the soul, so to speak, unstrung.”

⁵⁶ Sophia’s tumultuous movement of passion (shame, weeping, repentance) originates from her failed attempt to attain God by discursive reasoning (ἐνθούμησις). This is, of course, the ‘orthodox’ Stoic position, which claims that the affective and kinetic aspects of passion have their source not in some irrational part of the soul, or in its irrational capacity, but in the rational commanding faculty—hence Chrysippus’s equation of passions with false judgments (cf. Galen *PHP* 4.14 ff.). Does this mean that *Ap. John* departs, in this case, from the alternative Platonist position which places passions in the soul’s irrational parts, appetitive and desirative? The description of Sophia in terms of a victimized heroine “moving to and fro . . . in the darkness of ignorance” upon “learning that the garment of darkness [Ialdabaoth] has not come to exist perfectly” (II 13:22–36), reflects the Chrysippian intellectualist account of repentance (μετάνοια, cf. Plut. *De virt. mor.* 7, 447A). On the other hand, “darkness” in *Ap. John* is synonymous with “matter” (II 21:7–8, BG 55:7–8), so that Sophia’s disorderly movement seems to result from her fall into a flowing matter—a well-known Platonist *topos* whereby the soul is at rest when contemplating forms and confused and moved in a disorderly fashion when imprisoned in the bodily flux. Following this Platonist model, Sophia would stand for the “desirative part in the soul”—one which “is not purely passionate (παθητικόν) but frequently has a mental image of what is fair, though one commingled with what is irrational” (Plut. *Quaest. Plat.* 9.1, 1008C–D), “sometimes joining forces with the appetitive part” that is “willing to consort with body,” and “sometimes lending strength and vigor to reason” (Plut. *De virt. mor.* 3, 442A). This is exactly the way Plutarch describes the precosmic soul, or “soul in itself” (*De an. procr.* 6, 1014B ψυχὴ καθ’ ἑαυτήν)—a “third principle and capacity intermediate between matter and god” (6, 1015B), having a nature sensitive and akin to both, “its perceptivity laying hold on matter and its discerning faculty on the intelligibles (23, 1024B). In this precosmic phase, prior to the establishment of world order, the soul converts motionless ideas into shifting perceptible images within the primary matter, “keeping all things in disorderly and jangling motion” (7, 1015E) and being simultaneously “moved” by sense perception (24, 1024C). In sum, Sophia’s movement of repentance combines two seemingly incompatible alternatives—it represents a particular state of mind stirred by the rational acknowledgment of evil as well as an irrational affection resulting from the soul’s union with the flowing and ebbing tide of the bodily substrate. A similar blending of Stoic and Platonist ethical ideas can be found in Posidonius of Apamea who, albeit reverting to Plato’s pluralist psychology and placing passions in the soul’s irrational parts, viz., appetitive and desirative, retained many essential views of the ‘orthodox’ Stoa. For a detailed discussion of Sophia’s repentance and her double meaning (individual and universal, ethical and noetic, psychological and cosmological), see chap. 3, pp. 246–63.

occupies an even lower level—he lacks reason and cannot even depart from right judgment. Born from Sophia’s womb as an aborted fetus and assigned a plant-like status, it is only upon taking a portion of Sophia’s divine breath, her “great power” (II 10:21–22; BG 38:15–16), that he evolves into an ensouled creature—an irrational animal capable of receiving impressions (φαντασίαι) from the senses and responding to them in an automatic way, as well as of uttering an unlimited variety of non-referential, magic-like, sounds (*voces magicæ*).⁵⁷ Ialdabaoth, in sum, possesses all the natural faculties of an animal’s soul—impression, irrational impulse, and locomotion—and

⁵⁷ The analogy from the field of ancient linguistics is not as developed in *Ap. John* as in some other ‘Gnostic’ systems (e.g., the Marcosian ‘letter mysticism’ in *Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.13–20, *Gos. Eg.* IV 54:3–13, 78:10–19, Heracleon frags. 3–5), but the movement from absolute silence of the One, via the “unrestrained and measurable sound” (*Trim. Prot.* XIII 38:14–15) of the first female principle (indefinite Dyad) and its further articulation into a limited set of specific units that constitute rational discourse (Logos), down to an unlimited variety of vocal sounds (the unlimited plurality of sensible objects), is still discernible in the Savior’s revelatory monologue. The first series of aeons, starting from Barbelo down to Christ the Self-Originate and his Intellect, “came into existence within silence (σιγή) and conception (ἔννοια)” (BG 31:10–11; cf. II 7:3–4). Next, the Self-Originate “fabricated the entirety [of aeons] by the Word” (BG 31:17–18, II 7:10–11), that is, by the articulated discourse consisting of a limited set of distinct elements (vowels, consonants, semi-consonants), whose combinations, governed by certain organizing principles, make up the basic units of meaning (syllables, words). The names assigned to the Pleromatic aeons constitute a signifying chain of articulated divine dispositions (truth, perception, memory, intelligence, love, wisdom, etc.). Ialdabaoth’s authorities and powers, in contrast, have pairs of names: “one set given . . . after the superior glory,” that is, by reference to their paradigmatic counterparts in the Pleroma, and the other assigned by Ialdabaoth from “desire (ἐπιθυμία) and anger (ὀργή),” and “with reference to appearance (φαντασία) and their powers” (BG 40:19–41:12). The latter set of names, one which stems from Ialdabaoth’s capacity of uttering non-referential sounds (e.g., Athoth, Harmas, Kalila-Oimbri, Abrisene, etc.), is a series of *nomina barbara* and *voces magicæ*, the Semitic-sounding names borrowed from magical incantations of the period and displaying many characteristics of religious glosso-lalia: the high frequency of vowels, the utterance of incomprehensible sounds such as mumbling, gurgling or groaning, and the alliterative combination of syllables reminiscent of the abecedaria and writing exercises in the Hellenistic primary schools. For the derivation of ‘Gnostic’ *nomina propria* from the Hellenistic magic see Jackson (1989) 69–79 and Fauth (1973) 79–120. The etymology of such names as Barbelo or Ialdabaoth is still disputed. For the etymology of Ialdabaoth cf. e.g. Scholem (1974) 405–21 (Aram. *yld* and the abridged form of Sabaoth, viz., “Begetter of Sabaoth”), Fauth (1973) 91 n. 75 (the combination of “elements” taken from Iao, Elohim, Adonai, and Sabaoth), and Dan (1996) 557–64 (“a combined form of the formula used by the Hekhalot mystics to describe the powers of the divine pleroma,” i.e. the combination of Yah, the L of Elohim, the D of Adonay, and the ending “baoth” of “Zevaoth”). For the etymology of Barbelo see, among others, Harvey

stands for the ‘pneuma’ in its lowest degree of tension, one which the *Apocryphon of John* calls the “counterfeit” (ἀντίμιμον) or “adversary spirit” (ἀντικείμενον πνεῦμα).⁵⁸ For this reason, the first product of his modeling, viz., the animate body of Adam, had also been born weak and incapable of moving, until Sophia’s power, or *pneuma*, was blown into it, so that “the body moved, became strong, and shone” (II 19:10–33; cf. BG 50:11–52:1). As his “intelligence grew stronger than those who had made him, and stronger than the first ruler” (II 20:3–5, BG 52:8–11), Adam was cast down in matter and clothed in the body, experiencing the condition common to all of his posterity—an uneasy coexistence of two incompatible elements,

(1857) 221 (Aram. “God revealed in the Tetrad”); Fauth (1973) 80–84 (the phonetic variant of Μαρμαρι, Copt. ΜΑΡΜΑΡΟΪ, the female consort of Marmaraoth–Barbaraoth, presumably from Aram. “Herr der Lichter” or Syr. “Herr der Herren”—the code name of Iao Sabaoth as Cosmocrator); Layton (1987) 15n. 3 (Coptic *berbir* f., “projectile, lance,” but also likely to recall Coptic *berber* m., “boiling over, overflow”); Jackson (1989) 74–75 (derived from such incantatory *voces magicae* as βερβαλι or βελβαλι, βαρβαρβελωχα, βερβελωχ, all from various Greek magical papyri), and Merkelbach (1992) 214 (βερβαλι in PGM XIII 192, 198, 529 derives from κρηε, κρηε, κρηι “new,” and κελ, κελ “eye”). For the Egyptian origin of the names for demons in *Ap. John* see now Quack (1995) 97–122. Versnel (2002) 105–58 provides an exemplary treatment of the thematics, composition, and tropology of the magical spell; cf. also Cox Miller (1986) 481–505. For the ‘poetics’ of ancient Greek glossolalia see Crippa (1990) 487–508 and (1997) 121–41. The explanation of the transition from unity to multiplicity in terms of the division of speech elements is given in Plato’s *Philebus* (17a–b, 18b–d), where the discovery of letters by the Egyptian god Teuth illustrates the “divine art” of dialectic. Teuth proceeds bottom-up, from the unlimited multitude of sounds (φωναί) through the articulation of the intermediary units of speech (vowels, consonants, semi-vowels, and mutes) and their respective letters (γράμματα) to an abstract generic unit, or “element” (στοιχείον), which corresponds to the notion of ‘phoneme’ in modern linguistics. The Marcosian system of procession is the exact inversion of Plato’s method of collection—the topdown analysis of the highest genus (στοιχείον), first into species and subspecies, then into a limited multitude of individual units, and finally into unlimited plurality among the sense-perceptible copies: cf. Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.14.2: “The element itself (στοιχείον), from which the letter (γράμμα) together with its pronunciation (ἐκφώνησις) came down is made up of thirty letters, and each of the thirty letters has in itself other letters, through which the name of the letter is coined; and again, these other letters are named through still others, and these through others, so that the multitude (πλήθος) of letters runs into infinity (ἄπειρον).”

⁵⁸ In Ptolemy’s view, “the Demiurge was too weak (ἀτονώτερον) to get acquainted with any spiritual being,” and so he “thought that he alone was God” (Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.5.4). Jesus stands as the Demiurge’s antipode, according to Carpocrates and his disciples, in that “his soul was vigorous (εὔτονον) and pure, remembering what had been made visible to her in her rotatory motion with the ingenerate God (1.25.1; cf. Hippol. *Ref.* 7.32.1; Epiph. *Pan.* 27.2).

viz. the divine *pneuma* and the material body, with soul serving as a necessary link between the two and capable of moving either way. Which of the two courses the soul will take depends on the outcome of the struggle for mastery between the “spirit of life”, characterized by a high degree of tension and vigor, and its weakened counterpart, the “counterfeit spirit,” which “derives from matter” (II 21:7–8) and consorts with the body.

Indeed, the power will descend unto everyone, for without it no one can stand up; and after they are begotten, if the spirit of life increases . . . it strengthens the soul, and nothing can mislead it into the works of wickedness. . . . In those . . . who have not known to whom they belong, the despicable spirit has increased within them while they were going astray, and it weighs down the soul and beguiles it into the works of wickedness, and casts it down into forgetfulness. And after it [the soul] has come forth, it is handed over to the authorities, who came to exist through the ruler; and they bind it with bonds and cast it into the prison, and they go around with it until it awakens out of forgetfulness and takes knowledge unto itself. (II 26:13–27:10, BG 67:4–69:13)

(v) In accordance with the Biblical association of water imagery with the presence of God,⁵⁹ and starting from Jesus’ obscure references to a “spring” and “rivers” of “living water springing up to eternal life” in the Fourth Gospel (John 4:10, 14; 7:38–39), the God of the *Apocryphon of John* is conceived as “the spring of living water” overflowing endlessly and “supplying (χορηγεῖν) all aeons and worlds” (BG 26:17–27:1; II 4:21–22). The universe is imagined as a series of effluences from God’s overabundance—a multiple-tiered fountain with water spurting copiously from the top and gathering at the base as a disorderly tide of water “above matter” (II 14:27–28).⁶⁰ The distinction between the pure water of the Pleromatic realm and the

⁵⁹ Isa 44:3 “I will pour water . . . I will place my spirit upon your seed”; Joel 3:18 “A fountain shall come from the house of the Lord”; Zech 13:1, 14:8 “On that day, the living waters shall flow out from Jerusalem;” Prov 18:3–4 “The words of the mouth are deep waters; the fountain of wisdom is a gushing stream”; cf. Jer 2:13, Ezek 47:1–12.

⁶⁰ The representation of reality as a continuous effluence from God’s substance is a literary *topos* of the period. The list of structurally homologous passages from Hellenistic literature that might have contributed to the development of the water-analogy in *Ap. John*, is available in Winston (1979) 184–87. In this complex network of texts and textual fragments, Philo and his intertextual strategy of juxtaposing Platonist and Stoic images of effluence (e.g., Plato, *Phaedr.* 255c9, *Rep.* 6.509b, Cicero, *ND* 2.79) with those stemming from his own milieu (Prov 18:3–4; Sir 1:9–10, 19;

bottomless chaotic waters underlying the visible world is of Biblical origin, too, and refers to God's separation of "the waters under the firmament from those above the firmament" in the Book of Genesis (Gen 1:7).⁶¹ Sophia's agitated movement in "the darkness of ignorance" (BG 45:13–15, II 13:24–25) or dark "matter" (cf. II 21:7–8) results from the contact with the lower waters of chaos, whose ever-flowing quality resembles a turbulent welter of elemental qualities from Plato's *Timaeus* (52d–53c).⁶² In its final transformation, water is, along with earth, fire, and "spirit" (air), one of the four elements constitutive of "matter" (ύλη), the "source" (πηγή) and "mother" of their respective properties: "hot" for fire, "cold" for spirit or air, "wetness" for water, and "dryness" for earth (II 18:2–5).⁶³ It is out

24:23–34; Wis 7:25–8:1) might have served as a direct impetus. See, e.g., *Fuga* 197–98: "And now we have to speak of the supreme and most excellent spring, which the Father of All declared by the mouth of prophets; for he said somewhere, 'Me they forsook, a spring of life, and dug for themselves broken cisterns which shall fail to hold water' (Jer 2:13). God, therefore, is the primordial spring, and well may be so called, for he showered forth this whole universe. . . . Matter is a dead thing, yet God is something more than life, and ever-flowing (ἀένναος) spring of living." Another common element in Philo and *Ap. John* is the creative modification of analogies in order to bring them as close as possible to a theme ('derivation of plurality from unity') which they must clarify; cf. *Det.* 117: "The fountain of the divine wisdom runs sometimes with the gentler and more quiet stream, at other times, again, more swiftly and with a fuller and stronger current. When it runs down gently, it sweetens much as honey does; when it runs down swiftly, it comes in full volume as material for lighting up the soul, as oil does the lamp." For the images of the divine source, its superabundance, and its endless overflow in Plotinus cf. *Enn.* I 7.1, II 5.3, V 1.7, V 3.12.15, VI 1.6, VI 7.21, VI 8.18, and esp. III 8.10: "Imagine a spring that has no other source, giving itself to all the rivers, yet never exhausted by what they take but remaining integrally as it was."

⁶¹ For various 'Gnostic' interpretations of Gen 1:7, see Orbe (1966) 51–68; cf., e.g., Hipp. *Ref.* 5.27.3 (on Justin's *Baruch*): "For there is a distinction . . . between water and water, and the water below the firmament is of the wicked creation, in which earthly and animate men bathe, and there is above the firmament the living water of the Good, in which the spiritual living men bathe"; *ibid.* 5.19.5–17 (on the system of the Sethians): "The darkness is a dreadful water, into which the light, together with the spirit, is drawn down. . . . For there was a ray from above, from that perfect light, held fast in the dark, dreadful, bitter, filthy water, which is the luminous spirit 'moving upon' the water (Gen 1:2b) . . . The light and the spirit are imprisoned in the unclean and baneful disorderly womb, into which the serpent enters, the wind of darkness, the first-born of the waters, and produces the human being . . ."

⁶² Cf. *supra*, chap. 1, pp. 71–72 and n. 48 for Numenius's identification of the "waters" of Genesis (1:2b, 1:7) with prime matter.

⁶³ The characterization of the four elements by their respective essential property is Stoic (cf., e.g., D.L. 7.137), but the ultimate source in this particular case

of these elements and their generic properties that Ialdabaoth and his companions modeled Adam's material body, "bringing him into the shadow of death" (BG 54:14–55:7, II 20:35–21:7).

The final two analogies which, along with the aforementioned five, make up the discourse of procession in the *Apocryphon of John*, represent modified versions of the Stoic model of mental process and of Plato's craft-analogy, the structuring principle of the Platonist theory of causality.

(vi) By reference to the Stoic theory of cognitive process,⁶⁴ the God of the *Apocryphon of John* is conceived as initially an intellect in potentiality, which does not yet receive information from the senses and has nothing to conceptualize. Only upon perceiving his image in a luminous, mirror-like substrate, he attains the first notion (Ennoia) of the 'self'. This first notion is vague and requires further specification of its essential characteristics. For this reason, according to the *Apocryphon's* longer redaction (II 6:10–18; IV 9:11–23), God next "looks into" Ennoia and begets his "only-begotten son," Christ the Self-Originate, who assumes the role of an active Intellect (Nous) capable of thinking of itself as a separate object and, by engaging in discursive reasoning (Logos), analyzes the content of its own thought into a set of individual predicates (aeons). The sum total of these individual traits is Sophia, the last aeon of the Pleroma—God's vague notion of the 'self' turned into a closed system of his defining characteristics. The process unfolds differently in the two shorter versions of the *Apocryphon* (BG 29:18–30:8, III 9:11–19). Here it is Ennoia-Barbelo who "looks into the pure light" of God, then "commits the act of 'conversion' (ἐπιστροφή), or "turns herself" to God, and, by giving birth to Christ the Self-Originate, activates the faculty of intellection, or Intellect (Nous), capable of articulating her intuitive notion of God into a signifying chain of distinct dispositions. Sophia, the lowest aeon in the Pleromatic realm, follows Ennoia's example and attempts to "unite" with her divine consort. This time, however, 'conversion' does not take place because Sophia, from her remote position in the divine realm, and endowed only with discursive think-

may be the Platonic dichotomy, drawn in the *Timaeus* (50a–53c), between the ideal forms of Fire, Air, Water, and Earth, and their shifting qualities, or "vestiges," in the "receptacle of becoming" at the pre-cosmic stage.

⁶⁴ See supra, pp. 98–106.

ing (ἐνθύμησις),⁶⁵ cannot “look into God” and grasp him in the same intuitive fashion as Ennoia. For this reason, Sophia’s discursive thinking collapses back into itself and ends up in “miscarriage” (Ialdabaoth). Incapable of moving upwards and conceiving God’s primordial unity

⁶⁵ III 14:9–19 “Our fellow-sister Sophia, being an aeon, conceived a thought from herself in the ἐνθύμησις (BG 36:18–19 ζῆλα ζῆ-ΠΙΘΕΣΥΕ) of the Spirit and Foreknowledge; she wished to bring forth her likeness out of herself. Her ἐνθύμησις was not ineffective and her deed came forth imperfect and without sharing in form with her form, because she had made it apart from her consort” (cf. II 9:25–29). The author of *Ap. John* was not the first to take this term in a pejorative sense. The verb ἐνθυμείσθαι had already been used by Thucydides as meaning both ‘consideration’ and ‘irritation’; cf. Huart (1968) 238–39. For Aristotle, ἐνθυμείσθαι and ἐνθύμημα denote a deductive inference whose premises are not certainties, viz., axioms and theorems, but “probabilities and signs” (*Rhet.* 1.1.1357a31–32, 2.25.1402b13 ff.) belonging to the realm of “commonly held opinions” (ἔνδοξα) and reflecting values and attitudes shared by a speaker (*êthos*) and his audience (*pathos*). Philo of Alexandria argues against the “careless” literalist interpreters of Gen 6:6–7 (ἐνεθυμήθη ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἐποίησε τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς καὶ διανοήθη . . . καὶ εἶπεν ὁ θεός, ἀναλείψω τὸν ἄνθρωπον . . . ὅτι ἐθυμώθη ὅτι ἐποίησα αὐτόν) who supposed that ἐνεθυμήθη means ‘repentance’ (μεταμέλεια), hinting that “the demiurge repented of the creation of men” (*Deus* 21). The same scriptural passage is cited as an argument against God’s immutability by Celsus (Origen, *C. Cels.* 6.58 πῶς δ’ ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς ἀχαρίστοις καὶ πονηροῖς γενομένοις μεταμέλει καὶ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ τέχνην μέμφεται καὶ μισεῖ καὶ ἀπειλεῖ καὶ φθείρει τὰ ἴδια ἔκγονα) and by Simon in *Ps.-Clem. Hom.* 3.39.4, where ἐνθυμείσθαι is portrayed as a vacillating thought stemming from ignorance and lacking a clearly defined goal: καὶ τὸ γεγράφαι ὅτι ἐνεθυμήθη ὁ θεός ὅτι ἐποίησεν τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ μετανοεῖ καὶ ἄγνοεῖ· τὸ γὰρ ἐνεθυμήθη σκέψις ἐστίν ἢ τις δι’ ἄγνοιαν ὧν βούλεται τὸ τέλος ἀκριβῶσαι θέλει ἢ ἐπὶ τῷ μὴ κατὰ γνώμην ἀποβάντι μεταμελουμένου. In all these cases, the ambiguity of ἐνεθυμήθη is the basic issue (*stasis*) of the dispute where each party (Philo vs. the ‘literalists’, Peter vs. Simon, Origen vs. Simon) appeals to a different reading of Gen 6:6. In Philo’s view, the terms ἐνεθυμήθη and διανοήθη point to the two most constant and unvacillating powers of the divine intellect—“the thought stored up, or stocked, in [God’s] intellect and the thought in its all-traversing course” (*Deus* 34)—and to God’s “lucid reasoning (ἀκραιφνοῦς λογισμοῦ) considering the reason why He made man upon the earth” (*QG* 1.93). The Stoic base of this positive evaluation of ἐνθύμησις is discernible in Philo’s terminology (τὴν μὲν ἐναποκειμένην οὖσαν νόησιν, τὴν δὲ νοήσεως διέξοδον), but the conclusive proof for the Stoic influence comes from Irenaeus’s polemics against the Valentinians. There, in *Adv. haer.* 2.13.1–2, we find ἐνθύμησις included in the sequence of mental process and defined, in an obvious allusion to the ‘growing argument’ of the Stoics, as one of the expanding movements of the mind from the initial, intuitive conception (*ennoia*) of some object to its final articulation in the “utterable word” (*verbum emissibile*). In this process of expansion and growth, during which the mind remains unaltered and retains its identity, ἐνθύμησις figures as the “amplification” of the initial conception (*ennoia*)—a comprehensive consideration of an object “which apprehends the entire soul” and “spends much time on the same until it gets, so to speak, completely approved”: *prima enim motio eius [scil. mentis aut sensus] de aliquo ennoia appellatur; perseverans autem et aucta et universam comprehendens animam enthymesis vocatur; haec autem enthymesis, multum temporis faciens in eodem et velut probata sensatio*

beyond being, she inclines downwards and conceives dark matter—the unfathomable kernel of God’s being which she could not articulate⁶⁶ and in which she will later act as *Epinoia*, or practical wisdom.⁶⁷

[φρόνησις] *nominatur; haec autem sensatio in multum dilatata consilium* [βούλευσις?] *facta est; augmentum autem et motus in multum dilatatus consilii cogitatio* [διδιολογοισμός] *nominatur; quae etiam in mente perseverans verbum rectissime* [ἐνδιάθετος λόγος] *appellabitur, ex quo emissibile emittitur verbum* [λόγος προφορικός]. A similar sequence occurs in *Soph. Jes. Chr.* III 96:3–7 and BG 86:16–87:1, and in *Eugnostos* III 73:8–11 and V 3:10–13 (νόυς, ἔννοια, ἐνθύμησις, φρόνησις, λογισμός, δύναμις). As this example indicates, some ‘Gnostic’ systems did not assign the same pejorative meaning to ἐνθύμησις as *Ap. John* or Ptolemy (*Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.2.2–4); cf. also *Clem. Exc. Theod.* 7, where the term is taken, just as in Philo, *Deus* 34 (cf. supra), as synonymous with God’s first self-conception (ἔννοια): ἄγνωστος οὖν ὁ πατήρ ὃν ἠθέλησεν γνωσθῆναι τοῖς Αἰώσι, καὶ διὰ τῆς ἐνθυμήσεως τῆς ἑαυτοῦ, ὡς ἂν ἑαυτὸν ἐγνωκώς, πνεῦμα γνώσεως οὐσης ἐν γνώσει προέβαλε τὸν Μονογενῆ. For the growing argument see Long-Sedley (1987) 1:166–76. The best discussion of ἐνθύμησις in Irenaeus, Philo, and various ‘Gnostic’ systems is Orbe (1958) 1:363–86 and (1966) 305–29.

⁶⁶ Phrased in ontological terms, Sophia’s attempt at conceiving the One beyond being, or the transcendent Non-Being, ends up in a ‘miscarriage’, that is, in conceiving “that which is really not-being” (cf. Plato, *Soph.* 237b–239c). Sophia, who occupies the intermediate soul-level on the ontological ladder consisting of five tiers (the One or the transcendent non-being, that which really has being or the intelligible realm, that which is not really being or Soul, that which is not really not-being or the sensible world, and that which is really not-being or matter), symbolizes the risk that every individual soul is destined to incur—the risk of mistaking utter nothingness (matter) for the absolute One which transcends the distinction between being and non-being. Plotinus, *Enn.* VI 9.11 offers a more optimistic scenario: “It is not in the soul’s nature to come into the absolute non-being; when moving downwards, it does come into evil and, so far, into non-being, but to utter non-being, never. When the soul moves the opposite direction, it comes not to something alien but to its very self, and thus, not being in something else, it cannot be in nothing but itself; self-gathered, it is no longer in the order of Being, it is ‘in Him’. For this reason, whoever approaches Him becomes not Being but ‘beyond Being’ (*Plat. Rep.* 6.509b9). For the modalities of being and non-being in Neoplatonist ontology and its indebtedness to Plato’s treatment of the subject in the *Sophist* and *Parmenides*, see Kohnke (1957) 32–40 and Hadot (1968) 1:176–78.

⁶⁷ *Epinoia*, or Afterthought, who represents Sophia’s saving power and her miraculous appearances history—the same rescuing role that Dame Wisdom plays in Sapiential literature (cf. *Wis* 10:1 ff.)—is defined by Plotinus as the act of discursive planning and practical thinking concerned with the making of things; cf. Plotinus, *Enn.* V 8.7: “Consider the universe; we are agreed that its existence and its nature come to it from elsewhere; are we now to think that its maker first thought it out in detail (ἐπινοῆσαι) . . . and that having thus arranged every item, he then set about the execution? No, such designing (ἐπίνοια) was not possible; for how could the plan like this come to one that had never seen anything? Nor could he work on material gathered from elsewhere as our craftsmen do, using hands and tools; for feet and hands are of the later order” (transl. MacKenna, slightly modified). According to Eon (1970), 252–89, esp. 268–70, the term is used in different meanings which, in most cases, refer to the same domain as Spinoza’s products of reason, viz., apparitions and fictitious beings. “C’est, peut-on dire, la pensée en tant qu’elle est seulement

(vii) Taking as its structuring principle the Platonic analogy between “the products of nature” and “the works of divine craft” (*Soph.* 265e), the universe of the *Apocryphon of John* is conceived as a complex artifact founded on a vertical interpretive schema linking sensible phenomena to a transcendent regulating principle. In Plato’s *Timaeus*, this regulating principle is portrayed as the divine craftsman, or demiurge, who informs phenomenal reality with a specific finality (beauty and goodness) after a preordered and ontologically independent pattern (ideas). While adopting this schema of representation, the *Apocryphon* introduces in Plato’s craft-analogy a series of adjustments and refinements that seriously alter its original make-up. The first refinement deals with the psychological attitude of the craftsman in action: whereas Plato’s craftsman operates from conscious purposes (cf. *Soph.* 265c μετὰ λόγου καὶ ἐπιστήμης) and is determined to produce a world bearing as close a resemblance as possible to the model, the demiurge of the *Apocryphon of John* (Ialdabaoth) cannot deliberate and does not have thoughts about whatever he does. Craft is essentially practical, and calls for someone else to provide the plan for the craftsman’s activity—hence the distinction drawn by the Savior between a craftsman who fabricates (Ialdabaoth) and a discursive planner who designs (Sophia). The second objection to Plato’s craft-analogy challenges the metaphysical objectivity of the model accessible to the craftsman: whereas Plato’s craftsman has direct access to the intelligible model (*Tim.* 28a and 29a δῆλον ὡς πρὸς τὸ αἰδίον ἔβλεψε), Ialdabaoth “did not see the incorruptible ones, but it was the power in him, one which he had taken from his Mother, that produced in him the image of the ordered world” (II 13:1–5). What Ialdabaoth imitates is not the objective pattern outside of himself but a distant semblance of forms construed by the “image-making power” of imagination (φαντασία) in his irrational soul. This conjunction of imagination, the power of producing illusory semblances of intelligible forms (φαντάσματα), with the soul’s irrational impulses can be traced all the way back to Plato and his analysis of the soul’s appetitive part (ἐπιθυμητικόν) and its divinatory power in the *Timaeus* (70d–72b):

une pensée. En tant que telle, elle a deux opposés: ὑπόστασις, l’existence (VI 2.13) . . . et ἔννοια, la pensée qui se rapporte à un objet réel (VI 8.7) . . .”

That part of the soul that is appetitive (τό . . . ἐπιθυμητικὸν τῆς ψυχῆς) of food and drink [. . .] they tethered like a beast untamed (ὡς θρέμμα ἄγριον) but necessary to be maintained along with the rest if a mortal race were ever to exist . . . And . . . since it would not understand the discourse of reason (λόγος) . . . whereas it would most readily fall under the spell of images and apparitions (ὑπὸ δὲ εἰδώλων καὶ φαντασμάτων . . . μάλιστα ψυχαγωγῆσαιτο), . . . for this reason the god, forming designs upon it (or: plotting against it, θεὸς ἐπιβουλεύσας αὐτῷ) composed the form of liver . . . so that the power proceeding from the intellect, making impressions of its thoughts upon it, which would receive them like a mirror and give back visible appearances, might strike fear in it (ἵνα ἐν αὐτῷ τῶν διανοημάτων ἢ ἐκ τοῦ νοῦ φερομένη δύναμις οἷον ἐν κατόπτρῳ δεχομένῳ τύπους καὶ κατιδεῖν εἰδῶλα παρέχοντι, φοβοῖ μὲν αὐτό) . . . but when some inspiration of gentleness coming from the reason delineates semblances of the contrary sort (καὶ ὅτ' αὐτὸ τάναντία φαντάσματα ἀποζωγραφοῖ πραότητός τις ἐκ διανοίας ἐπίπνοια) . . . it makes that part of the soul dwelling around the liver serene and tame (ἴλεών τε καὶ εὐήμερον), by night passing its time in the sober exercise of divination by dreams (μαντεία χρωμένη καθ' ὕπνον), since it had no part in rational discourse or understanding (ἐπειδὴ λόγου καὶ φρονήσεως οὐ μετείχε).

The third refinement starts from Plato's own theorem that the visible world is the *analogon* of the invisible model (*Tim.* 29a–d) and concludes therefrom that the relations between the principles and causes in this universe must have their exact counterparts in the intelligible world of forms. This means that the Pleromatic realm of aeons must have its own 'designer' (the remote Absolute and its providential plan, i.e., Pronoia-Ennoia-Barbelo) and its own 'demiurge' (Christ the Self-Originate). In contrast to Plato's world of ideas, the Pleroma of the *Apocryphon of John* is no longer endowed with an independent existence, but is relegated to God's subjectivity. Plato's ideas thus become a set of inner dispositions that the solitary God, or his thinking capacity,⁶⁸ gradually brings into existence, by using the demiurgic capacity of his Son, the divine Self-Originate. In a similar fashion, the Son fabricates his twelve aeons by making use of his

⁶⁸ Notice what seems to be a disagreement among the redactors of *Ap. John* as to whom the act of "making" (εἶπε) should be assigned; cf. BG 31:10–13 and III 10:14–17 "And all these came to be within silence and thinking (ἐννοῶ). The invisible spirit wished to make (εἶπε) something" (III 10:17 supplies "... by the Word") vs. II 7:3–6 and IV 10:19–22 "And all these came to be within silence. And thinking (ἠεερε) wished to fabricate (ταμιω) something by the Word."

“coactors,” viz. Intellect and Logos (BG 31:11–18)—just as, at the next stage, Sophia, who plays the role of a discursive planner, will act in her son Ialdabaoth and provide him with the impulse to create, and just as, later on, Ialdabaoth will make use of his coactors (powers and authorities) to model the first human being (Adam) and clothe him with the material body.⁶⁹

The following table provides a synoptic survey of the above described analogies, or ‘codes’, which constitute the discourse of procession in the various redactions of the *Apocryphon of John*.

<i>Dramatis Personae</i>	<i>Reproduction</i>	<i>Kingship</i>	<i>Light/Darkness</i>	<i>Pneumatology</i>	<i>Water</i>	<i>Epistemology</i>	<i>Causation</i>
First God	Father	Monarch	Pure Light	Pneuma	Living Water	Self-Searching [Sunaisthêsis]	‘Maker’
Barbelo	‘Womb’		Image of Light			Ennoia	Designer
Christ	Son	Viceroy	Spark of Light	Intellect		Nous/Logos	Demiurge
Sophia	Mother alone		Light Diminished	Soul		Enthumêsis Metanoia	Planner
Ialdabaoth	Miscarriage	Ruler Powers	Fiery Realm/Darkness	Physique/Counterfeit Pneuma	Waters of Chaos	Anoia Phantasia	Blind Demiurge

The table should first be read vertically, column by column, so as to identify different stages in the downward movement of procession. The blank slots in the table indicate that some analogies are not fully developed in the extant redactions of the *Apocryphon of John*. The longer redaction, however, shows a consistent tendency to supply some missing terms and even to engage in the refinement of certain analogies—most notably, the analogy of light and the sequence of mental process. The interplay of light and darkness is especially developed in the section dedicated to Ialdabaoth’s demiurgic activity,

⁶⁹ For a more detailed discussion of the Savior’s revision of Plato’s craft-analogy see chap. 1, pp. 51–62.

where the nature of the visible world is explained in terms of the total blending of darkness and light, and in the episode dealing with the modeling of the first human being.⁷⁰

BG

NHC II

(41:12–15)

And he ordered that seven kings
reign over the heavens
and five over the chaos of the underworld.

(11:4–15)

And he established seven kings,
one per firmament of heaven,
to reign over the seven heavens
and five over the depth of the abyss.
*And he shared some of his fire with them,
but he did not bring forth any of the power of
the light that he had gotten from his mother;
for he is dark and without knowledge.
Indeed, when light mixed with darkness
it made the darkness shine;
but when darkness mixed with light
it darkened the light,
so it became neither luminous nor dark,
but rather became dim.
Now, this dim ruler has three names . . .*

(44:19–45:5)

Then the mother began to “move upon”
when she recognized her lack;

(13:13–17)

Then the mother began to move.
She recognized her lack
*as the radiation of her light was diminishing.
And she grew darker,*
for her consort had not come in harmony with her
as she was rebuked by her perfection.
with her.

(48:4–16)

The blessed one revealed his image to them.

(14:24–15:5)

. . . he revealed his image.
And all aeons of the chief ruler trembled,
and the foundation of the abyss moved,
and through the waters that are over matter
*the bottom [shone] because of the [appearance]
of his image that had appeared.*
And when all of the authorities
and the chief ruler looked,
they saw that the whole lower part shone;

And the entire ruling power
of the seven authorities inclined downwards,

⁷⁰ A strikingly similar refinement of the light-darkness analogy occurs in the longer redaction of the Greek text of Sirach. Schlatter (1897) was the first to locate this editorial work in the context of Alexandrian Judaism (Aristoboulos). For an excellent analysis of the relevant passages in the expanded Greek version (G II) of Sirach (1:10c–d; 3:19, 25; 11:15–16; 16:15–16; 17:18, 26b; 25:10–11 see Prato (1990) 317–46, 423.

they saw in the water
the form of the image.
They said to each other,
“Let us fabricate a human being
in the image of God and the likeness.”

And they fabricated out of one another’s power
and the likeness.

(51:17–52:2)

And he blew at him from his spirit,
which is the power from his mother,

into the body.

And then it moved [- - -]
and immediately the rest of the authorities
became envious . . .

and through the light they saw in the water
the form of the image.
And he said to the authorities attending him,
“Come, let us fabricate a human being
after the image of God and after our likeness,
so that his image might become a light for us.”
And they fabricated through one another’s powers.

(19:25–20:1)

And he blew into him his spirit,
which is the power of his mother.
He did not understand, for he exists in igno-
rance.
And the mother’s power passed through Altabaoth
into the animate body,
which they had labored at after the image
of the one who exists from the beginning.
The body moved, gained strength, and *shone*.
And in that moment the rest of the powers
became envious . . .

The analogy borrowed from Stoic epistemology is further refined, too. The longer version states that the first principle, when seeing his image, “exercised his will” (II 4:24–5), hinting at teleological implications of God’s act of self-definition. This may also explain the prominence assigned to Pronoia, identified with Ennoia-Barbelo, the second principle, in the cosmological and soteriological parts of the longer version.⁷¹

Let us now read the table synoptically, or synchronically, row by row. Each stage in the downward movement of procession, along with its characters and the actions they perform, is represented in a variety of ‘codes’. Barbelo, for example, is the feminine principle providing matter for, and giving birth to, a perfect male offspring, the First-Begotten Son of the Pleroma (Self-Originate, Christ). She is also the “likeness” or “image” (εἰμῆ) of God’s immeasurable light responsible for the emanation of the divine Self-Originate, “a luminous spark.” And finally, she is also Ennoia, the first vague conception of God’s ‘self’ which will, upon giving birth to Intellect (the Self-Originate), articulate her intuitive understanding of God into a coherent symbolic presentation and externalize the ‘inexpressible’ into a signifying chain of individual predicates.

⁷¹ See chap. 1, pp. 2–4, 13.

There is, however, one important feature that could not be conveyed in the table. None of the above described analogies is fully developed in either redaction of the *Apocryphon of John*. Rather, individual elements of one analogy are fused with the elements of another, creating almost impenetrable metaphors and resulting in an enigmatic obscurity of the discourse of procession. An illustrative example is the language in which the longer redaction articulates Sophia's fault and her subsequent repentance (II 9:25–31; 13:13–17, 23–26):

And the Wisdom (σοφία) of practical thinking (ἐπίνοια), being an aeon, thought a thought from herself and from a discursive reasoning (ἐνθύμησις) about the invisible Spirit (ἀόρατον πνεῦμα) and foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις). She wanted to show forth an image out of herself without the spirit's will—for he had not approved (εὐδοκεῖν)—and without her consort and without his consent. . . .

Then the mother began to move.

She recognized her lack as the radiation of her light was diminishing.

And she grew darker, for her consort had not come in harmony (συμφωνεῖν) with her. . . .

She repented (μετανοεῖν). And forgetfulness came to her in the darkness of ignorance.

And she began to be ashamed with a movement.

Rather than presented in strictly univocal and transparent terms, the decisive moment in the development of the *Apocryphon's* account of creation is narrated by patching together a series of condensed and seemingly unrelated analogies: the sequence of cognitive process (foreknowledge, wisdom, discursive reasoning, practical thinking, wishing, approval for action, ignorance, repentance, shame), light vs. darkness (radiation of light, growing dark, darkness), physical causation (disorderly movement in matter), pneumatology (the invisible spirit vs. Sophia as the divine spirit “moving upon the waters”), and biological reproduction (Sophia's desire to “bring forth” without a consort).

What may have been the reasons for such a deliberate cultivation of obscurities, for conjoining seemingly unrelated codes, and for condensing analogies? The most obvious explanation is that the discourse of the *Apocryphon of John* is informed by exigencies and presuppositions typical for the revelatory literature of the period. It was a widely shared belief in all ancient Mediterranean cultures that divine wisdom is intrinsically obscure—partly because of its subject matter, and partly because it must remain hidden from vulgar cobblers. Gods, prophets, and wise men, from Apollo and Heraclitus to Plato and Jewish Wisdom, prefer to riddle. And the principle of the

riddle, as Aristotle states in his *Poetics*, is to create impossible combinations of words, or ‘codes’—to “conjoin impossible elements while speaking of what is taking place” (22.1458a26–27: αὐνίγματός τε γὰρ ἰδέα αὐτὴ ἐστὶ, τὸ λέγοντα ὑπάρχοντα ἀδύνατα συνάψαι).

Conceptual blending, however, is not only the way in which gods speak—it is also the way in which human beings represent the content of their experience, discover connections between heterogeneous inputs and seemingly non-contiguous positions, and create new structures of meaning. The *Apocryphon of John* is one such attempt at projecting unrelated inputs—that is, symbolic systems borrowed from religious and philosophical traditions—to a single plane and present them, in this act of blending, as coordinate cases of the same universal. This universal should not be confused with the universalistic claim, so typical for the Antonine period, that various cultural traditions are compatible disclosures of the same divine wisdom. The basic presupposition sustaining and legitimizing the accumulation and fusion of various codes in the *Apocryphon John* is that there is an irreducible dissonance between the Absolute qua subject and its signifier; that the Absolute can never be adequately expressed by linguistic means; and that language can only fill God’s inexpressible void with disconnected concepts and equivocal images lacking any necessary continuity with its transcendent subject. In this admission of the inadequacy inherent in any symbolic representation lies the subversive core of the Gnostic ‘poetics’. What unites all analogies exploited in the *Apocryphon of John*—Plato’s craft-analogy, the Stoic doctrine of *pneuma*, the symbolism of light and darkness, etc.—is their incapacity to fill the minimal gap that forever separates the infinite Absolute (*theos*) from any account of its essence and its qualities (*theology*).

Ogni testo che pretenda di asserire qualcosa di univoco è un universo abortito, ovvero il risultato del fallimento di un cattivo Demiurgo il quale, ogni volta che tenta di dire “questo è così,” scatena una ininterrotta catena di infiniti rinvii, nel corso della quale “questo” non è mai la stessa cosa. (Eco 1990, 53)⁷²

⁷² “Every text that pretends to assert something univocal is an aborted universe, or rather, the result of the failure on the part of an evil demiurge who, whenever attempting to say ‘This is so’, unravels an uninterrupted chain of infinite deferrals, where ‘this’ never remains the same thing.” This never-ending filling of the inexpressible void with non-contiguous analogies is a commonplace of Mannerist poetics—a literary procedure called ‘marquetry’ or ‘inlay work’ (*intarsiare*). As Galileo phrased it in his critique of Tasso’s poetry (Galileo 1970, 494), “questo andare empiendo . . . le stanze di concetti che non hanno una necessaria continuazione con le cose dette e da dirsi, l’addomanderemo *intarsiare*.”

CHAPTER THREE

THE REALM OF BECOMING

Sophia “Our Sister” (*Prov* 7:4)

Sophia the Lowest Aeon

The universe that emerges from the Savior’s revelatory narrative in the *Apocryphon of John* is a complex multi-layered structure based on two seemingly incompatible schemas of representation: formism and organicism. Formism, a distinctive feature of Platonist speculations of the period, links the visible world to a preordered pattern (ideas) conceived in the mind of God. Organicism, in contrast, is of Stoic provenience, and sees the universe as a dynamic continuum endowed with an immanent principle of internal coherence (*pneuma*) in its qualitatively different manifestations (mind–soul–physique–tenor). Two features common to both of these ‘input models’ seem to have contributed to their partial matching and conceptual integration in the *Apocryphon of John*: the hierarchical arrangement of various levels of reality (intelligible sphere–animate realm–sensible world); and a gradual derivation of these levels from a single principle (the Platonist ‘One’, the divine *pneuma* of the Stoics), leading to an increasing disorder in the system and, eventually, to entropy and stagnation:

First Principle (Transcendent Unity, Invisible Spirit)
Intelligible Sphere (Pleroma)
Animate (‘Liminal’) Realm
Visible World
Matter (‘Chaos’)

The mechanics of deriving such a complex reality from the transcendent Absolute does not follow the mode of logical deduction. The supreme principle of the *Apocryphon of John* is not identical with the Middle Platonist Intellect that constantly externalizes its eternal thought-content in a two-way movement of analysis and collection. Rather, it is what Plato’s *Parmenides*, Speusippus, and some Neopythagoreans defined as the unfathomable One beyond Being—the abyss of pure freedom that rejects all determination and which, for

reasons that cannot be accounted for by dialectical method but only described *post factum* in a mythical narrative, actualizes itself in the guise of a will for self-determination and self-acquaintance. The Savior's revelatory account in the *Apocryphon of John* is precisely this kind of mythical narrative, the remembrance of the past of the Absolute, a piece of metaphysical fiction that reenacts the stages of God's history in a folktale sequence—his primordial unity ('initial situation'), his gradual self-differentiation into a series of defining characteristics ('preparation for misfortune'), his alienation from the state of absolute determination ('violation'), his tragic realization ('repentance') of the abortive desire ('villainy') to comprehend his incomprehensible nature, his attempt to restore the original identity ('quest'), and his final self-affirmation or return to self ('restoration of the initial situation'). In this autobiographical narrative, God must play the roles that an ordinary folktale distributes among various characters: he is both the hero and the villain in the story, both the helper and the opponent, both the victim and the rescuer.

The passage from the 'initial situation' to 'violation' is effected by building what Vladimir Propp (1968, 27) described as "a contrasting background for the misfortune to follow"—the realm of prosperity and "fullness," the Pleroma, organized in a tripartite genealogical scheme: (1) a single supreme principle in its "immeasurable majesty" (BG 25:12–13) and "purity" (IV 5:16); (2) its inner dispositions, or aeons, "brought into existence in Silence" (BG 31:10–11; II 7:3–4); (3) "the entirety" of the twelve additional aeons which "Christ, the divine Self-Originate, fabricated by the Word" (BG 31:17–18; II 7:10–11).

Transcendent First Principle

Barbelo–Ennoia–Pronoia
The Decad of Secret Aeons

Christ and His Coactors: Intellect and Logos
Twelve Manifested Aeons
(Sophia the Last Aeon)

The leading analogy in the Savior's portrayal of the Pleroma is taken from late Hellenistic political philosophy—more specifically, from the Neopythagorean treatises on kingship that extolled monarchy as the ideal form of government. The monarchic constitution is projected onto the heaven, where God, an absolute ruler, organizes a court

of attendants (παρεστάται), or 'aeons', each appointed to their appropriate rank upon the request (αἰτεῖν) by a superior courtier and the king's "nodding" approval (κατανεύειν). The principal duty of these attendants is worship and veneration of the ruler—a heavenly liturgy in which "all bow willingly to one soul, that of the best and most revered of kings" (Max. Tyr. *Orat.* 11.12 Trapp) and, in the manner reminiscent of the angelic songs of praise from early Jewish mystical literature (e.g., *Mart. Ascen. Isa.* 7:12–10:6, *Jub.* 38:6–7, 2 *Enoch* 20–22), "glorify the invisible spirit and Barbelo" as the sources and guarantors of their prosperity (BG 32:2–3, II 7:14). In order to secure the continuity of his rule and the absolute loyalty of his subjects, the divine monarch imposes at the next stage the law of hereditary succession—that is, he confers some of his authority on the only-begotten son, Christ the Self-Originate, who, with the help of coactors (Intellect and Logos), sets out to create his own court hierarchy consisting of four 'luminaries' and twelve 'aeons'. The appointment of Sophia to the lowest post in the Pleromatic kingdom marks the end of the process and the fulfillment of all theoretical underpinnings of monarchical constitution: the rational basis of the king's rule, hereditary succession, voluntary submission of all subjects, and reciprocity of benefaction.

And yet, "the specter of the misfortune to follow already hovers invisibly above the happy family" (Propp 1968, 27). The order in God's kingdom is the result of a temporary balance between two opposite egotistic drives: the monarch's desire for self-preservation and the competitive centrifugal tendency of his subjects, which can, at any moment, explode into one of two extremes—tyranny or anarchy. In the narrative of the *Apocryphon of John*, the blame for subversion of this fragile power structure is laid on the least likely candidate—Sophia, the Wisdom of God. This surprising move signals a radical departure from Judaism, where Dame Wisdom figures as an eternal emanation of God's beneficent power, and from contemporaneous philosophy, for which 'wisdom' (σοφία) is synonymous with divine order, rationality, and systematic consistency. By placing responsibility for 'violation' on God's Wisdom, the highest expression of cosmic order, the *Apocryphon of John* introduces a crack into all rationalist systems of the period—it discloses the impossibility of an adequate rational representation of God's inexpressible nature. This impossibility, this irreducible gap between the subject and its signifier, corresponds to Sophia's 'fault' in the Savior's revelatory

account and marks the moment of ‘complication’ in the development of the plot. The dominant ‘code’ in this episode is no longer the analogy of god and king. Political jargon now gives way to imagery borrowed from the spheres of human psychology and biological reproduction.

Sophia’s Miscarriage

Sophia is the last of the twelve aeons, all feminine nouns denoting the twelve abstract dispositions of the Self-Originate Christ, God’s only-begotten son and the viceroy in the Pleromatic kingdom. The twelve aeons make up four triadic groups, each governed by one of the four luminaries (φωστῆρες), whose names—Harmozêl, Ôroiaêl, Daueithai, and Êlêlêth—sound like *nomina barbara* from magical formulas or like syllabic exercises from Hellenistic elementary schools (ὑπογραμμοὶ παιδικοί).¹ Sophia ranks as third in the fourth luminary Êlêlêth, standing below Perfection and Peace. The fourth luminary is the dwelling place of the ‘archetypal’ souls of those “who were not acquainted with the Pleroma, and did not repent at once, but rather persisted for a while, and afterwards repented” (BG 36:7–11; III 14:1–6; II 9:18–22). The destiny of these souls, which is in fact the destiny of the majority of humankind, is comparable to the situation in which we find Sophia after her fall. This is why the shorter redactions of the *Apocryphon* address her in the same way as Proverbs, “our sibling” (7:4).

Sophia’s action—her “bringing forth” of an offspring—is not without precedent in the narrative of the *Apocryphon of John*. The model for her mimetic activity is the successful mating of the Father of Entirety with his first emanation, Ennoia–Barbelo, resulting in the birth of a perfect male offspring, Christ the Self-Originate, and in the successful completion of the supreme divine trinity (Father–Mother–

¹ A papyrus from the third century B.C. reveals the method; after the alphabet, students would learn two-letter combinations of consonant and vowel, then three-letter syllables with an extra consonant, then words of more than one syllable (cf. Guérard–Jougouet 1938), and finally the strings of hardly pronounceable syllabic sequences (ὑπογραμμοί, cf. Ziebart 1913, 57, no. 6). For the resemblances between elementary reading and writing exercises and *voces magicae* see Crippa (1999) 95–110; for the employment of linguistic analogies in presenting the passage from the absolute One (silence) to the multitude of sensible objects (vocal sounds) in various ‘Gnostic’ systems, see chap. 2, n. 57, pp. 125–26.

Son). Sophia, a feminine entity, desires to imitate Barbelo's paradigmatic action accomplished *in sinu Dei*. But neither was she, a feminine character, able to "look into the pure light" and "turn herself to God" (BG 29:18–30:8, III 9:11–19) in the manner of Barbelo, her androgynous predecessor, nor was her discursive reasoning (ἐνθύμησις) the proper match for Barbelo's intuitive thinking (ἔννοια); nor did the divine Father give Sophia his consent as he had previously granted to Barbelo by, as the longer version of the *Apocryphon* has it, "gazing into her with the pure light" (II 6:10–11).

However, Sophia's bold project of "bringing forth an image out of herself," did not remain unrealized. She "was filled" (III 15:2 $\chi\eta\kappa \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$) and "brought forth" (II 9:35 $\epsilon\iota\eta\epsilon \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$, BG 37:10 $\tau\omega\kappa\epsilon \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$),² thanks to the element or faculty in her about whose exact nature the three versions seem to disagree. One manuscript witness describes this element as Sophia's "invincible power" (II 10:1 $\tau\delta\omicron\mu \dots \bar{\eta}\text{-}\alpha\tau\text{-}\chi\rho\omicron \epsilon\rho\omicron\text{-}\varsigma$) the other as her impetuous, vulgar, or licentious nature (BG 37:1 $\pi\epsilon\pi\rho\omicron\gamma\eta\kappa\omicron\eta$, $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu\eta\kappa\omicron\eta$),³ and the third

² Crum (1939) 403b–404a takes $\tau\omega\kappa\epsilon$ and the combinative adverb $\epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ as a dialectal ('Achimic') variant of the Sahidic $\tau\omega\kappa \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ 'cast away, throw out', Gr. $\pi\rho\beta\acute{\alpha}\lambda\lambda\epsilon\iota\nu$, *intr.* 'proceed forward', Gr. $\pi\rho\iota\acute{\epsilon}\nu\alpha\iota$, and cautiously suggests "swelling out," as a possible English equivalent. Kasser (1964) 63a–b argues that "certaines formes de ce verbe [$\tau\omega\kappa\epsilon$] semblent avoir été classées à tort sous $\tau\omega\kappa$ 'lancer' 403b [Crum], et surtout $\tau\omega\omega\delta\epsilon$ 'fixer, planter' 464a, and claims that this is a separate verb, cognate with $\tau\kappa$, $\tau\iota\kappa$ 'spark', Gr. $\sigma\pi\iota\nu\theta\acute{\eta}\rho$ (which Crum 404b "mistakenly" relates to $\tau\omega\kappa$ 'bake') and meaning 'produce luminous emanations'. Crum's proposal seems more likely, not only because the parallel passage in the longer version has a synonymous $\epsilon\iota\eta\epsilon \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ 'bring forth', but also because $\pi\rho\omicron\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\epsilon\iota\nu$, $\pi\rho\omicron\phi\omicron\rho\acute{\alpha}$, $\pi\rho\omicron\phi\omicron\rho\rho\acute{\iota}\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ are 'technical' terms denoting procession, externalization (e.g., the Stoic $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma \pi\rho\omicron\phi\omicron\rho\rho\acute{\iota}\kappa\omicron\varsigma$), and the derivation of one level of reality from another (e.g., Plot. *Enn.* II 4.8 ἡ ψυχὴ . . . $\pi\rho\omicron\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\epsilon\iota$ καὶ $\pi\rho\chi\epsilon\iota\rho\acute{\iota}\zeta\epsilon\tau\alpha\iota$). Wisse–Waldstein (1995) 60 consider $\tau\omega\kappa\epsilon \epsilon\beta\omicron\lambda$ "unclear", translate it as the act of "bringing forth," and refer in a note to Crum's translation.

³ For a thorough discussion of the term $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu\eta\kappa\omicron\varsigma$, $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu\eta\kappa\omicron\iota\kappa\omicron\varsigma$, its ambiguous etymology, "primitive meanings," and the 'Gnostic' usage thereof, cf. Pasquier (1988) 47–66. Ancient Greek and Byzantine grammarians and lexicographers offer two meanings for the term—a young, hasty, and enterprising peddler ($\pi\rho\omicron$ - and $\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\epsilon\iota\nu$, a form of $\phi\acute{\epsilon}\rho\epsilon\iota\nu$), or a quick-tempered and excessive character ($\pi\rho\omicron$ - and $\nu\epsilon\acute{\iota}\kappa\omicron\varsigma$)—both emphasizing impetuosity and impulsive, even licentious, behavior. Sexual connotations are discernible already in the poem by Strato of Sardes (2nd century A.D.) and in Hesychius's lexicon, where the word $\pi\rho\omicron\nu\eta\kappa\omicron\iota\alpha$ is listed under the entry $\sigma\acute{\iota}\kappa\iota\tau\alpha\lambda\omicron\iota$ 'lustful, lewd, licentious'. This is why Epiphanius, possibly inspired by Hippolytus, *Ref.* 6.19.3, considers $\pi\rho\acute{\omicron}\nu\eta\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ as equivalent with $\pi\omicron\rho\eta\eta\kappa\omicron\varsigma$ (*Panar.* 2.54.3). According to Pasquier, Sophia Prouneikos covers all of the above listed meanings: "There is a projection outside the upper world of a luminous Power

as the “guarding” element (III 15:3 ΠΕΦΡΟΥΓΙΚΟΝ, φρουρικόν)⁴ within Sophia. Next, her product (ῥωϞ) came out as “imperfect,” “different from his mother’s form” (II 10:3–7), and “not resembling the image of his mother” (BG 37:16–18)—a “dark miscarriage” (BG 46:10), “the garment of darkness” (II 13:33).

The deformity of Sophia’s offspring results from the absence of the male factor (semen) that would set up its form-producing move-

(προφέρω) with the intention of organizing the inferior elements or a shapeless matter (abortion), and this organization is carried out through rejection, expulsion, through separation as well as through dissension (νείκος), because of Sophia’s impetuosity, of her zeal or even of her excessive fecundation” (art. cit., 59). The term occurs also in III 23:19–21, “the mother wanted to cast (τῶκε) the power which she [had given] to the ruler impetuously (ῥῆ-ογπρωγικόν “in dissension” or “insubordination” according to Pasquier), and, once again, in the parallel section of BG (51:3–4), where it denotes Ialdabaoth’s appurtenance to Sophia: ΠΑΡΧΩΝ ΠΤΕ-ΠΕΠΡΩΓΙΚΟΣ, “the ruler belonging to, or born from, the impetuous one.” In her translation, Pasquier disregards ΠΤΕ-, the mark of appurtenance, and translates this phrase as “the Archon of insubordination or of dissension” or “who cannot be tamed,” adding that “one would rather expect here the word προυνικία” (art. cit. 60, n. 49). The noun ΠΕΠΡΩΓΙΚΟΣ can hardly stand for an abstract noun, and it is even less likely that it refers to Ialdabaoth (“who cannot be tamed”). A more plausible explanation may be that the Coptic translator mistakenly took the ending -OC as the mark of masculine gender: Greek προύνικος, -ον is, of course, an adjective of two terminations, using the masculine for the feminine. Wisse-Waldstein (1995) 112 insist on the sexual connotation of the term (“sexual desire”). Earlier interpretations of the term, from Beausobre (1739) to Nilsson (1947), emphasize, in my view quite correctly, the ‘liminal’ dimension in the ‘Gnostic’ usage of the term (‘porter’ or ‘messenger’) and its relation to προφέρειν, ‘carry forward, set forth, express’. Sophia is the world-soul, the intermediary between the intelligible and visible realm, ‘expressing’ the content of the former in the corporeal substrate.

⁴ For Pasquier (1988) 57, n. 37, “φρωγικόν, which means ‘of a watch’, is perhaps a mistake. The word is interesting, however: a watchman stands on the frontier and looks outside (maybe an allusion to the watchers in 1 Enoch?).” For Wisse-Waldstein (1995) 60, “a scribe may have had Latin *prurigo*, ‘itch’, in mind”—an unlikely suggestion turning a Coptic scribe into a polyglot capable of creating subtle phonetic associations in the process of copying. Rather than a simple “mistake” or a semi-conscious change, φρουρικόν may be a conscious variant, an attempt at ‘Platonizing’ Sophia’s nature. The word φρουρά, ‘prison’ or ‘guard-duty’, is a common Platonist metaphor for the body as a kind of prison of the soul (Plato, *Phaed.* 62b3–5 ὡς ἐν τινι φρουρᾷ ἐσμεν οἱ ἄνθρωποι). As reported by Athenagoras, *Leg.* 6 (fr. 15 D–K), Philolaos the Pythagorean claimed that “the universe is encased by god as though in a custody (or in a prison-house),” ὡς περ ἐν φρουρᾷ πάντα ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ περιελήφθαι λέγων. Like Philolaos’s god, Sophia is a prison-guard, a ‘liminal’ being dwelling at the outer rim of the heavens, viz., in “the Ninth” (BG 47:12 ΤΗΕΖ-ΤΙΤΕ, II 14:12 ΠΗΑΖ-ΤΙΤ), which “like the circuit of an impenetrable wall completely encloses the universe and shields all within itself,” including the earth, “a prison-house and fetters for sinful bodies” (γῆν δὲ οἶον φρουρὰν καὶ δεσμούς ἀλιτρῶν σωμάτων Max. Tyr. *Or.* 11.12; cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 30.10). For the Platonist and Early Christian usage of the word see Courcelle (1966) 406–43.

ments in Sophia's womb and entail the formation of a new living being, from the zygote all the way down to the mature fetus. Sophia's desire to generate without a mate is thus a violation of the natural process of reproduction as postulated by Aristotle and reiterated, albeit with some important modifications, by the Stoics.⁵ This process follows the basic requirement of natural change: the preexistence of the active 'male' principle providing form (and movement) and the passive 'female' element contributing a sufficient amount of matter.⁶ As Aristotle states it (*GA* 2.5.741b2–10),

In all living beings where the male and female are separate, the female is unable by itself to generate offspring and bring it to completion; if it could, the male would have no purpose, and nature does nothing in vain. Hence in such living beings the male always brings generation to an end—for it implants sentient Soul (τὴν αἰσθητικὴν ψυχὴν), either through itself or by means of semen. As the parts of the future living being are potentially present in the matter [coming from the female], once the principle of movement has been activated, one part follows on after another in a series, just as it does in the miraculous automatic puppets.

Conception takes place when the seed imparts motion upon the menstrual blood and initiates the epigenetic differentiation of the parts of the 'zygote' that are potentially present in the female residue. The semen does not mix up with the residue, but rather, as Aristotle

⁵ The Stoic theory of conception can be reconstructed from a brief summary in Eusebius (*PE* 15.20.1) and from the papyrus fragments of Ἡθικὴ στοιχειώσις by Hierocles, a Stoic of the second century A.D. (L-S 53B); cf. Hahm (1994) 175–225, esp. 217–24. For Aristotle as well as for the Stoics, both the sperm and the katalmenial blood, also a seminal residue, contain the life-giving *pneuma* and the soul heat. Both Aristotle and the Stoics distinguish the four stages of human embryonic development, from conception and vegetative growth to animation and the development of reason. The crucial difference lies in assessing the exact time of animation, that is, of the embryo's loss of its plant-like status—forty days upon conception for the male and eighty days for the female fetus according to Aristotle (*HA* 7.3.583b), vs. the moment of birth, viz. the embryo's "falling out" (ἐκπεσόν) of the womb into the environment (ἐμπροσθοσα τῷ περιέχοντι L-S 53B.3), according to the Stoics.

⁶ Some aspects of Aristotle's theory of animal reproduction—sexual differentiation and inheritance—are discussed in chap. 2, pp. 115–18; for Aristotle's embryology see Oppenheimer (1975) 331–43, Boylan (1984) 85–111, Code (1987) 51–59, Cooper (1990) 55–84; for Graeco-Roman 'bioethical' perspectives on embryology, including various Early Christian views, see Emmel (1918), Rüsche (1930), Lesky-Waszink (1959) 1228–44, and Bernard-Deleury-Dion-Gaudette (1989) 179–95; cf. also Gronau (1914), Rizzerio (1989) 389–416 (Clement of Alexandria), Aubert (1989) 421–49 (ancient uterine magic), Bertier (1992) 635–45 (Galen), Canévet (1992) 678–95 (Gregory of Nyssa).

explains (1.21.730a15–18), “causes the matter and nourishment in the female to take on a particular character.” The exact mechanics of actualizing the residue’s potential is likened to the above mentioned “automatic puppet” which, once wound up by a spring, continues to move on its own:

It is possible that one part [of the developing embryo] should move another, and this one move yet another one, and that the process should be like that of the ‘wondrous’ automatons: their parts, even while at rest, have in them somehow a potentiality, and when some external agency sets the first part in movement, then immediately the adjacent part comes to be in actuality. . . . Now semen, and the movement and the principle which it contains, are such that, as the [initial] movement ceases each one of the parts gets formed and acquires soul; for there is no such thing as face or flesh without soul in it. (2.1.734b9–26).

Compared with this model of natural reproduction, Sophia’s attempt at parthenogenesis represents a radical deviation from the normal patterns of coming-to-be provided by higher animals, most notably humans. The absence of a pre-existing form-bearing male relegates Sophia’s action to the reproductive activity characteristic of the lowliest among living beings—spontaneous generation.⁷ In this anomalous kind of reproduction, the female residue has to take on a more active role and have a certain extra capacity that could impart movement. In plants and some animals, where male and female are not distinct, this capacity is the male principle “mixed in” with the female residue; in some other animals, where male and female are separate, this is “the seasonal heat present in their environment” or, as in the unfertilized production of the eggs of fish and birds, “the heat from the incoming nourishment” (3.11.762a35–b18). The case of the hen laying infertile eggs without the intervention of the male counterpart is perhaps the best analogue for Sophia’s spontaneous generation.

The instance of the birds laying wind-eggs proves that up to a point the female is able to generate. Yet there is a puzzle here too: In what sense are we to say that these eggs are alive? We cannot say that they [i.e. the wind-eggs] are alive in the same sense as fertile eggs, for in that case an actual living being would hatch out of them; nor are they

⁷ For Aristotle’s analysis of spontaneous generation and the problems it poses to his doctrine of the pre-existing form as a necessary condition for every coming-to-be, see Balme (1962) 91–104 and Lloyd (1996) 104–25.

on a par with wood or stone, because these eggs go bad just as fertile ones do, and this seems to indicate that they, in some way, partake of life. Hence it is clear that potentially they possess some sort of soul. What sort, then? The lowest, it must be, and this is nutritive soul; for this is what exists alike in animals and plants. Why then does this soul fail to bring the parts to their completion and so produce an animal? Because the parts of an animal are bound to possess sentient soul, since they are not on a par with those of a plant; and that is why the male is required to take a share in the business, the male being separate from the female in such animals (2.5.741a19–30).

Whichever of the proposed analogues for the nature of Sophia's miscarriage one decides to follow—automatic puppet⁸ or wind-eggs—it is clear that, in both cases, the product of her spontaneous generation is matter informed to a certain degree and possessing the nutritive function, but lacking the sentient soul and therefore incapable of further differentiation into a fully formed living being. In the absence of a male consort required to “complete the business of generation” (2.5.741b5–6), Sophia assumes the unlikely role of an active cause and, in a glaring reversal of Aristotle's doctrine of biological reproduction,⁹ endows her misshapen creation with a sentient soul

⁸ The automaton-analogy was actually applied to Ialdabaoth: Tertullian, *Adv. Val.* 18, refers to the Valentinian Sophia–Achamoth as a hidden force controlling the demiurge's activity “as if pulling the strings in a puppet theater.”

⁹ If Aristotle's theoretical treatment of the causes of becoming is indeed compatible with the empirical field of biology, as argued by Balme (1962) 94, Verdenius (1983) 102, and Lloyd (1996) 122–23, then Sophia's ‘animation’ of her miscarriage, that is, her taking on a more active role in generation, can be attributed to *appetitus materiae*—a natural longing (ὀρέγεσθαι, ἐφίεσθαι) of matter for actuality and form, “as the female [longs] for the male and the base for beautiful” (Arist. *Phys.* 1.9.192a13–23). This active tendency of matter, its longing and yearning for actualization, can be accounted for by positing some sort of life and soul-element in it, and this is exactly the way in which some Middle Platonists interpreted this innate tendency to change. Plutarch, for example, preoccupied with intertextual connections between Plato's and Aristotle's thought, ‘translates’ the Aristotelian notion of prime matter yearning for form and “moving by itself” (*Meta* 6.9.1034b5–6 ἡ ὕλη δύναται καὶ ὑφ' αὐτῆς κινεῖσθαι παύτην τὴν κίνησιν ἦν τὸ σπέρμα κινεῖ) into a pre-cosmic ‘material’ principle, reminiscent of Plato's space, “the mother” of becoming at the stage when “deity was still absent from it” (*Tim.* 53b), and portrays it as “neither inanimate nor without reason nor unable to move of itself. . . but constantly yearning and longing for and pursuing what is better” (*De Is. et Osir.* 48, 370F–371A τρίτην τινὰ μετὰξὺ φύσιν οὐκ ἄψυχον οὐδ' ἄλογον οὐδ' ἀκίνητον ἐξ αὐτῆς . . . ἐφιειμένην δὲ τῆς ἀμείνονος αἰεὶ καὶ ποθοῦσαν καὶ διώκουσαν). This Middle Platonist ‘feminine’ principle of coming-to-be, which Plutarch identifies with the pre-cosmic world soul and portrays as the Egyptian goddess Isis, provides perhaps the closest parallel to Sophia—the conceptual blend of Plato's space-receptacle producing in itself the chaotic flux of abortive, “shifting copies of the eternal forms”

(αισθητικὴ ψυχὴ) and its vital characteristics: sensation, impulse, and locomotion. In the narrative of the *Apocryphon*, this transformation of a dark miscarriage into a non-rational animal—“a lion-faced snake” (II 10:9)¹⁰—is effected through Sophia’s gift of light to her imperfect product or, alternatively and in a more dramatic fashion, the latter’s theft of Sophia’s light.

Sophia’s Motivation: The Soul “in Travail of Birth”

Concealed behind the cloud of heterogeneous metaphors, Sophia’s ultimate motive for her impetuous action of “bringing forth” with-

(*Tim.* 50c5–6) and of Aristotle’s prime matter which, lacking of itself in form, has a soul-like desire for it, yet occasionally, in cases when it does not get mastered by the form, manifests its innate lack or “evil tendency” (*Phys.* 1.9.192a15 τὸ κακοποιὸν αὐτῆς) by generating deformities. For the ‘dynamism’ inherent in the Aristotelian prime matter see Kullmann (1979) 51–53 and Verdenius (1983) 110–12.

¹⁰ This theriomorphic mutant closely resembles *Aion*, the lion-headed god representing time, with a snake entwining his human trunk—the epiphany of an endlessly revolving life-cycle of the world found in many Mithraic temples, and, in a less frightful iconographic modality of a semi-nude youth (with or without the swirling snake), the vehicle of the Antonine Golden-Age propaganda; cf. Gall (1978) 511–25 and esp. Jackson (1985) 17–45 and (1994) 131–164 with the accompanying plates i–xxi. The unfavorable interpretation of this leontocephaline cosmocrator in *Ap. John*, possibly a subtle critique of Antonine imperialism and cultural universalism (cf. e.g., the reverse of Hadrian’s aureus representing *saeculum aureum* in Jackson 1994, plate XIa), is effected by resorting to Plato’s passage from Book 9 of the *Republic* (588d–590b, trans. Cornford, slightly modified), where the three parts of the soul—desiring, spirited, and rational—are compared to the three hardly compatible creatures: “Let us shape the soul’s image as one of those mythical natures said to have existed long ago, such as the Chimaera, Scylla, Cerberus, which combined many forms in one. . . . Shape, to begin with, the form of a multifarious and many-headed beast, girt round with heads of tame and wild animals, and capable of growing them and transforming out of itself. . . . Now add two other forms, a lion and a man, and let the first be the largest by far, and the second next to it in size. . . . Then join them in such a way that the three somehow grow together into one. . . . Lastly, mold the outside into the image of one of them, a man, so that, to those unable to see inside the outward sheet, the whole may look as a single creature, a human being. . . . All our words and actions should tend towards giving our inner man complete mastery over the whole human being, and letting him take the many-headed beast under his care. . . . He should enlist the lion as his ally. . . . You will agree, too, with the reasons why certain faults have always been condemned: profligacy, for its giving too much license to the multiform monster. . . . Arrogance (αἰθάδεια) and ill temper (δυσκολία) are blamed whenever the lion and serpent part of us grows (ὅταν τὸ λεοντῶδες τε καὶ ὀφεῶδες ἀΰξηται) and its sinews get overstrung; . . . and flattery (κολακεία) and meanness (ἀνελευθερία) whenever one makes the spirited part subordinate to the turbulent beast” (ὅταν τις τὸ αὐτὸ τοῦτο, τὸ θυμοειδές, ὑπὸ τῷ ὀχλώδει θηρίῳ ποιῆ). The section of this ‘parable’ (588a–589b) was rendered in Coptic and included in the sixth codex of the Nag Hammadi ‘Library’ (NHC VI 48:16–51:23).

out a mate represents the principal hermeneutical challenge facing the reader of the *Apocryphon of John*. Prior to the action, there was a willful impulse to act—“she wanted to show forth an image out of herself” (II 9:28–29, BG 36:20–37:1). And prior to the will, there was a thought—for “no one wishes for the sort of thing he does not think he should go for” (Arist. *NE* 5.9.1136b6–9). In Sophia’s case, this thought is identified with discursive reasoning (ἐνθύμησις), a comprehensive consideration of an object (God, “the invisible Spirit”) which, insofar as inferred from weak suppositions, fails to receive “the Spirit’s approval.”¹¹ The narrative of the *Apocryphon of John* concatenates these stages of Sophia’s mental process in the following logico-temporal sequence:

- (i) And the Wisdom (σοφία) of practical thinking (ἐπίνοια), being an aeon,
thought a thought from herself and [from] a discursive reasoning (ἐνθύμησις)
concerning the invisible Spirit and foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις).
- (ii) She wanted to show forth an image out of herself without the Spirit’s will
—he had not approved (εὐδοκεῖν)—
and without her consort and without his consent (ἁοκηκεκ, κατανεύειν).
- (iii) And although he had not approved (συνεϋδοκεῖν),
that is, the face (πρόσωπον) of her maleness,
and although she had not discovered her partner,
but consented (ἁοκηκεκ, κατανεύειν) without the Spirit’s will
and the acquaintance with her partner,
- (iv) she brought forth. (II 9:25–35; cf. BG 36:16–37:10, III 14:9–15:2)

The line of causation leading to Sophia’s act of “bringing forth” follows the intellectualist account of human action (iv) as a voluntary assent (iii) given to an impulse to act in accordance with (ii) the rational evaluation of (i) external impressions or innate conceptions.¹²

¹¹ Cf. chap. 2, pp. 129–32, and n. 65.

¹² The priority of impulse to assent seems to be an aberration from the ‘orthodox’ Stoic sequence of causation as outlined by Chrysippus (external impression, assent, impulse, action), according to which all impulses are acts of assent. Seneca, *Ep.* 113.18, has impulse preceding assent: “Every rational being is inactive unless it is first aroused by the some external impression (*specie alicuius rei irritatum*), then gets an impulse (*impetum*) and finally assent confirms this impulse (*adsensio confirmavit hunc impetum*)”; cf. Rist (1989) 2003; Sorabji (2000) 66–67 argues that, in the above quoted Seneca’s passage, “the word *impetus* is uncharacteristically used for initial shock” and takes this term as synonymous with *agitatio*, first agitation, and *primus*

Sophia's fault lies in (iii) assenting precipitately to (ii) her 'enthymematic' analysis of God into (i) a signifying chain of predicates. The last aeon of the Pleroma, she encompasses all of God's previously manifested dispositions, including the eleven aeons directly superordinate to her (Grace, Truth, Outward Form, Afterthought, Perception, Memory, Understanding, Love, Ideal Form, Perfection, and Peace). Yet predication, however exhaustive and systematic, does not amount to knowledge. As the Savior states in his negative praise of the One beyond Being, discursive thought can only demonstrate what God *is not*, so that establishing the stable relationship of identity between God *qua* Subject and *its* predicative content is a faltering effort. The problem with Sophia is that she is incapable of achieving a bottom-up movement of synthesis, of collecting a multiplicity of divine qualities into the original self-unity of the Absolute. Translated into gender categories, she cannot "discover her partner" and, inasmuch as failing to obtain the approval of "the face of her maleness," gives assent, in advance of perfect cognition, to her weak supposition of God—a mocking 'simulacrum' of true wisdom.

For its blending of biological and psychological metaphors, the description of Sophia's situation leading to the fatal 'miscarriage' closely resembles the Platonic image of the soul's conceiving, and laboring with, new conceptions. The idea of pregnancy of soul occurs

motus, a first movement of the mind, "not merely independent of judgment and emotion, but . . . actually occur[ing] *before* it." For the problem of the first involuntary movements in Seneca's psychology and their identification with the pre-emotions (*προπάθειαι*) in the post-Panethian period of Stoicism, see Inwood (1993) 150–83 and Graver (2000) 300–325. The problem is as old as Chrysippus, as indicated in Plutarch's account of Stoic self-contradictions (*De Stoic. rep.* 47, 1057A–B): on one hand, both Chrysippus and Antipater hold a thesis that "there is neither action nor impulse without assent and that they are talking fiction who maintain that upon the occurrence of an appropriate impression impulse follows immediately without any prior yielding or assent"; on the other hand, "Chrysippus claims that both god and the sage induce false impressions, not asking us to assent or yield but only to act and be impelled towards what impresses itself, but that we, being inferior, out of weakness assent to such impressions." In his refutation of the Stoic view that assent is a prerequisite for action, Plutarch appropriates Arcesilaus' stance: "For in spite of all their [the Stoics'] probing and wrenching, impulse refused to turn into assent or accept sensation as what tips the scale; it was seen instead to lead to action on its own initiative, requiring no approval from other quarters" (*Adv. Col.* 26, 1122A–B). Seneca's departure from the typical Stoic sequence (external impression–assent–impulse) seems thus a simple reiteration of the Academic order: "The soul has three movements: impression, impulse, and assent" (*ibid.* 26, 1122B *τριῶν περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν κινήματων ὄντων, φανταστικοῦ καὶ ὀρητικοῦ καὶ συγκαταθετικοῦ*).

in the *Symposium* (208b7–209e4), in Diotima’s discourse on the soul’s travail “in beauty” and its ultimate delivery, after much labor and the communion with an older male, of “wisdom and virtues” as its perfect philosophical offspring. The same idea is also introduced in the opening pages of Plato’s *Theaetetus* (147c–151d), where Socrates describes his god-given educational program and likens it to the art of midwifery. When the young Theaetetus acknowledges his incapacity to offer an account of knowledge, of collecting the multiplicity of individual kinds of expertise into a coherent and universal definition of what knowledge is, Socrates exclaims that “this is because [Theaetetus is] suffering the pains of labor because [he is] not barren but pregnant” (148e7–8). By referring to pregnancy, Socrates reassures his ‘model student’ that, acting as a spiritual “midwife,” he “will make a difficult labor easy” or, when necessary, “cause a miscarriage at an early stage” (149d1–3). Socrates’ method of cross-examination, of testing every hypothesis posited by a student, has the same purpose as the art of ‘midwifery’: just as “the habit of women is to give birth sometimes to genuine children and sometimes to mere phantoms (εἰδῶλα τίκτειν) and the task of midwives, themselves past the age of bearing, “to discern (κρίνειν) the true from what is not” (150a8–b4), so “the highest point of [his] art is the power to test (βασανίζειν), by any means, whether the mind (διάνοια) of a young man gives birth to a phantom and falsehood (εἰδῶλον καὶ ψεῦδος) or something fertile and true” (150b9–c3). Those who frequent Socrates’ company will gain an intimate experience of having their opinions delivered and tested and, as a result, “discover by themselves many admirable truths” (150d6–8). They will “feel pain, and [be] full of difficulties, night and day, far more so than the woman,” but his “art will be able to bring on these pains and allay them” (151a5–b1). To this successful outcome of his midwifery, Socrates opposes two other, less fortunate, scenarios. One is the refusal of his company, the sign of the soul’s complete barrenness (151b1–3);¹³ the other is abandoning Socrates as a spiritual guide

¹³ The sterility characteristic of that sort of youth, several of whom Socrates happily “gave away to Prodicus and to other wise and gifted gentlemen” (151b5–6), is not to be confused with Socrates’ self-presentation as a mere midwife of others’ thoughts, himself “unproductive of wisdom” (ἄγονός εἰμι σοφίας) and “bearing not a single discovery of that sort as the offspring of [his] soul” (150c3–d2). As Socrates explains earlier, “midwifery is not given to barren women” but “to those unable

sooner than one should. The passage that describes the consequences of this impetuous decision is worth quoting for its striking resemblance with Sophia's mental state:

There have been many who did not know [that the delivery is God's and Socrates' responsibility] and held themselves responsible while making light of me; and, either of their own motion or persuaded by others, they have gone away sooner than they should and, once they have gone away, miscarried the rest [of their thoughts] through falling into bad company; and they have lost the ones delivered by me by bringing them up badly, caring more for false phantoms than for the true; and at last they have come to appear as ignorant both to themselves and to everyone else. . . . When these come back, begging for my company and doing extraordinary things to get it, sometimes the divine power that comes to me stops me communing with them, but with others it lets me, and these make progress again. (150e1–151a6)

Similarly to Socrates' disreputable student, Sophia in the *Apocryphon of John* first becomes pregnant with a conception of God "holding herself responsible" for it, then "goes away of her own motion sooner than she should," and finally "miscarries" her sham wisdom, her phantom-like, uncertified opinions about God. Yet once she begins to "appear as ignorant to herself," Sophia will try to "come back," "beg for the company" of her consort and, eventually, upon becoming aware of her barrenness and emptying herself from false conceit of wisdom, recover to some extent and "make progress again." In her double movement of downfall and partial recovery, Sophia thus stands as the paradigmatic case of the human condition—of the soul's 'diversion' from the source, which is God, and of its subsequent 'con-

to bear children because of their age" (149b9–c3). If the analogy with midwifery is to be taken as fully homogenous with Socrates' situation, then he too, as a young man, must have held opinions and even discovered many admirable things, but is now aware of "having nothing wise" in himself. This recognition of lack of wisdom is the sign of Socrates' maturity, of his inability to beget sham wisdom as well as of the sobering awareness, indispensable for any genuine seeker after truth, that true wisdom belongs to the gods and that, for this very reason, the gap between man and god is simply irreducible. Precisely this recognition constitutes Socrates' ethical goal of "becoming like god so far as possible" (176b): it permits a longing for divine wisdom which he is incapable of attaining, and thus empties him of a false conceit of wisdom. As Diotima teaches Socrates in the *Symposium*, a true "lover of wisdom" (philosopher) is placed "midway between wisdom and ignorance," between the gods who "do not long for wisdom because they are wise" and the ignorant humans who "do not long for the virtues they have never missed" (203e–204a).

version' back to the divine master; or, as the *Apocryphon of John* states it, "of the souls of those who were ignorant of the fullness and did not repent at once, but persisted for a while and then repented" (II 9:19–22; cf. BG 36:8–12, III 14:3–6).

The images of intellectual midwifery and the soul's pregnancy were so often commented among ancient Platonists, including those roughly contemporary with the author of the *Apocryphon of John*—Plutarch, Alcinous, the *Anonymous Theaetetus Commentary*—that we may reasonably assume his familiarity with these Platonic commonplaces.¹⁴ The decisive stimulus might have come from the work of Philo of Alexandria, more specifically from his hermeneutical program of reading the Greek text of the Pentateuch and the Prophets as a monumental 'diary of the soul', in which Biblical characters symbolize various states, or modalities, of the soul—from its original residing with God through its 'diversion' from the divine source and the subsequent 'laboring' with false suppositions to the eventual rediscovery of its true identity.

Philo's narrative of the soul's passage from the fixed state of unity with God to the unbalanced and alienated state of the individual 'self' results from the conflation of the several already existing endeavors to explain how the primal harmony eventually disintegrated—Plato's account of the 'fall' of the soul, the story of Adam's original sin in Genesis, and the Stoic analysis of false value-judgments resulting in turbulent, self-degrading passions in the human soul. Philo's version of the story begins with the initial situation of the closed 'organic' community, where the soul "lives the virgin life in the house of God and clings to knowledge" (*Cher.* 52) in the non-reflected awareness of its divine identity, "illuminated by the bright and pure rays of wisdom (φρόνησις), through which the sage sees God and his potencies, with none of the messengers of falsehood having access to the reasoning capacity (λογισμός)" (*Deus* 3). The original soul, which Philo identifies with the pure mind (νοῦς) "docked of all powers of sense-perception" and unable to "apprehend incorporeal things as well as solid bodies" (*Cher.* 59–60), is described as "clothed in neither vice nor virtue, yet absolutely stripped of either [and] naked, just as the

¹⁴ For diverging interpretations of Plato's *Theaetetus* among ancient Platonists see Sedley (1996) 79–103. The puzzle of Socrates' midwifery is the subject of Plutarch's *First Platonic Question* (999c–1000e), on which see Opsomer (1998) 27–82.

soul of an infant, since it is without part in either good or evil, is bared and stripped of coverings” (*Leg.* 2.53). At this stage, the soul does not have to discern good from evil, virtue from vice, true knowledge from false suppositions, but “possesses virtue instinctively (αὐτομαθῶς) and without incitement to it” (*Leg.* 1.92; cf. *Opif.* 148), “regarding as its goal to become fully conformed to God who begat it” (*Opif.* 144 ψυχᾶς . . . τέλος ἡγουμέναις τὴν πρὸς τὸν γεννήσαντα θεὸν ἕξομοίωσιν).¹⁵

The dramatic reversal of this original balance occurs when “the mind gets diverted and deflected from honoring God” (*Conf.* 129 τοῦ μετατραπῆναι καὶ μετακλιθῆναι διάνοιαν ἀπὸ τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ τιμῆς) and, departing from its “virgin” life with God, begins to search for another end—itself. This act of “apostasy from knowledge” (*Cher.* 52 ἀποστατεῖς), of “turning away from God” (*Conf.* 129 ἀποστροφή θεοῦ), results from the impious “self-love” (φιλαυτία) that Philo defines as “a swollen, vanity-ridden condition, robed in a vesture of pride beyond measure and making some people appear to dishonor virtue” (*Congr.* 128). The soul is now in the distracted state of Socrates’ renegade students, “ascribing to [itself] with a boastful speech the choice and the birth” (129) of its thoughts and perceptions, in the manner of an “impious man” who thinks that

The mind has sovereign power over what it deliberates, and sense over what it perceives (αὐτοκράτορα μὲν εἶναι τὸν νοῦν ὃν βουλευέται, αὐτοκράτορα δὲ καὶ τὴν αἴσθησιν ὃν αἰσθάνεται). He [i.e. the impious man] holds that the latter judges corporeal things and the former all things, and that both are free from fault and error. Yet what could be more blameworthy or more clearly contested by the truth than these beliefs? Is not the mind often (πολλάκις) convicted of delusion on innumerable points, and all the senses judged guilty of false witness, not before irrational judges who are likely to be deceived, but at the bar of nature herself whom it is impossible to corrupt? And surely if the criteria [of

¹⁵ Compare Philo’s interpretation of Zech 6:12: “I have heard also an oracle of one of Moses’s fellow disciples, which runs as follows: ‘Behold a man whose name is branching out’ (ἀνατολή), a strangest of titles, surely, if you consider that what is spoken of here is the compound of body and soul. But if you suppose that this being is incorporeal, not differing from the divine image, you will agree that the name of ‘branching out’, which is applied to him, hits the mark; for that man the Father of all caused to spring up as his eldest son, whom he called elsewhere the first-born (πρωτόγονον); and indeed the son thus begotten, imitating (μιμούμενος) the ways of his Father, shaped the different forms by looking to His archetypal patterns” (*Conf.* 62–63).

truth] within us, supplied by mind and sense, are liable to error, we must admit the logical consequence, that it is god who showers conceptions (ἔννοιαι) on the mind and apprehensions (ἀντιλήψεις) on sense, and that what comes into being is no gift of any part of ourselves, but all are bestowed by Him, on account of whom we too have been made. (Conf. 125–27)

Whereas the original soul lived its virginal life in the state of impregnable stability and instinctive virtue, the ‘fallen’ soul no longer takes itself as depending on God as the only criterion of truth, asserting instead its epistemological autonomy and positing its own mind and senses as unfailingly accurate reports of reality. But for Philo, who seems here to follow the skeptical Academics’ refusal to grant infallibility to either criteria, “the distinguishing properties which things present sometimes reach the eye of the soul as blurred and confused, and sometimes as clear and distinct” (*Congr.* 135), so that the soul has no capacity on its own to distinguish the true from the deceptive impressions or to differentiate between true conceptions and false suppositions. This state of confusion, of anarchic discontinuity with the original providential order, Philo portrays by resorting to the sexual imagery of “begetting for oneself” instead of “begetting for God,” of “having in the womb” instead of “receiving in the womb,” and of “conceiving without deliberative wisdom” as opposed to “becoming pregnant with deliberative wisdom.”

The souls, then, whose pregnancy is accompanied with deliberative wisdom (μετὰ φρονήσεως κυοφοροῦσι), [although they labor,] manage to deliver, for they distinguish and separate what is in confusion, just as Rebecca, receiving in her womb the knowledge of the two nations (λαβούσα γὰρ ἐν γαστρὶ τῶν διττῶν διανοίας ἔθνῶν ἐπίστημην, cf. Gen 25:23) of the mind, virtue and vice, separated and distinguished the nature of the two founding thereby a happy delivery. But those whose pregnancy is without deliberative wisdom (ἄνευ φρονήσεως) either abort (ἀμβλίσκουσιν) or bring forth a quarrelsome ‘sophist’ who shoots with the bow [i.e., Ishmael, Hagar’s son; cf. Gen 21:20] or is the target of the Bowman. And this is surely reasonable. For the one kind of soul thinks that it receives and the other that it has in the womb, and this is a mighty distinction. Indeed, those supposing to ‘have’ boastfully ascribe the choice and the birth to themselves, while those who claim to ‘receive’ confess (συνομολογοῦσι) that they have of themselves nothing that is their own but seize upon the seeds of impregnation showered on them from outside and, in their admiration of the Giver, repel the greatest of evils, the love of self (φιλαυτία), by reverence (θεοσεβεία), the perfect good. (*Congr.* 129–30).

The opposition that Philo draws in the above passage between two kinds of soul is reformulated in his interpretation of Eve's birth of Cain and Abel into the contrast between "two opposite and conflicting opinions" (δύο τοίνυν δόξας . . . ἐναντίας καὶ μαχομένης ἀλλήλαις) within the *single* soul,

One that ascribes all things to the mind as our master, whether we are reasoning or perceiving, in motion or at rest, the other that follows God as though it were his handiwork. The first of these [opinions] is figured by Cain who is called 'possession' because he thinks that he possesses all things, the other by Abel, whose name means 'one who refers [all things] to God'. Now it is with both of these opinions that the single soul is in labor (ἀμφοτέρως μὲν οὖν τὰς δόξας ὠδίνει μία ψυχή); yet when they are brought to birth, they must needs be separated, for enemies cannot live together forever. Thus so long as the soul had not brought forth Abel, the God-loving thought (τὸ φιλόθεον δόγμα), Cain, the self-loving thought (τὸ φιλαυτον) resided in it; but once it produced agreement with regard to the cause (τὴν πρὸς τὸ αἴτιον ὁμολογίαν ἐγέννησε),¹⁶ it abandoned the concord with the mind's conceit of wisdom (τὴν πρὸς τὸν δοκησίσοφον νοῦν ἐξέλιπε). (*Sacr.* 1-3)

Philo here distinguishes between the two successive stages in the life of the soul—according to his translation of the Genesis verse, God "added the birth of Abel to that of Cain" (Gen 4:2 καὶ προσέθηκε τεκεῖν τὸν ἀδελφὸν αὐτοῦ τὸν Ἀβελ), implying that, "as in the case of arithmetical quantities or the soul's discursive thoughts, the addition of one thing entails the removal of the other" (*Sacr.* 1). The first stage is dominated by the soul's perverted will or foolishness (ἄφροσύνη), whose distinctive trait is "travailing" indiscriminately with the opposites (good and evil, virtue and vice, true concepts and false opinions), but never producing anything but "abortions and miscarriages (ἀμβλωθρίδια καὶ ἐκτρώματα)" (*Leg.* 1.75-76). The second stage is in the exponent of "intermediate" or deliberative wisdom (φρόνησις

¹⁶ Philo seems to provide here a theologized version of the Stoic doctrine of the supreme human good; cf. Cicero, *Fin.* 3.21 "A human being's earliest attachment (*conciliatio*) is to what is in accordance with nature. But as soon as he has acquired some understanding (*intelligentiam*), or rather conception (*notionem*), what the Stoics call *ennoia*, and sees an order and so to speak harmony of things which one ought to do, he values this much more highly than all those earlier objects of affection and so concludes through rational cognition that in this lies the supreme good for man, one which is praiseworthy and choiceworthy for its own sake. This good the Stoics call *homologia*, and we may call it 'consistency' (*convenientiam*), if you approve, for in this resides that good to which everything else must be referred, namely moral action and morality itself (*honestum*)."

μέση; cf. e.g., *Opij.* 154), “the science of knowing through which the good and beautiful things are distinguished from bad and ugly” (*QG* 1.11), the disposition to make right practical decisions. The decisive moment in this passage from criterial impotence to the rule of deliberative wisdom occurs when the soul “confesses to have nothing of its own,” and, “by a single power of attraction, begins to incline to the Good, never swaying in the opposite direction nor oscillating into equilibrium between the two” (*Praem.* 63). This confession that freedom is merely an illusion grounded in ignorance and that the perfect good can be acquired only by “reverence for God” (θεοσέβεια) and his ‘midwifery’ marks the beginning of the soul’s recovery—of its “disowning and discarding the offspring of ignorance” (62) and becoming again a virgin, barren of false suppositions and ready to receive God’s seed of virtue. As Philo states it commenting on Sarah’s conception of Isaac (*Gen* 21:1), “at the time when God visited her in her solitude” (μονωθεισαν),

For it is appropriate that God should hold converse with the truly virgin nature, which is unpolluted and free from impure touch. Yet it is opposite with us; for the union of human beings for the procreation of children turns virgins into women. But when God begins to consort with the soul, he turns what before was a woman into a virgin again; for he takes away the degenerate and emasculate desires that unmanned it and brings in instead the genuine and undefiled virtues. (*Cher.* 50)

Philo’s solution to the exegetical problem of the miraculous transformation of Sarah, whom “the [Biblical] oracles earlier describe as barren [i.e. Sarai, Σάρρα] and now admit that she will become a mother [i.e. Sarah, Σάρρα]” (*Mut.* 143),¹⁷ is the bold suggestion that barrenness is ultimately redeemed by a spiritual fecundity. He arrives at this solution by conflating two culturally separate, yet structurally homologous discourses—on the one hand, Socrates’ self-professed barrenness in human wisdom in the *Theaetetus* and, on the other, the Jewish Wisdom theme of “the barren unstained woman who . . . shall bear fruit at the great assize of souls” (*Wis* 16:13; cf. *Sir* 16:1–4). This “startling paradox” (παραδοξότατον) of Sarah, “represented as

¹⁷ Cf. *Cher.* 7, 50; *Deus* 10–15; *Congr.* 1–12; *QG* 3.53–54; for the opposition between Sarai and Sarah see the pertinent remarks by Nikoprowetzky (1977) 149–85, esp. 166–78.

at once barren (στεῖραν) and exceedingly prolific (πολυγονώτατον)” (Congr. 3), for which Philo finds linguistic support in a paronomastic play on the words στεῖρα and στέρρα (“barren” as “firm”),¹⁸ is consistently set in contrast to barrenness as sterility (στεῖρα καὶ ἄγονος, “barren” as “unproductive”) unreceptive to virtue (e.g., *Praem.* 108, *Spec.* 3.34–36, *Mut.* 225)—a split by means of which Philo cleaves the notion of ‘barrenness’ from within and formulates a complex ‘dialectic’ of spiritual sterility and fecundity as the outcome of an anamorphic shift of perspective.

Back to the *Apocryphon of John*, it is precisely by reference to this Philonic ‘dialectic’ that we can best explain the character, motivation, and actions of the ‘fallen’ Sophia—her original, fertile state of “the solid and indestructible wisdom of God” (*Det.* 115) marked by the religious reverence for God, her ultimate source; her diversion from God resulting in criterial impotence and sterility as regards to true wisdom; her painful realization that, because she travailed without God’s ‘midwifery’, her thoughts and desires have no positive truth-content and therefore must be miscarried, or “cast away”;¹⁹

¹⁸ *Deus* 13: “We might reasonably expect that the ‘barren’ woman (τὴν στεῖραν)—not the ‘unproductive one’ but the ‘firm’ who still abound in power (οὐ τὴν ἄγονον ἀλλὰ τὴν στέρραν καὶ ἔτι σφριγῶσαν), who struggles in her contest with endurance, courage and perseverance in order to acquire the best, should bring forth the monad which is of equal power with the seven; for her nature is prolific and blest with offspring.”

¹⁹ Seeing the imperfection of her miscarried product, Sophia “cast it away (CITE EBOLA, HOYXE ZICA HOLA or ΠΙΣΑ ΗΒΟΛ) from her, outside those places, so that no one among the immortal ones might see it” (BG 38:1–5; III 15:13–15; II 10:11–13). Philo uses the similar jargon of “disowning” or “discarding one’s offspring,” and of “removing” or “cutting away” the extremities, to convey the Stoic ethical ideal of the eradication of erroneous opinions, or passions, to root and branch. See, e.g., *Praem.* 61: “Thus everyone who is taught, when he passes over to knowledge, must abandon ignorance. . . . For the learner may also be said to disown the offspring of ignorance (ἀποκηρύττει τὰ τῆς ἀμαθίας ἔκγονα) and discard (παραίτεῖται) them as hostile and ill-willed”; *LA* 1.52: “Whoever does not conceive [God as One and incorruptible and unchangeable] fills his soul with a false and godless opinion (δόξης). Do you not see that, even if He brings us into virtue and even if, when brought in, we plant no fruitless thing but ‘every tree good for food’, He yet bids us ‘thoroughly to cleanse its uncleanness’ (Lev 19:23)? Indeed, he demands the cutting away of self-conceit (ἀποτεμῖν οἷσιν), and self-conceit is in its nature unclean”; *ibid.*, 3.131: “So [Moses] cuts out, as he needs must, anger, discordant offspring of the soul that loves strife and contention, (τῆς οὖν ἐριστικῆς καὶ φιλονεικίου ψυχῆς πηλομελὲς γέννημα θυμὸν ἐκτέμνει δεόντως) so that it may be rendered barren (στειρωθεῖσα), and cease bearing harmful progeny, and that this may become a portion befitting the lover of virtue, not the breast nor the seat of anger, but the removal of these

and, finally, her renewal of the intercourse with God and of the virtuous life “in agreement with the cause” (*Sacr.* 3), once she has become barren of her erroneous and ‘abortive’ suppositions.

(τὸ ἀφελεῖν ταῦτα); for God assigned to the wise the best possible share—the ability to cut out the passions (τὸ ἐκτέμνειν τὰ πάθη δυνάσθαι).” At the cosmological level, the same action of casting or cutting away signals the moment of rupture in the universe conceived as a spiritual continuum capable of limitless extension (ἐκτείνεσθαι)—the moment, that is, when dark matter is separated and shut off from the superordinate levels of reality. Cf. *Det.* 90: “For nothing that belongs to the divine cuts itself off and becomes separate, but only extends itself” (τέμνεται γὰρ οὐδὲν τοῦ θεοῦ κατ’ ἀπάρτησιν, ἀλλὰ μόνον ἐκτείνεται). Philo’s distinction between “extension” and “excision” is a commonplace in early Christian theories of procession. Tatian, for example, explains the emission, or “springing forth, of God’s *Logos* (προπηδᾷ λόγος) as follows: “He came into being by distribution (κατὰ μερισμόν), not by section (κατ’ ἀποκοπήν), for what is cut away (τὸ γὰρ ἀποτηθέν) is separated from its source, but what has been distributed (τὸ δὲ μερισθέν) takes on a distinctive function in the [divine] dispensation (οἰκονομίας τὴν διαίρεσιν προσλαβόν) without diminishing the source from which it has been taken” (*Tat. Graec.* 5). Similarly Tertullian who, taking issue with the Monarchian identification of father, son, and spirit, proposes the notion of divine economy as the passage of God’s unity into trinity “not by the separation of substance but through disposition” (*Prax.* 19.8 *non ex separatione substantiae sed ex dispositione*; 21.3: *not quasi separatum, dispositione alium non divisione*). Ernesti (1795) 209 and Schlossman (1906) 417 point to the grammatical and rhetorical roots of this dichotomy: whereas ἀποκοπή implies excision, for example of final letters of a word, μερισμός and διαίρεσις denote the distribution of an indiscriminate whole into distinct constitutive elements, for example of a diphthong into its constitutive vowels, or of the content of a speech into principal points. The distinction between these two modes of procession can be followed all the way down to their respective results: ‘part’ (μέρος, *pars*) in the case of ἀποκοπή, and ‘portion’ (μόριον, *portio*) as the outcome of μερισμός. For Calcidius, *In Tim.* 33, *pars* and *portio* result from the separate processes at two different levels of reality—one which is corporeal and composite, and the other which is simple and incorporeal: *Portio enim elocutione notanda est. Non enim partem quippe simplicis et incorporeae rei, sed portionem, id est partis instar, dixit esse sublatam.* It is perhaps by reference to this distinction that the Hermetic tract *Poimandres* (CH 1.4) explains the generation of darkness out of the primordial light-substance as ἐν μέρει γεγενημένον, projected apart: “I saw an endless vision in which everything became light. . . . After a little while, darkness began to move downwards, ἐν μέρει γεγενημένον, fearful and gloomy, coiling sinuously.” Festugière (1954) 4: 41–42 was the first to establish the link between the term μέρος and the breakup of the continuous process of derivation within the divine realm: “Je crois que nos parallèles pythagoriciens (Moderatus–Jamblique) nous donnent le sens exact. L’Obscurité s’est ‘formée à part’, c’est-à-dire, comme il n’y a d’abord que la Lumière, qu’elle s’est séparée de la Lumière en se portant vers le bas, tout de même que, selon Moderatus, Dieu a séparé de lui-même la ψόστης (αὐτοῦ ἐχώρισε τὴν ψόστητα), et que, selon Jamblique . . . Dieu a fait exister (παρήγαγεν) la matière par scission de la matérialité (ὑποσχισθείσης ὕλητος) à partir de la substance divine.” Festugière’s treatment of Moderatus’s account of the generation of ‘matter’ is somewhat superficial. What Moderatus, as quoted by Porphyry (*Simpl. In Arist. Phys.* 231,7–24), actually says is that “the unitary *Logos*, as Plato somewhere says (*Tim.* 30a2), wishing to constitute the generation of beings

Yet even when miscarried, the false judgments of Sophia continue their fleeting existence as shadowy phantoms of the Real—as Plato says, “clinging in some sort to existence on pain of being nothing at all” (*Tim.* 52c). It is to these fluttering and unstable products of Sophia’s ignorance, embodied in the figure of Ialdabaoth and his creation, that the revelatory narrative of the *Apocryphon of John* now turns.

Cosmogony, Part One: The ‘Gnostic’ Demiurge

Seeing what has come out of her will (οἰωωε, καζηε)—a serpent-like, lion-like impression (τύπος) or form (μορφή), its eyes shining with fire—Sophia “cast it away from her, outside those eyes, so that no one of the immortals might see it” (II 10:6–13; BG 37:18–38:5). Next, she harnessed it in, or surrounded it with, “a luminous cloud, and placed a throne in the midst of the cloud, so that no one might see it except the Holy Spirit, which is called Life (Zoe), the Mother of all” (BG 38:6–11; II 10:14–18). Only then, after finding an appropriate place for it, Sophia gave it a name: Ialdabaoth.

Two separate stages are discernible in this episode. First, Sophia manifested out of herself a theriomorphic being, and cast it away from her, that is, outside of the lowest region of the Pleroma. Second, she hid it in a luminous cloud and placed him on a throne in the midst of it. Removed from the Pleroma, surrounded with light of a cloud, and granted a name, the offspring has gotten a distinct position, and a distinct personality—Ialdabaoth, the First Ruler, and the Demiurge.

from himself, by self-privation left room for (ἐχώρησε; Zeller: ἐχώρισε ‘separated off’) quantity (ποσότης) depriving it of all his *logoi* and forms.” The identity of the unitary Logos (ὁ ἐνιαίος λόγος) is still debated by scholars—for Baltes in Dörrie-Baltes (1996) 480–82, it corresponds to Plato’s demiurge occupying the third rank in Moderatus’s universe (a ‘Third One’), or the level of Soul, while Tornau (2000) 210–11, following Dodds (1928) 137, assigns it a superior rank, that of the ‘Second One’, and identifies it with the Intellect in its twofold role of thinking forms and *logoi* and generating intelligible matter (“als denkender und als schöpferischer Geist”). Moderatus’s ‘quantity’ (ποσότης) is indeed the intelligible or ‘prime’ matter, described as the first manifestation of “Not-Being” (Simpl. *In Arist. Phys.* 231,4) and endowed with the attributes of Plato’s Receptacle of becoming from the *Timaeus*. In Moderatus’s account, this ‘prime’ matter is clearly distinguished from the corporeal substrate as “the paradigm of the matter of bodies” (παράδειγμά ἐστι τῆς τοῦ σωμαίου ὕλης).

Ialdabaoth in the Luminous Cloud

Like several other texts traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’, the *Apocryphon of John* exploits the Biblical symbolism of cloud as a privileged medium of divine epiphany in both of its traditional aspects: first, the cloud that hides in its interior the power and glory of god (*separating aspect*); and second, the cloud that ‘covers’ and transfigures an entity exterior to it—for example, the earth, the tabernacle, a mountain, water, or some special human being (*mediatory* or *creative aspect*). Along with this motif and its complex symbolic value, some ‘Gnostic’ authors also adopted a cluster of images and symbols traditionally associated with it: fire, light, spirit, voice, and throne. Thus, it is not the content and function of the Biblical motif that has changed in its various ‘Gnostic’ applications, but rather, as it will become clear in the ensuing pages, the extension of its application.

In Exodus, a cloud often figures as the place of God’s self-revelation and as the symbol of divine transcendence. It is a murky cloud (Exod 19:16, γνοφῶδες) on Mount Sinai whose primary function is to cover and hide (2:16 ἐκάλυψε). This cloud is paired with fire—God comes upon the mountain both in fire (19:18 ἐν πυρί) and in the column of cloud (19:9 ἐν στύλῳ νεφέλης)—and represents the dwelling place of God’s glory (δόξα κυρίου) as he appears on Mount Sinai (24:16) and upon the tabernacle (40:34 σκηνὴ τοῦ μαρτυρίου; κιβωτός in Num 10:34–36). Yet the function of the cloud is not only to hide and overshadow (cf. also Num 10:36 καὶ ἡ νεφέλη ἐγένετο σκιάζουσα ἐπ’ αὐτοῖς), but also to display and guide. Thus, it is within the column of cloud by day, and in the column of fire by night, that God “guides” (ἡγεῖσθαι) and “shows the way” (δείξει τὴν ὁδόν) to his people (Exod 13:21). Finally, a cloud is the privileged medium by means of which God utters his oracles (Exod 33:9; Num 11:25, 17:7–8).

A cloud as the place of Yahweh’s glory occurs in the opening lines of Ezekiel’s vision (Ezek 1:4 ff.), along with other images and symbols with which it has been traditionally affiliated: the flashing fire (1:4 πῦρ ἐξαστραπτόν), radiance (1:28 φέγγος), wind or spirit (1:12, 20 πνεῦμα; 1:21 πνεῦμα ζωῆς), voice (1:25 φωνή), throne (1:26) murkiness (1:28 “a cloud on a rainy day,” ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ὑετοῦ), rainbow (τόξον), and the oracular utterance (φωνὴ λαλοῦντος).

Wisdom literature associates the motif of a cloud with Sophia, the wisdom of God. In the Wisdom of Solomon, Dame Wisdom assumes the same appearance of two columns, of cloud and of fire, as Yahweh in Exodus (13:21–22): “She guided them on a wondrous journey,

and became a covering (σκέπη) for them by day, and a blaze of stars by night” (Wis 10:17). In his portrayal of God’s wisdom, Sirach combines several stock motifs—the column of cloud, lodging in a tent, and the throne of glory: “I placed my tent in heights (ἐν ὑψηλοῖς κατεσκήνωσα) and my throne was in a column of cloud” (Sir 24:3–4). In Baruch, Sophia dwells in heaven amidst the clouds, and nobody knows her but God (Bar 3:29–32). Both Baruch and Sirach emphasize the *separating aspect* of the cloud, that is, *its power to hide and protect the remoteness and inaccessibility of divine wisdom*: “There is no one who knows her way, no one who can think of her path” (3:31). Yet besides hiding and separating, the same cloud plays also an active role in the cosmic process: “One could see the cloud overshadowing (σκιάζουσα) the camp, the emergence of dry land out of what before was water” (Wis 19:7). A similar imagery occurs in Sir 24:3, where Sophia is described as a breath coming out of God’s mouth and covering (κατεκάλυψα) the earth like a mist (ὡς ὀμίχλη)—probably an allusion to the spirit of God and the pre-cosmic stage as portrayed in the opening lines of Genesis (1:2). In these cases, the cloud that overshadows and hides is a *positive intermediary power* triggering the process of creation and acting as a *link* between the heavens and the earth.

The same function of overshadowing belongs to a cloud in the Synoptic accounts of the transfiguration scene. Only Matthew (17:5) qualifies this cloud as “luminous” (νεφέλη φωτεινή). The luminous cloud corresponds, as it seems, to the Biblical “cloud of glory”—in the Septuagint, glory (δόξα) often stands as a synonym for light (cf. also Philo, *Spec.* 1.45). Matthew could also have in mind here the fiery aspect of the cloud from Exodus (24:17), just as the voice speaking from the luminous cloud (Matthew 17:5) may be a distant reminiscence of the oracles coming out of the cloud in the Pentateuch (Exod 33:9; Num 11:25; 17:7–8). Here, too, the cloud of transfiguration conveys a double meaning: not only does it symbolize God’s unattainable remoteness (*separating or privative aspect*), but also, through its act of overshadowing, enables communication between the earth and the heavenly realm (*mediatory or creative aspect*). A similar role belongs to a cloud in Luke–Acts—that of a vehicle of Jesus’ ascension, “taking him away from the eyes of his disciples” (Acts 1:9).²⁰

²⁰ See *Apoc. Pet.* 15–17 and *Acts Pil.* 16.6, where the cloud of ascension is identified with the luminous cloud of Jesus’ transfiguration.

The motif of a luminous cloud occupies a prominent place in the so-called ‘Sethian’ Gnostic corpus, where its complex symbolism finds manifold applications, depending on the level of reality—spiritual, animate, material—to which it is assigned. The *Gospel of the Egyptians*, for example, situates the luminous cloud within the spiritual or ‘Pleromatic’ realm and identifies it with Mirothea (Mirothoë), “the Mother of the holy incorruptible beings,” as she was about to give birth to Adamas, the heavenly prototype of humankind (III 49:1–16; IV 60:30–61:18). The “great cloud of light” embodies here the notion of divine transcendence. At the same time, the association of the luminous cloud with the female entity points to its traditional function in Wisdom literature—that is, to its positive role in creation.

The cloud-motif is reintroduced later in the narrative (III 56:22–57:21; IV 68:5–69:4) to signal the appearance of Saklas, the great ruler over Hades and chaos, brought into existence at the instigation of the great ‘luminary’ Eleleth, the representative of the spiritual world, and not, as is the case in the *Apocryphon of John*, on account of Sophia’s erroneous thought (ἐνθύμησις) and sinful desire: “After five thousand years the great light Eleleth spoke, ‘Let someone rule over Chaos and Hades.’” The account of the ensuing events is partly preserved in one of the two manuscript witnesses (III 56:26–57:21 Böhlig–Wisse):

And there appeared a cloud [whose name is] hylic (ὕλική) Sophia [. . .] gazed upon the parts [of Chaos], her face being like [. . .] her form [. . .] blood. And [the great] angel Gamaliel spoke [to the great Gabriel], the attendant belonging to [the great] luminary Oroiael. [He said, “Let an] angel come forth [to] rule over Chaos [and Hades.”] Then the cloud, [as it was agreed, came from] the two monads, each one [having] light. [. . .] [the throne?] which she established [. . .] within the cloud [. . .] Sakla the great [angel] beheld Nebrouel, the great demon [that was with him.] And they became [together] an earthborn spirit [and begot] assisting angels.

The portrayal of Sophia owes a great deal to Sirach’s account of Wisdom’s role in creation (Sir 24:3–4). Sophia, who is qualified as “hylic” because of her entering into contact with a disorderly matter, or “Chaos,” becomes assimilated to the cloud in which, if the restoration of the lacuna is correct, she subsequently places a throne. Her act of gazing out (καὼτ ἐκὼλ), seems a typical ‘Gnostic’ concept which, in the context of cosmogony, denotes the illumination of the primeval darkness. Plotinus reports that “[the Gnostics] say that the soul which declined [i.e. Sophia] saw the darkness and illuminated

it” (*Enn.* 2.9.12 Ἡ γὰρ ψυχὴ ἡ νεύσασα ἤδη ὄν τὸ σκότος . . . εἶδε καὶ κατέλαμψε). The cloud’s luminous nature, although nowhere made explicit, can be inferred from the reference to Sophia’s gaze: according to the optical law postulated already by Plato in the *Timaeus* (45b–46c), rays of vision are in fact rays of light emanating from the eye. Again, the cloud plays here the mediatory role of illuminating and transfiguring, yet this time not within the Pleroma, but in a *liminal* zone between the spiritual world and the dark realm of matter.

A similar intermediary position—but in this case between the ‘Ogdoad’ of the immortal beings and the ‘Hebdomad’ belonging to Ialdabaoth—is assigned to a cloud, the place of Sabaoth’s glory, in *On the Origin of the World*. The cloud appears “after the heaven, along with its earth, consolidated itself” (II 103:2–3), and after Ialdabaoth, blind in his ignorance, proclaimed himself a supreme god. Sophia’s reaction to Ialdabaoth’s impiety is twofold. Besides announcing the eschatological consummation of Ialdabaoth’s material realm, she also provokes an immediate repentance in Sabaoth, the son of Ialdabaoth. First,

She stretched out her finger and poured upon him some light out of her light . . . And because of his light, all the authorities of Chaos became jealous of him; and when they had become disturbed, they made a great war in the seven heavens. Then Pistis Sophia, seeing the war, sent seven archangels to Sabaoth from her light: they snatched him up to the seventh heaven and they stood firm in his presence as attendants. Furthermore, she sent him three other archangels and established the kingdom for him over everyone so that he might reside above the twelve gods of Chaos. When Sabaoth had taken up the place of repose in return for his repentance, Pistis also gave him her daughter Zoe together with great authority so that she might instruct him about all that exist in the Ogdoad. (II 104:3–31)

It is in the region between the seventh heaven and the ‘Ogdoad’ that Sabaoth subsequently creates his dwelling place, or dome, and, in front of it, “a throne upon a four-faced chariot called Cherubim,” whose description bears a strong resemblance to Ezekiel’s vision of the throne above the heavenly vault (Ezek 1:4–28, 10:1–5). Next, upon creating “a congregation of angels” along with “a first-born called Israel, ‘the man who sees God’,” Sabaoth establishes a ruling trinity in his heavenly court, himself sitting on his throne in the middle, with Jesus Christ, an ‘animate’ image of “the Savior above the

Ogdoad,” placed at his right, and with “the virgin of the holy spirit,” probably Zoe, upon a throne at his left (II 104:35–105:32). The episode of Sabaoth’s enthronement concludes with a summary description of his realm:

He sits upon a throne of light in a great cloud²¹ that covers (σΚΕΠΑσΕ) him (it). And there was no one with him in the cloud except Sophia Pistis, instructing him about all the things that exist in the Ogdoad. (II 106:3–8)²²

As already pointed out, the association of the cloud of Sabaoth with the motifs of light and a throne is a literary and theological commonplace in ancient Judaism, from Ezekiel’s vision to early Merkabah speculations. Another commonplace in the story of Sabaoth, one which it shares with the *Gospel of the Egyptians* and the *Apocryphon of John*, is the conjunction, already established by Sirach, between Sophia and a cloud, the privileged medium of her epiphany. In the previously quoted passage from the *On the Origin of the World*, Sophia Pistis, as well as her daughter, Zoe, also called the “virgin of the holy spirit,” is said to reside in a great cloud along with Sabaoth. In addition, Sophia seems to bear responsibility for the appearance of Sabaoth’s cloud; for it is by her pouring of some light upon Sabaoth, and by her act of dispatching the archangels, that the kingdom of Sabaoth (II 104:23–25)—that is, his place of repose (II 104:25–26) and his cloud—became established.

²¹ Painchaud (1995) 167 renders ΕΓ-ΖΗΘΟΣ ΛΕ ΖΙΣῆ-ΟΥ-ΘΡΟΝΟΣ ΟΥΘΕΙΝ ῆ-ΗΘΣ ῆ-ΚΛΟΟΛΕ ΕΣ-ΣΚΕΠΑσΕ ῆ-ΗΘ-ϸ as follows: “Et c’est sur un trône recouvert d’une grande nuée lumineuse qu’il est assis.” I follow Bethge–Layton (1989) 47 and Funk (1995) 51, who take ΟΥΘΕΙΝ as an attributive term modifying ΟΥ-ΘΡΟΝΟΣ. As noted by Emmel (1981) 142–43, the mark of attribution ῆ- is sometimes omitted before the indefinite determiner ΟΥ- or words in initial ΟΥ, viz. ΟΥΘΕΙΝ, but only when this ΟΥ is realized as a glide /w/. Painchaud (1995) 327 admits that “la construction de cette phrase est curieuse. On attendrait quelque chose comme ΟΥΗΘΣ ῆ-ΚΛΟΟΛΕ ῆ-ΟΥΘΕΙΝ.” Painchaud’s proposition (ῆ-ΟΥΘΕΙΝ ῆ-ΗΘΣ ῆ-ΚΛΟΟΛΕ) presupposes (i) the omission of the adverbial ῆ-; (ii) simplification of the vowel pair ΟΥΟΥ in ΟΥ-ΟΥΘΕΙΝ; and (iii) a “curious” variant of inverted attributive construction, one in which ΟΥΘΕΙΝ, a common gendered noun, acts as an attributive term preceding the noun it modifies—the role generally assigned to genderless common nouns.

²² The contrast between the claim that “there was no one with him in the cloud except Sophia Pistis” and the previous elaborate description of Sabaoth’s heavenly “congregation” (ἐκκλησία) suggests the conflation of different redactions in this episode; cf. Painchaud (1995) 327.

The function of a great cloud in the *On the Origin of the World* is to separate and to ‘cover’ (σκεπάζειν)—to “set Sabaoth apart from the darkness and summon him to her [Sophia’s] right” (II 106:11–13), to protect him from the powers of chaos, and to raise him from his inferior position to the upper limits of the material world. Besides serving as an intermediary between the two contrasted realms of light and darkness, the cloud of Sabaoth also protects its beneficiary from the powers of darkness (matter) and conceals the glory of his kingdom.

The same twofold role of a cloud—its power to hide and protect as well as to illuminate and transfigure—plays an important role in the *Apocryphon of John*, most notably in the Savior’s reinterpretation of the Biblical story of Noah and the flood (II 28:32–29:15; III 37:14–38:10; BG 72:12–73:18):

And he [Ialdabaoth] repented of all things that he had come to be by his agency;²³ again he plotted to bring down a flood (κατακλυσμός) upon the human creation. But the greatness of the light of Forethought (πρόνοια) taught Noah, and he preached to all posterity, that is, the children of humankind. And those who were alien to him did not listen to him. It is not as Moses said, ‘they hid (ῥωπ) in an ark’ (κιβωτός)—rather, it was in a certain place (τόπος) that they were hidden (ῥωπ; III, BG σκεπαζε), not only Noah, but also many other men from the immovable race (γενεά). They went into a place (τοπος) and were hidden (ῥωπ; NHC III and BG σκεπαζε) within a luminous cloud; and he [Noah] recognized his absolute power (αὐθεντία). And with him was she who belongs to the light, who illuminated them because he [Ialdabaoth] had brought darkness down upon the whole earth.

As in several other places in his revelatory narrative, the Savior here contests the Genesis version of the early history of humankind. Contrary to what Moses said, Noah did not receive instruction from the god of the Old Testament (Gen 7:7 κύριος ὁ θεός). Rather, it was the greatness of Forethought—or the Afterthought of Light (BG 72:16; cf. III 37:19–20)—that came from above to instruct Noah

²³ The Savior’s version of the Genesis story of the flood and Noah opens with a reference to Gen 6:6 καὶ ἐνεθυμήθη ὁ θεὸς ὅτι ἐποίησεν. The verb ἐνεθυμήθη, whose meaning was an object of dispute between Philo (*Deus* 34 “the thought stored up in the intellect”) and some “careless inquirers” (*ibid.* 21 “the creator repented of the creation of men” ἐπὶ τῇ γενέσει τῶν ἀνθρώπων ὁ δημιουργὸς μετέγνω), is rendered in all three redactions as αω-ῤ-ῥΤΗ-ω, in a manner that would have pleased Philo’s ‘literalist’ opponents.

and have him rescue the spiritual seed. Clearly, Moses was not aware of the true significance of the events he described—he had been made blind like “the whole creation (κτίσις), “so that the deity above them all might not be recognized” (II 28:27–9) and they might not discern the spiritual meaning behind the material symbolism of Noah’s ark. Moses’ condition is thus similar to those “who have not known to whom they belong,” whose souls were “weighed down” by the counterfeit spirit, “cast into a deep sleep” of forgetfulness, and imprisoned into bodies by Ialdabaoth’s authorities. Moses’ cognitive state resembles Adam’s “ecstasy” (ἔκστασις), which the *Apocryphon of John* describes in terms of ignorance and oblivion—the state that Adam had to endure before the messenger from the superior realm “uncovered the veil placed upon his heart,” so that “he became sober out of his drunkenness of the darkness” (BG 59:20–21; NHC III 30:1–2). Moses is a blind prophet of Ialdabaoth, himself a blind creature “stupefied in his madness” (II 10:26) and “without acquaintance of where his strength comes from” (II 11:21–22). Moses’ incompetence as an interpreter of primordial events is ultimately due to the distorted perspective of his master—more specifically, to Ialdabaoth’s unawareness that he is only an instrument, and not the principal cause, of creation. What escapes both Ialdabaoth and Moses, his exemplary prophet, is that the history of humankind unfolds at two separate levels: (1) the material level, governed by Ialdabaoth and his authorities (destiny or εἰμαρμένη, and physical time), whose ‘history’ Moses recorded in a chronological order; and (2) the spiritual level, exemplified in the figure of Sophia, whose representatives occasionally come into contact with the material world in order to recover the divine power stolen by Ialdabaoth.

Just as there is the hand of a hidden, superior master “pulling the strings” (cf. Tert. *Adv. Valent.* 18: *velut sigillario extrinsecus ductu*) in the puppet theatre of Ialdabaoth’s world, so is there a higher meaning hidden behind the literal reading of the Mosaic account of creation. According to the texts traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’, the interpretive key for uncovering that hidden meaning sometimes came from the Savior’s revelations issued during his public career on earth or in the wake of his resurrection (*vita gloriosa*). Sometimes, paradoxically, it came from individual sayings and oracles in the Septuagint, spoken by the prophets of Yahweh–Ialdabaoth, yet, as some ‘Gnostics’ believed, not issued from him. Rather, it was Sophia, the Logos, or some other members of the Pleroma, who spoke occasionally through

the mouth of various Biblical “prophets, priests, and kings” (Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.7.3), and sometimes even through their ruler:

The Logos used (χρησθαί) him [i.e. the intermediate Ruler] as a hand in order to beautify and work on that which is below, and used him like a mouth in order to say things which will be prophesied. (*Tri.Trac.* I 100:30–35)

The *Apocryphon of John* appropriates the same theory of the multiple authorship of Jewish scripture. The existence of the spiritual realm, for example, finds its confirmation in Yahweh’s recurrent self-proclamations as a “jealous god” beside whom no other god exists (Exod 20:5; Deut 5:9; Isa 45:5–6, 46:9):

In uttering this, he signified to the angels attending him that there is another god. For if there were no other, of whom would he be jealous? (II 13:9–13; cf. BG 44:15–17)

The distant realm of light also shines through the obscure language of Adam’s prophecy in Genesis (2:23): “This now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. For this reason, man will leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall together become one flesh” (II 12:10–14; BG 60:5–11; III 30:5–10). This oracle, which Adam uttered at the sight of a woman (Eve) beside him, announces the final συντέλεια—the annihilation of a fragmentary human existence (male and female) and the restoration of a primordial, androgynous unity within the Pleroma.

Another similar prophecy of a more sublime nature is God’s commission of Isaiah as the messenger of tribulations awaiting his people (6:10). Isaiah’s terrifying portrayal of the exalted suzerain ordering severe punishment for a morally corrupt Zion serves a double purpose in the Savior’s revelatory narrative. On one hand, it demonstrates the tyrannical character of Yahweh–Ialdabaoth. On the other, it helps to uncover the true meaning of Yahweh’s casting a deep sleep (ἔκστασις) upon Adam in the Genesis story of creation (Gen 2:21).

Not as Moses said, “He made him asleep,” but he veiled his sensations (αἴσθησις) with a veil and weighed him down with insensitivity (ἀναίσθησία). Indeed, he said through the prophet, “I will weigh down the ears of their hearts, so that they may not understand and may not see.” (BG 58:16–59:5; III 29:4–11; II 22:20–28)

The presence of a higher reality is paradoxically confirmed by the sayings of those separated from it by the veil of ignorance. This

means that even prophecies of the Jewish scripture prove the legitimacy of the ‘Gnostic’ worldview. As argued in the *Apocryphon of John*, it was not by his own design that Yahweh blew some of his spirit into Adam’s face (Gen 2:7). Rather, it was because of the advice given by Sophia and five luminaries, the agents of the Pleroma, that Ialdabaoth decided to share some of his spirit with the first human being—not his own spirit, in fact, but some of “his mother’s power” he had previously stolen. Similarly, it was not a rib, “as Moses said,” that the ruler of this world extracted from Adam while creating a woman. Rather, it was “a part (μέρος) of his power” (II 22:33) that he wanted to extract from Adam’s rib and restore it for himself. This same exegetical method is next applied to the flood story:

[It is] not as Moses said, “They hid in an ark (κιβωτός),” but she [the greatness of Forethought, which is the Afterthought of the light] hid (σκεπάζειν) him in a place (τόπος)—not Noah alone but men from the immovable race. They entered a place (τόπος) and were covered (σκεπάζειν) with a luminous cloud (ϒΙΓΓῆ-ΟΥΓΗΠΕ ἦ-ΟΥΟΙΗ). (BG 73:4–12; III 37:22–38:5; II 29:6–12)

As in the case of his interpretation of Adam’s “ecstasy,” the Savior probably got the idea to assimilate the Biblical ark (κιβωτός) with a place (τόπος) and a “luminous cloud” in his cross-referential reading of the structurally compatible Septuagint passages. In this particular case, he seems to have associated Yahweh’s box (κιβωτός) from Numbers (10:33), which guided Moses and his people, with the column of cloud (ἐν στύλῳ νεφέλης) leading (ἠγείτο) them on their way out of Egypt, from Exodus (13:21). He also appears to have linked the motif of a cloud that covers and hides (καλύπτειν, σκιάζειν), the symbol of Yahweh’s glory, with the “place” (τόπος) where Yahweh will “shelter” (σκεπάσω) Moses “with his hand” while passing by in his glory (Exod 33:21–22).

Like Moses in Exodus, so Noah and his followers also “entered a certain place (τόπος), and were covered (σκεπαζε) with a luminous cloud” (BG 73:10–12; NHC III 38:3–5). Here, too, the cloud reveals its traditional twofold aspect, of protecting and transfiguring. It protects from the darkness which Ialdabaoth had brought down upon earth by “hiding” within itself the privileged members of the human race; and it transfigures by “illuminating” Noah and the immovable race with the light of knowledge, so that they managed to “recognize the lordship (ἀθθεντία, ΤΗῆΤ-ΧΘΕΙC) from above” (III 38:5–7; cf. BG 73:12–14; II 29:12–13).

To conclude, various texts traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’ draw on the Biblical symbolism of a cloud in its twofold function or aspect: (i) that of hiding, in its interior, the glory of a transcendent deity (*separating aspect*); and (ii) that of covering, or overshadowing, some external object (e.g., box, mountain, earth, water, human being) in order to illuminate it and change its ontological status (*mediatory, creative aspect*). The only novelty these texts bring to the Biblical motif is the widening of its application. In a complex and hierarchically organized ‘Gnostic’ universe, a cloud becomes the vehicle of numerous divine epiphanies at all levels of a multi-layered reality. At the spiritual level, it appears in some narratives as the cloud of Mirothea. At the animate level, again, it manifests itself as the cloud of Sabaoth or Ialdabaoth, with Sophia, Zoe, or “the virgin of the holy spirit” residing in it. Finally, in the material realm, it is the cloud of the luminous Afterthought (ἐπίνοια), disguised under the material appearance of an ark (κιβωτός).

Both aspects of the Biblical image of the cloud are present in the Sophia–Ialdabaoth episode of the *Apocryphon of John*. By surrounding her miscarriage “with a luminous cloud,” Sophia illuminates this dark deformity and transfigures it into a ruler by granting it a throne (“she put a throne in the midst of the cloud”) and a name (“she called it Ialdabaoth”). Sophia’s cloud is nothing but the “cloud of light” already encountered in the *Gospel of the Egyptians* (III 56:26–57:21) and in *On the Origin of the World* (II 103:2–106:19). But this is also the cloud that hides the future demiurge and the ruler of the visible realm so that, as the *Apocryphon of John* puts it, “no one may see him except the holy spirit (ἅγιον πνεῦμα), which is called Life (ζωή), the mother of all” (BG 38:9–13; III 15:18–21; II 10:16–18)—just as, in *On the Origin of the World*, “there was no one with him [Sabaoth] in the cloud except Sophia Pistis” (II 106:3–8).

In its twofold aspect of illuminating and hiding, the luminous cloud of the *Apocryphon of John* is thus associated with both Sophia and Ialdabaoth. As a symbol of liminality, it represents the place (τόπος) where the light of the Pleroma (Sophia) encounters the darkness of material chaos (Ialdabaoth). And, like other Biblical symbols and motifs in their ‘Gnostic’ reinterpretation, it carries at once two separate meanings: the material or ‘literal’ meaning, signifying the glory in which Yahweh–Ialdabaoth appeared to Moses; and the spiritual or ‘figurative’ meaning, expressing Sophia’s illuminating and transfiguring power. Moses’ account remains confined to the level of mate-

rial symbols. The spiritual level discloses itself through the Savior's exegesis, which is nothing but the elucidation of Sophia's veiled oracles in Sirach, Baruch, Proverbs, and the Wisdom of Solomon.

Finally, in the context of the narrative organization, the episode of Sophia's "harnessing" her abortion in a luminous cloud stands as a transitional point toward the story of Ialdabaoth's creation of the visible realm. The cosmogonic process cannot take place before Sophia's original product, a "dark" miscarriage, acquires creative power (light), authority (throne), and identity (name). While Sophia's desire to generate and her subsequent production of a theriomorphic mutant represent the violation of the intra-Pleromatic harmony, her act of placing the ugly miscarriage in the cloud creates the necessary condition for the movement of the plot—it introduces into the story the agent whose role is to entail, and preside over, the cosmogonic process and the subsequent history of humankind. In this sense, the luminous cloud is not only the vehicle of transformation initiated by Sophia, but the symbolic expression of the situation that immediately precedes creation of the material universe. The luminous cloud is the dwelling place of Ialdabaoth's glory, before he begins to fabricate the visible universe—in the manner of a luminous cloud from various magical spells, wherein God "the Father" is said to have been "hidden (ΖΗΠ) before fabricating anything" (ΜΠΕϸ-ΤΑΜΙΕ-ΛΑΑΥ):

I adjure you, Yoriel, by the luminous cloud (†ΣΗΠΕ Ν-ΟΥΟΕΙΝ) that is with the father, in which he was hidden before fabricating anything; whose name is Marmarami, the great One, the place of the spirit of Adonai Eloei, the allmighty. (A. M. Kropp, *Ausgewählte koptische Zaubertexte* 1.69, 2.181, 3.45)

It is I who am Jesus Christ—I took a chalice of water in my hand and called upon it by the name of Marmaroi, the power standing before the Father, the great power belonging to Barbaraoth, the [right] forearm of Baraba, the luminous cloud (ΤΕΚΛΟΟΛΕ Ν-ΟΥΟΕΙΝ) standing before Iao Sabaoth. (ibid. 1.47–48, 2.57–58)

I invoke, Gabriel, by the great honored virgin [Marmaroi, Marmarami], in whom the father was hidden from the beginning, before fabricating anything, that you come to me today. (ibid. 1.74, 2.187)

Ialdabaoth the Villain

Ialdabaoth now begins to act—he commits a theft, a typical act of villainy in traditional tales, and thereby introduces the complication in the movement of the plot.

This is the chief ruler (ἄρχων): he took a great power (δύναμις) from (ΤΩΚΕ ΕΒΟΛ; II XI ΕΒΟΛ) the mother, retreated from her, and moved away from the place where he had been born. He embraced another place and fabricated for himself an aeon (αἰών) burning with a luminous fire, in which he is now; and he united with madness (ἄπρόνοια), which is with him. (BG 38:14–39:6; III 15:22–16:6; II 10:19–27)²⁴

The importance of Ialdabaoth's villainous act for the actual movement of the story is confirmed by recurrent allusions to it later in the text, in all of its three redactions:

He [Ialdabaoth] divided between them some of his fire, but he did not send forth any of the power of the light which he had taken from (XI ΠΤΠ-) his mother (II 11:6–9; cf. BG 42:13–17; III 18:12–15).²⁵

Not that he had seen the incorruptible ones, but the power in him, which he had taken from (XI ΠΤΠ-) his mother, had begotten in him the image of the ordered world. (II 13:1–5)

But when she [Sophia] saw the evil (κακία) that had come to happen, and the theft that her son had committed (ΠΧΙ ΕΠΤΑϞ-ΧΙΤ-Ϟ; BG: the forthcoming rebellion, ἀποστασία), she repented (μετανοεῖν). (II 13:21–23; BG 45:10–13)

Now when the arrogant one [αὐθαδέης] had taken power from the mother, he was ignorant of many things surpassing his mother. (BG 45:20–46:3; cf. II 13:26–29)

One passage in the narrative, however, does not identify Ialdabaoth's acquisition of his mother's power with theft, claiming instead that Sophia “wanted to retrieve the power that she had given (ΤΣΟΜ ΕΠΤΑϞ-ΤΑΔ-Ϟ) to the chief archon” (II 19:15–16; BG 51:2–3). What this act of “giving” most likely alludes to is the preceding episode, in which Sophia surrounded her miscarried offspring with a luminous cloud and thereby provided it with a power to create (light), authority (throne), and personal identity (name). In light of this passage, Ialdabaoth's immediate reaction, a theft, appears somewhat

²⁴ Cf. Irenaeus's summary, *Adv. haer.* 1.29.4: *virtutem autem magnam abstulisse eum a matre enarrant et abstulisse ab ea in inferiora et fecisse firmamentum caeli, in quo et habitare dicunt.*

²⁵ In NHC III and BG, the passage comes later in the narrative (BG 42:13–17; NHC III 18:12–15): “He shared with them some of his fire (BG only: “that belongs to him”), and some of his power, but of the pure light, that is (BG has instead: “of”), the power that he had detached (NHC III ΔΠΟCΤΑ *loco* ΔΠΟCΤΑ; BG has the Coptic equivalent ΤΑΚΗϞ ΕΒΟΛ) from the mother, he did not bestow on them any.”

confusing: how could he steal, or take away, what he was previously given? One way to solve this anomaly is to posit the mechanical conflation of two originally independent variations on the same theme—the loss of a portion of spiritual power into the hand of an extra-Pleromatic being. The probability of this assumption can be tested by the following synoptic comparison:

Episode One
BG 38:1–12 (II 10:11–18)

She cast it away from her,
outside those places
so that no one of the immortals might see it;
for she had begotten it without acquaintance.
She harnessed it in a luminous cloud.
She placed a throne in the midst of the cloud,
so that no one might see it

except the Holy Spirit, which is called Zoe,
the Mother of all.

Episode Two
BG 38:15–39:4 (II 10:20–25)

He took a great power from the mother,
retreated from her, and moved away from
the place where he had been born.

He embraced another place
and fabricated for himself an aeon,
burning with a luminous fire,
in which he is now.

In *Episode One*, the initiative for action belongs to Sophia. She casts away her dark abortion outside of the Pleroma and harnesses it in a luminous cloud—that is, she hides it from the sight of the immortals and, at the same time, provides it with a luminous power that will enable it to fabricate. Sophia's transfiguration of her formless miscarriage comprises two additional acts: she places a throne in the midst of the luminous cloud and thus transforms it into a ruler; and she gives it a name, Ialdabaoth, thereby providing it with personal identity. In *Episode Two*, the perspective has changed. Now it is Ialdabaoth who plays the role of an agent and imposes his point of view on the narrative. He takes a great power from his mother, moves away from the Pleroma where he was born, and, with the help of the power taken from his mother, fabricates a luminous, fiery realm in which he still dwells.

The preceding synoptic comparison reveals a number of similarities in content and structure between the two episodes. Both episodes highlight the moment of a spatial transgression, of the transference out of the Pleroma. In the first, Sophia transfers her offspring out of the invisible realm; in the second, Ialdabaoth transfers himself out of the place where he was born. Another common feature is the acquisition of the divine power by Sophia's offspring. But while in *Episode One* Sophia acts by means of a luminous cloud and Ialdabaoth

is just a passive recipient of Sophia's gift, the roles are reversed in *Episode Two*, to the point that it is now Ialdabaoth who plays the role of an agent and commits a theft in order to acquire the power. The two episodes are thus related to each other by structural inversion—in fact, a double inversion, first with regard to the relation between the dramatis personae (active subject vs. passive recipient), and second with respect to the sequence of actions (transgression—giving the power vs. stealing the power—transgression). Finally, both episodes bring about a similar outcome. In the first, the outcome is a luminous cloud, the replica of a fiery cloud from Ezekiel's vision (Ez 1:4), the dwelling place of Ialdabaoth's glory; in the second, the result is a fiery aeon in which Ialdabaoth dwells. But whereas Ialdabaoth's fiery aeon is the product of his own creative effort, in the case of a luminous cloud it is Sophia who bears responsibility for its apparition. The following diagram displays the structural homologies between the two episodes:

Episode One	Episode Two
(I) <i>In the Pleroma</i>	
<i>Agent:</i> Sophia	<i>Agent:</i> Ialdabaoth
<i>Action:</i> Casting Away (B)	<i>Action:</i> Stealing Sophia's Light (A)
	<i>Action:</i> Moving Away (B)
(II) <i>Outside of the Pleroma</i>	
<i>Agent:</i> Sophia	<i>Agent:</i> Ialdabaoth
<i>Action:</i> Giving a Luminous Cloud (=Light) (A)	<i>Action:</i> Fabrication the Fiery Realm (C)
<i>Action:</i> Giving a Dwelling Place (C)	

The two consecutive episodes in the plot of the *Apocryphon of John* appear thus to be equivalent not only in their content and structure but also in their narrative function. It is therefore hardly surprising that other 'Gnostic' accounts of creation considered these two variants of the same theme—the loss of a portion of divine power and its transference out of the Pleroma—as mutually exclusive. Irenaeus, for example, in his summary of the doctrine of Barbelognostics, which provides a cosmogonic account strikingly similar to the Savior's in the *Apocryphon of John*, does not even allude to Sophia's giving up some of her power to Ialdabaoth.

After that, moved by simplemindedness and kindness, she [Sophia Prounikos, Holy Spirit] generated a work in which there were ignorance and audacity. They claim that this work of hers was the first ruler, the fabricator of this creation. But they tell us that he took a great power from his mother, moved away from her to the lower

regions (*virtutem autem magnam abstulisse eum a matre narrant et abstulisse ab ea in inferiora*), and made the firmament of heaven, in which they say he also dwells. (Iren. *Adv. haer.* 1.29.4)

On the other hand, Ialdabaoth's theft is not so common a theme in the extant 'Gnostic' narratives and the heresiological reports thereof. Besides the *Apocryphon's* versions and the above quoted Irenaeus's summary of the Barbelognostic myth, the theme occurs in the *Pistis Sophia*,²⁶ as well as in Epiphanius's report on the sectarian book "entitled *Noria*," where the heroine, Noah's wife, sets out to recover "the parts stripped off (τὰ συληθέντα) from the superior mother by the

²⁶ In numerous references to Sophia's loss of light in the *Pistis Sophia*, the blame is placed not only on the deceitful plan of the "great triple-powered arrogant (αὐθάδης)" ruler but also on Sophia's violation of intra-Pleromatic interdictions and her subsequent submission to the villain's deception. As Jesus explains to Mariam and his other disciples (43, 7–46, 22 Schmidt), Sophia, who was "in the thirteenth aeon . . . looked to the height, saw the light of the veil belonging to the treasury of the light, and wanted to go that place." But the archons beneath, including their ruler, "the great triple-powered arrogant One (αὐθάδης)," hated her "because she pondered about going to the light which was above" them. In the manner of a typical folk-tale villain attempting to deceive his victim in order to take her possession (Propp 1968, 29–30), "the great triple-powered arrogant One (αὐθάδης) . . . persecuted Sophia up to the thirteenth aeon, so that she should gaze at the inferior parts and see there his light-power, which is lion-faced, and desire it and come thither, so that it could take her light from her. After this, she looked down and saw his light-power; and she did not realize that it belonged to the triple-powered arrogant One, but she thought it was from the light which she had seen from the very beginning in the height, and which was from the veil of the treasury of the light. And she thought to herself, 'I will go to that place without my consort and take the light, and create of it luminous aeons for myself, so as to be able to go to the light of lights which is in the highest height'. Now as she was thinking these thoughts, she came forth from her place in the thirteenth aeon and came down to the twelfth aeon. The rulers of the [twelve] aeons persecuted her: they became angry with her because she had pondered about finding greatness. However, she came forth from the twelfth aeon, came to the places of the chaos, and approached the lion-faced light-power in order to swallow it. Yet all of the material emanations of the arrogant One surrounded her; and the great lion-faced light-power swallowed the light-powers in Sophia, and it purified her light and swallowed it. And her matter was cast forth into the chaos, and it became a lion-faced archon in the chaos, whose one half was fiery and the other dark, namely Ialdabaoth . . . Now when these things had happened, Sophia grew increasingly weaker, and the aforementioned lion-faced light-power attempted to take away all light-powers from Sophia." Cf. also 86, 25–87, 2: "My light has grown dim, for they [the Arrogant One with his great lion-faced power and his material emanations] had taken away my power from me, and all the powers within me have been shaken"; 107, 6–8: "Indeed, my light and my power have been taken away, and my power shakes within me, and I have not been able to stand in their midst." In this version of the 'Gnostic' mythologeme of the loss of spiritual power into the hand of an extra-

ruler who created the world" (*Pan.* 26.1.9). More often, it was Sophia, and not Ialdabaoth, whom the Gnostics blamed for the creation of the visible universe.²⁷ As for Ialdabaoth, he figured as a mere instrument ('that-through-which', δι' οὗ) of creation—an ignorant ruler manipulated by his mother, the actual triggering cause.

Why did the author of the *Apocryphon of John* decide to concatenate both variants and shift the focus from Sophia to Ialdabaoth, at the risk of introducing inconsistencies and creating redundancy in the Savior's revelatory narrative? First, as has been already noticed, a continuous oscillation between the two levels at which the creation story unfolds—the material one, governed by Ialdabaoth, and the animate one, presided over by Sophia—is the pivotal point of the author's narrative strategy. Second, the author desired to clear Sophia, the heroine in the story, of any direct involvement in the material creation, making Ialdabaoth primarily responsible for creation on account of his villainous theft. Similarly to many other narratives traditionally labeled as 'Gnostic', the *Apocryphon of John* represents Ialdabaoth as an ignorant demiurge who, in order to fabricate the world out of matter, requires the presence of some superior power. In this case, however, Sophia does not seem personally involved—she does not fabricate the world by means of an inferior agent, by imprinting in his soul the images of the invisible reality. As the Savior states in the longer version of the *Apocryphon*, it is rather "the power in him, which he had taken from his mother," that "had begotten in him the image of the ordered world" (II 13:2–5).²⁸

Pleromatic villain, the story concerns the duel in cunning, played out between the arrogant villain (αὐθάδης) and his superordinate, Sophia. Albeit a victim, Sophia is ultimately responsible for the chain of ensuing tragic events—the violation of the initial order results from her desire to overcome her rank, to move up to the height "without her consort, take the light, and create of it for herself luminous aeons." Sophia's deceitful plan is recompensed by her submission to the villain's deceit—that is, by her mistaking the semblance of light in the dark 'chaotic' substrate for its original source in the Pleroma.

²⁷ See the previous note and the discussion on the "luminous cloud" in the previous section, chap. 3, pp. 160–71; see, in addition, Ptolemy's version of the Valentinian cosmogony (*Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.4–5) which portrays the demiurge as "surreptitiously moved by the mother" (1.5.1); cf. also Clem. Al. *Exc. Theod.* 49.1–2, and the excellent analysis of the 'Gnostic' mediators by Orbe (1972) 265–301 and (1987) 1:180–82.

²⁸ In Hippolytus's account of the "Valentinians" (*Ref.* 6.33), Sophia acts as both

Finally, Ialdabaoth's theft is introduced in the narrative to initiate the movement of the plot. This is the point in the story at which the actual intrigue begins. Ialdabaoth's villainous act produces an insufficiency (Sophia's "lack") which, in its turn, entails the quest for the object (Sophia's "power") he has stolen and transferred to another place (Ialdabaoth's aeon and, at the next stage of the story, the material world).

Related to the previous episode, in which Sophia surrounded her offspring with a luminous cloud and thereby transferred to it some of her "power" (the Pleromatic light), Ialdabaoth's theft introduces a new movement in the story, bringing about the shift in emphasis from Sophia to Ialdabaoth. What originally might have been two hardly compatible versions of the same theme (*viz.*, the acquisition of Sophia's light by Ialdabaoth) become now two distinct moments in the sequential structure of the narrative—the preparatory action (Sophia's illumination of her offspring) and the beginning of complication (Ialdabaoth's villainy).

Whereas the preceding synopsis has shown how, under the apparent inconsistencies between the two episodes, there lie hidden numerous affinities in their structure and content, the following diagram indicates how the author of the *Apocryphon of John* managed to incorporate them both into the traditional narrative scheme of a folktale type: initial situation—violation—lack—quest—restoration of initial situation).²⁹ By doing so, he introduced a series of important spatial distinctions in the description of the events preliminary to creation: (i) between Sophia's miscarriage (primordial darkness, material substrate) and Ialdabaoth (the illuminated darkness, *viz.*, the archon of a fiery realm); (ii) between the "place(s)" where Sophia miscarried her ugly product (the lower part of Pleroma) and "another place," or "places,"—where she hid it (the luminous cloud); and finally, (iii) between the place to which Sophia removed her offspring (the superior part of the extra-Pleromatic realm) and the place into which

the preliminary and joint cause in Ialdabaoth's creation: "It is through him [the Demiurge], who did not know (ἀγνοοῦντι) what he was doing, that Sophia actualized everything (ἐνέργησε πάντα) and provided them with strength. And while she was working, he thought that he was creating the universe from himself (ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ)," whereas, in fact, we should add, he was just an instrumental cause, τὸ δι' οὐδ'.

²⁹ For the definition and analysis of traditional narrative schemes see Propp (1968), Brémond (1973), Barthes (1985) 167–206, and Ricoeur (1984) 2:55–91.

Ialdabaoth removed himself (the lower part of the region outside of the Pleroma, where the material creation will take place).

As a result, we have two almost identical sets of actions, one performed by Sophia and the other by Ialdabaoth, yet each occurring at two different levels of the cosmological model, and at two different stages of the cosmogonic process.

(I) IN THE PLEROMA		
<i>Initial situation 1</i>	Sophia and her miscarriage	[Agent: Sophia]
<i>Transgression 1</i>	Sophia casts out her miscarriage	
(II) OUTSIDE OF THE PLEROMA		
		UPPER PART
<i>Gift/ Enthronement 1</i>	Sophia surrounds her miscarriage with a luminous cloud	
<i>Initial Situation 2</i>	Ialdabaoth in the cloud	
<i>Theft/ Violation</i>	Ialdabaoth takes power from Sophia	[Agent: Ialdabaoth]
<i>Transgression 2</i>	Ialdabaoth moves away from Sophia	
		LOWER PART
<i>Enthronement 2</i>	Ialdabaoth embraces another place and fabricates his fiery realm	

Ialdabaoth the Demiurge

Ialdabaoth's theft of Sophia's power affects simultaneously both agents. Ialdabaoth "embraces another place" and becomes the ruler of the cosmogonic process, while Sophia, deprived of her original perfection, experiences "lack" ($\psi\tau\lambda$). From now on, the narrative will alternately follow the 'villain' and the 'victimized heroine'—Ialdabaoth, engaging in creation of the material world and, later on, in the gradual enslavement of humankind; and Sophia, determined to restore the "lack" by recovering the light stolen by Ialdabaoth.

The story at first focuses on Ialdabaoth and takes his point of view.³⁰ Upon obtaining his mother's power and seizing a different place, Ialdabaoth begins to inform phenomenal reality by imitating

³⁰ Ialdabaoth's appropriation of Sophia's light announces a shift in narrative perspective. As pointed out to me by Gordon Williams, the light stolen by Ialdabaoth stands for "the view point of Ialdabaoth. Sophia's is that she 'gave', but Ialdabaoth misused it. . . . When the transition is made to Ialdabaoth, the aspect changes and the narrator locates himself within the physical world where light is only derivative . . . and Ialdabaoth's perception totally constricted."

the superior model—in the manner of the Platonic craftsman, “according to the likeness of aeons that exist from the beginning” (BG 44:7–8; II 12:34–35), or “according to the likeness of the prototype which precedes him” (BG 39:16–18; III 16:13–14).

Yet Ialdabaoth’s initial acts of world production only partly overlap with the design of the intelligent demiurge from the *Timaeus*. He has neither a direct access to the ideal model nor a carefully designed plan for shaping the phenomenal world—for he is “dark and without acquaintance,” and “impious in his madness” (II 11:10, 18). Nor does he operate from conscious purposes like his Platonic counterpart: he does not begin by shaping the four primary elements, nor does he fit the world’s body into the frame of the rational world-soul (*Tim.* 69a–c, 31b–32c, 36d–e). Ialdabaoth’s first product is not the universe consisting of the four successive elements forming the concentric spherical layers, with fire in the outer celestial region and earth in the midst of this harmonious construction. Instead, Ialdabaoth first “fabricated (ΤΑΜΙΟ) for himself an aeon burning with a luminous fire, which still exists” (BG 39:1–2; cf. II 10:24).

In the *Timaeus*, the genesis of the phenomenal world begins with the demiurge giving a distinct configuration to a constant flux of elemental qualities “by means of shapes and numbers” (53b), and thus forming the four primary elements. These elements are subject to the everlasting process of transformation—upwards from water to fire, and downwards from fire to water—due to the dissolution and recombination of their constituent units, the mathematical figures of triangles. This version of elemental change postulates the hierarchical arrangement of the elements, with fire as the most refined and active of all, and not, as is the case with the *Apocryphon of John*, the chronological priority of fire over the other elementary bodies. The fiery world of Ialdabaoth points thus to another source, whose origins can be traced all the way back to the vitalist cosmology of the Stoics.

According to the Stoic model, the world comes into being through the change in volume and in density of a continuous corporeal substance (prime matter) and, in its initial stage, consists exclusively of fire. This change results from the activity of god or *pneuma*. Blending with prime matter, god causes this bare and unqualified substrate to expand, transforms it into fire, and “has the whole substance as its controlling principle” (Origen, *C. Cels.* 4.14). Chrysippus describes this phase of the world cycle in his lost work *On Providence* as the

state in which “the cosmos is fiery throughout” and “is simply its own soul and controlling principle” (Plut. *De Stoic. rep.* 1053b). The subsequent stages of the cycle, from the conflagrational phase to a gradual differentiation of fire into the remaining three elements, represent thus a self-transformation of god in his changing relationship with the original bare substance.³¹

Apart from the fieriness of Ialdabaoth and his realm, other features of the cosmogonic process in the *Apocryphon of John* display much less affinity with the Stoic cosmology. The Savior agrees with the Stoics that the duration of the world-order is finite, but he neither alludes to an everlasting recurrence of natural processes nor describes further cosmic stages by differentiating fire into three other elements on the basis of their increased density (hot air–moisture–earth).³² The ensuing sections of his revelatory account are not concerned with elemental change, but with the demiurge’s organization of the fiery realm. At this point, the sequence of events begins to coincide anew with the narrative line of the *Timaeus*, moving from (i) the plane of the Zodiac to (ii) the Planets, including the Sun and Moon, and ending with (iii) the stars of the sky. To this hierarchically arranged outline of celestial entities the longer redaction of the *Apocryphon of John* will also supply the list of the decans, the constellations occupying thirty-six segments of the celestial circle, and of the pentads representing the seventy-two stars that preside over the Egyptian weeks of five days. Such an amalgamation of two originally independent systems, zodiacal and decanal, traditionally attributed to the legendary Egyptian astrologers Nechepso and Petosiris (Firm. Mat. *Math.* 4.22.2), signals a gradual lapse from the ‘scientific’ discourse of astronomy to the realm of popular astrological speculations.³³ As

³¹ For the problems involved in the interpretation of the Stoic cosmic cycle (διακόσμησις), the status of fire, and the important distinction between elemental and qualitative change, see, e.g., Hahn (1985) 39–56, Long–Sedley (1987) 1:274–79, and White (2003) 133–38.

³² See Arius Didymus’ summary of Chrysippus’s theory of elemental change: “First there is the change from fire into air by contraction, second, from this into water, and third, into earth when the water contracts proportionately even further” (Ar. Didym. fr. 21 = *SVF* 2.413). The process is of course reversible.

³³ Firm. Mat. *Math.* 2.4: “Each sign is divided into three parts, and each part has one decan. . . . In addition, the decans themselves are allotted to individual planets, so that if the planet should be in that decan, even though it is in a strange sign, it is considered as being in its own sign. . . . Certain [astrologers], wishing to explain

the contours of Ialdabaoth's universe begin to take shape out of the fiery blaze, one becomes increasingly aware of its oppressive character, of the negative influences exerted by the planets and stars on the sublunary world, and of the inexorable laws of destiny to which these heavenly rulers will subject the human race.

The physical world emerging from the Savior's presentation in the *Apocryphon of John* is a 'mannerist' construction peopled with demonic figures, which is organized around the following astrological assumptions: first, that the revolutions of celestial bodies are associated with time and its circular movement; second, that each segment of time is assigned to a particular heavenly body and its recurrent rhythm of rising and setting; and third, that the celestial sphere does not tolerate the presence of void, leaving no place empty of heavenly bodies. Twelve zodiacal constellations, seven planets, thirty-six decans, and their numerous attendants (*leitourgoi*) play thus the double role as units of celestial time (*chronocrators*) and cosmic space (*cosmocrators*). It is their role as the instruments of time that the Savior first sets out to examine.

Ialdabaoth begins to fill up his fiery realm by mating with Madness (*ἀπόνοια*)—in a grotesque imitation of the original union of God with his feminine consort Conception (*ἔννοια*) or Forethought (*πρόνοια*)—and by “engendering the authorities (*ἐξουσίαι*) that are under him as the twelve angels, each of them unto its own aeon, after the pattern (*τύπος*) of the incorruptible (*ἀφθαρτος*) aeons” (BG 39:4–8; cf. III 16:7–11).³⁴ Translated into astronomical terms, he divides the circle of the ecliptic into twelve sections and assigns to each of them one of the twelve zodiacal constellations or signs. The individual signs are further divided, according to the text of the shorter redactions, into seven unequal fractions, each assigned to an angel—the total of eighty-four angelic attendants representing, in all likelihood, the stars rising and setting with the zodiac (*paranatellonta*). Ialdabaoth continues to create by allotting another three powers to each angel,

this with more refinement, add three divinities each to every decan, which they call 'attendants' (*munifices*), that is, *leitourgoi*, so that for every sign nine 'attendants' can be found and every decan is divided into three 'attendants'.”

³⁴ III 16:7–11 runs as follows: “He begot the authorities that are under him along with the twelve angels, and each of them as an aeon, after the pattern of the incorruptible ones.”

“so that all that belong to him are 360 angelic beings” (BG 39:13–15), each controlling a single degree of the zodiacal band (*monomoiriai*) and corresponding to the individual day in the yearly cycle.³⁵ The division of the ecliptic into elementary units that mark off the regular periods in the revolving solar year—i.e., months, weeks, and days—is now completed. Taken as a whole, these units constitute the realm of Fate (εἰμαρμένη), or “the bond of forgetfulness,” representing the proportional ratio of “measures, times, and ages” with which Ialdabaoth will later bind “the whole creation” (II 28:21–32; cf. BG 72:2–10, III 37:6–13).

Ialdabaoth now proceeds to the creation of the planets within the zodiacal band: “And he established seven kings, each corresponding to the superior firmament, in charge of the seven heavens, and five over the depth of the abyss” (II 11:4–6; BG 41:12–15; III 17:17–20). The passage describes the distribution of the twelve zodiacal signs among the seven planetary rulers, effected according to the following astrological principles: first, that the celestial sphere is divided along the line of horizon into two hemispheres, diurnal and nocturnal; second, that the zodiacal constellations appear either as diurnal signs in the upper hemisphere (“heaven”) or as nocturnal signs in the lower hemisphere (“the depth of the abyss” II 11:6, “the *chaos* of the underworld” BG 41:15, “the *chaos* and the underworld” III 17:19–20); and third, that the signs of the zodiac are ruled by the planets which, with the exception of the Sun and Moon, have two

³⁵ The computation leading up to the number of days in the yearly cycle—12 authorities (angels) + 12 aeons assigned to them + seven angels for each authority (84) + seven powers for each angels (252), i.e., “the total of 360 angelic beings”—is absent in NHC III, perhaps because the redactor considered the separation of the twelve authorities from their correspondending aeons as problematic. In NHC II, again, the creation of angels ruling over 365 days—an increase effected by the addition of the five intercalary days—occurs later in the narrative (II 11:22–26), following the appearance of the seven planetary kings, and is attributed to the “rulers” (ἄρχοντες) who seem to represent the seven planets, and not to Ialdabaoth and his “authorities” (ἐξουσίαι), or the twelve zodiacal signs: “And the (seven) rulers made seven powers for (each of) themselves, and the powers made six angels for each of themselves, until they amounted to 365 angels.” Yet the arithmetic calculation does not yield the desired number: 12 authorities, 7 archons, 49 powers, and 294 angels make up the total number of 362 astrological beings. The redactor’s computation can be “saved” by adding the demiurge’s three names—Ialdabaoth, Saklas, Samael (II 11:16–18)—taken as self-subsistent entities or hypostases. For various ways of dividing the zodiacal circle down to its single degrees, each ruled by an astrological entity (χρονοκράτωρ), see Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 216–218.

signs, one per each hemisphere, as their domiciles or ‘houses’ (οἶκοι) in which they exert an increased influence (οἰκοδεσπότηαι) and “rejoice” (χαίρειν, *gaudere*).

Ialdabaoth’s command that seven kings rule over the same number of heavens and five over the fathomless abyss, or the chaos of the underworld, appears thus to stand for the allocation of the seven planets to their zodiacal domiciles (‘houses’). Five of the planets—Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn—are allocated to their double domicile, one in the upper or ‘diurnal’ hemisphere of the zodiacal circle, and the other in its lower or ‘nocturnal’ hemicycle. As for the remaining two, the Sun and Moon, they rule only one sign and have their single dwelling place in heaven. In the traditional system of ‘houses’, as recorded by Ptolemy, these signs are identified as Leo and Cancer.

Since of the twelve zodiacal signs the most northern, which are closer than the others to our zenith and therefore most productive of heat and warmth, are Cancer and Leo, they [i.e. previous astrologers] assigned these to the greatest and most powerful heavenly bodies, that is, to the luminaries, as houses—Leo, which is masculine, to the sun and the feminine Cancer to the moon. In keeping with this they hypothesized the semicircle from Leo to Capricorn to be solar and that from Aquarius to Cancer to be lunar, so that in each of the semicircles one sign might be assigned to each of the five planets as its own, one bearing aspect to the sun and the other to the moon, consistently with the spheres of their motions and the peculiarities of their natures. (Ptol. *Tetr.* 1.17 trans. Waddell)

The odd thing about the *Apocryphon*’s system is that the Moon, the luminary of night, appears to have its domicile in the diurnal hemisphere. The astrological model that may best account for this ‘anomaly’ is of a mixed Greco-Egyptian origin, and deals with the manner of constructing the world horoscope (*thema mundi, mundi genitura*). According to this model, attributed to the legendary astrologers Nechepso and Petosiris (Firm. Mat. *Math.* 3.1 Monat 15 = frag. 25 Riess), the celestial machine was set in motion by the demiurge at the beginning of the Sothic year—that is, at the time of the heliacal rising of Sothis, or Sirius, over the eastern horizon (Ascendant), when the Sun was in the middle of Leo, and the Moon in the middle of Cancer (*Solem in Leonis parte XV, Lunam in Cancri parte XV, . . . horam in Cancri parte XV*). The “seven heavens” of the *Apocryphon of John* should thus represent the seven zodiacal constellations that, in part

or completely, lie above the horizon: Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, and Capricorn.³⁶

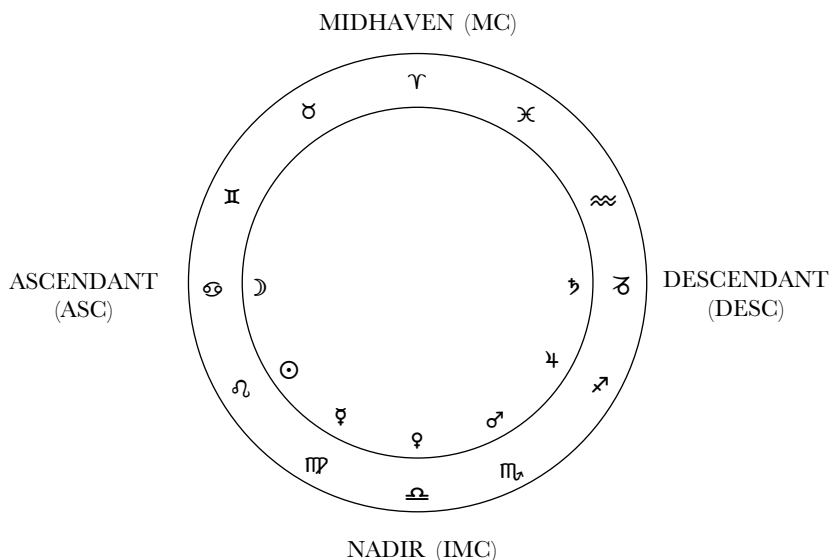


Figure 1 Thema Mundi

³⁶ Firm. Mat. *Math.* 3.1: “They [i.e. Petosiris and Nechepso] set up the birthchart of the universe (*mundi . . . genituram*) following Aesculapius and Anubis, to whom most powerful Mercury [i.e. Hermes] entrusted the secrets of this doctrine. They placed the Sun in the fifteenth degree of Leo, the Moon in the fifteenth degree of Cancer, Saturn in the fifteenth degree of Capricorn, Jupiter in the fifteenth degree of Sagittarius, Mars in the fifteenth degree of Scorpio, Venus in the fifteenth degree of Libra, Mercury in the fifteenth degree of Virgo, and the Ascendant [i.e. Horoscope] in the fifteenth degree of Cancer.” Firmicus does not discuss the positions of the planets vis-à-vis the remaining five zodiacal signs, an omission that is easy to rectify: Mercury in the fifteenth degree of Gemini, Venus in the middle of Taurus, Mars and Jupiter in the middle of Aries and Pisces respectively, and Saturn in the fifteenth degree of Aquarius. The model is an amalgamation of two different calendars: a tropical solar year beginning with the summer solstice, when the Sun is at the first point of Cancer, and the Egyptian sidereal year regulated by the heliacal rising of Sirius–Sothis in the middle of Cancer. For the *thema mundi* see Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 182–92 and Boll–Bezold–Gundel (1931) 58–60.

The theory of planetary ‘houses’ also provides the best explanation for a few oddities in the *Apocryphon*’s list of the twelve zodiacal “authorities” and their corresponding planetary archons.³⁷ In the shorter versions (BG 40:4–18, 41:16–42:8; cf. III 16:19–17:5, 17:20–18:7), this list runs as follows:

Zodiacal Authorities

Iaoth
 Hermas, “the eye of fire”
 Galila
 Iobel
 Adonaios
 Sabaoth
 Kainan–Kae, “the Sun”
 Abiressine
 Iobel
 Harmouphiael
 Adonin
 Belias

Planetary Rulers

Iaoth, the lion-faced
 Eloaios, the donkey-faced
 Astaphaios, the hyena-faced
 Iao, the serpent-faced with seven heads
 Adonaios, the dragon-faced
 Adoni, the monkey-faced
 Sabbataios, the face of a shining fiery flame

³⁷ The ‘anomalous’ division of the zodiacal band into two asymmetrical groups of the seven and five signs may also stem from the classification of the signs and their corresponding months on the basis of their respective ratios of daylight to night. Following this division of the zodiac by the celestial equator, the months in which the day is longer than the night belong to the ‘diurnal’ signs, from Aries to Virgo, and the remainder, in which the night prevails, to the ‘nocturnal’ zodiacal constellations, ranging from Libra to Pisces. According to Macrobius, who traces the classification all the way back to “the Assyrians and Phoenicians” (*Sat.* 1.21.1), the ‘nocturnal’ signs occupy the lower hemisphere (*inferiora signa*), identified with the underworld or the realm of Persephone (*Proserpina*), where the Sun, in its apparent yearly path round the Earth, seems to experience a “temporary death” (*tamquam sole raptu mortis temporalis amisso et a Proserpina retento*). Hippolytus (*Ref.* 4.50) attributes a similar *interpretatio mythologica* of the zodiacal classification to an unidentified ‘heretical’ commentary on Aratus, which distinguished between the ‘diurnal signs’ of the upper hemisphere (“a bear, lion, kid, waterman, Cepheus, and Andromeda”) and “the figures that have names given them in Hades” (τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου ὀνομαζομένων εἰδῶλων). Hippolytus’s opponents seem to have used the Greek form of the Zodiac, probably construed by Hipparchus and adopted by Aratus, which represented the sign Libra as the claws (*Chelai*) of the Scorpion. If this assumption is correct, there remain, strictly speaking, only five zodiacal constellations ruling over Hades or, as the *Apocryphon* calls it, “the depth of abyss” and “the chaos of the underworld”—that is, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. Boll (1914) 68–77, argues that these five ‘nocturnal’ signs ruling the realm of Hades were conflated in the extravagant imagination of the anonymous author of the *Revelation to John* (Rev 9:1–12) into a horrifying vision of the locusts, “allowed to torture [people] for five months” (9:5) and having a composite appearance of “horses equipped for battle,” with “crowns of gold on their heads,” with “faces like human faces” and “scales like iron breastplates,” and with “tails like scorpions” (9:7–11). The problem is that,

The astrological doctrine of ‘houses’ (οἴκοι) has an important corollary: any conjoining of heterogenous astrological items (planets and zodiac signs, but also decans, *paranatellonta*, and astral *leitourgoi* or attendants) results in the blending of their respective peculiar properties. Each planet, for example, exerts influence over the zodiacal wheel or the decanal band by lending its particular shape (πρόσωπον, ‘mask’ or ‘face’), and even its name, to a sign or decan allotted to it. The converse often held true, too, depending on how each astrologer determined the causal relation between various astrological entities.³⁸ Applied to the above list of the twelve authorities and seven archons, the rule explains many of its striking features: (i) the inclusion of a planet’s name (Hermes or Hermas) into the zodiacal list; (ii) the names (Iaoth, Adonaios) shared by the signs and their planets; and (iii) the odd duplication of the name Iobel in the series of the zodiacal ‘authorities’, referring to two different signs—one in the diurnal and the other in the nocturnal hemisphere—allocated to a common planetary ruler.

Taken together, these oddities provide a sufficient number of clues to identify the zodiacal signs and planets hidden behind their mag-

in this division, the influence of Jupiter and Mars would remain confined to the ‘nocturnal’ hemisphere, whereas Mercury would govern only ‘diurnal’ signs. For this reason, the birthchart of the universe (*Thema mundi*), in which each planet rules a different zodiacal sign in the diurnal hemisphere, appears a more likely source for the set of planet-signs correlations established by the *Apocryphon of John*.

³⁸ Zodiacal influence can be altered by a number of factors: stars rising at the same time as the sign (παρανατέλλοντες), a planet allotted to the zodiacal section (πρόσωπον), particular decans (δεκανοί), three per zodiacal sign, or even smaller fractions (πεντάδες); cf. *supra*, n. 32. Astrologers proposed various theories about the mutual relationship of these entities. For the ‘Chaldeans’ of Cicero (*Div.* 2.89), the signs appear superordinate to the planets, whereas the Hermetic tract *The Eye-Pupil of the World* (Stob. frag. 23.29) seems to claim the opposite: “‘And I, said Hermes [i.e. Mercury], ‘will shape the nature of mankind, will confer Wisdom, Prudence, Persuasion, and Truth onto them, and will never cease to unite with Invention. Moreover, I will always benefit the life of mortal men born under my zodiacal signs; for the signs that the Father and the Demiurge has allotted to me are rational and intelligent. And I will do so even more whenever the movement of the stars [i.e. planets] that dominate these men is in accord with the force of nature working in each of them.’” The excerpt from another Hermetic tract, the dialogue between Hermes and Tat (Stob. frag. 6.3–4, 9), assigns the supreme rule to thirty-six decans who, placed “between the [outermost] circle of the universe and that of the zodiac,” both “delimit” the signs (καθορίζοντες 6.3) and “rule over the seven planets” (ἐπιστατοῦσι 6.9). For the whole issue see Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 180–240, esp. 180–82 and 224–26, and Barton (1994) 86–113.

ical names. Assuming that their order of appearance follows the arrangement of the planetary houses, that the reference to Harmas concerns not only the sign but also its governing planet, and that at least some of the planetary archons (e.g. Iaoth, the lion-headed planetary archon) appropriate a theriomorphic “mask” (*prosopon*) of the signs they govern (e.g. Leo, the Sun’s astrological sign),³⁹ there emerges the following set of identifications:

<i>Authority</i>	<i>Zodiacal Sign</i>	<i>Planet</i>	<i>Archon</i>
Iaoth	♌ Leo	☉ Sun	Iaoth
Hermas	♍ Virgo	☿ Mercury	Eloaios
Galila	♎ Libra	♀ Venus	Astaphaios
Iobel	♏ Scorpio	♂ Mars	Iao
Adonaios	♐ Sagittarius	♃ Jupiter	Adonaios
Sabaoth	♑ Capricorn	♄ Saturn	Adoni
Kainan–Kae	♒ Aquarius	♄ Saturn	Sabbataios ⁴⁰
Abiressine	♓ Pisces	♃ Jupiter	
Iobel	♈ Aries	♂ Mars	
Harmoupiael	♉ Taurus	♀ Venus	
Adonin	♊ Gemini	☿ Mercury	
Belias	♋ Cancer	☾ Moon	

³⁹ Macrobius, *Sat.* 1.21.16: “The Egyptians call the sign of Leo the domicile of the Sun.” The tauroctonous Mithras is sometimes portrayed as the solar god with a lion’s face (*Sol leonis vultu cum tiara*, etc.) because “the ineffable sun treads down and curbs its principal sign, that is, Leo” (Lact. *Plac. Schol. in Stat. Theb.* 1.719–20). In a magical spell addressed to the sun god who, during his apparent path along the δωδεκάωρος (the Egyptian circle of twelve hours), assumes twelve theriomorphic masks (PGM 4.1596–1715), the sixth hour has a leontine form: “In the sixth hour you have the form of a lion and your name is Bai solbai, the ruler of time” (1667–68); the most recent commentary on the spell is in Merkelbach (1990) 104–22. For the δωδεκάωρος and its Egyptian origins see Gundel (1968) 4–8 and Gasse (1984) 189–227. A well-known ‘Gnostic’ adaptation of the *dōdekaōros*-system is the series of twelve rulers with animal faces governing the “twelve chambers” inside “the great dragon of the outer darkness” in *Pist. Soph.* 317, 13–319, 23, on which cf. Boll–Bezold–Gundel (1931) 187–91.

⁴⁰ Sabbataios seems to relate to the Hebrew *Shabbathai*, the seventh planet or Saturn, as suggested by Michl (1962) 230 and Welburn (1978) 245. For other ‘Gnostic’ lists of the seven planetary rulers, see *Orig. World* II 101:7–102:7 and the ‘Ophite’ series in *Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.30.5 and *Orig. C. Cels.* 6.30. As noted by Broek (1981) 42, the most important difference between these lists and that of *Ap. John* is that “in the former Ialdabaoth, the demiurge, is one of the seven planetary rulers, whereas in the latter he stands above them as their creator”; this dissociation of the demiurge from the lesser gods is rightly attributed to “the influence of Plato’s *Timaeus*” (*ibid.*).

Clearly, the names of the archons do not fully correlate with the planetary order. In this arrangement, the same planet (Saturn) would belong to two different archons (Adoni and Sabbataios).⁴¹ The only satisfactory solution for bringing the names in to correlation with the planets is to move Adoniaios one place back in the list so that it rules the two homonymous signs (Iobel π and γ), and to relocate Iao, the seven-headed solar-lunar anguipede of Hellenistic magical papyri and amulets,⁴² to the last or lunar position—or even

⁴¹ Besides, both methods of running the list of the planetary rulers down to the Moon—symmetrical pairing or mechanical repetition in reverse order—would raise even more disquieting discrepancies.

⁴² Iao appears to be the Greek transcription of *yhw*, the abbreviated form of the *tetragrammaton*. His anguipede figure with the head of a cock, a lion, a jackal, or a man, is a common motif on magical amulets of the Hellenistic and Roman periods. Most of his iconographical attributes (serpent, lion, the whip of Helios) point to solar symbolism; cf. Goodenough (1953) 2:245–58 and 3:1078–115 (figures). On some engraved gems (figs. 1090–91), the field about the figure of Iao contains the Hebrew phrase *semes eilam*, ‘eternal sun’. The anguipede Iao is often paired with, and even assimilated to, a considerable number of other deities, most of them with solar characteristics. One amulet (fig. 1096) shows a cock-headed anguipede, with the name *Iao* engraved on his shield, *Abrasax* in the field, and *Mithras* on the reverse; another (fig. 1096) presents the same anguipede, *Ia*, with the Sun and Moon below his serpentine legs, surrounded by a series of Semitic-sounding magical names—*Iao Adonai Eloai Abrasax Ablanathanal*—and paired with a lion-headed god, engraved on the reverse of the amulet, with seven rays emanating from his head; another gem, again (fig. 1097), shows the ithyphallic lion-headed Iao with a pair of snakes in the place of legs, holding a torch and a whip in his hands. Whether juxtaposed or conflated in a single composite figure, the lion, Helios, and the anguipede were interchangeable stock-motifs in the portrayal of this ‘syncretistic’ version of the aniconic Jewish god. In magical spells, Iao figures either as the supreme god with many names and powers or as one of god’s attending powers. In the *Prayer of Jacob* (PGM XXIIb), for example, he is the manifestation of the supreme “Father of all powers” who “[sits upon] the sun as Iao” (4–5, 13); but in the Vienna papyrus K 192, published by Stegemann (1934) 12–14 and magisterially analyzed by Polotsky (1937) 119–27, Iao is the first emanation of the universal god and the highest among the seven planetary powers, represented by the first horizontal row of a *plinthion* (magical ‘square’) as a string of seven alpha-vowels. The seven-headed serpentine *prosōpon* of Iao in the *Apocryphon of John* probably illustrates a similar idea—that of the ruling Sun, the most powerful of all planets, encompassing in itself all other planetary archons. Polotsky (1937) 123–24, supplies additional evidence for Iao’s dominant role in the visible universe: Epiphanius’s report on the ‘Gnostics’ (*Pan.* 26.10.1) and the London Oriental Ms. 5525 (Kropp 1930, 1:16 = C 38–39), where Iao presides over the seven archons, as well as the Michigan papyrus Inv. 4932 f (Worrell 1935, 185) and the London Oriental Ms. 5987 (Kropp 1930, 1.25 = D 89–92), where he is promoted to the rank of “God almighty” (*παντοκράτωρ*) wearing manifold, most often the total of seven, animal ‘masks’. The Michigan love charm contains the invocation of a deity, most likely Iao Sabaoth (2–3), “whose head is in the heaven and the feet in the abyss, his front being the face of a sheep

better, have Iao trade place with Iaoth, possibly the substitute for Athoth, a variant of the Egyptian lunar god Thoth, who occupies the initial slot in the longer version of the *Apocryphon*.⁴³

<i>Authority</i>	<i>Zodiacal Sign</i>	<i>Planet</i>	<i>Archon</i>
Iaoth	♌ Leo	☉ Sun	Iao
Hermas	♍ Virgo	☿ Mercury	Eloaios
Galila	♎ Libra	♀ Venus	Astaphaios
Iobel	♏ Scorpio	♂ Mars	Adonaïos
Adonaïos	♐ Sagittarius	♃ Jupiter	Adoni
Sabaoth	♑ Capricorn	♄ Saturn	Sabbataios
Kainan-Kae	♒ Aquarius	♄ Saturn	Sabbataios
Abiressine	♓ Pisces	♃ Jupiter	Adoni
Iobel	♈ Aries	♂ Mars	Adonaïos
Harmouphiael	♉ Taurus	♀ Venus	Astaphaios
Adonin	♊ Gemini	☿ Mercury	Eloaios
Belias	♋ Cancer	☾ Moon	Iaoth (NHC II: Athoth)

and his back that of a serpent” (11–14). In the London Or. Ms. 5987, which probably served as a protective spell against demons, we have the following appeal: “Iao Iao, Christ, almighty (παντοκράτωρ), . . . whose fore is a lion’s face and the back a bear’s, the one with the form (μορφή) of a falcon and the face (ῥο) of a serpent” (Kropp D 81, 89–92). The fact that two redactions of *Ap. John* represent Iao as a “seven-headed serpent’s face” (BG 42:2–3, II 11:30–31) corroborates Polotsky’s assumption that Iao was originally the supreme deity “uniting in himself the animal symbols of all seven planetary rulers.” Yet neither of these two versions alludes to seven *distinct* animal ‘masks’—only in the third redaction (III 18:2) does Iao assume two different “forms” or “faces” (ῥο), of a lion and a serpent. For the Egyptian precedents of a seven-headed divine figure compare the ithyphallic god Bes “with seven faces” from the Brooklyn Museum magical papyrus [47.218.156], ed. Sauneron (1970) 12–15, 23–29, fig. 3.

⁴³ The latter solution is Welburn’s (1978) 255–75, who, however, does “not believe that Athoth has any connection with Thoth” (250), as suggested by Giversen (1963) 210. Welburn does not provide a persuasive evidence for identifying Athoth, the longer version’s substitute for Iaoth in BG and Aoth in NHC III, with the Moon. For Tardieu (1984) 278–79, Athoth is “probably” a transcription of of the Semitic *‘athūd*, ‘ram’—an appellative turned into a proper name and assigned to Aries, the sign from which the zodiac was commonly held to begin. Since Tardieu does not discuss the astrological theories of planetary ‘houses’ and πρόσωπα, it remains unclear how the name ended designating one of the planetary archons. Besides, etymological deciphering of magical names may not be the best way to deal with the ancient magicians’ ingenuity in evolving their Semitic-sounding names and formulas. Like many other magical deities, Athoth could also be the product of a sorcerer’s creative wordplay—more specifically, an instance of the gradual increase, or decrease, in the length of the magical name or word which, in its pre-modified form, denoted the identifiable referent. This technique of cumulative variation could easily explain such derivative forms of ΙΑΩ as ΙΑΩΘ, ΙΑΩΒΩΘ, ΙΑΩΗΛ, all recorded in Coptic magical texts; such variant spellings as ΑΛΛΑΒΑΩΘ and ΙΑΛΛΑΒΑΩΘ, or ΙΑΩΘ, ΛΘΩΘ,

Plainly, this is a hypothetical reconstruction, which brings the signs and their correlated planets into full agreement with the astrological theory of planetary ‘houses’. Yet all extant versions of the *Apocryphon* fall short of such a perfect arrangement, keeping the solar Iao entrenched in his central position among the planetary archons. Thus, in spite of adopting the birthchart of the universe (*Thema Mundi*)—one which presupposes the classic ‘Pythagorean’ order of the planets with the Sun coming second after the lowly Moon—they all retain the solar Iao in the fourth lot, in accordance with the ‘Chaldaean’ order.⁴⁴ This simultaneous application of two hardly compatible planetary orders prompted each redactor to make different jottings, which later insinuated themselves into the tradition. The results of such tampering are visible in the following synopsis of the names and animal-masks (*prosopa*) attached to the planetary rulers.

<i>II</i> 11:26–35	<i>III</i> 17:20–18:7	<i>BG</i> 41:16–42:8
Athoth (sheep or ram)	Aoth (lion)	Iaoth (lion)
Eloaiou (donkey)	Eloaios (donkey)	Eloaios (donkey)
Astaphaios (hyena)	Astophaios (hyena)	Astaphaios (hyena)
Iao (seven-headed serpent)	Iazo (serpent and lion)	Iao (seven-headed serpent)
Sabaoth (dragon)	Adonaios (dragon)	Adonaios (dragon)
Adonin (monkey)	Adonin (monkey)	Adoni (monkey)
Sabbede (shining fire)	Sabbadaios (shining fire)	Sabbataios (shining flame of fire)

Apart from minor varieties in spelling in all three redactions and the substitution of Sabbaoth for Adonaios in the longer version (NHC

and $\lambda\omega\theta$; and such an alternation of vocalic prefixes as in $\theta\omega\theta$, $\lambda\theta\omega\theta$, and $i\theta\theta$ (*Test. Sol.* 18.16 P, Mc Cown 54). For other examples in Coptic magical papyri see Kropp (1930) 3:28–30 and 129–39; for a variety of formal techniques applied to magical spells consult Versnel (2002) 130–41. As for the connection of the Egyptian god Thoth and the Moon, the coupling of his name with the moon-good $\Gamma\alpha\eta$ (Sah. $\omega\omega$, $\omega\omega$, Old Coptic $\omega\omega$) is, according to Griffiths (1970) 458, “unequivocal” and can be dated as far back as the New Kingdom; cf. Plutarch, *De Is. et Os.* 41, 367D–E, who reports on the Egyptian story in which “Heracles, making his seat in the sun, goes around it, and Hermes [i.e. Thoth] does the same with the moon; for the affairs of the moon are like those of reason and wisdom, while those of the sun are like blows inflicted with might and main.”

⁴⁴ Ptolemy also adopted the ‘Chaldean’ order, notwithstanding its incompatibility with the theory of the planetary houses. The ‘Pythagorean’ order, better known as ‘Egyptian’ among ancient astrologers, resembles Plato’s exposition of the system of planetary revolutions in the *Timaeus* (38c–39d). In Macrobius’s words (*In Somn. Scip.* 1.21.27), “It must be noticed here that, regarding the birthchart of the universe, it was either the providential order of things or ancient ingenuity that gave to the planets the same order which Plato assigned to their revolutions; cf. Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 185–86 and Armisen-Marchetti (2003) 198–200.

II), the most interesting disagreements pertain to the treatment of the first and fourth archons. One shorter redaction (BG) distinguishes them by form, the former carrying the mask of a lion and the latter that of a seven-headed serpent, yet assigns to each the variants of the same name: Iaoth and Iao.⁴⁵ The other shorter version (NHC III) distinguishes them by name, Aoth and Iazo,⁴⁶ but has them both partake in the leonine form; thus, Aoth has the “face of a lion,” while Iazo, an alternative spelling of Iao, wears a composite “mask of a lion and a serpent,” well attested in magical objects and formulas. Finally, the redactor of the longer version, determined to dispel any confusion, assigns to each planetary ruler not only a different name—that is, Athoth, which may be an incantatory variant of the lunar Thoth, and Iao—but also a distinct form, of a sheep (or ram)⁴⁷ and of a seven-headed serpent respectively.

Similar lists of the planetary archons appear in other narratives traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’, in contemporary heresiological

⁴⁵ Like Iaoel, Iaoth is just another Semitic-sounding variant of Iao with the characteristic ‘magical’ suffix -oth, probably construed by analogy with Sabaoth. In some spells, the name denotes the supreme deity (PGM V 141, 476); in the Jewish *Testament of Solomon*, however, it represents one of the ‘thwarting angels’, capable of restraining and rending powerless the cohort of decanal demons: “The ninth [demon] said, ‘I am called Kourtael. I send four colics into the bowels. If I should hear, ‘Iaoth (Sabaoth H), imprison Kourtael’, I retreat at once” (18:13 McCown 53). In Rossi’s ‘Gnostic’ tractate (Kropp 1930, 1:70 = R 9, 21–22), Iaoth is one in the series of proper names denoting a divinity “seated in the heights”: $\text{C}\alpha\text{R}\alpha\text{C}\alpha\text{R}\alpha\text{B}$ $\text{C}\alpha\text{R}\alpha\text{W}\theta$ $\text{I}\alpha\text{W}$ $\text{I}\alpha\text{W}\theta$ $\text{H}\alpha\text{-}\text{H}\rho$.” Tardieu (1984) 278–79 explains the change of Iaoth for Athoth in BG by the redactor’s ignorance of the latter name, and Welburn (1978) 252 by the similarity of the ‘Chaldaean’ and ‘Egyptian’ sequence of the planets, the former commencing with the Moon and the latter with the Sun: “The initial name in these would be Athoth and Iao(th) respectively, and no doubt soon brought in chaos.” But the anguipede Iao was affiliated with both the Sun and Moon, as pointed out by Goodenough (1953) 249 and 254, so it may be that the distinction Iao–Iaoth was introduced to separate these two affiliations.

⁴⁶ Aoth is not the scribal error but a variant of Iao–Iaoth. The name occurs on a lead tablet from the Roman cemetery of Hadrumentum, in a spell addressed to the spirit of a deceased person and to its master, the god of Israel: “I adjure you *daimonion* spirit who lies here, by the holy name Aoth Abaoth, you the god of Abraham and Iao, the god of Jacob, Iao Aoth Abaoth” (Merkelbach 1996 XII transl. Gager 1992, no. 36, 112–15). See also PGM V 133 (“Aoth Abraoth Basym Isak Sabaoth Iao”) and XII 118 (“I am going to say the great name, Aoth”). Blau (1987) 102–5 and Merkelbach (1996) 118 derive the name from Sabaoth; yet Aoth seems rather a typical product of the ancient magicians’ taste for wordplay, variation, rhyme, and repetition. For the magical technique of cumulation and alliterative variation see *supra*, n. 41. For the epenthesis of ‘zeta’ in Iazo cf. Philonenko (1979) 301–2.

⁴⁷ The longer redaction’s substitution of a sheep’s face ($\epsilon\text{C}\theta\theta\upsilon\gamma$) for a lion’s ($\mu\theta\gamma\iota$, $\mu\theta\gamma\epsilon\iota$) is explained by Giversen (1963) 221 as an attempt to dispel the semantic

reports on heterodox cosmographies, in Hellenistic Jewish writings, and in magical amulets and papyri.⁴⁸ The stable element in these lists is the triad Iao–Sabaoth–Adonai(os), apparently a fixed incantatory formula.⁴⁹ The names of the remaining archons vary from one list to another. Horaios, for example, is absent from the *Apocryphon*'s list, whereas Ialdabaoth either occupies the first position in the series or, as in the *Apocryphon of John*, stands above the archons as their creator and ruler. The lists thus combine Jewish theophoric names found in the Hebrew Bible with Semitic-sounding *nomina barbara*—the move that, in the eyes of ‘mainstream’ Christian theologians, had some troubling side-effects. The assemblage of traditional Hebrew appellatives of God and the sorcerer’s incantatory words could easily lead toward associating Judaism with illicit magical practices. What

ambiguity inherent in the word $\mu\omicron\gamma\iota$, a homonymous term applying to both ‘lion’ and ‘ram’; but see Crum (1939) 161a, who states that the $\mu\omicron\gamma\iota$, ‘ram’, can be found only in the place-name $\theta\mu\omicron\gamma\iota$. The motive lying behind this substitution may not have been purely linguistic. In the Michigan love charm (Mich. Inv. 4932 f) edited by Worrell (1935) 185 (cf. *supra*, n. 40), a deity that pervades the whole world, probably identical with “Iao Sabaoth” from the opening lines of the charm (2–3), is portrayed as having his front in the face of a sheep and his back in that of a serpent” (13–14): $\epsilon\pi\epsilon\text{-}\rho\eta\ \mu\mu\omicron\text{-}\tau\ \omicron\ \eta\text{-}\rho\alpha\ \eta\text{-}\epsilon\text{-}\sigma\omicron\omicron\gamma\ \epsilon\pi\epsilon\text{-}\eta\lambda\lambda\omicron\gamma\ \mu\mu\omicron\text{-}\tau\ \omicron\ \eta\text{-}\rho\alpha\ \lambda\rho\alpha\kappa\omega(\iota)$. In addition, the figure of a sheep is found engraved on two magical amulets, both recorded by Kopp (1829) 4:5–7, 216–18, the first of which was given the label *Iiao*; cf. Goodenough (1953) 288, who finds this association of the sheep and Iao “quite inexplicable.” The association is most likely of Egyptian provenience: Plutarch states in his *On Isis and Osiris* (4, 352C and 72, 380B) that Egyptians priests venerated the sheep for its usefulness. As pointed out by Griffiths (1970) 547, however, “the sheep-deities are hard to come by,” in contrast to the well-attested “ram-deities embodied in Amûn and Khnum.” Since the Coptic noun $\epsilon\sigma\omicron\omicron\gamma$ is gender-unmarked, it may denote both ‘ram’ and ‘sheep’. The problem is that neither ‘sheep’ nor ‘ram’ appear as animal-prosopa of the Moon; and there is no version of the houses of the planets where Aries figures as the dwelling place of the Moon.

⁴⁸ *Orig. World II* 101:9–102:7: <Ialdabaoth> *Iao Sabaoth Adonaios Eloaios Oraios Astaphaios*; *Orig. Cels.* 6.31–32, on the ‘Ophite’ diagram: *Ialdabaoth Iao Sabaoth [Adonaios] Astaphaios Ailaoios Horaios*; Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.* 1.30.5, 2.35.3, on the ‘Gnostics’: *Ialdabaoth Iao Sabaoth Adoneus Eloeus Oreus Astaphaeus*; the ‘Gnostic’ gem (Bonner 1950, no. 188): *Ia Iao Sabaoth Adonai Eloai Horeos Astapheos*; London Or. Ms 5525 (Kropp 1930, 1:16 = C 38–39): *Iao Sabbaoth Atonai Eloei Elemas Miksanther Abrasaks*. See also the lists of thwarting angels in *Test. Sol.* 18:13–18 (*Iaoth Adonael Sabaoth Iae Ieo Adonai Iaz*) and of God’s powers in the fragmentary *Pr. Jac.* (*Iao Abaoth Abrathiaoth Sabaoth Adonai Astra[phaio]*), as well as the Mithraic seven-gated ladder in *Orig. C. Cels.* 6.22, where the seven planetary rulers are given the names of Greek gods (*Kronos Aphrodite Zeus Hermes Ares Selene Helios*).

⁴⁹ See Broek (1981) 42 and n. 15.

is more, it could turn the appellatives expressive of God's peculiar qualities into a series of proper names that indicate unique individuals. This is precisely the issue that Origen takes with the 'Ophite' list of the planetary archons (*C. Cels.* 6.32–33).

It is necessary to realize that those who composed these things confused everything without any understanding of the art of magic or any clear idea of the divine scriptures. From magic they took Ialdabaoth, Astaphaios, and Horaios, and from the Hebrew scriptures they took Iao Ia, as called among the Hebrews, and Sabaoth, Adonaios and Eloaios. But the names taken from the Bible are titles (ἐπώνυμα) of one and the same God; but this God's enemies did not understand, as even they admit, thinking instead that Iao was one god, Sabaoth another, and Adonaios, whom the scriptures call Adonai, a third besides, and Eloaios, whom the prophets call in Hebrew Eloai, yet another.

For "God's enemies," as Origen calls the 'Ophites', Sabaoth, Adonaios, Eloaios, Iao, etc. are the proper names revealing the essential identity, or the proper substance (οὐσία), of the individuals they designate. For Origen, in contrast, only 'God' deserves the status of a proper name, or a name in the strict sense (κύριον ὄνομα), denoting a unique individual constituted by a peculiar concurrence of stable qualities. As for Sabaoth, Adonaios, Iao, or Eloaios, they do not have the function of proper names—they are eponyms, or titles, which the ancient grammarians defined as the class of names "applied together with another, proper name, to a unique entity."⁵⁰ Eponyms stand half-way between common and proper names. They can be predicated of several items (e.g. φοῖβος, 'bright'), yet they also have "the power of proper names" (δύναμιν ἔχον κυρίου *Schol. Marc. in art. Dion.* 391, 29 Hilgard)—that is to say, they can counterpredicate with the proper name they qualify and reveal its inherent property (e.g. Φοῖβος ὁ Απόλλων).

The grammarians' claim that eponyms, notwithstanding their capacity to designate unique objects, do not lack in descriptive or connotative content, made the way wide open for Irenaeus to 'translate'

⁵⁰ Dion. Thrax, *Ars. gramm.* 12, 38.3–5 Uhlig. Dionysius provides two examples for the class of 'eponymous names': *Enosikhthôn* ('Earth-shaker') Poseidon and *Phoibos* ('Bright') Apollo. The passage runs as follows: Ἐπώνυμον δέ ἐστι, ὃ καὶ διώνυμον καλεῖται, τὸ μεθ' ἑτέρου κυρίου καθ' ἑνὸς λεγόμενον, ὡς Ἐνσίχθων ὁ Ποσειδῶν καὶ Φοῖβος ὁ Ἀπόλλων.

the Semitic-looking names of the planetary archons into a set of common nouns or adjectives revelatory of God's inherent properties (*Adv. haer.* 2.35.2–3).

As for the others who are falsely called 'Gnostics', who say the prophets made their prophecies from various gods (1.30.11), they are easily refuted by the fact that all the prophets proclaimed one God and Lord as Creator of heaven and earth and everything in them, and that they announced the coming of his Son, as we shall prove from the scriptures themselves in the subsequent books. Now if anyone should oppose us on the ground of the various Hebrew expressions (*dictiones*) placed in the Scriptures, such as *Sabaoth* and *Eloë* and *Adonai* and others of this sort, trying to prove from them that there are various powers (*virtutes*) and gods (*deos*), they must learn that all such terms are signifiers and titles (*significationes et nuncupationes*) for one and the same entity. In fact, the word *Eloë* in Hebrew means 'true God' and *Elloeuth* means 'that which contains all'. *Adonai* sometimes means 'unnamable' and 'admirable', while sometimes, with a double delta and an aspiration, i.e. *Haddonai*, it means 'He who separates the earth from the water so that the water cannot rise up against it'. Similarly *Sabaôth* with omega in the last syllable means 'voluntary', while with omicron it means 'first heaven'. Just so, *Iaôth* with omega means 'fixed measure', while with omicron it means 'he who puts evils to flight'. And all the rest are titles (*nuncupationes*) of one and the same entity, such as 'Lord of Hosts', 'Father of All', 'God Omnipotent', 'Most High', 'Lord of Heavens', 'Creator', 'Maker', and others similar to these. All these are eponymous titles (*nuncupationes et pronomina*) not of separate entities but of one and the same being, by means of which the one God and Father is revealed, the one who contains all and who provides existence to all.

The same issue of the semantics of proper and common names seems to lie behind a curious passage in the *Apocryphon* about the two sets of names allotted to the planetary rulers. First, the longer version (II 12:11–33):

And in his thinking, he [Ialdabaoth] mixed the seven powers with the authorities (ἐξουσίαι) subordinate to him; as he was speaking, they came to exist; and he assigned a name to each power beginning (ἄρχεσθαί) from above:

- First is goodness (χρηστότης), with the first, Athoth;
- second is providence (πρόνοια), with the second, Eloaio;
- third is divinity (ἡντινοῦτες), with the third, Astraphaio;
- fourth is lordship (ἡπταρχοίαι), with the fourth, Iao;
- fifth is kingship (ἡντερο), with the fifth, Sabaoth;
- sixth is zeal (κωρ), with the sixth, Adonein;
- seventh is intelligence (ἡπταρῆνην), with the seventh, Sabbateon.

And each of these has a firmament (στερέωμα) corresponding to each aeon—heaven. On the one hand (μέν), they were given names after the glory of the heavenly ones for the [destruction of the] power[s]; on the other hand (δέ), it is in the names given to [them by] their first begetter (ἀρχιγεννήτωρ) that they exercise power. And (δέ) the names given to them according to the glory of the heavenly ones exist for their destruction and their powerlessness; and so they have pairs of names.

Ialdabaoth's pairing of powers (δυνάμεις) and 'authorities' (ἐξουσία)⁵¹ bears clear sexual connotations. The seven powers, all of them abstract feminine nouns in the Greek original,⁵² are united with the seven male authorities in Ialdabaoth's attempt to imitate the 'syzygies' of aeons in the Pleromatic realm. The clearest expression of this doubling of archontic names along gender lines is the Nag Hammadi treatise *On the Origin of the World* (II 101:23–102:3), which asserts that the seven archons who "appeared in chaos [are] androgynous: they have their masculine names [Sambathas, Iao, Sabaoth, etc.] and their feminine names [providence, lordship, deity, etc.]." Surprisingly, the longer redaction of the *Apocryphon* plays down the androgynous identity of the planetary rulers and explains their two sets of names by bringing in the classic Platonist dichotomy, most clearly drawn in the *Sophist* (235e–236a), between two kinds of images (*eidōla*)—that is, between copies (*eikones*) and simulacra (*phantasmata*). The "names given after the glory of the heavenly ones," which signify "the seven powers," are the copies of God's individual properties ('aeons') endowed with an internal resemblance to their models. In contrast, the "names given by their first begetter"—that is, the proper names of the archons accompanied by their respective animal 'masks'—are the products of the blind Ialdabaoth and his subversing imagination (φαντασία), bearing the character of dreamlike, subjective illusions and producing only an external effect of resemblance to their models. It is by

⁵¹ In this passage, the term 'authority' (ἐξουσία) is not the common name for twelve signs of the zodiac, as was the case earlier in the text; in this particular context it is plain that it signifies the planetary 'rulers' (ἄρχοντες) or 'kings' (ἄρχοι).

⁵² Here is the hypothetical Greek list: χρηστότης πρόνοια θεϊότης κυριότης βασιλεία ζηλοτυπία σύνεσις. For the similar list in LXX see Isa 11:2 "The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord" (καὶ ἀναπαύσεται ἐπ' αὐτὸν πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ, πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως, πνεῦμα βουλῆς καὶ ἰσχύος, πνεῦμα γνώσεως καὶ εὐσεβείας). See Orbe (1976) 1:76–81, and Schlütz (1932) 148–68.

means of the latter set of names that the planetary archons, disguised in their frightening theriomorphic appearances, “exercise power” in the visible word as the guardians of physical time (*chronocrators*) and space (*cosmocrators*), as the implacable tyrants of destiny, and as the controllers of all aspects of human existence. The former set of names, on the other hand, assigned to the seven archons “after the glory” of the Pleromatic realm, “exist for their destruction and powerlessness.” The function of these names consists thus in revealing the distortive semblance of the archons vis-à-vis the spiritual model, and in exposing them, ultimately, in the eyes of the recipients of the Savior’s revelation, as false pretenders destined for “destruction” following the final deliverance of the human race from their tyrannical influence.

The shorter redactions explain the mystery of two sets of names in a somewhat different fashion, shifting the focus from the Platonist copy-simulacrum dichotomy to the grammarians’ distinction between proper name and appellative or common name.

BG 40:19–41:12

NHC III 17:5–17

And (δέ) they all have one set of names from desire (ἐπιθυμία) and anger (ὀργή). Yet (δέ) they all have another set of names—thus being double—that are given to them; these were given to them after the superior glory, and (δέ) these designate their nature (φύσις) in accordance with truth.

And Saklas called them by the former names with regard to imagination (φαντασία) and their power.

Now (μέν), through them, at times, they decrease and grow weak, but (δέ) by the latter they grow strong and increase (αὐξάνειν).

Now (μέν), they have one set of names from desire (ἐπιθυμία) and anger (ὀργή).

In general (ἀπλῶς), regarding all of them, their names are double since they are called by them after the glories on high; these (names) designate their nature (φύσις) since they have been (thus) called in accordance with truth (ἀλήθεια).

And Saklas called them by their names with regard to imagination (φαντασία) and their power.

Therefore (οὖν), through those glories they decrease and grow weak; through the latter they grow strong and increase (αὐξάνειν).

The sense of both passages is dark, if not desperate.⁵³ Still the echoes of Irenaeus’s polemics against the ‘Gnostics’, and of Origen’s against the Ophites, are transparent. Here, too, the issue at stake is the

⁵³ Even the position of the passage in both versions is confusing, in that it follows immediately after the list of the twelve zodiac signs—in contrast with the longer redaction (II 12:25–33), which places the passage after the list of the seven kings and their respective powers. This could mean that, in the shorter redactions, the discussion of the double set of names refer to the zodiacal band. Later, however, both redactions use the phrase “names of glory” (BG 41:16, III 17:21)—clearly the reference to the set of names assigned “after the glories on high” (III 17:8–10), or “after the superior glory” (BG 41:3–4)—to designate the seven planetary archons.

semantics of proper names as opposed to appellatives or common names. The criterion of distinction, again, is the thesis borrowed from the Alexandrian grammarians:

A proper name (κύριον, scil. ὄνομα) is one which signifies a peculiar substance (τὴν ἰδίαν οὐσίαν σημαίνον), e.g. ‘Homer’, ‘Socrates’; an appellative name (προσηγορικόν, scil. ὄνομα) is one which signifies a common substance (τὴν κοινὴν οὐσίαν σημαίνον), e.g. ‘man’, ‘horse’. (Dionysius Thrax, *Ars gr.* 12, 33.6–34.2 Uhlig)

Proper names belong to a single item, common to a plurality. The former are called ‘proper’ or ‘dominant’ (κύρια ὀνόματα) because, as pointed out by the scholiast *ad locum* (385.25–26 Hilgard), they “dominate (κυριεύει) a single existence (ὑπαρξίς) and substance (οὐσία) and denote it alone.” They reveal the true nature of the individual entity (‘Plato’) they designate, pointing to a property (ἴδιον) peculiar to it (*Platonitas*), whereas the latter, insofar as predicable of many things, have the status of either universals (‘man’) or accidents (‘wisdom’ or ‘vice’). Applied to the discussion about the double names of the planetary archons in the shorter versions of the *Apocryphon*, the proper names correspond to those “given after the superior glory,” which “designate their nature (φύσις) in accordance with truth (κατ’ ἀλήθειαν),” and the common names to those derived from the “desire (ἐπιθυμία) and anger (ὀργή)” of Ialdabaoth’s irrational or appetitive soul, which is capable of producing, through its image-making power (φαντασία), only the distant semblances (φαντάσματα) of God’s mental dispositions, or ‘aeons’. Eloaios, for example, is the name that designates the true nature (φύσις) of an individual archontic entity, whose peculiar property is the mask (πρόσωπον) of a hyena. The other name assigned to Eloaios “with regard to [Ialdabaoth’s] imagination and [Eloaios’s own] “power” is “Divinity,” which holds of him only secondarily, as an accident, while belonging primarily, as a peculiar property, to God in the Pleromatic realm. Eloaios is thus a possessor of ‘divinity’ of the inferior rank, the false pretender participating in God’s disposition in the same way in which degraded semblances participate in their distant models.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Compare Eunomius’s distinction of names “in accordance with truth” (κατ’ ἀλήθειαν) and “in accordance with human conception” (κατ’ ἐπίνοιαν ἀνθρωπίνην)

The shorter versions offer thus an interpretation of the two sets of archontic names that is directly opposite to that in the longer version. In the former, “the names given after the superior glory” are explicitly related to the proper names of the seven archons and their animal ‘masks’: “And the names of glory belonging to those in charge of the seven heavens are as follows: first is Iaoth, the lion-faced; second, Eloiaios, the donkey-faced,” etc. (BG 41:16–42:8; cf. III 17:20–18:7). In the latter, “the names given after the glory of the heavenly ones for the destruction of the powers” are the names of the seven powers (δυνάμεις) by means of which the planetary rulers participate in various spiritual dispositions inhabiting, in the manner of hypostasized aeons, the Pleromatic realm. This is why the redactor of the longer version announces the list of the archontic names and their corresponding theriomorphic appearances (*prosôpa*) in a different way: not as “the names of glory,” but as “the bodies (σῶμα) belonging to the names” (II 11:26).

To summarize: The physical world of the *Apocryphon of John* is a complex creation that binds together several cosmological models—a sort of palimpsest in which the underlying texts, albeit rubbed out,

in *Apol.* 8, 246–49 Sesbouïe–Durand–Doutreleau; or the distinction drawn by Zosimus of Panopolis (*On the Letter* Ω 10, 5–6 Mertens), which seems to follow Alexandrian grammarians: “The fleshly Adam is called Thouth with regard to his visible outer mold; yet the man within him, the spiritual one, has both a proper and a common name. Now, the proper name no one knows for the present; for only Nicotheos, the one who cannot be found, knows such things. Yet his common name is Phos, and hence it followed that men, too, were called ‘phôtes.’” As for the Nag Hammadi corpus, the closest parallels come from the *Gospel of Philip*: 54:18–31 “The archons wanted to deceive (ἀπατῶν) the human being since they saw him have a kinship (συγγένεια) with truly good ones. They took the names of the good ones and gave it to the nongood, to deceive him by the names and bind these to the nongood, and then, as if doing them a favor, have them removed from the nongood and assign them to the good. These they knew, for they wanted the free to be taken and enslaved to them forever”; 56:3–13 “Jesus is a proper name, and Christ (the anointed) is a common name. For this reason, Jesus does not exist in any language, yet ‘Jesus’ is his name, by which he is called. As for Christ, his name in Syriac is ‘messias’, and in Greek is ‘khristos’, and in general all the others have it according to the particular language of each. The ‘Nazarene’ is the common name belonging to the proper name” (i.e. the eponym, cf. *supra*, n. 49); see also 53:23–35, 53:35–54:18, 57:22–28, 59:11–18, 62:6–17, 62:26–35, 63:21–24. For the semantics of proper names in Hellenistic grammar and philosophy, and for interesting applications thereof in Patristic literature, see Kalligas (2002) 31–48.

still reveal their traces. Ialdabaoth's fabrication of the visible universe functions as a radical revision of Moses' account of the first, second and fourth day of creation (Gen 1:1–8, 14–19)—so radical, in fact, that, aside from some lexical affinities (e.g. “firmament,” “darkness,” “abyss” II 11:5–7; cf. BG 41:12–15) and Ialdabaoth's two short addresses to his authorities, both taken from the Septuagint (Gen 1:26 and Isa 42–46), it seems totally disconnected from the Biblical narrative. In order to make up for gaps and errors in the Mosaic version of cosmogony, the author of the *Apocryphon* resorted to other compatible discourses—to contemporary astrological speculations, to the doctrines of Stoic and Platonist philosophers, and even to Plato's cosmology in the *Timaeus*. From Stoic physics, he borrowed the fiery nature of god and the idea that, at the beginning of the cosmic cycle, the world is coextensive with the state of pure fire. From Platonic tradition he appropriated the chronological unfolding of cosmogony (zodiacal band—planets—time), as outlined in the first part of the *Timaeus* (36b–40b), as well as the metaphor of the demiurge fabricating in accordance with a preexisting rational model. Yet whereas Plato's craftsman “looks to that which is always unchanging” (28a) in his goodness, for “in the good no jealousy (φθόνος) in any matter can ever arise” (29e), Ialdabaoth is a “blind” and incompetent pretender, moved by the impulses of his irrational soul and therefore capable of producing only deceptive semblances of ideal forms. Finally, contemporary astrology provided the model of the world horoscope (*thema mundi*) and, more importantly, the overall ‘mannerist’ image of a multi-layered universe in which various concentric spheres, occupied by archons, authorities, angels, and demons, leave no space empty of bodies and no gap to escape the tyranny of physical laws implemented by the rulers of time (*chronocrators*) and space (*cosmocrators*). Here is perhaps the most detailed and vivid description of such a universe, as preserved in the dialogue between Hermes and his son Tat (*Stob. frag.* 6.3–6, 12):

Hermes: I told you elsewhere, my son, that there is a body encompassing all things. You must conceive the shape of that body as circular; for such is the shape of the universe. *Tat*: I conceive its shape as circular, just as you bid me, father. *Hermes*: And you must imagine that below the circle of that body are placed the thirty-six decans, between this whole circle and that of the zodiac, separating the one circle from the other—bearing up, as it were, the circle of the universe and delimiting the zodiac; and that, as they are moving along

with the planets,⁵⁵ they exert, alternately, the same power as the seven (planets) in the revolution of the universe. Furthermore, they retard the all-encompassing body—for this body would move by itself with extreme velocity inasmuch as it encloses all things—yet, at the same time, they urge on the seven other circles because these move with a slower movement than the circle of the universe. Thus, both of these are borne according to necessity. Let us conceive then that the decans preside over the circles of the seven and the universal circle, and furthermore that they preside over all these as the guardians of all things in the world, holding all things together and watching over the order of all. . . . Moreover, in their heavenly course they [the decans] also generate their attendants, whom they hold as servants and soldiers. And these, mingled by the order of their superiors, are borne along floating in the ether, filling all the region of that element lest there be no place in heaven empty of stars; they contribute to the order of the universe having a force that is their own, yet subject to the force of the six and thirty.

“*Let Us Make a Man*”

The planetary gods of the *Apocryphon of John* are not just the controllers of physical time and space. They also act, later in the narrative, as Ialdabaoth’s collaborators in shaping Adam’s animate body⁵⁶ and they do so “according to the image of God,” revealed to them in the primordial waters.

⁵⁵ Planets have their domiciles not only in individual zodiac signs. Each planet also lends its properties and its outward appearance, or ‘mask’ (*prosôpon*), to one of the thirty-six decans, distributed equally within the zodiacal band—three to each zodiac sign. The best iconographical representation of such a blend of different astrological entities, and the clearest example of the theory of planetary ‘prosopa’ dominating individual decans and zodiac signs, is *Tabula Bianchini*, discussed in Boll (1903) 295–346, Gundel (1936) 178–79, 184–85, and plates 16–17, and in Nock-Festugière (1954) 3:xlvi–xlviii. For the theory of planetary *prosôpa* see Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 224–30, Gundel (1936) 248–56, and *supra*, n. 37.

⁵⁶ The author of *Ap. John* takes two Genesis accounts of the creation of man not as variants but as two consecutive moments in cosmogony: while Gen 1:26–27 refer to the creation of Adam’s animate body, Gen 2:7 (“God molded the human being as dust from the earth, and he inbreathed onto his face the breath of life”) describes the formation of the empirical or ‘fleshly’ man. A similar distinction occurs in Philo, *Opif.* 134: “There is a vast difference between the man who has been molded now and the one who previously came to be after the image of God. For the man who has been molded as sense-perceptible already partakes in quality, consists of body and soul, is either man or woman, and mortal by nature. The man after the image is an idea or genus or seal, is attained by intellect, incorporeal, neither male nor female, and immortal by nature.” Yet whereas Philo’s distinction is based on the Platonic dichotomy between the intelligible model and its perceptible copy, the

BG 48:4–50:11 (III 21:23–23:11)

II 14:24–15:29

The blessed one (μακάριος) revealed his image to them.

And the entire rulership (ἀρχοντική) of the seven authorities (ἐξουσία) bent down (κατανεύειν).

They saw in the water
he form of the image (εἰκόν).
They said to each other,
“Let us fabricate a man
in the image (εἰκόν) of God and the likeness.”

They fabricated out of themselves and all of their powers;

they molded (πλάσσειν) a form (πλάσμα) out of themselves. And [each] of the powers [fabricated] from its power the soul (ψυχή); they fabricated it from the image that they had seen

by imitating (κατὰ μίμησιν) him who is from the beginning, the perfect (τέλειος) man. They said, “Let us call him Adam, so that his name and his power might become a light for us.”

And he (the Mother-Father) revealed his image; and the whole realm (αἰών) of the first ruler (πρωτάρχων) trembled, and the foundations of the abyss moved. And through the waters that are over matter (ύλη) the bottom [shone] by the revelation of his image (εἰκόν) that had appeared.

And when all the authorities (ἐξουσία) and the first ruler (πρωτάρχων) looked, they saw that the whole bottom part shone; and by the light they saw in the water the form (τύπος) of the image (εἰκόν). And he said to the authorities (ἐξουσία) attending him, “Come, let us fabricate a man after the image (κατ’ εἰκόνα) of God and after our likeness, so that his image (εἰκόν) might become a light for us.” And they fabricated by means of one another’s power, according to (κατά) the characteristics given to them.

And each authority (ἐξουσία) supplied a characteristic in the form (τύπος) of the image (εἰκόν) that he had seen.

He fabricated a subsistent entity (ὑπόστασις) after (κατά) the image of the perfect (τέλειος) first man.

And they said, “Let us call him Adam, so that his name might become a luminous power for us.”

author of *Ap. John* applies to the two Biblical accounts another Platonic dichotomy, that between soul and body, taking Plato’s comment in the *Timaeus* about the ‘priority’ of soul over body in a literal or diachronical sense: “Now this soul, though it comes later in the account we are now attempting, was not made by the god younger than the body. . . . But the god made soul prior to body and most venerable in birth and excellence, to be the body’s mistress and ruler” (34b–c). Just as the Platonic demiurge first creates the world’s soul with all of its concentric circles representing the movements of the planets and stars—the process that corresponds to Ialdabaoth’s formation of his realm peopled with archons, authorities, and angels—and only thereafter fits the world’s body into this construction, so will Ialdabaoth, who possesses the natural faculties of an animal’s soul and represents the soul-substance devoid of reason and intelligence, first mold an ‘animate’ human being, or Adam’s animate body, and only later fit it or, better, imprison it, into matter—the act that the versions of *Ap. John* designate as the second modeling (ἀνάπλασις II 21:10, IV 31:22–23, III 26:20–21; BG 55:10–11 has πλάσμα; cf. also II 21:5–6 πλάσσει ἡ κεκοιτη, BG 55:3–4 εἶρε ἡ κεπλασις ἡ κεκοιτη; III 26:14–15 [. . .] κεπλασις). In the story of cunning and deceit, as *Ap. John* sees the whole Biblical account of creation, Genesis 2:7 represents the duel of wits between the messengers of the Pleroma and Ialdabaoth and his host of rulers: first, Ialdabaoth is tricked into “blowing some of the spirit” (cf. Gen 2:7) he has stolen from Sophia into the face of the animate Adam (II 19:19–28; BG 51:8–20); next, acting in recompense for the loss and feeling envy at Adam’s acquisition of divine power, Ialdabaoth and his helpers molded Adam’s material body, or the material Adam (cf. Gen 2:7): “they brought him in the shadow of earth, in order to mold (πλάσσειν) him again out of earth, water, fire, and the spirit that derives from matter” (II 21:4–7; BG 55:2–7).

And the powers began (ἄρχεσθαι) from below:
 the first is divinity—it is a bone-soul (ψυχή);
 the second is goodness (χρηστός)—it is a sinew-soul (ψυχή);
 the third is fire⁵⁷—it is a flesh (σάρξ)-soul (ψυχή);
 the fourth is providence (πρόνοια)—it is a marrow-soul (ψυχή) and the entire foundation of the body (σῶμα);⁵⁸
 the fifth is kingship—it is a [blood-]soul (ψυχή);
 the sixth is intelligence (σύνεσις)—it is a skin-soul (ψυχή);
 the seventh is wisdom (σοφία)—it is a hair-soul (ψυχή).
 And they ordered (κοσμεῖν) the whole body (σῶμα),
 and their angels (ἄγγελος) attended them.
 From that which the authorities (ἐξουσία) had first pre-
 pared <they fabricated> animate (ψυχή) substances
 (ὑπόστασις), the harmony of the limbs (μέλος)
 <and> joints (άρμός).

And the powers (δύναμις) began (ἄρχειν):
 the first, goodness (χρηστός), fabricated a bone-soul (ψυχή);
 the second, providence (πρόνοια), fabricated a sinew-soul;
 the third, divinity, fabricated a flesh (σάρξ)-soul (ψυχή);
 the fourth is lordship—it fabricated a marrow-soul (ψυχή);

the fifth is kingship—it fabricated a blood-soul (ψυχή);
 the sixth is zeal—it fabricated a skin-soul (ψυχή);
 the seventh is intelligence—it fabricated a hair-soul (ψυχή).

And the multitude of angels (ἄγγελος) stood before him.
 They received from the authorities (ἐξουσία)
 the seven substances (ὑπόστασις) of the soul (ψυχική)
 in order to fabricate the system of limbs (μέλος)
 and the system of parts
 and the proper composition (σύνθεσις)
 of each limb (μέλος).⁵⁹

The passage yields yet another example of the *Apocryphon's* emulative use of the Mosaic narrative. The major source of signification here is Genesis 1:26, where, for the first time in the cosmogonic account, God is not alone responsible for his work.⁶⁰ During the whole six-day period of creation, God acts on his own (Gen 1:1, 7, 16, 21, 25, 27, 31), yet in this particular verse, marked by a sudden shift to direct discourse, he uses the extraordinary plural form

⁵⁷ The order of appearance of Ialdabaoth's seven powers, as given in this passage (BG 49:11–50:4), is not the same as that in the previous section (BG 43:10–44:4), viz., providence, divinity, goodness, fire, kingdom, intelligence, wisdom. The surprising presence of 'fire', a neuter noun in Greek, in the list of feminine powers, should be attributed to scribal tampering at the Coptic stage of transmission, when some copyist substituted 'fire' (κωϛ) for 'zeal' (κωϛτ), still preserved in the longer version (II 12:22, 15:20–21). The motive for this substitution seems obvious: of the seven powers, only 'zeal' is a vice; the rest are virtues.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Tim.* 73d "That part which was to retain the remaining, i.e. mortal, kind of soul he divided into shapes at once round and elongated, naming them all 'marrow'. From these, as if from anchors, he put forth the bonds of all the soul (πάσης ψυχῆς δεσμούς), and now began to fashion our whole body round this thing (περὶ τοῦτο σύμπαν ἦδη τὸ σῶμα ἡμῶν ἀπηργάζετο).

⁵⁹ Cf. *Tim.* 74a "To protect all the seed, he fenced (συνέφραξεν) it in a stony enclosure, making joints (ἄρθρα)"; 74b "For these reasons he divided the sinews and the flesh in such a way that, by binding together all the limbs (τῶ μὲν πάντα τὰ μέλη συνδήσας) with sinew . . . he might enable the body to bend or stretch"; 74d "With these [i.e. the sinews] the god enveloped (συμπεριλαβόν) the bones and marrow, binding the bones to one another with sinews (δήσας πρὸς ἀλλήλα νεύροις), and he then buried them all by flesh."

⁶⁰ Two other verses in Genesis where God makes use of the same plural form are 3:2 ("Behold Adam has become as one of us by knowing good and evil") and 11:7 ("Come, let us descend and confuse their tongue there"); cf. Philo's comments in *Conf.* 168–182.

of the hortatory subjunctive: “Let us make (a) man in our image and likeness” (Ποιήσωμεν ἄνθρωπον κατ’ εἰκόνα ἡμετέραν καὶ καθ’ ὁμοίωσιν). This puzzling plural stirred numerous debates among early Christian and Jewish exegetes, for rather obvious reasons: it posed a radical challenge to the legitimacy of absolute monotheism and its core assumption about God’s unity and omnipotence. Solutions to this puzzle ranged from intratextual (the plural “us” referring to products of God’s creation listed in the preceding verses of the Mosaic account of creation) and grammatical (“let us make” as plural of majesty) to explicitly intertextual. The last solution—grafting one text upon another—was most common. In this case, the obscurity of the Biblical verse was resolved by bringing in structurally homologous passages, individual works, or generic models borrowed from the dominant cultural discourses of the period: Jewish sapiential tradition (the plural “us” designating God and his Wisdom) and apocalyptic literature (God and the host of his angels), early Christological speculations (God and his creative Word, or *Logos*), Hellenistic astrology (God and the zodiacal signs, planets, decans), and, finally, Plato’s cosmological account in the *Timaeus* (the divine craftsman and his “younger gods”), often enriched by Stoicizing, Pythagorean, and Aristotelian transpositions.⁶¹ The revisionist interpretation of Gen 1:26 in the *Apocryphon of John* seems particularly indebted to Plato’s *Timaeus*, and specifically to the demiurge’s address to the younger gods, charged with the “task of making the generation of mortals” (*Tim.* 69c).

Now, take heed to what I declare to you. There are still three kinds of mortal creatures that have not been born. If these be not born, the heaven will be imperfect; for it will not contain all the kinds of living being, as it must if it is to be fully perfect. Yet if they came to exist through me and partook of my life, they would be equal to gods. In order, then, that mortal things may exist and this All may be really all, turn according to your nature to the fabrication of living beings, imitating my power during your generation. And insofar as it is appropriate that something in them should be homonymous with the immortals, being called divine and ruling over those among them willing to follow after justice and after you—that part, having sown it and brought it to existence, I will hand over to you. For the rest, do you, weaving mortal to immortal, produce living beings and bring them to birth;

⁶¹ For a brief yet detailed discussion of various Jewish and early Christian interpretations of Gen 1:26, see Alexandre (1988) 169–73.

give them food and have them grow; and once they fail, receive them back again. (41b–d)

In contrast with the *Apocryphon*'s narrative of the formation of Adam's animate body, Plato does not identify God's coworkers with the seven planets. The divine offspring of the Platonic demiurge comprises both "all that revolve before our eyes," that is, the fixed stars and the planets, and "all that reveal themselves in so far as they will" (41a), signifying, in all likelihood, the anthropomorphic divinities of traditional religion. In the *Timaeus*, the planets serve as receptacles to the 'fallen' immortal souls, to which the generated gods will add the mortal or irrational parts, their bodily vessels, *viz.* individual organs, and the outward human frame. What might have prompted the identification of the younger gods with the seven planets is the section in the *Timaeus* where Plato ascribes to the demiurge and/or his helpers⁶² the framing of the *seven* successive layers of the human body: marrow, bones, sinews, flesh, skin, hair, and nails (73b–76e). The catalyst in this process was contemporary astrology—more precisely, astrological medicine (*iatromathematics*) and its doctrine of planetary *melothesia*.

The doctrine of *melothesia*, or the allotment of parts of the human body to various astrological entities, assumed numerous forms.⁶³ A founding principle of astrological medicine, it postulated that the individual constituents of the human physique remain under the influence of celestial powers responsible for their formation. The identity of these powers varied from one astrological tract to another. Manilius allotted parts to zodiac signs, Ptolemy to planets, the legendary 'Nechepso' to decans, the allegedly Babylonian *Salmeschiniaka* to seventy-two pentads, while the 'Gnostic' *Pistis Sophia* filled the womb of the woman, at the time of conception, with three hundred sixty-five "ministers" (λειτουργοί), "kneading the blood" and "building mem-

⁶² Throughout this section, Plato does not maintain the distinction between the demiurge and his fellow-workers, assigning the work sometimes to "the gods" and sometimes, again, to "the god"; cf. Cornford (1937) 279–80.

⁶³ The best discussions about the principles and various forms of astrological *melothesia* are in Bouché-Leclercq (1899) 318–26, Boll–Bezold–Gundel (1931) 54–55, 135–40, Gundel, W. (1936) 262–81, and in Quack (1995) 97–122; cf. also, e.g., Gundel, W. and G. (1950) 2155–56, and Gundel, H. (1972) 579–82.

bers in the image of the body of the human being” (342, 4–344, 11 Schmidt).⁶⁴

Other iatromathematical texts resorted to combining different kinds of celestial powers. In a fragmentarily preserved imaginary encounter (σύνοδος) of Plato with the Egyptian priest Peteesis, the latter communicates a version of astrological medicine that links parts of the bodily frame to the zodiac signs and vitals organs, the seats of senses and emotions, to the planets:

Peteesis: Listen! The Sun is the right eye, the Moon the left; the tongue, smell, and hearing belong to Hermes, the viscera to Zeus, the chest to Aries, the spleen to Aphrodite, the kidneys to Cronos, the head to the Ram, the neck to the Crab, the belly to the Lion, the cheek and loins to the Maid, the buttocks to the Balance, the seat to Scorpion, the . . . to Sagittarius, the nails to Capricorn, the calf of the leg to the Waterman, the extremities to the Fishes. (*P. Ryl.* 63, 3–12)

A similar blending of the zodiacal and planetary versions of *melothesia* characterizes the iatromathematical discourse of Hermes Trismegistus to Ammon (*Hermet. Iatromath.* 1.1–6, *Phys. med. gr. min.* 1:387). The doctrine of astral influence over humans stems here from the idea of an analogical relationship between man (microcosm) and the universe (macrocosm). As Hermes states it, “At conception the rays emanating from the seven planets mingle with each part of the human being, as is the case, too, with the allotment of the twelve zodiac signs at birth” (1.2–3). The head is assigned to Aries as a chieftain of all signs, and the seven sensory organs, all located in the head, to the planets: the right eye to the Sun, the left to the Moon, the ears to Saturn, the brain to Jupiter, the tongue and the palate to Mercury, smell and taste to Venus, and all bloody parts to the aspects of Mars (1.4–5).

Other combinations were in use, too,⁶⁵ some of them involving the set of thirty-six decans or the related system of ‘pentads’, the

⁶⁴ Zodiacal *melothesia*: Manilius, *Astron.* 2.453–65; Firm. Mat. *Math.* 2.24; planetary *melothesia*: Ptolemy, *Tetr.* 3.11; *Hermippus* 1.13 and 2.3 (18–20, 37–39 Kroll), Procl. In *Tim.* 42e (3, 354–55 Diehl). For the ‘Egyptian’ theory of decanal *melothesia* cf. the *Secret Book of Hermes to Asclepius* (Ruelle 1908), Orig. *C. Cels.* 8.58, and a magical spell for binding a lover in PMG IV 296–322; for the distribution of bodily parts among seventy-two divine beings cf. the fragment of the so-called ‘Astrological Calendar’ in P.Oxy. 465, ed. Grenfell–Hunt (1903) 126–37.

⁶⁵ Another example of the blending of the planets and zodiac signs is CCAG VI

seventy-two stars in charge of the Egyptian weeks of five days. An illustrative example of this tendency to multiply bodily parts and to articulate the human body as a work without gaps is the longer redaction of the *Apocryphon of John*, where the “multitude of angels,” seventy-two in numbers, and the host of demons presiding over elementary qualities and irrational affections, all originally listed in the mysterious *Book of Zoroaster* and interpolated in the Savior’s revelatory account, continue the process of *melothesia* initiated by the planetary archons. Just as the celestial sphere cannot tolerate the presence of void, man, too, conceived as a perfect replica of macrocosm, must have his bodily frame completely filled with layers of volumes.⁶⁶

The choice of a particular set of agents in charge of *melothesia* affected the ways of imagining the human body, of defining its essential constituents, and of determining their proper sequence. The above mentioned *Book of Zoroaster*, for example, had an ambitious program of listing three hundred and sixty-five celestial beings assigned to an equal number of bodily parts, organs, and emotional states—the program that betrays not only the ‘mannerist’ obsession with details but also a thorough knowledge of human anatomy. On the opposite pole stood the simplest versions of planetary *melothesia*, with their restrictive rule that each of the seven planets relate to one specific element or region in the human body (e.g. *Hermippus*)—the rule often cleverly superseded by applying the sevenfold division to the outward frame, to its internal content, and even to each of the exter-

83–84 Kroll (*On the twelve signs of the zodiac, the seven planets, and the plants in sympathy with them*); for the combined influence of the zodiacal band and the thirty-six decans on the human body see also CCAG VI 73–78 Kroll (*On the decans belonging to the twelve signs*).

⁶⁶ The representation of *melothesia* as the act of filling the void of the bodily frame with volumes, all the way down to the infinity of smallest magnitudes, alternates with that of dismembering the original whole of the ‘spiritual’ body. See the fragment of a ‘Gnostic hymn’ in *1 Jeu* 79, 7–26 Schmidt–Till), whose twelve ‘stanzas’ repeat the same praise of “First Mystery . . . who has caused Jeu to establish” the twelve aeons. The seventh praise goes as follows (79, 22–80, 3: “Hear me as I praise you, O First Mystery, who has shone in your mystery, who has made Jeu establish the seventh [aeon], and has set up archons and decans and attendants in the seventh aeon, whose imperishable name is Khazabraozā. Save all my members (ΜΕΛΟΣ ΗΜ ΗΤΑ-Ι) that have been scattered (ΗΜ ΕΤ-ΧΟΡΕ ΕΒΟΛ) since the foundation of the world in the archons and the decans and the attendants of the seventh aeon; gather them all together (ΟΟΥΖ-ΟΥ ΤΗΡ-ΟΥ) and take them to the light!”

nal and internal bodily parts.⁶⁷ The arrangement of these constituents depended not only on anatomical considerations but also on the position of astral rulers in the celestial sphere. In the ‘Egyptian’ version of planetary *melothesia*, where the Sun occupies the middle, fourth position, the center of the human microcosm is reserved for the heart, the source of life-giving heat (*Hermippus*). In Ptolemy’s version, again, the body consists of two parts, right and left, one governed by the Sun and the other by the Moon, following the division of the celestial globe into the ‘diurnal’ (right) and ‘nocturnal’ hemisphere. To conclude with an instance of zodiacal *melothesia*, as put into verse form by Manilius, several parts of the human body seem to have been chosen as its essential constituents for their structural similarity with the iconography of specific zodiac signs: “Bull receives as of his estate the handsome neck; evenly bestowed, the arms to shoulders joined are accounted to the twins; . . . the belly comes down to the Maid as her rightful lot, . . . and over the feet the Fishes claim jurisdiction” (*Astron.* 2.453–65, trans. Goold).

Compared with the previous examples of *melothesia*, the framing of Adam’s animate body in the *Apocryphon of John* displays several distinctive characteristics. This is a rarely attested instance of the creative association of Plato’s division of the human frame with Hellenistic astrological medicine, resulting in the simplest form of planetary *melothesia*—one in which each of the seven planets belongs to one, and only one, bodily part. The sequence of Adam’s parts closely resembles that of the *Timaeus*, which starts from the marrow and then proceeds outwards, through the successive layers of bones, sinews, flesh, to the exterior parts—the skin, hair, and nails. Two important modifications are made to this list in the *Apocryphon*: first, the blood, which Plato viewed as a stream of nourishment for “the flesh and the whole body” (*Tim.* 80e) and not as bodily part, is substituted for the nails; and second, the marrow, man’s fundamental substance, no longer heads the list but occupies the fourth position. The relocation of the marrow was most likely prompted by astrological considerations—more specifically, by the adoption of the ‘Egyptian’

⁶⁷ Arithmological speculations about the importance of the number seven provided an important impetus for such sevenfold subdivisions of the human body; see Philo, *Opif.* 117–25; cf. Mansfeld (1971) 196–204, and Runia (2001) 260–66, 288–93.

planetary order that assigned the central position to the Sun, the source of the cosmic *élan vital*. The association of the Platonic series of essential bodily parts with the ‘Egyptian’ sequence of the planets leads thus to subordination of axial thinking to circular thinking—while Plato construed the body from the inside out along the rectilinear axis, the Savior emphasizes the relation of the geometric center to the circumference in a multiple-layered organism.

Who was the instigator of this astrological reinterpretation of Plato’s analysis of the human frame in the *Timaeus*? Did the author of the *Apocryphon of John* himself tamper with Plato? Did he simply adopt the jottings he had found in his copy of the *Timaeus*? Or did he use some doxographical manual, epitome, or medical handbook to ascertain the view of Plato in brief? Or did he have no direct access to the *Timaeus*? A strikingly similar, yet not fully identical, version of planetary *melothesia*, as recorded by the ninth-century A.D. Persian author Zadspram, seems to favor the presence of some intermediary source—that is, of some Hellenistic astrologer, or physician, who systematized Plato’s division of the human body and brought it into connection with the planets.⁶⁸ However one might reconstruct this process of transmission, the existence of an intermediary doxographical source does not preclude the hypothesis of direct intertextual relations between the *Apocryphon of John* and the *Timaeus*, already demonstrated, by means of comparative narratological analysis, in the previous chapters. The reason why the Savior resorts to planetary *melothesia* is his global revisionist attitude, directed not only at the flaws of the Mosaic cosmogony but also at the limitations of Plato’s world-model.⁶⁹ Just as the *Timaeus* is grafted unto the Biblical narrative not as a commentary, but as a subversive transformation, so Plato, too, becomes a phenomenon not to read, but to rewrite. If Moses could not even identify God’s fellow-workers, Plato failed to understand their tyrannical character, their negative power over humans, and their unfounded pretension *vis-à-vis* the spiritual world.

⁶⁸ On the planetary *melothesia* in Zadspram’s *Selections* 30, 4–12 see Broek (1981) 48–50.

⁶⁹ Compare, once again, Plotinus’s assessment of ‘Gnostic’ revisionism in *Enn.* 2.9 [33] 6: “And in general they falsify Plato’s manner of presenting the fabrication of the universe, and a great deal else, and degrade the man’s opinions as if they had understood the intelligible nature, but he and other blessed philosophers had not.”

In the *Timaeus*, the celestial divinities are assigned the task of shaping the human body and the mortal parts of the soul in order to make the world “perfect and complete” (41c–d), to bring rational design in the corporeal realm of “Necessity” (69a–d), and to free their divine parent from all responsibility for “the future wickedness” of mankind (42d). Their task, too, is to “govern and guide the mortal creature to the best of their powers, save in so far as it should be a cause of evil to itself” (42e)—that is, to turn men’s eyes to their orderly “circuits of intelligence in the heaven,” beneficial for “the revolutions of [their] own thought” (47b–c), and to help them reconstruct, in their own mind, the rational laws governing creation. In the *Apocryphon*, on the contrary, the seven planets and other astral deities are no longer intelligent auxiliaries of the rational demiurge, but false pretenders serving the blind and aggressive craftsman, capable of producing only the external effects of resemblance—the *simulacrum*, a third-rank copy of the “the form of the image” of the archetypal human being,⁷⁰ as reflected in the primordial waters of chaos. In short, Ialdabaoth’s rulers and authorities in the Savior’s account stand in the same relation to Plato’s celestial gods as the external resemblance of deceptive apparitions stands to the exemplary similitude of good copies. Plato’s celebrated distinction between ideas, copies, and apparitions is thus effectively obliterated in favor of the duality of the original model and its distant *simulacrum*.

The rules governing the Savior’s interpretive technique in this episode have been laid out in my opening chapter.⁷¹ Taking as his hermeneutical model the rhetorical theory of issue (*status, constitutio, στάσις*), more specifically its *genus ratiocinativum* or analogous reasoning, he posits the obscure Biblical verse (Gen 1:26)—“Let us make

⁷⁰ The archetypal man corresponds to “the holy and perfect (τέλειος) father” in the shorter versions (BG 48:1–4, III 21:22–24) and to “the holy and perfect (τέλειος) Mother-Father (μητροπάτωρ), the perfect providence (πρόνοια), the image of the invisible (ἀόρατος) Father of all” in the longer redaction (II 14:19–22). The longer version adds up yet another degree in the hierarchy of images—the “form of the image” which the archons see in the water is not a direct copy of the Father of the entirety, but of Barbelo, “the image of the invisible Father.” In this kind of elective participation in the foundational paradigm, the animate Adam is a possessor of the third rank in the shorter versions, and of the fourth rank in the longer redaction.

⁷¹ Cf. *supra*, chap. 1, pp. 67–73.

man in our image and likeness”—as the initial premise (*propositio*). To elucidate obscurities in Moses’ account of the creation of Adam, he first brings in the homologous sections from the *Timaeus* that deal with the creation of man, both of his sevenfold bodily frame and of the mortal parts of his soul, by the celestial gods subordinate to the demiurge. Plato’s text, in turn, also undergoes significant modifications—excisions, transpositions, amplifications—all effected through the intercession of the astrological discourse of planetary *melothesia*, which narrates the distribution of parts of the human body to the seven planets (*rationis confirmatio*). The relationship established between the premises is not that of mechanical juxtaposition but of partial substitution. The conclusion drawn from these premises (*complexio*), namely that the seven planetary rulers fabricated the seven parts of Adam’s *animate body*⁷² upon seeing the reflection of the ideal human type in the waters of primordial chaos, is a sort of palimpsest in which there still appear traces, some tenuous and some clearly visible, of all previous hands—Moses’, Plato’s, and that of an anonymous expert in iatromathematics.

Moses: “Let us make man in our image and likeness.”

Plato: God orders heavenly gods to make man’s mortal soul and his sevenfold frame.

Astrology: Seven planets create and influence different parts of the body and/or soul.

Savior: Seven planetary archons fabricate seven parts of Adam’s animate body.

Propositio

Ratio

Rationis

confirmatio

Complexio

Ialdabaoth the Jealous God

The demiurge of Plato’s *Timaeus* was good—“and in the good no jealousy (φθόνος) in any matter can ever arise; so, being without jealousy, he desired that all things should come as near as possible to being like himself” (29e). The only restriction imposed on his pur-

⁷² On Adam’s animate body see *supra*, n. 55. By distinguishing between the three kinds of Adam—spiritual, animate, and empirical—the author of *Ap. John* probably resorted to the same scriptural passages as Ptolemy (*Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.8.3), and especially to 1 Cor 2:14–15, 15:42–55. The same tripartition applies, too, to other aspects of reality: (1) to the macrocosmic level, which *Ap. John* divides into the intelligible realm, the heavenly sphere, and the sublunary world; (2) to different forms of cognition: intellection, opinion, sense perception, and (3) to the series of efficient causes, one per each layer of the universe: the ‘self-originate’ intellect (Autogenes), the demiurge of the animate world (Ialdabaoth), and the ruler of the corporeal substrate (Counterfeit Spirit).

poseful work is the independent disorderly factor, Necessity, which can be subdued to his preordered program yet never fully controlled. Plato's demiurge is thus a metaphorical expression of two theological axioms, or molds (οἱ τύποι περὶ θεολογίας), postulated in the *Republic* (2.378e–383c), which posit that God is good and that, insofar as being good, he can neither do harm nor keep his goodness jealously to himself. The demiurge of the *Apocryphon of John*, on the contrary, is the irrational principle originating from the disorderly 'darkness' of Sophia's ignorance—a blind, ignorant, and jealous god (ΟΥΝΟΥΤΕ Ν-ΡΕΩ-ΚΩΩ):⁷³

And seeing the creation which surrounded him and the multitude of the angels around him, those that had come into being out of him, he said to them, "For my part, I am a jealous god, and there is no other god apart from me." (II 13:5–9; cf. BG 44:10–15)

Ialdabaoth's words paraphrase the basic tenet of Israelite faith—the unity of God—reiterated throughout the Law and in Prophets (LXX), and particularly in Deutero-Isaiah:

For it is I who am the lord your God, a jealous God (θεὸς ζηλώτης) punishing children for the iniquity of parents . . . (Exod 20:5)

You shall worship no other god, because God, whose name is jealous (ζηλωτὸν ὄνομα), is a jealous god. (34:14)

So acknowledge today and take to your mind that God is your lord, this god in heaven above and on the earth beneath, and that there is no other besides him. (Deut 4:39)

You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for it is I who am the lord your God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents . . . (5:9)

Hear, O Israel: The lord our God is the lord alone (κύριος εἷς). (6:4)

See now, see, that I am, and there is no god besides me (καὶ οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς πλην ἐμοῦ). (32:39)

I am the lord God, this is my name: I give my glory to no other. (Isa 42:8)

⁷³ Iren. *Adv. haer.* 3.25.5: "Plato appears to be more religious than they [the 'Gnostics'] are, for he acknowledged this same God as both just and good, having power over all, and himself making judgement. . . . Again, he shows that the maker and fabricator of this universe is good: "In the good no jealousy (φθόνος) in any matter can ever arise" (*Tīm.* 29e), setting as the beginning and the cause of the making of the world the goodness of God, not an ignorance or a fallen aeon or a 'fruit of deficiency' or a weeping and lamenting Mother or another God and Father." Plotinus raises the same Platonic argument about God's ἀφθονία in *Enn.* II 9.17 (ὅτι μὴ θέμις φθόνον ἐν τοῖς θεοῖς εἶναι).

I am the first and I am the last, besides me there is no other god (πλὴν ἐμοῦ οὐκ ἔστιν θεός). (44:6)

You are my witnesses! Is there any god besides me? There is no other rock; I know not one. (44:8)

For I am the lord God, and there is no other god besides me. (45:5)

I am the lord God, and there is no one else. (45:6)

For I am God, and there is no one besides me. (46:9)

God's self-proclamation of unity was commemorated in the liturgy, during the daily recitation of the Shema (Deut 6:4–9)—“Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord alone” (6:4)—not only as a reminder of the essence of Judaism and a deterrent against idol-worship but also as a defense against dualism. Familiarity with scriptural passages proving God's exclusiveness and unity served as a powerful weapon in rabbinic anti-dualist polemics.⁷⁴ Early Christians also made use of the same Old Testament quotations—some to bring their charges against pagan polytheism, and some, surprisingly, to contest the monotheistic tenor of the Jewish Law.

The hermeneutical presuppositions of these opposite claims are best evidenced in the Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, which contain a series of imaginary disputes between Peter, the partisan of God's unity and Simon, his dualist opponent. Peter's assumption throughout the dispute is that one could best refute the arguing party from within one's own authoritative tradition. Simon, on the other hand, applies the revisionist strategy—the best way to challenge the monotheistic opponent is to show that his own sacrosanct scriptures are ridden with lexical ambiguities (*amphibolia*), that the implicit intention of Yahweh's proclamations does not correspond to their explicit formulation (*rhêton vs. dianoiã*), and that even the proclamations themselves often contradict each other (*antilogia*). In one homily, for example (16.5–21), Peter repels Simon's claim that the Jewish scriptures support polytheism by quoting from a comprehensive anthology of Biblical monotheistic declarations (16.7–8). In another dispute (2.43–44), Simon refutes Peter's argument for the unity and goodness of the Biblical god by adducing the whole catalogue of his sins, all extracted from the Jewish scriptures: God is ignorant, changes his purpose, hardens hearts, makes blind and deaf, mocks, is weak and unjust,

⁷⁴ On the rabbinic reports about the heresy of ‘two powers in heaven’ see Segal (1977).

does evil, is false, dwells in shadow, darkness, storm, and smoke, loves war, and likes to change his mind. And he envies, too, as Simon reminds Peter in yet another public encounter (3.39.1, 3):

To begin with Adam, who has been made after his likeness, he is created as blind, is reported not to have knowledge of good or evil, is found a transgressor, is cast out of paradise, and is punished with death. . . . And in his saying about Adam—"Let us cast him out lest he reach out his hand and take from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (Gen 3:22)—in saying "lest" he is ignorant (ἀγνοεῖ); and in adding "lest he should eat and live forever," he is also envious (καὶ φθовеῖ).

Simon's agenda appears very much in tune with the Savior's in the *Apocryphon of John*, or with that of Marcion and the group of second-century theologians traditionally labeled as 'Gnostics'. As he pointed out to Peter, in front of the crowd,

And now I wish, in the presence of all, to discuss with you from these books [that are common among the Jews] on the necessity of believing that they are gods, first demonstrating with regard to him whom you call God that he is not the supreme and omnipotent [power], insofar as he is without foreknowledge, imperfect, needy, not good, and subject to many and innumerable grievous passions; then, after this has been demonstrated from the scriptures, there remains another, not written of, foreknowing, perfect, without need, good, removed from all grievous passions. Yet he whom you call the demiurge is subject, as it were, to the opposite. (3.38)

Simon and Peter are both experts in conducting rhetorical controversies. They both use commonplace arguments bearing upon the main issue—the conflicting nature (*antinomia*) of the Jewish scripture. Peter's solution is that the sayings accusatory of the Biblical god are forgeries "not written by a prophetic hand," and that they are "both rendered void by the opposite sayings which are alongside of them, and refuted by the creation" (3.46). Simon, on the other hand, argues that the accusatory sayings were "written by another power and not according to (Yahweh's) choice," proving his radical dualist thesis of the existence of two divine powers.

Simon speaks here primarily as a rhetorician, focusing on the issue of the scope of scripture and disregarding the metaphysical presuppositions of his dualist thesis. For philosophical arguments in favor of this position, one has to turn to the 'Gnostic' camp. The anonymous 'Gnostic' opponents of Plotinus, for example, arrived at Simon's

conclusion, namely that the Biblical creator is ignorant and subject of all the vices, yet they did so from a different angle, focusing on his ontological status in the hierarchical order of reality. The maker of the material world, in their view, is “the maker derived from matter and apparition” (ἐμποιεῖν ἐξ ὕλης καὶ εὐδώλου τὸν ποιήσαντα)—the figurative version of the Platonist disorderly soul inherent in the corporeal substrate—who creates “out of arrogance and rashness” (δι’ ἀλαζονείαν καὶ τόλμαν ποιεῖ *Enn.* II 9.11). This is not a well-founded aspirer who creates the world modeled on the Idea, but an aggressive semblance-maker who conceals his incompetence by an unfounded pretension, guarding his false prerogatives as a “jealous god,” and directing his grudge or envy at superior competitors.

Both Christian heresiological literature and the Nag Hammadi material suggest that the ‘Gnostics’ also compiled the lists of Biblical passages accusatory of the Biblical creator.⁷⁵ Like Simon, they turned on the issue of *antinomia*, conflict of laws, and argued that the proclamations of unity issued by a god subject to emotional disturbances are indicative of his ignorance, of his limited value judgment, and, ultimately, of his status inferiority. Their favorite books were also Genesis, Deuteronomy, Psalms, and Deutero-Isaiah. Few Biblical passages were quoted as often as Isa 44:6, 45:5–6, and 46:9—the same verses that figured so prominently in Jewish arguments in favor of God’s unity. For the ‘Gnostics’, they served as the ultimate confirmation of the demiurge’s arrogance, madness, and ignorance.

This is why [according to the ‘Ophites’] Ialdabaoth exulted and boasted over everything below him, saying, “I am God the Father and there is none above me”; but the Mother, hearing this, cried out against him: “Do not lie, Ialdabaoth; above you are the Father of all, the First Man, and the Man, the Son of Man!” (*Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.30.6)

They [the Valentinians] say that the demiurge believed that he was constructing these things from himself, yet he really made them through Achamoth’s emission. For he made a heaven without knowing about the [spiritual] Heaven, modeled a man without knowing the Man, and showed forth earth without knowing the [real] Earth. And in all other cases, he was similarly ignorant (ἡγνοῦκένοι) of the ideal forms of the things he was making and of the Mother; rather, he thought (ὠήσθαι)

⁷⁵ Cf. Orbe (1976) 1:69–100.

that he was all alone. . . . For this reason, being too slack (*ἀτονότερον*)⁷⁶ to know spiritual beings, he thought that he alone was god and so said through the prophets, "I am God, and there is no one besides me." (*ibid.* 1.5.3–4)⁷⁷

When the ruler saw his magnitude—and it was himself that he saw: he saw nothing but water and darkness—then he thought that it was he alone who existed. . . . When the heavens had established themselves together with their powers and all their administration, the prime parent became elated; and the whole army of angels glorified him, and all the gods and their angels gave blessing and honor to him. And for his part he rejoiced in his heart and continually boasted, saying to them, "I have no need of anyone." He said, "It is I who am god, and besides me there exists no other one." . . . And when the prime parent saw the image of Pistis in the waters, he grieved very much, especially upon hearing her voice resembling the first voice that had called to him out of the waters. And when he realized that it was she who had given a name to him, he sighed and became ashamed of his transgression. And having come to know in truth that an immortal man of light had existed before him, he was greatly disturbed; for he had previously said to all the gods and their angels, "It is I who am god, and besides me there exists no other one." For he had been afraid they might realize that another had existed before him, and might condemn him. Yet, foolish as he was (*ἀνόητος*), he scoffed at the condemnation and acted impetuously (*τολμᾶν*). He said, "If anyone has existed before me, let him appear so that we may see his light." And, behold, immediately light came out of the eighth heaven above and passed through all of the heavens of the earth. (*Orig. World* II 100:29–33, 103:2–13, 107:17–108:5)

Their chief is blind. [Because of his] power and his ignorance [and his] arrogance he said, with his [power,] "It is I who am god and

⁷⁶ For the divine *pneuma* and its various degrees of tension (*τόνος*), from its original tensility (*εὐτονία*) down to slackness (*ἀτονία*), cf. *supra*, chap. 2, pp. 112–13, and 123–27.

⁷⁷ Compare Hippolytus's summary of the 'Valentinian' doctrine: "Sophia acted from above, from the Ogdoad as far as the Hebdomad. For the demiurge, so they say, knows nothing at all, but is, according to them, without understanding (*ἄνους*) and mad (*μωρός*), and does not know what he is doing or working at. Yet it was in him, who does not know what he is doing, that Sophia was active and empowered all things. And while she was active he believed that he was bringing about from himself the creation of the world; hence he began to proclaim: "I am God, and besides me there is no other" (*Ref.* 6.33.1); cf. *Tert. Adv. Val.* 21. See also Epiphanius's report on the 'Nicolaitans' (*Pan.* 25.2.2) and Hippolytus's on Justin's *Baruch* (*Ref.* 5.26.15) and Basilides, who quotes Exod 6:2–3 (7.25.2–3). The best survey and analysis of early Christian responses to Yahweh's self-proclamation of unity are in Orbe (1968) 345–79.

there is none [besides me].” When saying this, he sinned against [the entirety]. And this pronouncement reached up to incorruptibility; and, behold, a voice came forth from incorruptibility saying, “You are mistaken, Samael,” which is ‘god of the blind’. His thoughts turned blind: and having cast out his power, that is, the blasphemy it had spoken, he was pursued down to chaos and the abyss, his mother, by Pistis Sophia. (*Hyp. Arch.* II 86:27–87:7)⁷⁸

In all previous passages, the most sacred dogma of the religion of Israel becomes the essential error of Judaism. What many generations of Jews viewed as the confirmation of Yahweh’s unity, of his omnipotence and omniscience, the Gnostics took as the proof of Ialdabaoth’s limited perspective, the result of his arrogance (ἀυθαδής, χασι-ρητ) and his false opining (οἴεσθαι, μεεγε); of his lack of tension (ἀτονώτερον) and understanding (ἀνόητον); of his madness (μωρός) and audacity (θράσος), and of his tyrannic nature (τύραννος) and impulsive character (τόλμα).

The extant versions of the *Apocryphon of John* and Irenaeus’s summary of its cosmological section offer a similar interpretation of the Biblical formula of exaltation:

And he is impious (ψαυτε) in his lack of understanding (ἀπόνουα) which is in him. For he said, “It is I who am god and there is no other god besides me,” because he was without acquaintance of where his strength comes from. (II 11:18–21)

And seeing the creation (κτίσις) surrounding him and the multitude of angels around him,

⁷⁸ See *ibid.* 94:19–95:13: “[Ialdabaoth] opened his eyes and saw a vast unlimited matter. And he became arrogant, saying, “It is I who am god, and there is none other besides me.” When he said this, he sinned against the entirety. But a voice came forth from above, from the realm of absolute power, saying, “You are mistaken, Samael,” which is ‘god of the blind’. And he said, “If any other exists before me, let it appear to me.” And immediately Sophia stretched out her finger and brought the light into matter, and pursued it down to the regions of chaos, and then withdrew up to her light. . . . This ruler, being androgynous, fabricated for himself a great aeon, a limitless extension, and thought about fabricating offspring for himself; and he fabricated for himself seven offspring, androgynous like their parent. And he said to his offspring, “It is I who am the god of the entirety.” And Zoe, the daughter of Pistis Sophia, cried out and said to him, “You are mistaken, Sakla,” whose alternate name is Ialdabaoth. She breathed into his face, and her breath became a fiery angel for her; and that angel bound Ialdabaoth and cast him down into Tartarus, at the bottom of the abyss.” Among other relevant passages from the Nag Hammadi treatises, see especially *Gos. Eg.* III 58:23–59:9, *Trim. Prot.* XIII 43:31–44:4, and *Treat. Seth* VII 53:27–31; 64:18–27.

who had come forth from him, he said to them, “As for me, I am a jealous god, and besides me there is no other god.” Yet by announcing this, he signified (σημαίνειν) to the angels under him that there was another god. For if no other existed, of whom would he be jealous? (II 13:5–9; BG 44:10–15)

Now, the arrogant one (αὐθάδης) had taken a power from the mother. Indeed, he was ignorant, for he supposed (ἠέεγε) that there existed no other except his mother alone. And [seeing] the multitude of the angels that he had created, he then exalted himself over them. (II 13:26–32; cf. BG 45:20–46:9)

He [i.e. *Protarchon*] stole a great power from his mother, as they say, and departed from her to the lower regions and made the firmament of heaven, in which he dwells. And since he is ignorant, he made powers that are beneath him, and angels and firmaments and all earthly things. Next, they say, he was united with arrogance (*authadia*) and generated wickedness (*kakia*), jealousy (*zelus*), envy (*phthonos*), strife (*eris*), and desire (*epithymia*). Once they were generated, the mother Sophia fled in grief and withdrew above, becoming the Eight for those counting from below. When she withdrew, he supposed he was alone, and therefore he said, “I am a jealous god, and besides me there is none.” (Iren *Adv. haer.* 2.29.4)

The novelty in comparison with other ‘Gnostic’ accounts is the explicit reference to jealousy or envy as the rationale for Ialdabaoth’s exaltation, effected by reasoning from analogy (συλλογισμός, *ratiocinatio*)—that is, by a clever blending of Yahweh’s first-person proclamations from Exodus (“I am a jealous god”) and from Deutero-Isaiah (“I am the lord God, and there is no other god besides me”).⁷⁹

In the preceding passages from other ‘Gnostic’ writings, jealousy or envy (ζήλος, φθόνος, κωχ) are passions that governed Ialdabaoth in his interaction with Adam. It was because of his jealousy that, as

⁷⁹ Irenaeus criticizes this revisionist technique, based on the rhetorical issue of ‘assimilation’ (*sullogismos, ratiocinatio*). “They [i.e. the ‘Valentinians’] transfer and transform, and making one thing out of another, deceive many by the ill-constructed apparition (φαντασία) that they make out of the Lord’s words they adjust. It is as if someone destroyed the figure of a man in the authentic portrait of a king, carefully arranged by a skillful artist out of precious stones, and transferred the stones to make the image of a dog or fox, declaring that this badly composed image is the same beautiful image of the king constructed by the skillful artist. . . . In the same way these people combine old wives’ tales and then, plucking words and sayings and parables from here and there, wish to adapt these words of God to their fables” (1.8.1).

was often explained, Ialdabaoth forbade the first couple to eat from the tree of knowledge (Gen 2:17 and 3:3); and it was out of envy, too, that Ialdabaoth subsequently expelled them from the garden (Gen 3:22). In the *Apocryphon*, however, jealousy and envy also refer to Ialdabaoth's attitude toward the spiritual realm, long before he and his authorities set out to create the first human being. Irenaeus's summary even refers to the moment when jealousy (*zelos*) and envy (*phthonos*), along with Ialdabaoth's other passions, assumed the status of subsistent entities. In this version, the Deutero-Isaian formula of exaltation, modified by the insertion of the epithet ζηλώτης from Exodus (20:5, 34:14), provides the scriptural support for raising envy and jealousy to the level of independent 'hypostases'. In the manuscript witnesses of the *Apocryphon of John*, on the other hand, the insertion of jealousy and envy serves a different purpose—it turns Ialdabaoth's proclamation of unity into yet another instance of his ambiguous prophecies, hinting at the existence of the superior reality.

In announcing this [i.e. that he is a jealous god, with no other besides him], he signified (σημαίνειν) to the angels dwelling with him that there was another god. For if no other existed, of whom would he be jealous? (II 13:9–13, BG 44:15–19)

What has been said earlier about the Gnostic interpretation of the Biblical motif of a cloud⁸⁰ applies, too, to the *Apocryphon's* modified version of the formula of unity. Individual Biblical verses occasionally have two meanings, depending on the level of reality to which they refer. Yahweh's self-proclamation of unity and omnipotence to his people, repeated at various points throughout the history of Israel, is relocated in the *Apocryphon of John* to the pre-historic stage, in the wake of cosmogony. The same holds true for Ialdabaoth's self-presentation as a jealous god. The words that Yahweh issued to Moses on Mount Sinai (Exod 20:5, 34:14) as a warning against idol-worship and as the explicit refusal to surrender his divine privileges become now, in Ialdabaoth's mouth, the declaration of ill-will and envy directed at a superior being. The Biblical formula of exaltation encloses thus two different levels of signification:

- (i) the public or common meaning, revealed to Moses and Jewish prophets, which represents the symbol of faith for the 'animate'

⁸⁰ Cf. *supra*, pp. 160–71.

- men, the offspring of Adam and Eve, imprisoned in matter and deprived of the ‘pneumatic’ element;
- (ii) the proper or hidden meaning, which Ialdabaoth, because of his ignorance, only “signifies” (σημαίνειν), and only the recipients of the Savior’s revelation are capable of fully uncovering.

The Greek verb σημαίνειν is a *terminus technicus* of allegorical exegesis. Signifying, or giving a sign, means saying one thing that in turn means another—“signifying other than what is said” (Ps.-Heraclit. *Quaest. Hom.* 5). Ialdabaoth, however, is not as shrewd an allegorist as Delphic Apollo, who “neither reveals nor conceals, but signifies” (B93 D–K); nor is he so skillful as ancient ‘physiologists’ who consciously veiled their physical doctrines “in riddles and hidden meanings” (δι’ αὐνιγμάτων καὶ ὑπονοιῶν), with the result that “what is spoken is less clear to the masses than what is unsaid, and what is unsaid gives cause for more speculation than what is said.” (Plut. *Daed. Plat.* frag. 157, 1). Ialdabaoth has neither knowledge nor intention to imply more than what he literally declares. And if he occasionally signifies something more sublime, something which lies beyond the surface meaning and belongs to the higher realm, it is because Sophia, Logos, or any other agent of the Pleroma, “used him like a mouth in order to say the things to be prophesied” (*Tri. Trac.* I 100:33–35).

The most persuasive refutation of the sort of questions posed by the Savior and all others who challenged the internal coherence of the Jewish Scriptures came from the *tannaim*.⁸¹ In one of his disputes with the anonymous heretics, or *minim*,⁸² Rabbi Nathan appears to address exactly the sort of criticism raised in the *Apocryphon of John*.

Rabbi Nathan says: From this one, one can cite a refutation of the heretics (*minim*) who say: “There are two powers.” For when the Holy One Blessed be He, stood up and exclaimed, “I am the Lord thy God” (Exod 20:2, 5), was there any one [i.e., of the alleged heavenly powers] who stood up to protest against Him? If you should say that

⁸¹ Cf. Marmorstein (1950) 72–105 and Segal (1977), esp. 56–59.

⁸² *Min*, the Hebrew word for sectarian, has many applications—it designated various individuals and groups challenging the doctrines and practices of the Yavnean and post-Yavnean rabbinic authorities. For the semantics and history of this term, for the main stages in the development of the *birkat-ha-minim*, the ‘benediction against heretics’, and for a comprehensive bibliography on these problems, see now Vana (2003) 201–41.

it was done in secret—but has it not been said, “I have not spoken in secret,” etc. (Isa 45:19)? “I said unto the seed of Jacob” (*ibid.*) that is, to these alone I will give it. “They sought me in the desert” (*ibid.*). Did I not give it in broad daylight? And thus it says, “I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right” (*ibid.*). (*Mek. Bahodesh* 5, 2:232 Lauterbach)

As a matter of fact, the ‘Gnostics’ would probably reply to Rabbi Nathan, the heavenly powers did rise up against the arrogance of the Jewish god. “Do not lie, Ialdabaoth”—exclaimed his mother Sophia (Iren. *Haer.* 1.30.6), just as, in the ‘Nicolaitan’ cosmogony, the mother Barbelo immediately began to cry (Epiph. *Haer.* 25.2.4). In the treatise *On the Origin of the World*, the light “came out of the Ogdoad and passed through all of the heavens of the earth” (II 108:2–5). In the *Hypostasis of the Archons*, again, Sophia’s irradiation of light follows after the voice of indignation came from the realm of the absolute power: “You are mistaken, Samael” (II 94: 21–25). And, immediately afterwards, as soon as Ialdabaoth proclaimed his unity and authority over the entirety, it was Zoe, the daughter of Pistis Sophia, who interfered and refuted him for the second time with the same words: “You are mistaken, Sakla” (II 95:5–7). Finally, in the *Apocryphon of John*, it was a voice “coming forth from above the exalted aeons” that Ialdabaoth heard proclaiming, “The man exists, and the son of man” (II 14:13–15; cf. BG 47:14–16, III 21:16–18).

It seems unlikely that Rabbi Nathan would have been moved by this argumentation—for none of the aforementioned voices of indignation finds support in scriptural verses or passages. What Rabbi Nathan demanded was a refutation of his literalist interpretation from within Scripture—the refutation, that is, which would take into account the immediate context of God’s pronouncements and refrain from cross-referential tampering. In rabbinic comments on the incriminated passages, Yahweh’s ordinances and statutes, including those affirming his unity and jealousy, are directed at Israel, not at other gods. Yahweh can indeed be angry and jealous—but at the idolatry of his people and their lack of respect, not at some superior power. And even when acting out of jealousy and anger, he never surrenders to these pathological states—omnipotent, he never loses grip over them as men do.

“For I the Lord Thy God Am a Jealous God.” Rabbi says: A God above jealousy. I rule over jealousy, but jealousy has no power over

Me. I rule over slumber, but slumber has no power over Me. And thus it says, "Behold, He that keepeth Israel doth neither slumber nor sleep" (Ps. 121:4). Another Interpretation "For I the Lord Thy God Am a Jealous God." Zealously do I exact punishment for idolatry, but in other matters, I am merciful and gracious. A certain philosopher asked R. Gamaliel: It is written in your Torah, "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God." But is there any power in the idol that it should arouse jealousy? A hero is jealous of another hero, a wise man is jealous of another wise man, . . . but has the idol any power that one should be jealous of it? R. Gamaliel said to him: Suppose a man would call his dog by the name of his father, so that when taking a vow he would vow: "By the life of this dog." Against whom would the father be incensed? Against the son or the dog? (*Mek. Bahodesh* 6, 2:244–45 Lauterbach)

Such counterarguments could hardly persuade the other party in the debate, including the heavenly revealer of the *Apocryphon of John*. The Old Testament is full of obscurities, some intrinsic to the subject-matter and some deliberately cultivated by its multiple authorial voices. In this sense, Jewish scripture does not differ from any other law, nor scriptural exegesis from any dispute about the meaning and proper application of legal documents. The task of the Biblical exegete is very similar to that of the legal expert—both are entitled to search for contradictions in the document (*antinomia*); to find the hidden intention behind the explicit formulations (*rhêton kai dianoia*); to solve verbal ambiguities in the text (*amphibolia*); and to elucidate one part of the document by bringing into discussion other compatible sections (*sullogismos*). The Savior's effort in the *Apocryphon of John* to move beyond literal meaning bespeaks not a desire to mystify or, as Irenaeus put it, "lead astray by the badly constructed phantom" (*Adv. haer.* 1.8.1), but the adoption of an ordered series of steps in developing a persuasive argument. There is an ambiguous term or statement in the legislator's document ("I am the lord thy God, a jealous God"). This ambiguity ("jealous God") discloses the contrast between letter and intent (resentful of idolaters *vs.* suspicious of a superior rival). The proper intent can be elucidated by means of compatible propositions from other parts of the document ("I am the lord God, and there is no other god besides me"); yet such supportive evidence can unexpectedly disclose incompatible alternatives in the law (unity *vs.* jealousy). In the manner of a skilled Hellenistic rhetorician, the Savior passes his subject over a grid of abstract headings; and from this contact between the subject and each of the headings he formulates

his revisionist theory of the multiple authorship of Old Testament prophecies.

And just as we said that the speaker who is upholding the letter of the law would find it most useful to lessen in some degree the justice or equity which supports his opponent's claim, so the speaker who opposes the letter will profit greatly by converting something in the written document to his own case or by showing that it contains some ambiguity; then on the basis of that ambiguity he may defend the passage which helps his case, or introduce a definition of some word and interpret the meaning of the word which seems to bear hard upon him, so as to support his own case, or develop from a written word something that is not expressed; this is the method of reasoning from analogy. (Cicero, *Inv.* 2.142)⁸³

Cosmogony, Part Two: Sophia's Repentance

Narrative Function of the Episode

In the majority of 'Gnostic' texts listed above, the response of the superior world to Ialdabaoth's arrogant proclamation of unity follows right away. This does not happen in the *Apocryphon of John*, where, before a voice from the Pleromatic realm announces the existence of a higher deity, the story first goes back to Sophia, the victimized heroine.

Now (δε), the mother began to rush over (ἐπιφέρεσθαι BG 44:19–45:1; ὤρει 'go back and forth' II 13:13–14).

The manuscript witnesses describe Sophia's reaction in three subsequent sections of the narrative.⁸⁴ Differences in phraseology and theological details between the shorter and the longer redaction are significant enough to deserve a separate synopsis.

⁸³ The author of *Ap. John* does not draw directly on Cicero, of course, but rather on their common Hellenistic source: Hermagoras of Temnos and other Greek-speaking contributors to *stasis*-theory.

⁸⁴ There is a two-page lacuna *ad locum* in NHC III.

Shorter redaction (BG 44:19–45:19, 46:9–15)

44:19–45:5	45:5–19	46:9–15
Now the mother began (ἄρχεσθαι) to rush over (ἐπιφέρεισθαι):	And I said, “Christ, what does it mean ‘to rush over’ (ἐπιφέρεισθαι)?”	When the mother
she recognized her lack;	But he smiled and said, “Do you think that it is as Moses said, ‘over the waters’?”	recognized
for her consort (σύνζυγος) had not agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with her, as she was blamed (ψέγειν) by her perfection.	No, but she saw the evil and the coming separation (ἀποστασία) of her son;	the miscarriage of darkness, that it was not perfect, for her consort (σύνζυγος) had not agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with her,
	she repented (μετανοεῖν). And moving to and fro in the darkness of ignorance she began (ἄρχεσθαι) to feel shame. And she did not dare (τολμᾶν) to return, but was moving to and fro. Now, her moving to (ἰδ) and fro (εἰ), this is ‘to rush over’ (ἐπιφέρεισθαι).”	she repented (μετανοεῖν) and wept with much weeping.

Longer redaction (II 13:13–27, 13:32–14:1; cf. IV 20:29–21:15, 21:23–22:1)

13:13–17	13:17–27	13:32–14:1
Now, the mother began (ἄρχεσθαι) to come and go (ὑεσει).	And I said, “Lord, what does it mean, ‘she came and went?’”	When the mother
She recognized the lack when the shining of her light diminished. And she grew dark, for her consort had not agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with her.	But he smiled and said, “Do not think that it is as Moses said, ‘over the waters’.”	recognized the garment of darkness, that it had not come out perfectly,
	No, but when she saw the evil that had come to be and the theft committed by her son,	she knew that her consort had not agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with her. She repented (μετανοεῖν)
	she repented (μετανοεῖν). And forgetfulness came to her in the darkness of ignorance. And she began (ἄρχεσθαι) to feel shame [IV: And she did not dare (τολμᾶν) to return, but she . . .] with a movement. Now, the movement (κῆ) is ‘to come and go (ὑεσει)’.”	with much weeping.

Each of the three sequences has a specific function in the organisation of the text as a narrative. The first sequence brings Sophia back into the tale, right at the moment when she realizes her deficiency, or lack (ϣΤΔ). It reveals the immediate result of Ialdabaoth's villainy which, in turn, provokes a new action: Sophia's movement, designated by the Biblical verb ἐπιφέρεισθαι, 'rush over' or 'move upon' (ϣϞϞ⁸⁵ in the longer redaction). The second sequence is a dialogue between the savior and the seer, in which the former proposes a true interpretation of Genesis 1:2b, "The spirit of god rushed upon the waters." Finally, the third sequence resumes the narrative following the exegetical digression; but instead of proceeding immediately to the next point of complication—the disclosure of Sophia's deficiency to the Pleromatic realm—it first summarizes briefly the main points of the whole Sophia–Ialdabaoth episode, from Ialdabaoth's theft and his act of arrogance to Sophia's movement of repentance (μετανοεῖν).

Although all three sections focus on the same theme—Sophia's reaction to Ialdabaoth's villainy—each grants this theme a different purpose. In the first, Sophia's disorderly movement is an immediate reaction to Ialdabaoth's theft. In the second, it becomes the exegetical problem for John and the Savior. In the third, again, it determines the next point of the intrigue: the response by the Pleromatic realm to Sophia's repentance, followed by her establishment in the ninth heaven, right above the fiery realm of Ialdabaoth.

On the other hand, viewed in isolation from both what precedes and what follows in the text, these three sections represent three successive stages in the gradual discovery of the true meaning of Sophia's action. In the first section, the action is presented as an allusion to Genesis 1:2b, with Sophia's "rushing over" (ἐπιφέρεισθαι, ϣϞϞ) made equivalent to the movement of the spirit of God upon the waters. In the second, the Biblical imagery is rejected and its hidden, spiritual meaning uncovered—not "rushing over the waters," but rather "being ashamed," "not daring to return" and, as a result, moving disorderly in "the darkness of unacquaintance." In the third section,

⁸⁵ The Coptic intransitive verb ϣϞϞ carries the idea of a disorderly movement (περιφέρεισθαι), 'go and come, wander', which is lacking in the Biblical ἐπιφέρεισθαι; cf. Crum (1939) 547a–b.

the interpretation suggested by the Savior assumes the form of a narrative in order to replace the Mosaic account in Genesis 1:2b: “The mother . . . repented with much weeping” (II 13:36–14:1; cf. BG 46:13–15).

Other ‘Gnostic’ Interpretations of Genesis 1:2b

In their diverging approaches to the Old Testament, early Christian writers shared a couple of general exegetical principles. They followed the path announced by Jesus in his discussions with the Jews: “You search the scriptures in which you think you have eternal life; they too testify about me” (John 5:39); or, “Because you had believed Moses, you would believe me; for it is about me that he wrote” (5:46). Most of them read and interpreted the Jewish scriptures on the basis of the Septuagint and other Greek translations. Finally, they did not refrain from offering several readings of the same Biblical verse or passage as simultaneously valid and equally abiding.

Procopius of Gaza’s *Commentaries on Genesis* provides a succinct and comprehensive survey of various ‘orthodox’ interpretations of Genesis 1:2b (PG 87, 45–48). For one group of commentators, the “spirit of god” represents the Holy Spirit that warms (θάλπειν) the water like a brooding bird, setting it in motion (κινεῖν) and producing living creatures. In this interpretation, the verb ἐπιφέρεσθαι cannot befit the divine spirit “unless understood in the sense of God’s descending, ascending, or walking around.” Other exegetes rejected this identification, arguing that “one should not count together the uncreated and the creation,” and suggesting instead that the Biblical “spirit” (πνεῦμα) stands either for the air, finer (λεπτότερον) and more agile (κινετικώτερον) than other elements, or for the wind (ἄνεμος), which is the air set in motion. There were also some who interpreted “the spirit of God” as the divine “energy” (ἐνέργεια) warming up the waters. Others, again, saw in the spirit rushing over the waters “the gift of holy baptism” and emphasized the “purifying nature” (τὸ καθάρσιον) of the water imbued with the divine spirit. Finally, some theologians interpreted the Biblical *pneuma* as the Holy Spirit, the primordial “waters” as holy powers, and the “deep” (ἄβυσσος) below them as evil powers ruled by the devil and his “darkness” (σκότος).

One reading does not necessarily undermine the other. To early Christian interpreters of the Jewish scriptures, different interpretations were mutually compatible and equally acceptable. Augustine, for example, clearly preferred the interpretation by the Holy Spirit,

yet he did not reject the identification of “the spirit of God” with the air or with the “life-giving” breath (*spiritus vivificator, vitalis creatura*; cf. *Gen. imp.* 4.466, 22–471, 2 Zycha). Didymus the Blind, on the other hand, following Origen’s, and ultimately Philo’s, exegetical technique, moves beyond a mere tolerance of apparently disparate readings. In his view, all of them are in fact complementary with one another, each conveying either of the two meanings inherent in the Biblical prophecies: the non-literal one, which refers to things spiritual (πνευματικά), and the literal one (κατὰ τὴν ἀπλουστέραν διάνοιαν), which remains at the level of “perceptible descriptions” (ταῖς αἰσθηταῖς διήγεσιν) and is often (πολλάκις) employed by the Holy Spirit to disguise the higher spiritual reality. According to this way of reading, “the spirit of God rushing over the waters” is the breath or wind blowing over the physical waters which, in the beginning, covered the earth and made it invisible. Following the non-literal or spiritual reading, the “darkness” from Genesis 1:2 stands for the darkness of “ignorance” (ἄγνοια), the “abyss” below for the devil with his evil spirits, and “the spirit of God” for the Holy Spirit of the superior realm, moving over the angelic authorities (ἔξουσία, θρόνοι) disguised as the primordial waters (*In Gen.* 1:2, 39–41 Nautin–Doutreleau).

The variety and originality of ‘Gnostic’ interpretations of Gen. 1:2b is equally astounding. All of these start from the following two assumptions:

- (i) The sayings of Biblical prophets reflect the voices of various divine powers assigned to one of the three levels of reality: spiritual, animate, material
- (ii) Every Biblical verse has accordingly three levels of application

Depending on the immediate context in which individual ‘Gnostic’ exegetes situated the Genesis account, “the spirit of god rushing over the water” could stand for the manifestation of

- (i) the divine spirit in its most refined state within the Pleromatic realm;
- (ii) the intermediate spirit (πνεῦμα μεθόριον) moving between the divine realm and chaotic matter;
- (iii) the spirit imprisoned in matter and responsible for the formation of phenomenal reality.

The doctrine of the ‘Ophites’, as summarized by Irenaeus (*Haer.* 1.30), emphasizes the female character of the Biblical “spirit of God,” derived from the feminine gender of the Hebrew equivalent *ruah*. The ‘Ophite’ account opens with the portrayal of the pre-cosmic stage, clearly alluding to the opening lines of Genesis:

There exists a certain first light in the potency of the Deep—blessed, incorruptible, and infinite; this is, moreover, the Father of All, called First Man (*Primum Hominem*). Furthermore, a Conception (*Ennoeam*) proceeding from him they call the Son of him who emits it, and this is the Son of Man, the Second Man (*Filium Hominis Secundum Hominem*). Below these, again, is the Holy Spirit (*Spiritum Sanctum*), and under this superior Spirit are the segregated elements—water, darkness, abyss, chaos—over which the Spirit moves (*super quae ferri Spiritum dicunt*), called First Woman (*Primam Foeminam*). Next, they say, since the First Man exulted with his Son over the beauty of the Spirit, that is, of the Woman, and shed light upon her, he generated from her an incorruptible light, the Third Male (*Tertium Masculum*), whom they call Christ, the son of the First and Second Man and of the Holy Spirit, the First Woman. (*Iren. Adv. haer.* 1.30.1)⁸⁶

Irenaeus’s static description of the pre-cosmic stage does not allow for clearcut diachronical distinctions. The absence of temporal sequence can hardly surprise if one takes into consideration the fact that, in the spiritual realm, time has not yet come to exist. The ‘Ophites’ seem to have appropriated here the Platonic postulate that “time came into being together with the heaven” (*Tim.* 38b; cf. *Plut. Quaest. Plat.* 7, 4.1007C) and, as a result, maintained the distinction in verbal aspect between timeless processes in the Pleroma, expressed by a series of present infinitives and participles (*esse, progredientem, emittentis, ferri*), and the concatenation of actions regarded as single consecutive events in the realm of Becoming, marked by the perfect indicatives, participles, and infinitives (*generavit, arreptum statim, decidisse*

⁸⁶ *Alii autem rursus portentuosam loquuntur esse quoddam primum lumen in virtute Bythi, beatum et incorruptibile et interminatum; esse autem et hoc Patrem omnium, et vocari Primum Hominem. Ennoeam autem eius progredientem filium dicunt emittentis, et esse hunc Filium Hominis Secundum Hominem. Sub his autem Spiritum sanctum esse, et sub superiori spiritu segregata elementa, aquam tenebras abyssum chaos, super quae ferri Spiritum dicunt, Primam Foeminam eum vocantes. Postea, dicunt, exultante Primo Homine cum Filio suo super formositate Spiritus, hoc est Foeminae, et illuminante eam, generavit ex ea lumen incorruptibile, Tertium Masculum, quem Christum vocant, filium Primi et Secundi Hominis et Spiritus Sancti Primae Foeminae.*

1.30.1–3).⁸⁷ The ‘Ophites’, in other words, did not confuse diachrony and chronology, interpreting the series of derivations within the realm of Being in terms of a synchronic unfolding, or a structural differentiation, of contingents from their principles. As much as one can deduce from Irenaeus’s sketchy summary, they seem to have envisaged this mechanics of derivation in the following fashion.

At the topmost point of what will eventually become a multiple-layered universe there is the absolute first principle, split into the substance of “indefinite light” and “the potency of the deep.” This primary split that cleaves the Absolute from within into an indefinite substance and the void of its unfulfilled potential manifests itself, at the outset of the derivational process, as the opposition of two gendered principles⁸⁸—the Father of All, called First Man (*Primus Homo*), the instigator of reproductive process, and the Father’s feminine counterpart, his first self-conception (*Ennoea*)—whose ‘mating’ produces a perfect male offspring, the Son of Man or Second Man (*Filius Hominis*, *Secundus Homo*).⁸⁹ All subsequent derivations will obey the same logic of sexual procreation: at each stage, the first product of the union of the immediately preceding pair of principles will become an active (male) principle, mating with another material principle and producing the next level of reality. Following this logic, the Son of Man or Second Man, acting together with its paternal source, the First Man, unites with the Holy Spirit, the First Woman, generating from her “an imperishable light, the Third Male, called Christ.”

⁸⁷ For the category of verbal aspect in Latin (*infectum* vs. *perfectum*) see Ernout–Thomas (1972) 216–19.

⁸⁸ The shift from the original Twoness of an indefinite light and the potency of the deep (Βυθός) to the oppositional determination of the male and female principles is announced by the particle *autem*, the marker of transition throughout Irenaeus’s report; cf. *supra*, n. 85.

⁸⁹ Such an interpretation of Irenaeus’s obscure sentence presupposes the conjectural emendation of *emittentis* into *emittere*: “Furthermore, they say that a Conception proceeding from him emits the Son” (*Ennoeam autem eius progredientem filium dicunt emittere*). In this way, the generation of the Son of Man or Second Man in the ‘Ophite’ system would correspond to the derivation of Christ the Self-Originate, the offspring of the Father of the Entirety and his first Conception (ἔννοια), in the *Apocryphon of John*. For a different interpretation, which sees in the Son of Man an androgynous fusion of the Father’s Conception (*Ennoea*) and his first offspring or Intellect (*Nous*), see Orbe (1973) 191–230 and (1976) 1:17–20, and esp. Simonetti (1993) 424, n. 106.

Principles

First Light and Potency of the Deep

Father of All (First Man) and Conception (*Ennoea*)

Son of Man (and First Man) and Holy Spirit (First Woman) —> Christ (Third Man)

Products

—> Son of Man (Second Man)

—> Christ (Third Man)

The Holy Spirit, called First Woman (*Prima Foemina*), is said to be borne above the four segregated elements—water, darkness, abyss, and chaos—in an obvious allusion to the Biblical “spirit of God” from Gen 1:2. This seems to suggest that the opening verse of Genesis (“God created the heaven and the earth”), albeit not mentioned in Irenaeus’s summary, figured in the ‘Ophite’ cosmology as a symbolic expression of the preceding stage—that is, the stage “in the beginning” (ἐν ἀρχῇ), when the Father of All attains the vague notion of himself, his first Conception (*Ennoea*), and unites with this feminine ‘dyadic’ principle to generate the “heaven,” *viz.* the Son of Man and his aeons. The “earth,” on the other hand, represents the unfathomable (Gen 1:2a: “invisible and non-differentiated”) remainder of the Father’s abyssal potency (*in virtute Bythi*), the primordial chaos out of which, at the next stage, the Holy Spirit called First Woman will segregate and make visible the primary “elements” (Gen 1:2). This secondary ‘dyadic’ principle of division, multiplicity, and materiality will not only fill up the void with elementary substances—it will also serve as the female consort to both the Father of All and his Son, giving birth to the next conjugal couple, *viz.* Christ and Sophia, and, in the manner of a typical ‘Gnostic’ liminal figure, act as the mediator between the Father’s incorruptible abode and the lower realm, “moving above the elements” (*super quae ferri Spiritum dicunt*).

IMPERISHABLE ‘HEAVEN’

Father of All (Gen 1:1 θεός)

Conception (*Ennoea*)

Son of Man and His Aeons (Gen 1:1 οὐρανός)

----- Holy Spirit (Gen 1:2 πνεῦμα θεοῦ)-----

Water (Gen 1:2 ὕδωρ)

Darkness (Gen 1:2 σκότος)

Abyss (Gen 1:2 ἄβυσσος)

PERISHABLE ‘EARTH’

Chaos (Gen 1:2 γῆ)

Two opposite tendencies characterize this liminal figure of the Holy Spirit. One is to attain the superior realm of the Father and Son, and the other is to incline downwards, to the realm of matter, due to the ‘dyadic propensity’ of its feminine nature. Both of these tendencies become manifest at the next stage of cosmogony, in the dichotomy between Christ and Sophia, the products of the Spirit’s simultaneous union with the Father and his Son (*Haer.* 1.30.2). This dichotomy assumes the form of a traditional polarity of left (female and weak) and right (male and strong). The generation of Christ and Sophia is consequently explained in terms of the ancient theory of sex-differentiation, attested already in Parmenides (B 17 D–K: “in the right boys, in the left girls”) and still in vogue among Hellenistic and Roman medical theorists, according to which the sex of a newborn is determined during conception, and depends on which side of the bicameral uterus—left or right—retains the seed. Christ, therefore, placed as it were on the right side of the Spirit’s womb (*quasi dextrum*), is male (*Tertius Masculus*), and therefore incorruptible and luminous (*incorruptibile lumen*), tending by his nature to what was higher (*in superiora levaticium*). On her left side, however, the superior feminine Spirit was “filled to saturation and overflowed” (*superrepletam et superbullientem secundum sinisteriores partes*) because she was unable to “endure and contain the greatness of the lights” (*cum autem non potuisset portare nec capere magnitudinem luminum*). The product of this “overflow” is Sophia *Prunicos*, an imperfect product—for she possessed a sprinkle of light (*humectationem luminis* 1.30.3), that is, certain male characteristics, yet inasmuch as conceived on the left side (*sinistram*), she was also feminine (*masculo-feminam*) and therefore predestined to move downwards (*decidisse deorsum*), toward the material realm of the already differentiated corporeal elements.

Descending into the waters while they were [still] immobile, she set them in motion by impetuously agitating them all the way down to the abyss and assuming a body from them. For they say that all things rushed toward her moisture of light (*humectationi luminis*) and clung to it and enveloped it. Had she not possessed it, she would perhaps have been totally absorbed and submerged by matter. Bound as she was by a body composed of matter and greatly weighed down, she repented (*resipisse*) at one time and attempted to escape from the waters and ascend to her mother; but she could not do so because of the weight of the enveloping body. . . . But when she had received power from her moisture consisting of light, she rebounded (*resiliit*) and was lifted up on high, and once she reached the height, she spread out as a

covering and thus made out of her body the heaven that is visible (Gen 1:7–8). And she remained under the heaven that she had made, still having the form of an aqueous body. (*Adv. haer.* 1.30.3)⁹⁰

Contrary to Christ, who represents the Spirit's inclination toward the superior realm of light, and whose bottom-up movement eventually results in the formation of the holy congregation (*sanctam Ecclesiam*), that is, in his and the Spirit's union with the Father and his Son, Sophia descends into the motionless primordial waters and, in what is an unambiguous allusion to Genesis 1:2b, sets them in motion (*movisse*). While bestowing movement upon the material substrate, Sophia herself does not remain at rest. She moves, too, "by impetuously agitating them all the way down to the abyss" (*petulanter agentem usque ad abyssos*).

The Biblical image of "the spirit of God rushing upon (*ἐπιφέρεσθαι*) the water" is interpreted here as an impetuous movement (*petulanter agentem*) on the part of the divine element (*Sophia, humectatio luminis*), proceeding downwards to the lowest parts of matter (*usque ad abyssos*). This agitated movement has its ultimate cause in the original imperfection of Sophia's mother, (*Foemina, sinisteriores partes*)—in her incapacity to contain the greatness of the divine light in the right side of her uterus (*superrepletam et superbullientem*) of the Holy Spirit. Its immediate cause, on the other hand, is the fall of Sophia from the stable existence of the Fathers (*a patribus decidisse deorsum*) into matter. This fall reflects the condition of a divine element when newly incarnated (*assumpsisse ex eis corpus*)—weighed down by amorphous matter (*valde gravatam*), and devoid of reason and discursive capacity. Yet along with this negative aspect, the fall of Sophia also performs a positive role in the cosmogonical process. It gives life (*movisse*) to the previously motionless material substrate, and eventually, as it becomes more ordered and synchronized—that is, as Sophia "repents"

⁹⁰ *Et descendentem simpliciter in aquas, cum essent immobiles, et movisse quoque eas, petulanter agentem usque ad abyssos, et assumpsisse ex eis corpus. Humectationi enim luminis eius omnia accurrisse et adhaesisse dicunt et circumtenuisse eam: quam nisi habuisset, tota absorpta fortasse fuisset et demersa a materia. Deligatam igitur hanc a corpore, quod erat a materia, et valde gravatam resipisse aliquando et conatam esse fugere aquas et ascendere ad matrem; non potuisse [eam] autem propter gravedinem circumpositi corporis. . . . Et cum virtutem accepisset ab humectatione eius quod erat secundum eam lumen, resiliit et in sublimitatem elata est, et facta in alto dilatavit et cooperavit et fecit coelum hoc quod apparet, a [e] corpore eius; et remansit sub coelo quod fecit, adhuc habens aquatilis corporis typhum.*

or “becomes rational again” (*resipisse*)—will separate the visible heaven (*fecit caelum hoc quod apparet*) from matter.

The first three paragraphs of Irenaeus’s summary of the ‘Ophite’ cosmology contain the exegesis of the first eight verses of the Mosaic cosmogony. A special emphasis was laid on the image of “the spirit of god rushing upon the water” (Gen 1:2b), in which the ‘Ophites’ saw two distinct agents working at two separate stages of the cosmogony:

- (i) At the stage preliminary to the creation of the visible world, the spirit rushing upon the water” stands for the superior Holy Spirit, called First Woman, borne (*ferri*) over the differentiated elements, and separating the realm of light (Father of All–Conception–Son of Man) from the material substrate
- (ii) In addition, the “spirit of God” from Genesis 1:2b stands for Sophia, the offspring of the Holy Spirit, as she descended into the material substrate and set its superior parts (primordial waters) into motion, initiating the fabrication of the visible universe

One interpretation does not exclude the other. Even though they both ultimately interpret the Biblical “spirit of God rushing over the waters” in the same fashion, as the organization of the material substrate (*materia prima* in the first case, and separated elements in the second) by a divine agent (Superior Spirit, Sophia)—they carefully distinguish between the cosmological levels, and the stages of cosmogony, at which this ordering activity takes place.

Similarly to the ‘Ophites’, the author of the tract *On the Origin of the World* applies the words of Genesis 1:2 to the fabrication of the visible universe. This time, however, the Biblical spirit “rushing over the waters” is not the fallen Sophia but Ialdabaoth, her imperfect product. The relevant episode begins with Pistis Sophia appearing over the spiritless “matter of chaos”, the product of her own miscarriage, and moving disturbingly ($\psi\tau\omicron\rho\tau\bar{\rho}$) because of the defective ($\psi\tau\lambda$) nature of her creation. The result of this disturbance is a fearful and spiritless entity which Sophia subsequently transforms, upon bestowing some of her spirit—more precisely, upon “blowing into its face”—into a ruler “over matter and over all of its forces.” This ruler is “lion-like in appearance, androgynous, having great authority within him, but ignorant of whence he had come into existence” (II 99:24–100:10).

Now, when Pistis Sophia saw him moving in the depth of the waters (Ϸ𐌺̅𐌿-𐌱𐌴𐌹𐌺 𐌹-𐌹𐌵𐌹𐌳𐌹 𐌺𐌻-𐌸𐌵), she said to him, “Child, pass through to here,” whose equivalent is *ialdabaoth*. Since that day, there appeared the principle of verbal discourse (Ϸ𐌸𐌹𐌸𐌺, λόγος). . . . Now when he had come to have authority over matter, Pistis Sophia withdrew (ἀναχωρεῖν) up to her light. When the archon saw his magnitude—and it was only himself that he saw, and he saw nothing else except for water and darkness—then he thought (𐌲𐌺𐌺𐌺) that it was he alone who existed. [And] his thi[nking] was completed by means of verbal expression (Ϸ𐌸𐌹𐌸𐌺, λόγος), and appeared as “a spirit moving to and fro over the waters” (𐌴𐌲𐌹𐌹𐌸𐌹𐌸 𐌺𐌻-𐌹𐌸𐌹𐌸 𐌺𐌻-𐌹𐌸𐌹𐌸 𐌲𐌸𐌹𐌹-𐌹𐌸𐌹𐌳𐌹). And when the spirit appeared, the archon set apart the watery substance (οὐσία); and what was dry was set apart into another place. And from matter (ύλη) he fabricated for himself a dwelling place and called it heaven; and from matter the archon fabricated a footstool (ύποπόδιον) and called it earth. (*Orig. World II* 100:10–101:9)

The product of Pistis Sophia’s disturbance (Ϸ𐌿𐌴𐌹𐌲𐌹) was in a state of disorderly movement as soon as it came to exist. At first, it “rushed toward” (𐌱𐌴𐌿𐌲 𐌺𐌹𐌸𐌹) the mother “in the chaos” (99:32), and Sophia reacted by granting it spirit and form (τύπος) and turning it into the ruler of the lower realm. Since the ruler’s movement (𐌸𐌵) over the waters of chaos could not produce any positive effect, Pistis Sophia addressed him and thus passed onto him the power of verbal expression (λόγος). The result of all these corrective actions is Ialdabaoth, the character endowed with spirit, form, verbal expression, and (discursive) thinking, now capable of configuring the amorphous matter.⁹¹

⁹¹ The clue for understanding the nature of Ialdabaoth’s thinking is given later in the narrative, in the episode describing the rebellion of Sabaoth, one of Ialdabaoth’s archontic powers, who “hated his father, the darkness, and his mother, the abyss, and loathed his sister, the thinking (𐌲𐌺𐌺𐌺) of the prime parent, which moved to and fro over the waters (𐌱-𐌺𐌹𐌹-𐌹𐌸𐌹𐌸 𐌺𐌹𐌹-𐌹𐌸𐌹𐌸 𐌲𐌸𐌹𐌹-𐌹𐌸𐌹𐌳𐌹)” (104:10–13). A masculine noun, the Coptic word for thinking, 𐌲𐌺𐌺𐌺, does not convey the full meaning of the Greek original. The fact that the thinking of Ialdabaoth equals Sabaoth’s “sister” (𐌲𐌺𐌺𐌺) implies the presence of a feminine noun in the Greek *Vorlage*, probably one of the technical terms designating the discursive activity of reason—διάνοια (calculation, reasoning, pondering) or, more appropriate for Gnostic jargon, ἐνθύμησις (intention, conception, reflection). Both terms often assumed a pejorative meaning in the writings traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’, in that they (i) referred to a persevering discursive process in contrast to the intuitive and spontaneous act of thinking (ἐννοια) characteristic of God the Father, and (ii) pointed to the changeability and vacillation of thinking in contrast to the constancy of divine knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).

To summarize, the Biblical “rushing of the spirit over the water” is not simply a local movement of the active physical element over the corporeal substrate. In this particular ‘Gnostic’ application, it symbolizes the movement of Ialdabaoth’s discursive thinking (ἐνθύμησις or διόνοια), by means of which he designed the fabrication of the visible heaven and the sublunar earth. In order to carry out his design, he made use of the creative power of verbal expression (λόγος, ὡαχε)—for his intention would have come to naught had it not been “completed by means of verbal expression (λόγος)” (100: 33–34).

Sophia’s Movement and Wisdom Literature

Unlike the above discussed interpretations of Gen 1:2b, the *Apocryphon of John* engages in an open polemic with the Biblical portrayal of the stage preliminary to the ordering of the visible world. Speaking through the mouth of the Savior, the author of the *Apocryphon* draws an explicit distinction between the literal and non-literal meaning of Moses’ account of creation: “Do not think that it is as Moses said . . . No, but . . .” (II 13:19–21, BG 45:8–10).

The polemic is announced by the shift of emphasis, from Ialdabaoth the villain to Sophia the victimized heroine: “Now, the mother began to rush over” (ἐπιφέρεσθαι BG 44:19–45:1; ὡεει II 13:13–14). The Savior was about to expand on this statement when John, thus far totally speechless, suddenly interrupted his monologue and posed a brief question: “Christ, what does it mean, ‘to rush over?’” (BG 45:6–7).

Two features in this short sequence deserve a more detailed treatment. First, it is at this point that the narrative, following a long revelatory lecture by the Savior, resumes the form of a dialogue. This dialogue is, in fact, a brief exchange between the heavenly revealer and the seer, presented in question-and-answer form (*erotapocriseis*)—not a replica of Platonic dialogue, which consists of “detailed answering and ranging through everything” (Plato, *Parm.* 136d–e), but rather a sort of revelatory catechesis reminiscent of the atmosphere of school instruction. Second, and in accordance with the polemical objective of the passage, it is at this point that the Savior makes the first explicit reference to the Mosaic account of creation—the verb ἐπιφέρεσθαι in the shorter versions and its Coptic equivalent ὡεει in the longer.

The resumption of the dialogue format is triggered by the introduction of the Biblical reference. By inserting the term ἐπιφέρεσθαι in the first of the three sections portraying Sophia's reaction to Ialdabaoth's villainy, the Savior points to the compatibility of his account of Sophia's movement with the Mosaic cosmogony. John's immediate reaction discloses both curiosity and confusion. The Biblical ἐπιφέρεσθαι appears to him as an anomaly in the Savior's narrative, an obscurity that requires explanation. In the original context of the Mosaic account of creation, the verb denotes the local movement of a physical entity (the divine *pneuma* in Gen 1:2b, and Noah's ark in Gen 7:18) over the material substrate (water in both cases), so that John does not see how the use of this verb, with all of its materialistic overtones, should be accounted for in the present context. The simple question—"What is ἐπιφέρεσθαι?"—bears witness to John's perplexity: What meaning, he seems to ask, should one assign to the Biblical term in the context of the Savior's cosmological exposition?

The Savior's reaction is a commonplace in contemporary *Offenbarungsvisionen*—an omniscient teacher smiles benevolently, albeit slightly ironically, at his pupil's confusion, and then modifies or flatly rejects his erroneous belief.⁹² What the Savior contests is the literal interpretation of Genesis 1:2b: "Do not think that that it is as Moses said, 'over the waters'" (II 13:19–21). The verb ἐπιφέρεσθαι is not to be understood spatially, as the movement of one corporeal (πνεῦμα, κιβωτός) entity over another (τὰ ὕδατα)—*tamquam loco sicut corpus*, to use Augustine's words.⁹³ Rather, says the Savior, it designates an agitated movement of the fallen Sophia "in the darkness of unacquaintance" (BG 45:14–15; II 13, 24–25).

There is yet another question that John as an inexperienced neophyte failed to formulate—the question of the Savior's hermeneutical strategy. On what grounds did the Savior make his narrative compatible, and comparable, with the Mosaic account? In other words, why did he consider as legitimate his insertion of the Biblical phrase in his account of Sophia's movement?

⁹² For the motif of a smiling god, or angel, often employed in visionary accounts and in the cosmogonic context, see for example *Jos. Azen.* 16.7; *Herm. Vis.* 3.8.2; *Kōrē kosmou* 23.10; *PMG IV* 1611; *III* 161–91, 471–522.

⁹³ See *supra*, pp. 225–26.

The reference of Sophia's movement to the Biblical rushing of God's spirit over the waters was effected through the intercession of a third text—the group of Biblical passages, mostly from Hellenistic Wisdom literature, which openly set forth, or at least allude to, the identity of the spirit of God and the divine Wisdom as the creative principles in cosmogony. The first traces of this equation, which was often extended to encompass even the divine Word (λόγος, ῥήμα), appear in Psalm 103 (24: “You made everything in wisdom, and the earth was filled with your creation”; 30: “You will send forth your spirit, and they will be created”). The famous self-proclamation of the personified Wisdom in Proverbs (8:22–31), although it falls short of associating Sophia with the spirit of God, appears to have been a catalyst in this process of fusion that was finally completed in Sirach. It is here (Sir 24:3–5) that, in a clear allusion to the spirit of Gen 1:2b, Sophia portrays herself in the following fashion:

I came forth from the mouth of the most high (cf. Ps 32:6)
and covered the earth as a mist (cf. Gen 1:2b);
I dwelt in the highest heavens
and my throne was in a pillar of cloud (cf. Exod 13:21–22).
Alone I encircled the heavenly vault
and walked around in the depths of the abyss (cf. Prov 8:27–29).

The assimilation is pushed even further in the Wisdom of Solomon (7:22–24):

For there is in her [Wisdom] a spirit intelligent and holy,
unique of its kind yet manifold, subtle,
agile, lucid, and unsullied,
clear, inviolable, loving the good, keen,
irresistible, beneficent, humane,
firm, steadfast, and free from anxiety,
all-powerful, surveying all,
and moving through all spirits
that are intelligent, pure, and altogether subtle.
For wisdom is more mobile than any motion,
because of her pureness she pervades and permeates all things.

Wisdom (σοφία) and the intelligent spirit (πνεῦμα νοερόν) personify here the same cosmic ‘élan vital’ that sustains and governs the universe. Just as Wisdom “stretches mightily from one end of the earth to the other and orders all things befittingly” (8:1), so “the spirit of the Lord has filled the world” and “sustains all things together” (1:7).

Among many a relevant passage from Wisdom literature, there is one that seems most likely to have served as an intertextual link for

the Savior's interpretation of Genesis 1:2b. This is the last verse of Sophia's self-proclamation in Sirach (24:5).

I walked around in the depth of the abyss (ἐν βάθει ἀβύσσων περιπάτησα).

Two features in the Savior's exegesis corroborate this assumption. First, there is a clear structural analogy between Sir 24:5, Gen 1:2b, and the Savior's interpretation of Gen 1:2b: an agent (*pneuma*, Sophia) conducts movement ("rushing," or "walking around," or "going to and fro") while confined to a certain alien medium ("over the waters," or "in the depth of the abyss," or "in the darkness of ignorance"). Second, in the final poem of deliverance, fully recorded only in the longer redaction of the *Apocryphon* (II 30:11–31:31), the Savior refers to Sir 24:5 in the similar context of his own descent as the heavenly agent of salvation, identified with "the perfect Providence of the entirety" (II 30:12): "I walked in the greatness of darkness" (II 30:15–17 ΔΕΙ-ΜΟΟΨΕ ΔΕ Ζῆ-ΤΗῆΤ-ΜΟΣ Ἰ-ΠΚΑΚΕ).⁹⁴

The Savior's interpretive strategy very much agrees with the basic principles of the 'Gnostic' exegesis of Biblical oracles. The common presupposition was that the prophecies of the Old Testament issued from prophetic spirits belonging to distinct levels of reality. Thus, (i) certain oracles issued exclusively from Ialdabaoth and were uttered by his obedient, blind prophets; (ii) other oracles issued from Sophia, or other representatives of the Pleroma (e.g., *Logos*, the spiritual seed), and were promulgated directly by their prophets; (iii) finally, some prophecies originated in the Pleromatic realm but were transmitted by Ialdabaoth, clad in deceptive images and symbols, to his blind prophets.

In the case of the last group of oracles, the task set before any 'Gnostic' exegete is to uncover the hidden wisdom behind their literal meaning and their material imagery—that is, to interpret such oracles by means of allegorical 'translation'.

The interpretation of Genesis 1:2b is the first in a series of similarly structured allegorical 'translations' in the *Apocryphon of John*. Their common elements can be specified as follows:

⁹⁴ Notice the substitution of "darkness" for Ben Sira's "abyss," probably an attempt on the part of the author of *Ap. John* to allocate the primordial elements of the Biblical creation account within the fundamental polarity of two opposite principles of light and darkness (cf. *infra*, pp. 134–36). Compare the Sahidic translation of Ben Sira, *Cod. Taurenensis*, in Lagarde (1883) 148: ΔΙ-ΜΟΟΨΕ ΖΗ-ΠΩΚ Η-ΜΟΥΗ (see also John 8:12).

- (i) Most of these allegorical readings start with the same narrative device, that is, with John interrupting the Savior's exposition and putting forward a short question
- (ii) All of them occur at those points in the Savior's revelatory account when the superior realm comes in contact with the material realm of Ialdabaoth—that is, whenever Pleromatic messengers and helpers, disguised under various material appearances, enter the phenomenal world in order to recover the divine power of light that Ialdabaoth had originally stolen from Sophia
- (iii) Finally, most of them claim the superiority of their allegorical reading by quoting from, or alluding to, the aforementioned first and second group of Biblical oracles—that is, those in which Ialdabaoth openly revealed his ill-willed intentions to the prophets (e.g. Isaiah), or those issued by the Pleromatic figures to very few privileged individuals ('Solomon', Sirach)

Whereas in his exegesis of Genesis 1:2b the Savior only alluded to his 'intertext' (Sir 24:5) when identifying Sophia with the divine *pneuma*, he was more explicit about the starting point of his allegorical reading in another, similarly structured dialogue about the meaning of Adam's ἔκστασις (Gen 2:21). As the following synopsis will indicate, the Savior proceeds in both cases in a similar, thoroughly formalized, manner. The only new feature in the account of Adam's "ecstasy" is the insertion of an explicit quotation from the Septuagint (Isa 6:10)—a piece of Biblical evidence intended to support the Savior's reinterpretation of Genesis 2:21 (καὶ ἐπέβαλεν ὁ θεὸς ἔκστασιν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀδάμ, καὶ ὑπνωσεν).

Sophia's ἐπιφέρεσθαι (BG 44:19–45:19)

Now, the mother began to ἐπιφέρεσθαι:
she recognized her lack,
for her consort had not agreed with her
as she was blamed by her perfection.

And for my part I said,
"Christ, what does it mean, ἐπιφέρεσθαι?"
But he smiled.

Adam's ἔκστασις (BG 58:10–59:5)

He [the chief archon] wanted to bring out the power
that he had given to him [Adam].
And he cast an ἔκστασις over Adam.

And for my part I said,
"Lord, what is ἔκστασις?"
[III 29:4 He smiled.]

He said, "Do you think that it is
as Moses said, 'over the waters?'"

No, but rather
she saw the evil and the coming separation
of her son; she repented.
And moving to and fro
in the darkness of ignorance

she began to feel shame.
And she did not dare to return,
but was moving to and fro.
Now, her moving to and fro,
this is ἐπιφέρεισθαι."

And he said, "It is not
as Moses said, 'He made him asleep',

but rather

he veiled his senses (αἰσθησις) with a veil
and weighed him down with insensitivity (ἀναισθησία).
And indeed, he spoke through the prophet saying,
'I will weigh down the ears of their hearts
so that they may not understand' (Isa 6:10)."

In both passages, the Savior departs from the formal postulates of allegorical exegesis. He does not quote the whole Biblical verse as a *lemma* to be supplied with a comment or gloss. Nor does he keep a clearcut distinction between the text he interprets and his own interpretation. His *lemma* is, in fact, an already initiated interpretation of the Mosaic verse, one in which Sophia has already been substituted for the divine pneuma, and Ialdabaoth for the Biblical god, and retaining only a word (ἐπιφέρεισθαι) or a phrase (καὶ ἐπέβαλεν ὁ θεὸς ἔκστασιν ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀδάμ) from the original Mosaic account. Placed in the new context of the Savior's revelation, the material overtones of Biblical wording become an obscurity that John cannot resolve on his own. Before offering the correct reading of ἐπιφέρεισθαι and ἔκστασις, the Savior first rejects the literal meaning—not "over the waters," and not "he made him asleep." As for his 'correct' interpretation, it finds a crucial corroboration in a third text, also borrowed from the Septuagint, which functions as the interpretant—in the case of ἐπιφέρεισθαι, in the verse from Sirach (24:5); in the case of Adam's ἔκστασις, in a slightly modified quote from Isaiah (6:10).

Sirach and Isaiah, however, do not provide a sufficient clue on their own. Between Sirach's Dame Wisdom "walking around in the depth of the abyss" and the Savior's Sophia "moving to and fro in the darkness of unacquaintance," between the Yahweh of Isaiah that "weighs down the ears of their hearts" and the Savior's Ialdabaoth "weighing down Adam's senses with insensitivity," there still lies a wide gap that needs to be filled with analogous propositions from various philosophical traditions. In the case of Adam's ἔκστασις, such philosophical stimuli can be determined with relative certainty. Here,

the Savior's solution echoes one of Philo's Stoicizing interpretations of the same Biblical passage (*QG* 1.24 Petit). During his sleep or "ecstasy," Adam's senses slackened (τὴν τῶν αἰσθήσεων ὕφεσιν) and separated themselves from sensible objects (ἐξίστανται τῶν αἰσθητῶν), while his discursive reasoning "withdrew" (τὴν ἀναχώρησιν τοῦ λογισμοῦ) and remained still (ἡρεμεῖ), unable to activate any of the senses (οὐδὲ παρέχων κίνησιν αὐταῖς). In the case of Sophia's agitated movement, things appear even more complex—partly because of a variety of philosophical ideas that informed the Savior's exegesis of Gen 1:2b, and partly because many of these stimuli underwent a thorough revision and assumed a new meaning in order to fit in the specific context of the Savior's world hypothesis.

There is yet another level in the Savior's account of Sophia's movement that seems worthy of a more detailed comment, and this is the relationship he establishes between the temporal-logical order of events in the episode (*fabula*) and their order of presentation in the narrative (*plot*).⁹⁵ A strictly formal analysis of the episode of Sophia's reaction to Ialdabaoth's theft has already been conducted, both in respect to its internal division into three parallel sequences and in respect to its position within the larger narrative context.⁹⁶ What remains to be determined is the content of Sophia's movement of repentance and its order of presentation—that is, the spatial and temporal coordinates within which it occurs, and the role it plays in the cosmogony of the *Apocryphon of John*.

Temporal Coordinates of Sophia's Movement: Sophia, Ialdabaoth's Assistant

At the initial stages of the mythic drama, the narrative thread of the *Apocryphon of John* faithfully mirrors the rectilinear progression of events. The actions are presented as they logically ensue, in their natural order, from the blissful tranquillity of the solitary Invisible Spirit gazing at the surrounding light down to the generation of aeons in the Pleromatic realm. Even the sense of causality coincides with this chronological sequence—*post hoc, ergo propter hoc*. But a per-

⁹⁵ The distinction between *fabula*, the system of events in their logical order (the time of the narrated story) and *plot*, the system of events in their artificial order (the time of narration), is borrowed from Shklovsky (1990) 15–51; see also Segre (1979) 1–56 and Fusillo (1996) 280–88.

⁹⁶ Cf. *supra*, pp. 222–25.

fect congruity between the narrative order (*plot*) and the natural course of the events (*fabula*) begins to fade as soon as the action moves away from the Pleroma, and another dimension emerges besides the spiritual one—darkness alongside light, and the fiery realm of Ialdabaoth alongside the Pleromatic perfection. From now on, the heavenly narrator in the *Apocryphon*'s account has to deal with the problem of how to string a multidimensional reality upon a single unidimensional thread—especially at the moments when the representatives of the two separate levels of reality cross the boundaries and act simultaneously with one another.

A traditional story-teller's solution amounts to focusing exclusively on one dimension of reality. "There is no instance in our material," as Vladimir Propp argued referring to the corpus of Russian fairytales, "in which a tale follows both seeker and victimized heroes."⁹⁷ When kidnapped, the princess disappears both from "the horizon of her father" and from "that of the listener." Such a narrowing down of narrative perspective is not a solution acceptable to the Savior in the *Apocryphon of John*. To link the narrative thread only to the events in Ialdabaoth's realm would amount to mimicking Moses, his prophet, who was ignorant of any other dimension of reality. On the other hand, focusing exclusively on Sophia, the victimized heroine, or any other agent of the Pleroma, would deprive the story of its complication and its denouement. In this case, the reader would learn a great deal about Sophia's and, by extension, his own tragic separation from the spiritual realm, but would know virtually nothing about important historical consequences of this separation. Nor would the reader, unacquainted with the reasons for Sophia's and his own descent into the body, be able to discover the way of ascent and to attain salvation. As the Savior points out to John, one has to know the path that leads downwards in order to be able to reverse the process: "The way of ascent" is that same way "by which [all creation] descended" (II 20:22–24).

In the *Apocryphon of John*, all levels take part in the cosmic drama: the spiritual realm, Ialdabaoth's fiery universe, and that mysterious 'liminal' zone in between which serves both as a boundary separating the two worlds and as their meeting place. The narrative line

⁹⁷ Propp (1968) 36.

moves forward, but in a tortuous course, oscillating between the separate levels of reality, following now Ialdabaoth and his rulers, now Sophia and her helpers. This constant shift of perspective, clearly visible in the section dedicated to Sophia's illumination of Ialdabaoth and his theft of Sophia's luminous power, may occasionally raise serious interpretative problems. Should one, for example, consider these two separate episodes in the narrative sequence as two chronologically distinct moments, or rather as two simultaneous actions, in the cosmic drama? Or is it perhaps that both these episodes, which, as has been shown above,⁹⁸ display many affinities in content and internal organisation, simply describe the same cosmogonic event, yet from two different points of view? Similar questions arise whenever the narrator shifts perspective and moves from one level, or one agent, to another. The account of Sophia's conversion is such a turning point. Once again, Sophia enters the stage and Ialdabaoth, for a little while, disappears from the reader's sight.

The episode of Sophia's repentance (μετάνοια) is knotted into the narrative thread following Ialdabaoth's fabrication of the visible world and his declaration of unity. The transition to this new point is signaled by the Coptic connective and resuming particle ϛε, which usually stands for the Greek οὖν, and marks that which follows after (*post hoc*), or that which results from (*propter hoc*), the previous event or statement. In its first meaning (*post hoc*), the particle may denote (i) a new stage in the chronological sequence of events, but also (ii) a new stage in the march of thought, without referring to such 'external' categories as time, temporal succession, and causality. Now, in the cosmogonical story where, as in the *Apocryphon of John*, the events are supposed to proceed chronologically, the particle ϛε is expected to have both temporal ('next', 'then') and inferential ('then', 'so') connotations. To explain Sophia's movement as the consequence of an immediately preceding action would thus seem natural. *Post hoc, ergo propter hoc*.

Yet the Savior's narrative does not seem to support this way of reading. None of the three sequences that constitute this episode links Sophia's repentance to Ialdabaoth's creation of the phenomenal world. Each sequence offers instead its own explanation, which varies in wording and content from one redaction to another:

⁹⁸ See *supra*, pp. 171–78.

Now the mother began to rush over (ἐπιφέρεσθαι). She recognized her lack; for her consort had not agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with her, as she was blamed (ψέγειν) by her perfection. (BG 44:19–45:5)

Now the mother began to come and go (ἔχει). She recognized the lack when the shining of her light diminished. And she grew dark, for her consort had not agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with her. (II 13:13–17)

She saw the evil (κακία) and the coming separation (ἀποστασία) of her son; she repented (μετανοεῖν). (BG 45:10–13)

When she saw the evil (κακία) that had come to be and the theft committed by her son, she repented (μετανοεῖν). (II 13:21–23)

When the mother recognized the miscarriage of darkness, that it was not perfect, for her consort had not agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with her, she repented (μετανοεῖν) and wept with much weeping. (BG 46:10–15)

When the mother recognized that the garment of darkness had not come out perfectly, she knew that her consort had not agreed (συμφωνεῖν) with her. She repented (μετανοεῖν) and wept with much weeping. (II 13:32–14:1)

One thing turns out to be common to all of these explanations. They all view Sophia's repentance and her disorderly movement as the reaction to Ialdabaoth's theft, and not to his fabrication of the material universe—the reaction triggered as soon as Sophia became aware of her deficiency (ὑτά) and able to foresee the “forthcoming” separation, or ‘apostasy’, of her son. *Post hoc, at non propter hoc.*

Sophia's action lasts for a while, as indicated by the Savior's choice of the continuous and ingressive verbal aspects: “The mother began to (ἄρχεσθαι) rush over”; “She began (ἄρχεσθαι) to feel shame going to and fro (ἐC-ΝΑ ἐC-ΝΗΥ)”; “She did not dare to return but was going to and fro (ἠἐC-ΝΑ ἐC-ΝΗΥ).” This agitated movement, an outward expression of Sophia's continuing repentance and feeling of shame, came to an end only when “the prayer of her repentance” was heard and after her “brethren prayed on her behalf” (BG 46:15–18; II 14:1–5 “the whole fullness”). It was then that the invisible Spirit “poured over her a spirit from the perfection” (BG 47:1–3; NHC II 14:5–6) and rescued her from her predicament.

And she was taken up not to her own aeon but, because of a rather great ignorance that she had shown, she resides in the Ninth until she has rectified her lack. (BG 47:8–13; II 14:9–13)

The *terminus ad quem* of Sophia's ordeal could hardly be clearer. Her ascent to the ninth heaven implies that Ialdabaoth's fabrication of the eight cosmic spheres, his own and those assigned to his seven archons, has been completed. With Sophia's ascendance, the universe

of the *Apocryphon of John* reaches consolidation. Above, there is the spiritual realm; below, the geocentric universe of Ialdabaoth presiding over the seven planetary spheres; and at the outer surface of the visible world, right next to the Pleroma, Sophia's temporary dwelling—the liminal zone enabling the two separate worlds to communicate.

Sophia's movement of repentance unfolds in three separate sequences: its initial stage, its continuance, and its terminal point. Its *terminus a quo* is Ialdabaoth's theft, and it starts right after Sophia has recognized the loss of power, but before Ialdabaoth initiates the cosmogonic process. It continues all the way through Ialdabaoth's creation and ends only after his work, the visible universe, is complete. In a word, its position in the narrative does not reflect its real place in the natural course of events. As they stand in the narrative, all stages of Sophia's disorderly movement appear to be dislocated with regard to the natural order. Thus, the moment when Sophia recognized her miscarriage and began to move precedes, in fact, Ialdabaoth's creation (BG 45:11–12: “she saw the evil and the coming separation of her son”). Her movement of repentance runs along with the cosmogonic process, and does not come after it, as suggested by the order of presentation. Finally, even Sophia's ascent to the ninth heaven does not necessarily ensue Ialdabaoth's arrogant self-proclamation as a “jealous god”—for an inverse order, in which Sophia's withdrawal from the visible world comes prior to Ialdabaoth's formula of unity, was already indicated by Irenaeus as more ‘natural’: “When she [Sophia] withdrew, he opined to be alone and said, ‘I am a jealous God and there is none but me’” (*Adv. haer.* 1.29.4). The whole episode, therefore, is a regressive excursus that introduces a surprising discontinuity in the rectilinear presentation of events—to make use of Umberto Eco's paradoxical formula, *post hoc ergo ante hoc*.⁹⁹

The confusing tension between the temporality of the events and the temporality of the narrative might have been eased by a simple reversal of the order in which the two episodes, Ialdabaoth's fabrication and Sophia's movement, appear in the *Apocryphon*. The author of the *Apocryphon of John*, however, decided to sacrifice clarity for the sake of preserving the Biblical order of the cosmogonic

⁹⁹ Eco (1989) 19.

events. Sophia's movement of repentance occurs in his narrative after Ialdabaoth's creation of phenomenal reality just as, in the Mosaic account, the spirit's "rushing over the waters" (Gen 1:2b) follows after the "creation of the heaven and earth" (Gen 1:1). Changing the original Biblical order would destroy the perfect congruity between Moses' and the Savior's account of cosmogony—a price that the author of the *Apocryphon* was not willing to pay. Besides, keeping the original Biblical sequence of events does not obscure the intertextual character of the Savior's reinterpretation of Genesis. What the Savior sets out to teach the ignorant recipient of his revisionary revelation is the simultaneity of Sophia's disorderly movement of repentance and of Ialdabaoth's fabrication of the visible universe—the idea he has borrowed from Sophia's proclamation in Proverbs 8:27: "When he [God] established the heavens, I was there with him" (ἦνίκα ἠτοίμαζεν τὸν οὐρανὸν συμπαρήμην αὐτῷ).

Once again, Sophia's prophecies borrowed from Wisdom literature supplied the clue for a proper understanding of the Mosaic account of creation. The sequence of cosmological events in the first two verses of Genesis is not to be understood diachronically, as portrayed by Moses. What Sophia has revealed in Prov 8:27 is that she is herself the spirit that, in the beginning, "rushed upon the waters" (Gen 1:2b), assisting ("being there with") God in the creation of the heavens. Translated into the jargon of contemporary philosophical theories of causality, Ialdabaoth acts here as the instrumental, demiurge-like cause (τὸ δι' οὗ, 'that through which') of creation, while Sophia stands for both the preliminary (τὸ ἀφ' οὗ, τὸ ἐξ οὗ, 'that away from which' and 'that out of which', i.e. acting by impulse or impression) and auxiliary (τὸ σὺν ᾧ, αἴτιον συνεργόν) causes. Taken separately, neither Sophia nor Ialdabaoth can alone bring the universe into existence. Each one is a necessary contributory factor to the world's becoming, yet neither of them is alone entitled to take the full credit for it.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ Other writers traditionally labeled as 'Gnostic' also drew on contemporary philosophical theories of causation, as indicated by their complex classification of Biblical prophecies, on which see *supra*, pp. 237–38. In *Tri. Tra.* I 100:30–35, the divine Logos, Sophia's correlate, is presented as "using" (χρᾶσθαι) the demiurge "like a hand in order to beautify and work on that which is below." According to Tertullian's summary of 'Valentinian' doctrines, Sophia Achamoth acted as a hidden master controlling the demiurge as though pulling strings in a puppet theatre

Spatial Coordinates of Sophia's Movement: Metanoia, Its Meaning and Function

The spatial coordinates of Sophia's movement are not readily distinguishable. In the whole episode, there is no single clear reference to the place in the cosmic structure where Sophia's action took place. The local term from Genesis 1:2b, ἐπιφέρεσθαι, is interpreted by the Savior in an ethical sense, as an internal movement of repentance (μετάνοια)—and not as Moses said, rushing “over the water” (BG 45:9–10).

The three sections in which the Savior describes Sophia's response to Ialdabaoth's theft display the uniform sequence of actions. First, Sophia recognizes her deficiency, described as the partial loss of her light, and sees that the offspring she has brought forth is in fact a miscarriage, an evil (κακία). Only then she becomes aware of the dreadful fact that her male “consort (σύνζυγος) has not come in harmony (συμφωνεῖν) with her” (BG 36:20–37:1, II 9:28–29)—dreadful inasmuch as showing that her desire to “show forth an image out of herself,” her whole plan to generate the replica of her ‘enthymematic’ analysis of God into a signifying chain of predicates, was ill-conceived from the very beginning. Sophia knows how to evaluate her consort's refusal to “come in harmony with her”—whatever thought or intention God “keeps at distance” must be a fault, a wrongdoing (Tert. *Paen.* 3.2). The acknowledgement of fault and the acceptance of responsibility for it entail the internal tumult of repentance (μετάνοια)—a violent, disorderly motion accompanied with shame and “much weeping,” which weakens the soul to the point of losing audacity (τόλμα) to find the way out of this tumult. As the Savior

(*Adv. Val.* 18). Many Valentinians described the relation between Sophia and the Demiurge as that between ἐνεργεῖν (‘act in someone else’) and ποιεῖν (‘act in subordination to a superior agent’); cf. Hipp. *Ref.* 6.33.1 (καὶ ἐκείνης ἐνεργούσης αὐτὸς ᾤετο ἄφ’ ἑαυτοῦ ποιεῖν τὴν κτίσιν τοῦ κόσμου), and other passages adduced and discussed in Orbe (1955) 233–73, esp. 263–5. In addition to Platonist ‘metaphysics of prepositions’—on which see e.g. Theiler (1930) 17–34, Doerrie (1969) 217–28, Donini (1992) 99–145, and Doerrie–Baltes (1996) 4:110–79, 377–489—the ‘Gnostics’ might have found inspiration for their theory of double causation (Sophia vs. Ialdabaoth) in the Stoic classification of causes. The most likely source is Philo, who knew and freely combined both theories. For the Stoic theory of causes see Duhot (1989), Hahm (1994) 175–225, and Ioppolo (1994) 4491–545. For Philo's, ‘Gnostic’, and other early Christian theories of causation see Orbe (1955) 165–273.

explains it to John, Sophia “did not dare (τολμᾶν) to return, but continued to move to and fro” (BG 45:16–18, IV 21:13–15).

The lexical and thematic context within which Sophia’s repentance (μετάνοια) takes place in the *Apocryphon of John* is reminiscent of the use of *metanoia* in the Septuagint, in the Hellenistic Jewish pseudepigrapha, and in the New Testament writings. The association of repentance with shame and grief occurs, for example, in Paul, who connects *metanoia* with distress (λύπη): “Now I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you did so for the sake of repentance (2 Cor 7:9). The reference, later in the *Apocryphon*, to “the place where there is no repentance” (II 27:26; cf. BG 70:13–14), reserved for the souls of ignorant renegades, echoes the Biblical motif of “the place of repentance” (τόπος μετανοίας Wis 12:10; cf. Sir 4:5, Rom 12:19, Eph 4:27, Heb 12:17). The “baptism of repentance,” proclaimed by John the Baptist “for the forgiveness of sins” (Mark 1:4, Luke 3:3; cf. Matt 3:2–6, Acts 19:4), along with Peter’s Pentecost order to “repent and get baptized . . . for the forgiveness of . . . sins and “for receiving the gift of the holy spirit” (Acts 2:38), might have served as the narrative model for Sophia’s own baptism of repentance. After the invisible Spirit had heard her prayer of repentance, accompanied by that of her brethren, “he poured over her a spirit from the fullness” and “her consort came down to her” (BG 46:15–47:4; cf. II 14:1–5). Even the opposition of light and darkness—the symbolic frame of Sophia’s movement of repentance in the *Apocryphon*—seems to owe a great deal to Hellenistic Jewish literature: “For . . . repentance destroys disobedience, puts darkness to flight (φυγαδεύει τὸ σκότος), illumines (φωτίζει) the vision, provides the soul with knowledge (γνώσιν), and guides the deliberative powers (τὸ διαβούλιον) to salvation” (*T. Gad* 5:7). Finally, the whole episode dealing with Sophia’s dramatic fall into the darkness of ignorance, from her realization of wrongdoing and her change of attitude to her transformation by God, her partial ascent and her union with the heavenly “consort” (σύνζυγος) mirrors the syntagmatic development of Aseneth’s conversion to Judaism—separation, liminality, repentance and self-castigation, prayers of confession, request for acceptance, transformation by a heavenly visitor, reintegration—in the ‘haggadic’ romance *Joseph and Aseneth*.

But not every feature of Sophia’s repentance can be traced back to Biblical and pseudepigraphic sources—and particularly not the assimilation of *metanoia* with an agitated movement (ΝΕC-ΝΑ ΕC-ΝΗΥ,

ωσει). It is true that connecting repentance with an erratic movement can be traced as far back as Isaiah—“repent, you who have wandered (μετανοήσατε οἱ πεπλανημένοι) and convert in your heart” (Isa 46:8)—and as close to the *Apocryphon* as the cosmogony of the Hermetic *Poimandres*—“repent, you who have journeyed with error” (CH 1.28: μετανοήσατε οἱ συνοδεύσαντες τῇ πλάνῃ). Yet in neither does repentance stand for an agitated motion; on the contrary, both texts view it as the cancellation of the preceding erratic movement. It is also true that, in the story of Joseph and Aseneth, the heroine’s repentance includes a series of uncontrolled bodily moves;¹⁰¹ but in contrast with the *Apocryphon*’s portrayal of Sophia’s ordeal, there is no clear reference in the narrative to Aseneth’s *metanoia* as a tumult of the soul, a passion (πάθος) that forestalls the proper functioning of reason.¹⁰² Sophia’s repentance seems rather a philosophical construct, belonging to the domain of Stoic and Platonist ethics.

In its philosophical application, *metanoia* is a term unsuitable for any divine being. Changeability, in all of its aspects—physical, ethical, and noetic—is incompatible with God’s undisturbed existence and the wise man’s intellectual firmness. God is incapable of repenting (ἀμετανόητος) because he never acts out of ignorance, never commits sins, and never has to change his thoughts, let alone repent for his actions. Such a godlike existence is accessible at least to some humans—more specifically, to those endowed with mind (Stob. *Ecl.* 2.113, 5–11 Wachsmuth) and “possibly,” as Philo adds, “to a divine

¹⁰¹ *Jos. Asen.* 11.1: “And Aseneth . . . was exceedingly tired and could not control her limbs because of the want for the seven days. . . . And Aseneth clasped her hands, finger against finger, and shook her head to and fro (ἔσεισε τὴν κεφαλὴν ἀντὶ τῆς ἔνθεν καὶ ἔνθεν), and struck her breast constantly with her hands . . .

¹⁰² See, however, Aseneth’s dreamlike vision of being persecuted by “the father of the gods of the Egyptians,” represented as “the wild old lion” (*Jos. Asen.* 12.9–11): “But you, O Lord, rescue me from his hands, and from his mouth deliver me, lest he carry me off like a lion, and tear me up and throw me into the flame of fire; and fire will throw me into the big wave (εἰς τὴν καταγίδα), and the big wave will wrap me up in darkness and throw me out into the deep of the sea, and the big monster existing since eternity will swallow me; and I will be destroyed for ever.” What these tumultuous movements represent is not the soul of the repentant, which oscillates between good and evil, but the state of the soul that failed to repent and, as a result, surrendered itself to the “lion,” the symbol of fortuitous impulses characteristic of irrational emotions.

man”—for “conversion (μεταβαλεῖν) from sin to a blameless life is the property of a man of wisdom who has not been ignorant of what is for his benefit” (*Virt.* 177).

Viewed from the divine perspective, *metanoia* is thus a negative notion indicating change, both ethical (‘repentance for sin’) and noetic (‘change of mind’: τροπή γνώμης Plut. *Mar.* 10.5; γνώμης μεταβολή Philo, *Deus* 26). In fact, it is an emotion (πάθος) “depending on false assent” (Stob. *Anth.* 2.113,6 Wachsmuth: καὶ γὰρ τὴν μετάνοιαν ἔχεσθαι ψευδοῦς συγκαταθέσεως; Philo, *Aet* 38 πάθος καὶ νόσημα . . . ψυχῆς), the product of opinion (δόξα), rather than knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Just like the synonymous μεταμέλεια (Ps.-Andron. *Pass.* 2.227, 44–45 G–T), *metanoia* is a species of distress (λύπη), defined by the Stoics as the recognition of a present evil.¹⁰³ Yet this is a special kind of distress, in which we acknowledge, and grieve over, our own misdeeds, previous sins, and wrong decisions (*ibid.*).¹⁰⁴ Oftentimes, *metanoia* is accompanied with other kinds of distress—shame, crying, mourning (αἰδώς, αἰσχύνη). The acknowledgment of a wrongdoing provokes an upheaval, a fluttering motion (SVF 1.206 ποτοία) devoid of clear direction, yet capable of changing swiftly (Plut. *De virt. mor.* 7, 447A). Like other passions, *metanoia*, too, is “an opinion . . . possessing disorderly movement” (SVF 3.394 τὸ ἄτακτον κινητικόν).¹⁰⁵

Viewed from the human perspective, however, *metanoia* is a highly ranked ethical category—“a younger brother of sinlessness” (Philo, *Somn.* 1.91), “standing second to perfection” (τελειότης *Abr.* 26) and

¹⁰³ Plut. *De virt. mor.* 12, 452D; *Aem./Tim.* 2.11; *De soll. an.* 3, 961D λύπην δι’ ἀλγηδόνος . . . ἦν μετάνοιαν καλοῦμεν).

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Tertullian, *Paen.* 1.1 *passionem animi quandam esse, quae obveniat de offensa sententiae prioris.*

¹⁰⁵ For μετάνοια in relation to δόξα, see esp. *Tab. Ceb.* 11, where repentance is said to “release a man from his ills and provide him with another opinion, which leads him to true education, and also with another, which leads him to false education, as it is called”; *ibid.* 29, where opinion, δόξα, is described as inferior to knowledge, ἐπιστήμη: “For it is not allowed for opinion to move into the realm of knowledge.” For repentance in the sense of acknowledging and grieving over previous misdeeds see Philo, *LA* 3.12 ἐπὶ τῇ πάλαι τροπῇ, and *Fuga* 157 ἁμαρτημάτων μετανοίας; cf. also Plut. *De Her. mal.* 860E–F ταχὺ γὰρ μετανοῆσαι . . . αὐτοὺς ὡς οὐ ποιήσαντας ὀρθῶς. For the association of this term with other kinds of distress see *Agis et Cleom.* 53.3–4 αἰδώς καὶ μετάνοια; *Mul. virt.* 23, 259D ὄκτειρε καὶ μετενόει; *De virt. mor.* 12, 452C μετάνοιαν καὶ αἰσχύνην; *De tranq. an.* 19, 476F τὴν δὲ μετάνοιαν . . . δακνομένην σὺν αἰσχύνη; Philo, *Ios.* 87 μετανοοῦσι . . . αἰσχυνόμεθα.

to “the perfect memory of divine things” (*Virt.* 176). If the principal characteristic of the human condition is a proneness to cede to harmful emotions, or passions, then *metanoia* is the sage’s weapon (*Fuga* 157 τὸ δὲ μετανοεῖν σοφοῦ) for their eradication. Suppose that desire (ἐπιθυμία) carries the soul to wrong: it is through *metanoia* that the soul will next “recover itself again” (Plut. *De virt. mor.* 7.447A). *Metanoia* is “the healing process” (Philo, *LA* 1.106 ἴασις), “the recovery from an illness” (ἐκ νόσου ἀναλαμβάνει), aimed at “sobering out” (2.60 ἀνανήφει) and “self-rectification” (3.106 ἐπανόρθωσις; cf. Plut. *Virt. mor.* 11, 452C πρὸς τὰς ἐπανορθώσεις). Like any recovery, this one, too, may be very “slow and tarrying” (Philo, *Fuga* 159 ἐσταλμένον δὲ καὶ βραδὺν καὶ μέλλον ἢ μετάνοια). A “strong rock of safety,” *metanoia* is something we should not “quit hold of until we have been completely delivered from the tossing sea, that is, from the motion of our lapse” (*Post.* 177 ὡσπερ ἐκ κλυδῶνος ἀνανηξάμενοι λαβόμεθα μετανοίας . . . τὸ κυμαῖνον πέλαγος, τὴν φθορὰν τῆς τροπῆς, διεκδύναι). The process is not immune from relapses, so that the life marked by *metanoia* “consists of darkness and light—of darkness by the impact of passions and injustices, and of light when the light of virtue shines out, and its splendor is very bright” (*QG* 1.84). The award for perseverance is the life “outside of passions” (*Post.* 135 ἐκτὸς τῶν παθῶν), ready to convert to (ἐπιστρέφει πρὸς) the incorruptible one” and to “fellowship with god” (πρὸς θεὸν οἰκείωσις).

To conclude, *metanoia* is a concept laden with ethical ambiguity and semantic complexity:

- (i) In so far as implying changeability and stemming from the false assent, *metanoia* is a negative term, a genuine Stoic emotion (πάθος), “a disease of the soul,” and a sort of distress (λύπη), opposed to divine impassivity and the life of virtue
- (ii) At the same time, in so far as being a voluntary recognition of evil and a πάθος opposite to desire (ἐπιθυμία),¹⁰⁶ *metanoia* is the only kind of distress that reason does not “extirpate, but itself activates” (Plutarch, *Tranqu. an.* 19, 476F τὰς μὲν γὰρ ἄλλας ἀναιρεῖ λύπας ὁ λόγος· τὴν δὲ μετάνοιαν αὐτὸς ἐνεργάζεται)—a distress “tamed and domesticated by reason” (*De virt. mor.* 12, 451D τοῖς

¹⁰⁶ Plut. *Max. cum princ.* 777C–D οὐκ ὡσπερ ἐν μεθορίῳ τοῦ ἐπιθυμοῦντος καὶ τοῦ μετανοοῦντος.

- πάθεσι δεδαμασμένοις χρήται καὶ χειροήθεσιν ὁ λογισμός), a moderate and ordered emotion, and even a sort of “good emotion” (εὐπάθεια) serving as “the vehicle and stirring power of reason”¹⁰⁷
- (iii) Finally, in so far as characterized as an emotion set in order by reason, *metanoia* comes close to an ethical virtue (ἠθικὴ ἀρετή), a “proportionate mean between passions” (*De virt. mor.* 4, 433C συμμετρία παθῶν καὶ μεσότης), which helps men “recover their sight and come from the deepest darkness to behold the most radiant light” (Philo, *Virt.* 179 ἀνέβλεψαν ἐκ βαθυτάτου σκότους ἀγνοειδέστατον φῶς ἰδόντες)

Excursus: Ambiguities of Metanoia

Most of the above quoted evidence comes from Philo and Plutarch,¹⁰⁸ not only because of their extensive and diverse use of the term *metanoia*, but also for their value as the epitomizers of earlier philosophical and exegetical traditions. The term was apparently in vogue among the Stoics even before Epictetus (*Ench.* 34; *Diatr.* 2.22, 35; fr. 25), as suggested by Arius Didymus’s and Plutarch’s doxographical reports.¹⁰⁹ Initially, it seems to have been loaded with negative connotations—even its etymology indicates a

¹⁰⁷ The ‘Platonizing’ redefinition of εὐπάθεια as a moderate passion represents a serious modification of its original Stoic meaning as a healthy, rational, and thoughtful impulse (Epict. *Diss.* 2.68–9 φρονίμη ὀρμή) directed at predicating goodness to virtue and badness to vice—the modification introduced in accordance with Plato’s parts-of-the-soul theory. See, for example, Plutarch’s definition in *De virt. mor.* 9, 449B: “For a good emotion (εὐπάθεια) arises when reason does not destroy emotion but adorns it and sets it in order in temperate people (τοῦ λογισμοῦ τὸ πάθος οὐκ ἀναιροῦντος ἀλλὰ κοσμοῦντος καὶ τάττοντος ἐν τοῖς σωφρονοῦσιν); 4, 443C: “Ethics is . . . a quality of the irrational, . . . since reason does not wish to eradicate emotion completely . . . but puts upon it some limit and order (οὐ βουλομένου [τοῦ λόγου] τὸ πάθος ἐξαερεῖν παντάπασιν . . . ἀλλ’ ὄρον τινὰ καὶ τάξιν ἐπιτιθέντος) and implants the ethical virtues, which are not insensible to emotions”; cf. also 12, 451F. For *metanoia* and the other principal emotions (shame, desire, pleasure, distress, ambition) serving as vehicles to reason see 12, 452D: καθάπερ ὄρημα τοῦ λογισμοῦ καὶ ὄχημα τὸ πάθος προστιθέντας. According to Plutarch, even his Stoic opponents, when educating young people, chastise them with admonitions; what they hope to provoke by this is a kind of distress (λύπη), or repentance (μετάνοια), and a kind of fear (φόβος), or shame (αἰσχύνη), which may then lead to rectification (πρὸς τὰς ἐπανορθώσεις).

¹⁰⁸ For Philo’s ethics and his reading of the Jewish scriptures as a ‘diary’ of the soul, see *supra*, pp. 148–60; for Plutarch’s psychotherapeutic views see esp. Ingenkamp (1971; 1999, 79–94; 2000, 251–66).

¹⁰⁹ For Arius Didymus see Stob. *Anth.* 2.113, 5–11 Wachsmuth); Plutarch discusses the term in the context of his polemic with early Stoic ‘orthodoxy’ (Chrysippus); cf. *De virt. mor.* chaps. 7, 9, and 12. A thorough discussion about Plutarch’s sources is available in Babut (1969) 44–54 and Becchi (1990) 10 ff.

swift change of mind, fluttering, and cognitive instability, which are precisely the opposites of the Stoic ideal of systematic consistency and secure knowledge. Yet this sense of fluctuation and swiftness of change, which is inherent in *metanoia*, sets it at the same time apart from other bad emotions. As Chrysippus put it, *metanoia* denotes the change in both directions, to aversion and “shameful conduct” as well as to virtuous life. With the rise of the Platonizing trend within Stoicism in the mid-second century B.C., followed by a gradual abandonment of Chrysippus’s ethical monism, *metanoia* underwent further important modifications. In one of his earlier ethical treatises *On Tranquility of Soul*, Plutarch gives an interesting definition of *metanoia*, clearly intended to bridge the gap between the Stoic intellectualist view of emotions and the Platonist parts-of-the-soul doctrine (*Tranqu. an.* 19, 476E–F):

We can make this reply to Menander: True, “No man alive may say, ‘I shall not suffer this’” (Men. frag. 355 Kock), yet while still alive one can say, “I will not do this: I will not lie nor play the villain nor defraud nor scheme.” For this, lying as it were within our power, is not a small but a great help toward tranquility of soul (πρὸς εὐθυμίαν)—just as, on the contrary again, “My conscience, since I know I have committed a dreadful deed” (Eur. Or. 396), like an ulcer in the flesh, leaves behind in the soul regret which ever continues to wound and prick it (ἢ σύνεσις . . . τὴν μεταμέλειαν αἰμάσσουσαν αἰεὶ καὶ νύσσουσαν έναπολείπει). For the other kinds of distress reason does away with (τὰς μὲν γὰρ ἄλλας ἀναίρει λύπας ὁ λόγος), but repentance it exerts itself, when the soul feels stung with shame and self-chastised (τὴν δὲ μετάνοιαν αὐτὸς ἐνεργάζεται δακνομένης σὺν αἰσχύνῃ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ κολαζομένης ὑφ’ αὐτῆς).

First, Plutarch takes *metanoia* as synonymous with *μεταμέλεια*, which acquired a clear ethical connotation as early as Democritus (frag. 43 Luria). Second, he defines *metanoia* as a special kind of distress (λύπη) which, unlike all other kinds, is not extirpated by reason, but, on the contrary, arises by the agency of the same reason. Since earlier in his work Plutarch promoted the parts-of-the-soul theory, assigning autonomy to the passionate and irrational part (465B) and proclaiming it the ultimate source of all emotions, his assertion that *metanoia*, albeit a species of one of the cardinal emotions (λύπη, distress), originates in reason, comes as a surprise. The apparent contradiction may result from Plutarch’s concession to the Stoicizing view of *metanoia* as the product of mind, the “commanding faculty” of the soul (ἡγεμονικόν). In his later work, *On Moral Virtue* (19, 449B–D, 452D) Plutarch will propose a genuinely Platonist solution to the problem of the ethical status of *metanoia*—a species of distress produced by the soul’s irrational part, but set in order by reason.

Another important feature in Plutarch’s passage is the association, often reiterated in his vast corpus, of *metanoia* with the soul’s pricking of conscience (δηγμός).¹¹⁰ This term has an interesting prehistory. In Philo’s revi-

¹¹⁰ Cf. *De aud.* 16, 47A; *De ad. et am.* 12, 56A ὁ μὲν ἐλέγχω καὶ ψόγω δηγμὸν

sion (*QG* 2.57) of the original Stoic list of ‘good emotions’ (εὐπάθειαι), it figures, along with compunction (κατάνυξις),¹¹¹ as the rational equivalent of grief (λύπη). Philo’s non-orthodox treatment of the Stoic good emotions—for example, his occasional claim that hope, ἐλπίς, and not volition or willing, βούλησις, is a positive analogue to desire, ἐπιθυμία¹¹²—has often been credited to his drawing on the hypothetical ethical doxographies.¹¹³ Yet such a radical move as adding to the Stoic list of *eupatheiai* a positive emotion towards present evils—radical in so far as the sage cannot have any vice present to himself, and so can experience neither distress nor biting and compunction—seems to have more to do with Philo’s exegetical program of turning the Biblical narrative into a manual for spiritual therapy. Following this program, he had to account for many morally ambiguous statements in the Law and Prophets, and to exculpate Biblical heroes, the exemplars of virtue, for their occasional erratic behavior. For example, if reptiles symbolize poisonous passions, why does God enjoin them as food (Gen 9:3)? Philo’s answer in *QG* 2.57 is that negative passions have their positive counterpart in good emotions (tame reptiles). Or why did Abraham and Sarah fall on their face and so disrespectfully laugh at God’s promise of a son? Philo replies that “virtue is full of exceeding joy at her pregnancy” (*LA* 3.217), and so laughter is a presentiment (*propatheia*) of goods to come.

But Philo is not consistent in assigning a positive ethical meaning to δῆγμος and cognate expressions (δάκνειν, δῆγμα). In certain situations, the word may also denote a psychosomatic disorder that originates from distress

ἐμποῖων καὶ μετάνοιαν; *De vit. pud.* 18–19, 536C–D τὰ σημεῖα τοῦ δηγμοῦ καὶ μεταμελείας . . . τῷ μετανοοῦντι καὶ δακνομένῳ; *Praec. ger. reip.* 14, 810C δηγμὸν ἐμποῖων καὶ μετάνοιαν; *Non posse* 9, 1092E, where “animation” and “joy” (εὐφροσύνας καὶ χαράς), two genuinely good emotions (*eupatheiai*), are said to be pure of any taint of its opposite, having no trace of pricking and repentance (ἄς δὲ ἄξιον καὶ δίκαιον εὐφροσύνας καὶ χαράς νομίζεσθαι· καθαροὶ μὲν εἰσι τοῦ ἐναντίου καὶ σφυγμὸν οὐδένα κεκραμένον οὐδὲ δηγμὸν οὐδὲ μετάνοιαν ἔχουσιν).

¹¹¹ According to Harl (1986) 3–21, ancient Biblical commentators considered the term an equivalent of “regret” and “repentance.”

¹¹² As recently pointed out by Graver (1999) 314–15, Philo claims in *QG* 1.79 that hope is “a *propatheia* of joy,” and not the positive counterpart (*eupatheia*) of wrongful desire. To support this identification, Graver adduces the passage from *Det* 138–39, yet she forgets to quote *Det.* 120 and 140, *Mut.* 163, *Post.* 26, *Abr.* 14, all of which seem to consider hope as a ‘good emotion’ directed at prospective goods—the role assigned to volition and willing in Stoic ‘orthodoxy’; cf., e.g., *Det.* 120: “The expectation of some future thing begets fear, the acquaintance with what is present begets distress. But the man that pursues virtue is sure to be in analogous states of good emotions (ἐν εὐπαθείαις ἀναλογούσαις); he has either gained possession of the good or is on the way to win it; then to have it produces joy (χαράν), fairest of possessions; to expect that you will reach it produces the fodder of virtue-loving souls, hope (τὴν τροφὴν φιλαρέτων ψυχῶν ἐλπίδα), on account of which we give up hesitation and essay with unbidden readiness all noble deeds.”

¹¹³ See Giusta (1967) 2:281 ff., who argues unsuccessfully for an ethical doxographical handbook penned by Aurius Didymus.

and fear and deals almost a physical blow to the body, “whenever throbbing passion rages in the soul” (*Det.* 110). Elsewhere, again, δάκνειν is described as the activity of “reason and temperance” (ὁ δὲ λόγος σωφροσύνης) directed at “biting and wounding and destroying passion” (LA 2.99)—clearly, neither an involuntary reaction to non-voluntary stimuli (Sen. *Ira* 2.3.2 *corporis pulsus, animi ictus*) nor an instance of pre-emotion (*propathēia*), defined as an impulse refusing to turn into assent (2.3.4; Plut. *Adv. Col.* 26, 1121F). The ethical complexity of δηγμός is thus not unsimilar to that of *metanoia*—the term designates both an outward manifestation of passion (*pathos*) and its exact opposite, just as *metanoia* is both a sort of distress and an instance of positive emotion (*eupatheia*). The way to interpret this seemingly inconsistent treatment of the two terms is to posit the ongoing Platonizing revalorization of the Stoic ethical concepts—both *metanoia* and δηγμός are the products of the soul’s irrational part that reason “does not destroy . . . but composes and sets in order in the souls of temperate people” (Plut. *De virt. mor.* 9, 449B). Such a view, shared by both Philo and Plutarch, presupposes Plato’s parts-of-the-soul theory in which reason and passion, assigned to the opposite parts of the soul, struggle for domination. As Plutarch says in his polemic against orthodox Stoicism (449B–C),

For if emotion (πάθος) and judgment (κρίσις) were one, love and hate would follow upon our judgment of what we ought to love and hate; but as it is, the contrary happens: with some judgements the emotion joins forces, others it disregards. Therefore even these very men [the Stoics] affirm, since the evidence forces them to do so, that not every judgment is an emotion, but that which sets in motion a violent and excessive impulse, thereby admitting that in us the faculty of judgment and the faculty of experiencing emotion are different, in the sense that the former is that which sets in motion and the latter that which is moved.

For the orthodox Stoics, good emotion (*eupatheia*) and passion (*pathos*) are mutually exclusive concepts. Both are impulses that originate in our commanding faculty, the former being a rational (φρόνιμος ὁρμή) and the latter an excessive impulse (ὁρμή πλεονάζουσα). Since rationality is their common place of origin, the Stoics think that they cannot exist simultaneously in it. Rather, they ensue upon one another, as “the single reason turns in both directions” (ἀλλ’ ἐνὸς λόγου τροπὴν ἐπ’ ἀμφοτέρω), in the process “we do not notice on account of the sharpness and swiftness of the change” (λανθάνουσαν ἡμᾶς ὀξύτητι καὶ τάχει μεταβολῆς 7, 446F–447A). For Philo, on the other hand, δηγμός is a passion, a “poisonous” and “unclean reptile” from Gen 9:3 which, whenever controlled by reason, may turn into a good emotion—still a reptile, true, but a “tame” and “clean” one (*QG* 2.57). It is not that, as orthodox Stoicism would claim, εὐπάθεια arises as a positive affective response to good or wrong only after our reason destroys a pre-existent passion. On the contrary, good emotions come into being whenever the passionate part of the human soul obeys the rule of reason. Passions cannot be fully destroyed simply because they are an inextricable part of

human existence, which virtuous men can only set in order, or tame, but never eradicate. Every passion is thus potentially a good emotion, and every good emotion is nothing but a passion tamed by reason. This is a difference in degree, which does not require a clearcut lexical distinction—hence the semantic ambiguity of both *metanoia* and δῆγμός in the works of Philo and Plutarch.

The complexity of *metanoia* and its seemingly contradictory aspects—negative/noetic and positive/ethical—could not pass unnoticed by such authoritative scholars of the past as Eduard Norden and Werner Jaeger.¹¹⁴ The former blamed its inherent ambiguity on an uneasy fusion of conflicting cultural traditions (Hellenistic philosophy *vs.* Jewish ‘Vorstellungskreisen’), the latter on lively debates in Hellenistic philosophical schools (Stoics *vs.* Neopythagoreans). Yet Norden’s and Jaeger’s discussions are often schematic, and occasionally treat the available evidence in a rather superficial manner.

Norden believed that the positive (ethical) meaning of *metanoia* had developed in Judaism and for that reason doubted the authenticity of a fragment attributed to Democritus (B43 D–K, frag. 43 Luria), where μεταμέλεια, the synonym of *metanoia*, carries salutary and salvational connotations—“Remorse for shameful deeds is salvation in life.” In spite of Norden’s reservations, the notions of sin and repentance seem to go as far back as the fifth century B.C. Athenian sophist Antiphon (B59 D–K).¹¹⁵ Besides, it is hard to believe that the Greek translators of Biblical books would have chosen a thoroughly negative concept to render the Hebrew *niham*, ‘have pity’ or ‘feel remorse’. Some sort of positive meaning must have been granted to *metanoia* on the basis of what we know about the linguistic habits of the Septuagint translators. They used the Greek idiom of their own time and milieu when translating the Hebrew original, without coining new terms or altering the meaning of a Greek word in order to adjust it to the semantics of a Hebrew correlate.¹¹⁶

It is even harder to imagine that Callimachus, when describing the statue of the Delphian Apollo holding the graces in his right hand and bow and

¹¹⁴ See Norden (1913) 135 ff. and the recension thereof by Jaeger (1913) 569–610, reprinted in Jaeger (1960) 1:115–61. On the concept of *metanoia* in Judaism, Christianity, and Hellenistic philosophy, see also Latte (1920–1921) 254–98; Braun (1953) 243–58, reprinted in Braun (1962) 70–85; Hadot (1953) 31–36; Rudolph (1961) 2:236–254; Karpp (1969); Lührmann (1975) 103–16; Parente (1987) 7–25; Nelson Bailey (1991) 135–41; Winston (1995) 29–40; Alexandre (1998) 17–46; Aslanoff (1998) 50–63; Dubois (1998) 67–73; Stroumsa (1998) 74–84; Steel (1998) 161–75; and, last but not least, Foucault (2001) 197–219.

¹¹⁵ As suggested by Luria (1970) 151, 591. See also Jaeger (1913) 590, who takes the polemic of the early Stoics against *metanoia* as an argument for “the widespread presence of a type of ethics where [the term] had high value.”

¹¹⁶ On this issue, see the remarks by Marguerite Harl in Dorival–Harl–Munnich (1988), esp. 243–44, about the lexical correspondences between the Septuagint and the contemporary Greek papyri. Cf. also the verdict by Lee (1983) 146, that “the bulk of the Pentateuch vocabulary [in the Septuagint version] is the same as that of contemporary Greek.”

arrow in his left “because he is slower to chastize if man repents” (frag. 114.8–17 Pfeiffer), was under the influence of ‘Oriental’ religious traditions, or that the meaning he assigned to μετανοεῖν was not ethically positive.¹¹⁷

Contrary to Norden’s claim, Jewish authors like Philo, the ‘Pythagoreans’ of the *Tabula Cebetis*, the ‘Jewish’ author of the Hermetic *Poimandres*, or early Christians like Tertullian did not always attribute a positive religious value to the term. Nor did the Stoics, considered by Norden and Jaeger as the main proponents of the negative/noetic value of *metanoia*, view this as an exclusively negative concept, as shown in the preceding discussion. For the Stoics, *metanoia* is indeed a sort of passion, yet this particular *pathos* seems to have had a positive, ‘healing’ value in Stoic epistemology and ethics, perhaps even as early as Chrysippus (Plut. *De virt. mor.* 7, 446E–447C). It is true that the philosopher “never repents . . . or changes his opinion” (Cic. *Mur.* 61), but the change of mind from opinion and vice to virtue and knowledge is clearly the sign of moral progress.

The polysemy of *metanoia* has clearly something to do with intercultural contacts, too, yet it is misleading to explain it as an abstract, almost Hegelian synthesis of mutually exclusive conceptions. *Metanoia* had been an ambiguous term from the beginning, carrying both ethical and noetic connotations, and heading both *in bonam atque malam partem*. The syncretistic culture of Hellenism had just exploited, and further developed, these intrinsic ambiguities. The pagan component, and particularly Hellenistic philosophy, appears to have been a major factor in these developments; yet the Hellenized Jews, like the Septuagint translators, Aristoboulos, or Philo—that is, the readers and interpreters of the Biblical texts—appear to have been particularly sensitive to these ambiguities and interested in their further refinement.

The author of the *Apocryphon of John* was clearly aware of all these complexities when applying the term *metanoia* to the Biblical ἐπιφέρεισθαι (Gen 1:2b). What he needed was a complex concept conveying ethical, noetic, and even physical connotations—so that the spirit’s “rushing over the water” might be simultaneously interpreted as the cosmogonic movement (physical dimension), as emotional conflict (ethical dimension), and as the lack of consistent direction in thinking (noetic dimension).

Sophia’s movement of repentance contains much of the above discussed ambiguity. Her *metanoia* is a passion, a kind of distress (λύπη), and as such accompanied with shame (ἠπίε) and tears (ρῖμῆ). Having surrendered herself to such a strong irrational emotion, Sophia grows weak, lacking coherence (ἄτονος), stability, and consistent direction.

¹¹⁷ See Pfeiffer (1960) 69–71, and particularly his discussion about the inscription from the Delphic temple at Miletoupolis (*SIG³ 1268.II.8*), “not to be dated much later than 300 B.C.,” which contains the phrase μετανοεῖ ἁμαρτών, “repent upon doing wrong;” and which, still according to Pfeiffer, removes “any doubt about the pre-Christian existence of this idea [i.e., of *metanoia* as repentance].”

She flutters, she moves in a disorderly way, shaken and disturbed in her distress. Yet this distress, paradoxically, is at the same time the signal of recovery. It indicates Sophia's acceptance of responsibility for evil, her renunciation of a sinful desire (ΟΧΩΦΕ, ΣΑΖΗΕ) to travail without God's 'midwifery', and her determination to abandon all erroneous suppositions about God, conceived by her 'abortive' discursive reasoning (ΜΕΕΥΕ, ΕΝΘΥΜΗΣΙΣ). Chrysippus's model (Plutarch, *De virt. mor.* 7, 447A) seems thus easily applicable to Sophia's situation. Just as she has first been "moved by pleasure to wrong," so now, "while moved," she "recovers herself again." The recovery is tarrying and relapsing, yet rewarding. Although she "has not dared (τολμᾶν) to return" (BG 45:16–17, IV 21:13–14), Sophia will eventually, once her invisible parent gives his approval, convert ("return") and have her lack (ΨΤΑ) rectified.

The Savior's interpretation of Genesis 1:2b appears thus as primarily psychological. Sophia's movement of repentance signifies the soul's 'fluttering', a passion stirred by the perception (ΝΑΥ) and acknowledgement (ΝΗΕ, ΕΙΜΕ) of a wrongdoing. Shame, crying, forgetfulness, audacity, all of them psychological concepts, only strengthen the initial impression that Sophia's movement of repentance represents an inner change rather than locomotion. Even such a notorious cosmogonic metaphor as darkness, modified by the explanatory genitive ("of unacquaintance"), seems deprived of its usual semantic association with matter, indicating Sophia's inner state and not an external physical medium for movement. The same appears to hold true for the reflexive verb ΚΤΟΞ, 'return', to which Hellenistic philosophers and religious specialists frequently applied the ethical meaning of turning to oneself or 'converting' (ἐπιστρέφεισθαι, ἐπιστροφή).¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Hadot (1953) 31–36 and Foucault (2001) 197–219 reexamined the concepts of repentance and conversion in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, problematizing the standard view proposed by Nock (1933). For Hadot, the idea of conversion manifests itself in Western thought in two ways. One is the Platonic model of *epistrophê*, the soul's return to its divine source following its "turning away from this changing world" (Plato, *Rep.* 7.518c–d)—the spiritual move whose triggering cause is recollection (ἀνάμνησις). The other model of conversion, characteristic for Christianity, is *metanoia*, with its radical requirement of total self-renunciation and the death of an old 'self' as a prerequisite for "being born anew" (John 3:3). Foucault appropriates this dichotomy in his investigation of ancient "technologies of the self," but argues that Hadot's model is too static. Plato's theory of conversion, built on the fundamental ontological opposition between phenomenal reality

Yet spatial allusions are quite distinguishable in this episode. In the final scene, Sophia is “brought not to the aeon of her own, but above her son, so as to dwell in the ninth (heaven) until she rectifies her lack” (II 14:9–13; BE 47:8–13). Instead of returning to her aeon, she found her temporary place in the region above Ialdabaoth’s realm—in the manner of Plato’s “immortal souls” which “come at the top, take their stand at the outer surface of the heaven, and gaze on the things outside the heavens” (*Phaedr.* 247b–c; cf. *Tim.* 34b4, 36d9–e1, 36e3). The following implications can be deduced from this passage:

- (i) Before her ascent took place, Sophia performed her agitated movement in the lower realm, outside of the spiritual Pleroma—that is, in the place where Ialdabaoth, her imperfect offspring, upon “turning away from the place where he had been born, . . . fabricated for himself a [fiery] aeon” (BG 38:17–39:4; cf. II 10:22–25)
- (ii) In order to ascend to the ninth heaven—and “not to her own original aeon” (BG 46:8; II 14:9–10)—Sophia must have fallen down from her aeon within the Pleroma. Thus, albeit suppressed, the motif of the descent of Sophia into matter remains present in the *Apocryphon*’s version of the ‘Gnostic’ myth. Sophia’s ascent

and the world of forms, persisted in Platonist and Pythagorean circles. Yet soon after the emergence of the Hellenistic schools of philosophy, a new theory of conversion began to take shape. Whereas Plato and his followers insisted on a split which cleaves the ‘self’ into two opposite parts, *viz.* reason and passion, this new theory postulated a unitary ‘self’ lacking consistent direction and caught in a vicious circle of opening oneself up to indifferent contingencies of life and retreating into oneself, or ‘converting’, for the sake of ongoing self-examination. For the Platonists, conversion means turning one’s inner eyes away from this world towards transcendence; for the Stoics, Cynics, and Epicureans, conversion signifies a change of perspective within the unitary ‘self’ and the establishment of a firm rational control over one’s actions and feelings. As Clement of Alexandria explains, “To find one’s own soul is to know oneself. For the Stoics, this conversion (μεταστροφήν) to divine things occurs by change (ἐκ μεταβολῆς), when the soul changes into wisdom (μεταβαλοῦσης τῆς ψυχῆς εἰς σοφίαν); and for Plato, when the soul turns about and converts (περιαγωγὴν λαβοῦσης καὶ μεταστροφήν) from a day that is like night to what is better” (*Strom.* 4.6.27, 3–28, 1 Staehlin). Regarding *metanoia*, Foucault claims that it did not have any shade of positive meaning before late antiquity (*e.g.*, Hierocles, *Carm. Aur.* 14.10, p. 66 Koehler), and he adduces in support of this claim Thucydides, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius (*Med.* 8.2 “On the occasion of each act, ask yourself, ‘How is this related to me? Shall I repent of it?’”). But Hierocles’ positive view of *metanoia* as “the beginning of philosophy” appears as old as Philo and Plutarch, on which see *supra*, pp. 249–56.

would not be possible had her descent not happened in the first place.

The surprising finale of Sophia's repentance, her dramatic ascent to the ninth heaven, provides thus the whole episode with an additional, cosmological, meaning. Sophia's agitated movement is not only a *πάθος*, the fluttering of the soul, but also a local motion. "The darkness of ignorance" is not only a metaphor expressing Sophia's state of mind, but also the representation of an external medium in which her movement takes place. This medium is the corporeal substrate, or matter (*ύλη*), as explicitly stated in a learned gloss preserved in the longer redaction: "matter, which is the ignorance of darkness" (II 21:7–8 ΤΖΥΛΗ ΕΤΕ-ΤΑΙ ΤΕ ΤΗΨΤ-ΔΤ-ΣΟΟΥΗ Ψ-ΠΚΑΚΕ). Finally, Sophia's "not daring to return" does not only mean that she had no audacity to turn away from her unstable passions, but also that she did not dare to do what will be eventually effected through the intervention of her consort—to ascend, or to "return" to the place where she belongs.¹¹⁹ Sophia's return does not only signify an inner, moral conversion (*ἐπιστροφή*), but it also refers to an upward motion—exactly what Sophia, while "moving to and fro," was lacking.

To demonstrate the link between conversion (*ἐπιστροφή*) and the "upward" spatial movement, it suffices to adduce Irenaeus's summary of the 'Valentinian' version of Sophia's fall—her wrongful desire to understand the incomprehensible, her ensuing repentance, her daring yet unsuccessful attempt at departing from the rotary motion of her blind drives, and, finally, her conversion (*Adv. haer.* 1.2.3):

Upon undertaking an impossible and unattainable deed, she [Sophia] gave birth to a formless substance (*οὐσίαν ἄμορφον*), of such a nature as a female could bring forth. When she recognized (*κατανοήσασαν*) it, she was filled first with grief (*λυπηθῆναι*) because of the imperfection (*τὸ ἀτελές*) of her creation, and then was afraid (*φοβηθῆναι*) lest her very being should end. Next she became distraught and perplexed (*ἐκστήναι καὶ ἀπορήσαι*) as she sought the cause of what happened and how she might conceal it. While submerged in these passions, she converted (*λαβεῖν ἐπιστροφήν*) and tried to *run up* (*ἀναδραμεῖν*) to the father.¹²⁰ She had audacity for some time (*μέχρι τινὸς τολμήσασαν*), but

¹¹⁹ Sophia's incapacity to move upwards on her own is signaled by the passive "she was brought up" (BG 47:8 ΠΤ-ΔΥ-ΨΤ-Σ ΕΖΡΑΪ; II 14:9–10 ΔΥ-ΕΠΗΕ ΨΗΟ-Σ ΕΖΡΑΪ).

¹²⁰ For the meaning of *ἀναδραμεῖν ἐπί* see a thorough analysis in Mansfeld (1992) 14–18.

then grew exhausted (ἐξασθενῆσαι) and entreated (ικέτιν . . . γενέσθαι) the father. And the other aeons, especially Mind, made supplication along with her (συνδεηθῆναι αὐτῇ). Hence, they say, the substance of matter took its beginning: from ignorance and grief, fear and perplexity.

Lexical and thematic similarities with the Sophia episode in the *Apocryphon of John* are striking. In both narratives, Sophia first gave birth to a formless product (οὐσίαν ἄμορφον; “an imperfect product . . . without form when compared to the image of his mother, being a different form” II 10:3–7; cf. BG 37:13–18). Then, she realized that what she had done was a misfit (κατανοήσασαν; εἰμῆ BG 45:1–2; ἦμῆ II 13:14) and tried to hide it (ἀποκρύψει τὸ γεγονός; “she cast it away of her . . . harnessed it to a luminous cloud” BG 38:1–10; II 10:11–18). As soon as she acknowledged her wrongdoing, the ‘Valentinian’ Sophia succumbed to passions (λυπηθῆναι, φοβηθῆναι, ἐκστήναι, ἀπορήσαι, ἐγκαταγενομένην . . . τοῖς πάθεσι), just as her counterpart in the *Apocryphon of John* “repented,” “began to be ashamed,” and “wept with much weeping.” Unable to recover her former perfection, she converted, that is, attempted to *run up* to her Father, and dared for a while (ἐπὶ τὸν Πατέρα ἀναδραμεῖν πειραθῆναι καὶ μέχρι τινὸς τολμήσασαν; “she did not dare to return” IV 21:13–15) before turning to prayer (ικέτιν τοῦ Πατρὸς; “the prayer of her repentance” BG 46:16; II 14:2) and having other aeons pray with her for mercy (συνδεηθῆναι δὲ αὐτῇ καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς ἀδῶνας; “and the brethren entreated on her behalf” BG 46:17–18; II 14:1–2).

The manner in which the ‘Valentinians’ described Sophia’s conversion (ἐπιστροφή) is particularly interesting for the present purpose. Like repentance (*metanoia*) in the *Apocryphon of John*, Sophia’s conversion is associated here with audacity (τολμήσασαν) and upward movement (ἀναδραμεῖν). It is a bold attempt on the part of the exemplary ‘fallen soul’ to turn away from the lower realm, prompted by the same impulse to cross over imposed boundaries (τόλμα) that has brought her down in the first place. But whereas in the ‘Valentinian’ version of the myth conversion was attempted, yet turned out to be abortive, in the *Apocryphon* it did not even take place. Instead of running up, Sophia remained in the lower realm and, “not daring to return,” continued to “flutter” in a dark and disorderly substrate. Repent she did (μετανοεῖν), yet she never found the audacity to “return” (ἐπιστρέφεισθαι) on her own.

The discovery of spatial allusions in what at first appeared to be the story of Sophia’s interior struggle and personal distress reveals

anew an important characteristic of the 'Gnostic' myth—its ability to operate simultaneously at different levels, individual and universal, ethical and noetic, psychological and cosmological. The 'Valentinians' of Irenaeus, for example, traced the origin of matter down to Sophia's passions (*Adv. haer.* 1.2.3). Plotinus, in his turn, criticized his Gnostic opponents for ascribing to the world soul the same passions as those affecting individual souls (*Enn.* II 9.6). In a similar vein, Sophia's *metanoia* in the *Apocryphon* implies more than just the internal tumult of a repentant soul. Sophia is the actor in a cosmogony, and every act of hers, including her agitated movement, carries *eo ipso* a cosmic significance.

It is by no means easy to discern the cosmological repercussions of Sophia's miscarriage, her subsequent repentance, and her partial rescue at the end of the episode. It looks as though the author of the *Apocryphon of John* decided, once again, to disentangle his fallen heroine from any direct involvement in the organization of phenomenal reality—something he had already done at the earlier stage when inserting the motif of Ialdabaoth's 'theft' into the narrative.¹²¹ Here, as it seems, he suppressed the Platonizing, cosmological aspect of Sophia's fault—one in which the agitated motion of repentance resulted from her fall into the flowing tide of matter¹²²—and intro-

¹²¹ Cf. *supra*, pp. 171–78.

¹²² To uncover the cosmological significance of Sophia's actions, so elusive in the extant versions of the *Apocryphon of John*, it seems best to turn to contemporary Platonist interpretations of the *Timaeus*, and especially to Plutarch's 'literalist' take on Plato's cosmogony in his treatise *On the Generation of the Soul in the Timaeus*. This essay is in fact a thorough discussion of *Timaeus* 35a1–36b5, in which Plato described the composition and structure of the world soul. The question in dispute (ζήτημα) is how to elucidate many semantic and syntactical obscurities in Plato's passage. Plutarch employs here his favorite dialectical method of conducting philosophical discussion. He adduces two extreme interpretations, Xenocrates' and Cranor's, and then proposes a compromise solution, one whose standard (κάνων) is plausibility (τὸ πιθανόν), or conformity with Plato's physical and theological axioms (*De an. procr.* 3, 1013B). Plutarch's argument runs as follows: (i) God is good and cannot cause evil. (ii) Evil in the world must therefore originate from some other independent principle. (iii) This independent source of evil cannot be matter, which is "unqualified and void of all causality" (6, 1015A). (iv) A third principle besides these must be posited, which is recalcitrant to God (*ibid.*). (v) This principle manifests itself as a "disorderly and irrational motion that moves matter" (7, 1015E). (vi) Inasmuch as soul is the ultimate cause and principle of motion, the third principle must be the soul devoid of rationality and order (*ibid.*) (vii) God, accordingly, did not create the world out of nothing; he produced the visible universe by arranging the pre-existing chaos—the amorphous corporeal matter set in motion by the precosmic soul

duced instead the intellectualist, Stoicizing account of *metanoia* as Sophia's state of mind stirred by the rational acknowledgment of her erroneous, 'abortive' suppositions.

(7–9, 1015C–1017B). (viii) God was father and craftsman not of body and soul in the absolute sense: in the case of body, he separated four elements out of the primordial mass; in the case of soul, he simply regulated its irrational impulses, as well as its imaginative and opinionative potencies (ibid. 9, 1017A τινὰ τῆς φανταστικῆς καὶ δοξαστικῆς ἀλόγου δὲ καὶ ἀτάκτου φορέας καὶ ὁμῆς δύναμιν αὐτοκίνητον καὶ ἀεικίνητον). (ix) Plato therefore distinguished between two world-stages in the *Timaeus*: the precosmic stage, “before heaven came to be” (52d2–4) and the ordered universe (*Tim.* 50c7–d1). (x) The “simple” precosmic soul (ἀπλῶς ψυχή) acts as a mediator between Plato's motionless forms and unqualified matter. It “disperses here [i.e. in unqualified matter] the images from that [intelligible] world yonder” (24, 1024C), by means of which it transforms matter from primary and unqualified into perceptible and corporeal (3, 1013C), and then moves these corporeal images of eternal forms in a disorderly fashion. (xi) The reason why the simple precosmic soul cannot produce the ordered world lies in the nature of its relation to the intelligible world. The simple soul's encounters with the “better nature” happen exclusively “by chance” because its intellectual faculty (τὸ νοερόν) is “immobile and impassive” (ἀκίνητον καὶ ἀπαθές), and therefore only capable of transmitting ideas but not of attaining the intelligible realm through an active intellectual motion (τῆς νοητικῆς κινήσεως). The only motion proper to this soul is that of sense perception, by which “it moves toward what is perceptible without” (23, 1024A–C). (xii) In order that this soul may activate its intellectual faculty, an intervention from ‘above’ must take place—that is, the “superior principle” must provide it with intellect (27, 1026E τοῦ δὲ νοῦ μετέσχεν ἀπὸ τῆς κρείττονος ἀρχῆς ἐγγενομένου) which, “while abiding and immobile all by itself, upon having got into the soul and taken control makes her turn toward him (ἐπιστρέφει εἰς ἑαυτόν)” (24, 1024C–D). (xiii) Once the soul is converted to its ‘male’ consort, she become the rational world soul, “accomplishing the circular motion around that which always remains fixed, a motion that is most closely in contact with real being” (ibid.). Plutarch applies a very similar model to the Egyptian myth in his tract *On Isis and Osiris*. Here, too, he distinguishes between the precosmic stage and the ordered universe, with Osiris representing the stable element (intellect), and with Isis and her evil brother Typhon typifying two faculties of the precosmic soul: intellectual, still immobile and impassive, and irrational, which causes disorder in the material substrate. From the very beginning, when “gods were still in the womb of Rhea,” Isis was in love with Osiris and so, “even before they were born,” gave birth to Horus the Elder, “only an image and apparition (εἶδωλόν τι καὶ . . . φάντασμα) of the world to come” (*De Is. et Os.* 54, 373A–C). The ordered universe will come only after Isis becomes “transformed by reason (ὑπὸ τοῦ λόγου τρεπομένη) and receives all corporeal and spiritual forms” (53, 372E). Affinities with the Sophia episode in *Ap. John* are rather obvious: Sophia stands for the intellectual faculty of the precosmic soul, eventually transformed by her male consort (σύνζυγος), or intellect, into the rational world soul, and then “restored to the ninth heaven”; Ialdabaoth, in his turn, represents the irrational soul, “the mindless cause disturbing matter” (*De an. procr.* 7, 1015E), capable of producing only the chaos of deformed *simulacra* without any inner resemblance to their distant model (φαντάσματα). Still, there is one important difference between Plutarch's cosmological model and that of *Ap. John*. Plutarch is an orthodox ‘Platonist’ who distinguishes between ideas, copies, and *simulacra*—once the divine reason “gets into the

What is highlighted in this psychological interpretation is the didactic aspect of Sophia's repentance (*metanoia*)—its therapeutic value for every 'fallen' human soul and, along with it, its soteriological dimension. The struggle of Sophia is, in fact, the story of everyone's inner life, the struggle of everyone's reason that "desires as well as repents, feels both anger and fear, is moved by pleasure to wrong and, while moved, recovers itself again" (Plut. *De vit. mor.* 7, 447A). While repenting, Sophia turns away from her wrongful desire and from Ialdabaoth, the miscarried product of her false reasoning. She struggles for her previous life of eternal contemplation; for the world of light she had known before diverting from God and generating, as a result of her diversion, the darkness of ignorance (matter); for the paradigmatic world of stable forms ("what is"), which had existed before the phenomenal world came into existence ("what has come to be"). The message that human recipients of the Savior's revelatory account are supposed to get from the ordeal of their "sibling" Sophia (Prov 7:4) is that matter, as well as the world created out of it, is nothing else than the product of false reasoning, of intellectual failure, and therefore nothing else than a mere illusion, an appearance (φαντασία) without substance, the darkness of unacquaintance; and also that, insofar as being an illusion, matter and the material world may be annihilated by intellectual effort—by distancing oneself from this appearance, and by departing from excessive impulses and false thinking that created this appearance in the first place. *Metanoia* is, in the end, the healing process (ἴασις) that not only brings recovery to individual souls, but will also, eventually, bring to naught the material world, the greatest of all illusions.

"What Will Come to Pass"—Diakrisis, or Final Separation

In the remaining part of his revelation, the Savior develops a revisionistic reading of the Genesis version of early history (Gen 2–7), from the events leading to the expulsion from paradise to Noah,

disorderly soul and makes her turn toward him," the visible world will acquire its rational design and resemble as closely as possible to the realm of pure forms. This transformation of false *simulacra* into faithful copies of the ideal model will never occur in *Ap. John*, in spite of Sophia's eventual union with her long-desired consort and in spite of her departure from the realm of shadowy appearances. For Plutarch's literalist interpretation of the *Timaeus* and his cosmological theory see esp. Cherniss (1976), Baltes (2000) 245–70, and Ferrari-Baldi (2002).

Nephilim, and the great flood. The approach to the Mosaic account is rather selective, focusing on the situations where the superior realm is brought into contact with the chosen representatives of the human race by the agency of Sophia and her assistants. The concept of Sophia's providential guidance of history is borrowed from Wisdom literature, most notably from the Hellenistic *Wisdom of Solomon* (9:13–10.14), which describes Dame Wisdom's election of seven righteous men, one for each generation, as vehicles of her saving message (Adam, Noah, Abraham, Lot, Jacob, Joseph, Moses).¹²³ Once again, the Savior's revisionist strategy assumes the form of intertextual grafting of one text upon another. The purpose of this endeavor is not to challenge the historical accuracy of Genesis, but to provide a broader interpretive framework for the correct understanding of these events and their true motivation. Once incorporated in the Savior's story of salvation, the earliest history of Israel becomes a series of attempts on the part of Sophia and her envoys to rescue the previously stolen portion of the divine power, and not the providential care for Israel's prosperity. In fact, the same folktale sequence of quest, struggle, and partial recovery characterizes the whole historical process, which tediously replays the same scene—the hero's quest for the original unity, or “fullness,” which repeatedly aborts, yet at the same time weakens the villain's resistance and thus prepares the ground for the final liquidation of the “lack.”

The *Apocryphon of John* thus envisages salvation as a long process of gradual recovery. Just as “the consort had come down to [Sophia] to correct her lack” (BG 47:4–5; cf. II 14:7–9), “so the Mother also sent down her own [spirit]” (BG 63:16–17; II 25:3), which

remained for a while and labored for her seed (σπέρμα) so that, when (ὅταν) the Spirit¹²⁴ eventually comes forth from the holy aeons, it may rectify the lack for the sake of rectifying the aeon, in order that it might become a holy perfection and that, therefore, there may be no lack in it. (BG 64:4–13; cf. II 25:9–16)

¹²³ For the Sapiential interpretation of *Heilsgeschichte* see Collins (1977) 121–42; Schmitt (1977) 1–22; Winston (1979) 211–18; Schwenk-Bressler (1993).

¹²⁴ III 32:17 has “the holy Spirit,” perhaps in order to distinguish between the historical presence of Sophia's own spirit (32:9–10 ἴδιον πνεῦμα) in the posterity of Seth and the ultimate salvation brought about by the Holy Spirit.

The passage clearly alludes to final deliverance—that is, to the separation of the stolen spiritual portion from Ialdabaoth’s kingdom. The deliverance that first occurs at the individual level, by “the visitation of those beings who take away” (παραλήμπτους II 25:36–26:1; BG 66:4–6), will eventually bring about a total recovery of light. Individual salvation is thus the *sine qua non* of universal salvation.

What will ultimately happen with the material realm, the extant versions of *Apocryphon of John* do not say. Other texts traditionally labeled as ‘Gnostic’ defined the process of final separation in terms of the Stoic *lex naturae*, by resorting to the Chrysippean doctrine of total blending (κρᾶσις): “For the capacity to be separated again from one another is a peculiarity of blended substances, and this only occurs if they preserve their own natures in the mixture” (Alex. Aphr. *Mixt.* 3.216.23–217.2 εἶναι γὰρ ἰδίων τῶν κεκραμένων τὸ δύνασθαι χωρίζεσθαι πάλιν ἀπ’ ἀλλήλων, ὃ μόνως γίνεται τῷ σφῶξειν ἐν τῇ μίξει κεκραμένα τὰς αὐτῶν φύσεις). Or, in the ‘Sethian’ version, as recorded by Hippolytus (*Ref.* 5.21.5–6),

Blending . . . implies separation (πάντα τὰ συγκεκραμένα διακρίνεται). Indeed, he says, you can derive the same lesson from living beings. For when the living being is dead, each of its constituents is separated; thus dissolved, the living being vanishes (καὶ λυθὲν οὕτω τὸ ζῶον ἀφανίζεται). This is, he says, what has been said: “I have not come to bring peace to the earth but a sword” (Mt 10:34)—that is, to divide and separate what has been blended. For each of the things that have been blended is divided and separated when it reaches its proper place (οἰκείου χωρίου τυχόντα). For as there is one place of blending for all living beings, so also has there been established one of [their] separation, which, however, no one is aware of save we alone, the born-again spirituals (οἱ ἀναγεννώμενοι πνευματικοί), who are not carnal (οὐ σαρκικοί) and whose “citizenship is in heaven” (Phil 3:20).

The ‘Valentinians’, in their turn, specify the exact position of these places: According to Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.* 2.14.4; cf. 1.7.5),

To the spirituals (*spiritalibus*) they assigned their own region, one within the Pleroma; to the psychics (*animalibus*), the place of the Middle (*regionem Medietatis*); and to the corporeals, (*corporalibus*) the place made of dust (*choicum*).

The longer redaction of the *Apocryphon* seems to allude to the same law of nature. The outcome of the blending of light with darkness, as the redactor tries to explain, depends on which of the two constituents is active in this process. If this is light, then darkness will

shine. But if darkness assumes the role of active principle, as in the case of Ialdabaoth's theft of Sophia's light, it darkens the light, "so that it [is] neither luminous nor dark, but dim" (II 11:10–15). This seems to imply, at least in the case of the longer redaction, that the complete restoration of light to the Pleroma will entail the separation of previously blended substances, with different consequences for the main agents of cosmogony. Sophia, on one hand, will not "gain repose in the place of the Middle"—she will leave the Ennead, her temporary dwelling place, "upon correcting her lack" (BG 47: 11–13), and return to the Pleroma. Ialdabaoth, on the other hand, will simply turn to naught, along with the substance of which he was made—"the garment of darkness," a mere illusion generated by Sophia's subversive thinking (ἐνθύμησις) and unfounded pretension.

CONCLUSION

Irenaeus, the ‘proto-orthodox’ bishop in the province of Gaul and one of the most prominent critics of various ‘heretical’ groups, blamed his adversaries for corrupting the simple and innocent people with seductive myths and genealogies “on the pretext of *gnôsis*” (*Haer.* Pr. 1). Even worse, he claimed, these blasphemous teachers set out to destroy the simple souls with their “absurd and inconsistent” interpretations of the most sacred books of Jews and Christians, turning them into “a badly constructed phantom” (1.8.1):

It is as if someone destroyed the figure of a man in the authentic portrait of a king, carefully created by a skilful artist out of precious stones, and, rearranging the stones to make the image of a dog or fox, declared that this badly composed image is that same good image of the king made by the skilful artist.

The practice of turning a king into a fox has not only been a ‘Gnostic’ trademark. Later in cultural history, the Mannerist poets and painters made use of a similar ‘patchwork’ technique. Perhaps the best illustration of this procedure is Arcimboldo’s representation of ‘Summer’: take all summer fruit you can, put a cherry here, a peach there, and suddenly, within a newly imposed frame, a peach will turn into a cheek, and a cherry into an eye, of a noble man. Breaking an object, or a text, into pieces, then patching these pieces together into a jumble, a “badly constructed phantom,” might indeed, in the eyes of such a rationalist theologian as Irenaeus, have looked like a devilish plot aimed at destroying the simplicity and realistic clarity of the holy writ. Yet the “badly constructed phantoms” of the impious teachers of *gnosis* still presuppose some sort of poetics—a collection of choices, made at the levels of thematics, style, and composition, which helped them to inform their ‘mannerist’ constructions. It is against this background that I have undertaken my study of the ‘poetics’ of the *Apocryphon of John*, a firsthand and fully narrated version of the classic ‘Gnostic’ myth. The purpose of this conclusion is to enumerate the principal results of my enterprise.

1. *Genre.* A typical representative of the second-century A.D. cultural universalism, the *Apocryphon of John* belongs to the genre of revelatory

literature, one which intertwines cosmological speculations with a desire to attain personal salvation. Another common feature of this genre is the selection and arrangement of the main thematic blocks. In this arrangement, the present human condition, characterized by a sense of fatal alienation from its divine origins, is deduced from some traumatic pre-historic event. Correct understanding (*gnosis*) of this tragic narrative of origins provides the ground for escaping the present situation and attaining salvation. This means that, in the order of exposition, cosmology precedes anthropology and anthropology comes before soteriology.

2. *Narrative-within-narrative*. A commonplace, too, is the presence of the narrative frame. The *Apocryphon* begins as an impersonal report of John's encounter with the Pharisee Arimanius. The impersonal narrative turns abruptly into a first-person account by John, the son of Zebedee, who soon becomes the listener of the Savior's revelatory account about the secrets of the universe, human history, and final salvation. The flow of the Savior's first-person narration is occasionally interrupted by John's brief questions. The text does not end with the departure of the heavenly revealer, but with the enclosure of all frames, resuming at the very end the initial extra-diegetic mode. Another commonplace is the uncertainty about the separation between the frame and its subordinate narratives, giving the confusing impression of their mutual overspilling. The net result is the conflation of the two first-person narrators into a single voice, so that one becomes the double of the other—a rhetorical procedure characteristic of the discourse of mystic experience.
3. *Structure and narration*. The salient feature of the Savior's revelatory account is his radical revision of the Mosaic account of creation in the opening chapters of Genesis. In a series of brief exchanges with John, the *Christus redivivus* argues that Moses' understanding of the events in cosmogony was limited because his perspective was confined to the visible realm. The *Apocryphon of John* offers a broader perspective, in which sensible phenomena are referred to their invisible model. The contrast between a visible copy and its invisible paradigm is clearly a Platonist legacy, and can be traced all the way back to Plato's cosmology in the *Timaeus*. The universe that emerges from the Savior's revelatory account is a hierarchical structure arranged in tiers and organized along the vertical axis that links visible effects to their transcendent causes. Application

of this Platonist framework to the Mosaic story of creation raises both organizational and interpretative problems. The first problem is how to string a multidimensional reality upon a single *uni-dimensional* narrative thread. The second problem is how to justify the superimposition of Plato's world model on the Genesis creation story. The problem of designing a coherent narrative is solved by the choice of a linear, chronological exposition. The more serious problem of proving the compatibility of Plato and Moses is resolved by resorting to syllogistic reasoning, borrowed from rhetorical schools and manuals of the period—specifically, by the intercession of Wisdom literature as the 'minor premise'.

4. *Composition.* The problem of presenting the complex universe of the *Apocryphon of John* in the linear sequence is resolved during the Savior's introductory address: "Now I have come to teach you what is, what has come to be, and what will come to pass." Viewed from a form-analytical perspective, this statement represents the classic formula describing the office and the privilege of a prophet. In this formula, the prophet announces his knowledge of things past, present, and future. The Savior inverts the formula's original order and rearranges it according to the order of *ontological* priority. Instead of distinguishing between the three dimensions of physical time in their natural succession, the traditional formula of prophecy now expresses the Platonic dichotomy of Being and Becoming, as set forth in the *Timaeus* (27d–28a, 37e–38a). The revised formula outlines the program of the Savior's revelatory monologue. In the ensuing exposition, he will follow the sequence of events in their causal and temporal order. He will first talk about the realm of *Being*: the absolute first principle and its ideal realm. Next he will proceed to the realm of Becoming in its two constituent aspects: "What has come to be," *i.e.* creation of the visible world and the human race, and "What will come to pass," that is, the gradual salvation of humankind and the final dissolution (*diakrisis*) of phenomenal reality. Such a linear presentation of the cosmic process can only be conveyed in a mythical narrative, one that is capable, first, of moving beyond the logical deduction of contingents from their causes and, second, of describing the stages of divine development, from the original fullness of the absolute first principle, the Platonist 'One', down to its tragic *kenosis*, the state of entropy and stagnation.
5. *Plot.* At the level of an overall organization of the narrative, the

three thematic units figure as three separate moments in a typical folktale sequential structure: initial order—violation—restoration of the initial order. Each of these three generic units consists of a sequence of individual episodes, each characterized in turn by a specific chain of actions. The pervading logic of the whole narrative is a complicated game of giving and not-giving, taking and not-taking. The monotonous rhythm of reciprocal giving and taking in the first narrative block (e.g., the Invisible Father approving Barbelo's request for the gift of Foreknowledge, and so on) comes to an abrupt end when Sophia's request to unite with her heavenly 'consort' is flatly denied, yet she nevertheless continues to act alone. Next, and in yet another departure from the previous pattern, the villain of the story, Ialdabaoth, commits a theft of what he has neither requested nor been granted (Sophia's power). The rest of the story is a series of attempts on the part of the victimized heroine Sophia and her assistants to recover the stolen object. In the end, the theft will be recovered and the initial situation, prior to the initiation of the game of reciprocal giving and taking, fully restored.

6. *Metaphysical fiction.* In the Savior's presentation of the gradual derivation of a multiple-tiered reality from the unfathomable One beyond Being—the abyss of pure freedom rejecting all determinations—logical deduction had to give way to mythical narrative. The revelatory account in the *Apocryphon of John* is a piece of metaphysical fiction, an instance of "der gnostische Roman der Selbsterkenntnis" (Sloterdijk 1993, 44), which reenacts the stages of God's history in a folktale sequence: his primordial unity ('initial situation'); his gradual self-differentiation into a series of defining dispositions ('preparation for misfortune'); his departure from the state of logical determination ('violation'); his realization ('repentance') of the abortive desire ('villainy') to comprehend his unfathomable nature; his attempt to restore the original identity ('quest'), and his final return to self ('restoration of the initial situation'). In this autobiographical narrative, God must play manifold roles and assume the disguise of various mythical characters: he is both the hero (Christ-Savior) and the villain (Ialdabaoth) in this story, both the helper (Afterthought of Life and other assistants of Sophia) and the opponent (Archons), both the victim (Sophia) and the rescuer (Consort).

7. *Genesis and Plato's Timaeus*. I have already alluded to Plato and Moses as the principal sources of the *Apocryphon's* world-hypothesis, and to the role played by Wisdom literature as intermediary. The following synoptic table shows how the first part of Plato's account of cosmogony and the opening chapters of Genesis are combined, and occasionally fused, in the narrative of the *Apocryphon*.

<i>Apocryphon of John</i>	<i>Plato (Timaeus)</i>	<i>Moses (Genesis)</i>
I. WHAT IS		
A. <i>Agnostos Theos</i>	God – <i>patêr kai poiêtês</i> (28c–30c)	
B. Pleroma	Eternal Living Being Containing All Intelligibles (30c–31b)	
II. WHAT HAS COME TO BE		
A. <i>Sophia's Fault</i>	World-Soul and Its Double Orientation (35a–37c)	
B. <i>Ialdabaoth's Fabrication</i>	The Craftsman Fabricates:	<i>Gen</i> 1:1–2a: “In the beginning..”
(a) Fiery Realm	(a) World-Body (31a–34b)	<i>Gen</i> 1:3–8
(b) Twelve Signs of Zodiac	(b) Heavenly Gods = Stars	
(c) Seven Planets	(c) Planets	
(d) Other Chronocrators	(d) Time (37c–40d)	<i>Gen</i> 1:14–19
C. <i>Sophia's Adventures</i>	Soul in Body:	
(a) Disorderly Motion	Disorderly Motion (42a–44d)	<i>Gen</i> 1: 2b: “God's spirit moved upon the waters”
(b) Sophia Rescued (Ascent)	Soul Returns to Heaven (42b–c)	
D. <i>Creation of Adam</i>	Composition of Human Soul and 7 Parts of Human Frame (73b–76e)	<i>Gen</i> 1:26: Let us make . . .
(a) Seven Parts of Adam's Animate Body Created	Soul Implanted into Body (44d–45e)	<i>Gen</i> 2:7
(b) Adam in Matter (<i>hulê</i>)		
E. <i>Biblical History</i>		
(a) Trees in Paradise		<i>Gen</i> 2:9,15–17
(b) The Snake		<i>Gen</i> 3:1–7
(c) Adam's Unconsciousness		<i>Gen</i> 2:21
(d) Creation of the Woman,		<i>Gen</i> 2:22
Adam's Self-recognition		<i>Gen</i> 2:23
(e) Expulsion from Paradise		<i>Gen</i> 3:23
(f) Cain, Abel, Seth		<i>Gen</i> 4:1–2,25–26
(g) Noah		<i>Gen</i> 6:5–7:16: Noah
in the Luminous Cloud		in the Ark
(h) Angels and the		
Daughters of Men,		<i>Gen</i> 6:1–2,4: Nephilim
Counterfeit Spirit		<i>Gen</i> 6:3
III. WHAT MUST COME TO BE		
A. Destiny of Souls	The Laws of Destiny (41d–42d)	
B. Final Separation	God's Handiwork is Indissoluble, Save With His Consent (41a)	

The first section of the Savior's revelatory monologue ("What is") reiterates the main themes in the *Timaeus* and follows its order of exposition. As the Savior turns to the next section ("What has come to be"), he introduces the Mosaic creation story and follows for a while both Genesis and Plato. In my table, this section appears as the 'middle' zone, where Plato's world-model comes into contact with Moses'. In the concluding section of the Savior's lecture, the story line follows the early history of humankind (Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah, and the *Nephilim*) in the same order as Genesis. The shaded zone in the synoptic table offers an interpretive key for recovering the hidden meaning of Moses' materialistic imagery. For example, "the spirit of God's moving upon the water" (Gen 1:2b) is not to be understood in its literal sense, as the movement of one corporeal substance (breath, wind) over another (water). The deeper meaning can be found in the parallel section of Plato's *Timaeus* (42a–45e)—an agitated movement of the soul imprisoned in matter.

8. *Rhetoric and Hermeneutics.* The Savior's reinterpretation of Genesis 1:2b provides the best illustration of his overall hermeneutical strategy. He does not simply impose the Platonizing reading of the Biblical verse on his ignorant interlocutor, but assumes instead John's limited perspective and posits the verse as a premise (*propositio*) from which his 'correct' explanation may be inferred as a logical conclusion (*complexio*). In short, he resorts to the rhetorical theory of issue, more specifically to the issue of analogical assimilation (*ratiocinatio*, συλλογισμός), and inserts between the starting premise and the conclusion a compatible verse from Wisdom Literature as a supporting reason (*ratio*)—"I walked around in the depth of the abyss" (Sir 24:5). This simple insertion serves two important functions: on one hand, it effectively obliterates the materialist flavor of the Genesis verse ('the breath or wind of God moving upon the material waters'); on the other, it makes the way wide open for bringing in other compatible passages, this time from various philosophical traditions (Platonism, Stoicism), in order to spiritualize even further the crude language of Moses' oracle (*ratiōnis confirmatio*). The Savior's conclusion (*complexio*) is a philosophical revision of Genesis 1:2b—not the spirit of God moving upon the waters, but Sophia (Sirach), the cosmic soul (Plato), moving to and fro in the darkness of matter (Plato), and repent-

ing for her faulty reasoning in the darkness of her own ignorance (Platonizing Stoicism).

9. 'Gnostic' Platonism. For the author of the *Apocryphon of John*, the lore of Moses is a troublesome legacy which calls for a thorough reevaluation in the form of allegorical interpretation. Yet Plato's legacy is considered as troubling, too, and for that reason subjected to a series of refinements and adjustments. Revisionism emerges thus as the distinctive mark of 'Gnostic' mentality. Just as 'proto-orthodox' Christian theologians denounced the false teachers of *gnōsis* for misreading the scriptures, so some contemporary Platonists accused them of "falsifying" Plato: "They falsify Plato's *manner of presenting* the fabrication of the universe, and a great deal else, and degrade Plato's opinions as if they have understood the intelligible nature, but he and other blessed philosophers had not" (Plot. *Enn.* II 9.6). The focus of this revisionist agenda, as presented in the *Apocryphon of John*, is a thorough reevaluation of craft-analogy, the structuring principle of Plato's theory of causality, which posits a rational regulative principle—Plato's divine craftsman (demiurge)—capable of informing phenomenal reality with order and finality after the preordered pattern of forms. The first refinement focuses on the psychological attitude of the craftsman in action: in contrast with Plato's demiurge who operates from conscious purposes, the blind creator of the *Apocryphon of John* cannot deliberate and cannot understand whatever he does. Craft is essentially practical, and calls for some higher designer to outline the plan for the craftsman's activity. The net result is the distinction drawn in the *Apocryphon* between a craftsman who fabricates (Ialdabaoth) and a discursive planner responsible for the preordered design (the Self-Originate, i.e., Divine Intellect, and Sophia). This introduction of the notion of a designer has serious repercussions for the objective status of Platonic ideas—they are no longer endowed with an independent existence, but are reduced instead to the status of the thoughts of God. The second objection to Plato's craft-analogy deals with the model's accessibility to the demiurge: whereas the Platonic craftsman had a direct access to the realm of forms, Ialdabaoth "did not see the incorruptible ones, but it was the power in him, which he had taken from his mother, that produced in him the image of the ordered world" (II 13:1–5). Ialdabaoth cannot create copies that bear internal resemblance with the ideal pattern—he can only generate infinitely

degraded simulacra of the model by his “image-making power” of imagination (φαντασία). The phenomenal world has thus traded its privileged status as a perfect copy reflecting the measures and proportions of the original for the status of Plato’s ‘cave’—that is, of an illusory and unstable semblance (φάντασμα) of the superior world.

10. *Imagination and appearances.* Such a negative appraisal of artistic imagination (*phantasia*) is at odds with the dominant aesthetics of the period, best summarized by Apollonius of Tyana in his praise of Phidias’ sculpture of Zeus: “That was done by imagination (*phantasia*), which is a better artist than imitation (*mimesis*), for imitation can only depict what it saw, but imagination what it has not seen” (Philostr. *Vit. Apoll.* 6.19). Apollonius emphasizes the creative role of imagination (*phantasia*) in retaining and synthesizing various sensations into mental images which, in their turn, provide the substrate of all thought. In the *Apocryphon of John*, on the contrary, imagination is related to the soul’s irrational impulses and stabilized in one central image of the aggressive impostor (Ialdabaoth) who, driven by his appetitive soul (ἐπιθυμία), produces deceptive semblances of the model while pretending to have the capacity to reproduce its essential features. This conjunction of *phantasia* with irrationality can be traced all the way back to Plato’s *Timaeus* (70d–72b, 86b2–4), which situates the process of semblance-making in the spirited or ‘epithymetic’ part of the soul, the source of mindlessness (*aponoiā*), ignorance (*amathia*), and prophetic power (*mania*). Such a low appraisal of Ialdabaoth’s craftsmanship informs the Savior’s negative portrayal of the visible world. If the invisible realm remains out of the craftsman’s reach, and if the world he creates is the product of his unfounded pretension, then the human race, imprisoned as it were in this world by the astrological laws of Destiny, cannot reach back to the ideal exemplar. Ialdabaoth’s world is a labyrinth of deceptive symbols leading the terrestrial man astray from his transcendent origins. The only means for the human race to get beyond these illusory appearances is the experience of separation and loss, one that will eventually entail an encounter with the spiritual world in the form of a heavenly revelation.
11. *Language.* As indicated in the above synoptic table, Moses and Plato represent two dissonant yet diachronically complementary narrative voices, only occasionally made compatible through the

intercession of passages from Jewish Wisdom literature. In the Savior's analysis of the multiple authorship of Jewish scriptures, Wisdom's oracles provide the link between Moses' material imagery and the Savior's sublime discourse of the One. Just as Sophia dwells in the liminal zone, simultaneously dividing and uniting the spiritual realm and its distant material copy, so does the language she uses combine equivocal symbols with philosophical concepts. *The Apocryphon of John* speaks at once three languages: the language of speculative philosophy; the language of symbolic Wisdom theosophy; and the Biblical language of historical contingency.

12. *'Authorship' and provenience.* The solution to the problem of the *Apocryphon's* provenience depends on how one explains the Savior's motives in choosing Wisdom literature as his favored 'intertext'. Had he simply imposed the Platonist framework on the Mosaic account of creation (Gen 1:2b), without inserting the verse from Wisdom literature (Sir 24:5), the *Apocryphon of John* could be identified as a Christianized version of Platonist 'Orientalism', best exemplified in the work of the philosopher Numenius, a Greek-speaking Syrian from Apamea. Yet the intermediary role assigned to sapiential oracles, the initial position of Genesis quotations (*lémmata*) in the Savior's argumentation, and close affinities between his interpretive technique and Philo's *hypomnêmata*, point to the *Apocryphon's* indebtedness to exegetical traditions of Greek-speaking Alexandrian Jews. This does not yet mean that the *Apocryphon of John* represents an organic development within Judaism. Indebtedness does not necessarily imply embeddedness. After all, Sophia is not the most authoritative voice in the text, but the Savior, *Christus redivivus*, who speaks the lofty language of speculative Platonism interspersed with allusions to the Johannine gospel. A "badly constructed phantom," the *Apocryphon of John* is an early Christian response to the cultural universalism of the Antonine period, refusing to engage in any sort of demiurgic 'mimesis' and claiming instead that dominant cultural models and discursive modes should not be reproduced but thoroughly transformed.

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The list of publications provided below includes all the works referred to in this study, as well as other consulted works that relate to the study of Platonism and ‘Gnosticism’. Standard editions of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts and ancient authors can be found under the names of the editors in the *index locorum*. An exception has been made for editions with substantial introductions and commentaries referred to in this monograph, and these editions are listed below.

Abbreviations

<i>AAST</i>	<i>Atti dell’Accademia delle Scienze di Torino, II. Classe di scienze morali, storiche e filologiche.</i>
<i>ABG</i>	<i>Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte.</i>
<i>AcOr</i>	<i>Acta Orientalia.</i>
<i>AGPh</i>	<i>Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie.</i>
<i>AnnSE</i>	<i>Annali di storia dell’esegesi.</i>
<i>ANRW</i>	<i>Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt.</i>
<i>AntTard</i>	<i>Antiquité tardive.</i>
<i>AR</i>	<i>Archiv für Religionswissenschaft.</i>
<i>ArchPhil</i>	<i>Archives de philosophie</i>
<i>ATDan</i>	<i>Acta Theologica Danica.</i>
<i>Aug</i>	<i>Augustinianum.</i>
<i>BAGB</i>	<i>Bulletin de l’Association Guillaume Budé.</i>
<i>BCNH</i>	<i>Bibliothèque copte de Nag Hammadi.</i>
<i>BETL</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium.</i>
<i>BJS</i>	<i>Brown Judaic Studies.</i>
<i>BSAC</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte.</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly.</i>
<i>EPHE</i>	<i>École Pratique des Hautes Études.</i>
<i>EPRO</i>	<i>Études préliminaires aux religions orientales dans l’Empire romain.</i>
<i>EstEcl</i>	<i>Estudios eclesiásticos.</i>
<i>FZPhTh</i>	<i>Freiburger Zeitschrift für Philosophie und Theologie.</i>
<i>GGA</i>	<i>Göttingische Gelehrte Anzeigen.</i>
<i>GRBS</i>	<i>Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies.</i>
<i>Greg</i>	<i>Gregorianum.</i>
<i>HSCP</i>	<i>Harvard Studies in Classical Philology.</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review.</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual.</i>
<i>JAC</i>	<i>Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum.</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature.</i>
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society.</i>
<i>JHB</i>	<i>Journal of the History of Biology.</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies.</i>
<i>JSP</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Pseudepigrapha.</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies.</i>
<i>LTP</i>	<i>Laval théologique et philosophique.</i>
<i>MH</i>	<i>Museum Helveticum.</i>
<i>MusPat</i>	<i>Museum Patavium</i>

- NHMS Nag Hammadi and Manichaean Studies.
 NHS Nag Hammadi Studies.
 NTOA Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus.
 NTS *New Testament Studies*.
 NTT *Norsk Teologisk Tidsskrift*.
 OC *Oriens Christianus*.
 OS *Ostkirchliche Studien*.
 PCPhS *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society*.
 Phil *Philologus*.
 PhJ *Philosophisches Jahrbuch*.
 PhRdschau *Philosophische Rundschau*.
 PP *La parola del passato*.
 PW Pauly, A. F. *Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*.
 49 vols.
 RAC *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*.
 RdE *Revue d'égyptologie*.
 RE PW.
 REA *Revue des études anciennes*.
 REAug *Revue des études augustiniennes*.
 RechAug *Recherches augustiniennes*.
 RecSR *Recherches de science religieuse*.
 REG *Revue des études grecques*.
 RFIC *Rivista di filologia e di istruzione classica*.
 RFN *Rivista di filosofia neo-scolastica*.
 RhM *Rheinisches Museum für Philologie*.
 RlPh *Revue internationale de philosophie*.
 RPh *Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes*.
 RSPT *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*.
 RSR *Revue des sciences religieuses*.
 RTP *Revue de théologie et de philosophie*.
 SBLSP *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers*.
 SecCent *Second Century*.
 SJP *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*.
 SO *Symbolae Osloenses*.
 SPhA *Studia Philonica Annual*.
 StPatr *Studia Patristica*.
 TP *Theologie und Philosophie*.
 TU *Texte und Untersuchungen*.
 VChr *Vigiliae Christianae*.
 WUNT *Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament*.
 ZNW *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*.
 ZPhF *Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung*.
 ZRGG *Zeitschrift für Religions- und Geistesgeschichte*.
 ZTK *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*.

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